

[▲ Home](#)[◀ Contents](#)**The University Side of the College Transfer Experience:
Insights from University Staff***by Rosemary A. McGowan and Timothy Gawley***Abstract**

University staff members play a key role in the college articulation process. They implement articulation agreements and shepherd college transfer students through the academic and cultural changes encountered at university. Based on in-depth interviews with university staff, the paper describes five major themes including: transfer credits -the student as comparison shopper and negotiator; cultural norms and expectations of university versus college; student identities and decision strategies; transitioning to the university environment; and establishing internal and external administrative networks for managing college transfers. Recommendations for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the transfer process as well as the satisfaction and performance of college transfer students are identified.

Researchers examining college transfer experiences have indicated that our understanding of the college transfer process is enhanced by exploring an institution-centred focus in addition to a student-centered focus (Cjeda, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993). Recent research suggests that university staff are key partners in helping college transfer students manage the transition from the college system to the university system and can play an important role in student retention and program completion (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). College transfer students rely on university staff to help them understand policies and procedures regarding college transfer credits, on-line registrations, course timetabling, and for general information and support following admission. At a strategic level, university staff play a central role in the implementation of the programs and policies outlined in articulation agreements between universities and college.

The current paper seeks to enhance our understanding of the university staff side of the college transfer process. This paper presents a case study of the experiences and perceptions of staff employed at a university campus where, despite a fairly recent involvement with college-university articulations, the number of college transfer students has grown to represent approximately 30% of the study body. This paper has two primary objectives. First, it describes the experiences and perceptions of the university staff who implement articulation agreements on behalf of their institution and who advise, process, counsel, and support college transfer students as they negotiate their transfer from college to university. s Second, based on the analysis of these staff perceptions and experiences, the paper provides recommendations designed to enhance the college transfer experiences for university staff and transfer students.

Research Method

The research in this case study was based on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with six administrative staff members. All staff members are directly involved in implementing various aspects of college articulation agreements including transfer student recruitment and registration, as well as academic and personal counseling. All staff members are employed at a university in Southern Ontario where, within a decade, the percentage of college transfer students has grown to represent 30% of the student population. Interviews did not include university faculty because faculty class registration records do not identify which students are college transfer students so unless a student self-identifies as a college transfer student, a student's prior academic involvement is not known to faculty.

All interviews were conducted on an individual basis between the staff member and one of the two principle researchers. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and were tape recorded; subsequently, verbatim transcriptions were prepared. In the course of the semi-structured interviews, staff interviewees were asked four primary questions including:

1. What kinds of questions do transfer students bring to your office?
2. What kinds of comments do transfer students make about university life versus college life?
3. What kinds of challenges in transitioning to university do transfer students talk about?
4. Do college transfer students bring different questions to staff than other students like high-school transfer students?

In addition, staff members were invited to share any additional comments related to their experiences with college transfer students and/or college articulation agreements. Interviews focused on the staff understanding of the similarities and differences between two broad categories of students: college transfer students and students who entered university directly from high school. Comparing the performance of these two groups has been the focus of some U.S.-based studies (c.f., Glass & Harrington, 2002), the current paper extends this work to an examination of the university staff working in an Ontario-specific site who have direct involvement with transfer students.

The results presented include a number of quotes from university staff. The transcription notation is based on Atkinson and Heritage's (1984) notation for conversation analysis. In summary, words and terms that were emphasized by the interviewee appear in capitalized font, hesitations are noted by a series of periods, while starts and self-corrections are noted by a dash. In order to enhance the readability of the quotes, expressions such as "you know" were omitted in the final paper.

Based on the interviews, five main themes emerged including: transfer credits the student as comparison shopper and negotiator; cultural norms and expectations of university versus college; student identities and decision strategies; transitioning to the university environment; and, internal and external administrative networks. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Transfer credits: The student as comparison shopper and negotiator

Just as transfer credits were a focus of discussion among students in the focus group sessions described in the earlier paper (Gawley & McGowan, forthcoming), administrative staff report that many of their conversations with transfer students focus on transfer credit issues. The issues raised by students include the number of credits that the institution gives relative to other institutions, the number of transfer credits that students will be granted and eligible to use against their degree requirements, and the number of credits that they received relative to other students in their program.

According to staff most students are very aware of the transfer credit offerings of various institutions in Ontario and students bring this information to their initial meeting with university staff. Staff report that students attempt to use this information as a means to actively negotiate additional credits. As one staff member indicated, "they know what they can get at other universities and will quote that to us frequently." Another staff member stated that:

And they [students] DO research. They'll come back and say, "University X is giving me-I can start in third year at University X" or "University Y is going to give me MORE and I want to know what you can give me." There are two camps, ones that are fairly stingy and ones that are pretty generous, and it's about half and half. There are lots of universities that are the same as us, but there's a bunch that are much more generous when it comes to transfer credits. So they tend to know where those are and...and ...they make a REALLY big deal about transfer credits.

This finding parallels the suggestion made by Rhine, Milligan & Nelson (2000) that students may "'shop' schools and departments to see which degree will provide the earliest graduation" (p. 449). As one staff member indicated, "Probably, the most frequently asked question would be what kind of transfer credit they will receive." Another staff member indicated that students ask:

How many transfer credits am I going to get? That's the biggest one that we get, and they're, they're VERY, VERY concerned about the number of transfer credits that they're going to get.

In addition to concerns regarding transfer credit allowances, staff report that many students are "very upset" that the university does not give them credit for all the college courses that they have taken because many students view college and university courses as equivalent courses. With an Introduction to Psychology course, for instance, university staff report that they try to explain to students that in their college studies they may not have covered all the material that

the university course covers and that the university wants to ensure that all incoming students have a comparable knowledge base to the students who have taken courses at the university. In addition, staff are concerned that college transfer students are well-prepared for senior level courses, both in terms of course content but also in terms of academic skills such as essay-writing which, according to transfer students is not heavily emphasized at the college level (Gawley & McGowan, forthcoming).

It is likely that much of the awareness and negotiation of transfer credits is driven by a desire by college transfer students to complete their degree as quickly as possible. A number of staff members suggested that:

They're very concerned about length of time. Like how long is this degree going to take – honours versus the general? How do my transfer credits figure in? Does this cut down on my time? Like, they're really TIME conscious.

As another staff member observed, "generally speaking, it's, 'what can I get and how long do I have to come to school? How long is it going to take me?' that seems to be one of the biggest issues." It is not unreasonable for college transfer students to be concerned about the length of time and the number of terms of tuition that they will have to commit to university. Prior to attending university, college transfer students have typically spent two to three years in the college system so, students are interested in completing their university studies as quickly as possible; students want the maximum number of allowable transfer credits in order to shorten the length of their stay in a postsecondary institute.

One consequence of this desire to complete a university degree as quickly as possible is that some students select programs that are not their first choice -- a strategy that ultimately may affect their careers. As one staff member observed:

Some people will ACTUALLY pick a program that's not necessarily their FIRST choice, maybe their second, because it's quicker. So they won't go into program X, they'll go into program Y with a MINOR in program X, because they can do that in two years, whereas program X would take three.

University staff also reported that conveying information about transfer credits presents communication challenges for staff and potential students. Many incoming transfer students do not seem to realize that transfer credits are linked to specific articulation agreements. For example, students who are admitted to program X, receive transfer credits applicable to the articulation agreement between program X at the university and a specific program at the college. Based on comments from staff, it would seem that students are either unaware of, or choose to ignore the specific details of the ways that transfer credits are linked to specific articulation agreements. Staff noted that students try to negotiate transfer credits allocations designed for one program across to programs that are not part of the articulation agreement. As one interviewee stated:

Students are in a program that's part of the articulation agreement and they want a program at the university that's NOT in [named program] so therefore its NOT part of the articulation agreement? So if they're in College Program A and they want University Program B, they can't get the articulation agreement because the articulation agreement is with University Program C, it's not with University Program B, so they would get just the regular number of transfer credits, which might be three I have known a number of students who have chosen the program that they don't want because they'll get TWO EXTRA CREDITS and it just boggles my mind that they would spend time and get a degree in something they didn't want and give up the one that they did want and spend all that time NOT studying what they like and studying something they don't like because of TWO CREDITS...I mean, that's just two summer classes, right? Or a four or three month course. SO, once they get here they tend to realize that...okay one credit, no big deal.

This excerpt supports the earlier assertion that students are keenly focused on getting credits that shorten their stay at university; a focus that potentially shortchanges their long-term career goals and interests in favour of an earlier graduation date.

Staff reported that many students do not seem to understand how transfer credits are used in the calculation of total number of credits required to graduate. For example, students may be given five credits for their college studies; however, in the case of the university under study there are maximum numbers of junior credits (i.e., first year credits) that students can use towards their degree. So, while a student might be pleased to have been granted five credits, if they are all junior credits, students may only be able to apply a couple of the junior transfer credits to their degree -- leaving them short credits for graduation.

A staff member shared their experiences with a couple of situations:

They're [college transfer students] very interested in always having more. They think it's a very good thing. There are lots of students out there who can't even use all their transfer credits. There are students out there with nine junior transfer credits, and they just think it's great because of the time thing they think they're going to get through quicker, but they can't use them all. Um we spend a lot of time going through and counting and making sure [that students have the correct number of junior and senior credits].

The staff member had one student who had nine junior credits but was only allowed eight junior credits to graduate from his program and he was not allowed to graduate at the time he thought that he would. So, the transfer credit issue has implications for admission to university as well as for the graduation side of a student's academic progress.

University records show the university courses taken and the grades achieved in those courses. For college transfer students who receive transfer credits, there is a separate data field on the student record that lists the transfer credits granted by the university. Unlike

high school direct entrants who have to take 20 credits to complete a university degree, students who receive transfer credits only need to successfully complete twenty credits less the number of transfer credits awarded.

A simplified transfer credit structure for the university under study is described below and detailed in Figure 1. This information is important to understanding the transfer credit typology used at this institution.

1. No transfer credits awarded

In this case, a student's university record would list only university courses and grades because no transfer credits were granted. In some cases transfer credits are not awarded because a student transferred from a college program that did not have an articulation agreement with the university; in other cases, the student took courses at college for which there are no equivalent courses at university, or their college course grades were weak.

2. Transfer credits awarded

In order to be eligible to receive transfer credits, students must achieve a pre-specified level of performance in college courses for which they are seeking a credit; the necessary grade level is usually stated in the articulation agreement. Students can receive transfer credits either defined through an articulation agreement between the college and the university ("Degree Completion" students), or they can receive credits from outside of an articulation agreement ("Other Students"). In addition, transfer credits that are awarded are either "non-specific/ miscellaneous credits", or "specific credits."

i) "Degree Completion" Students: These are students who transfer from a college program which has an articulation agreement with the university. Through the articulation agreement the student is granted 5.0 junior "miscellaneous or non-specific" credits. Miscellaneous or non-specific credits are not tied to any particular university course and student records only list the number of "non-specific or miscellaneous" credits" awarded.

In some articulation agreements, students are given "specific" transfer credits because through the development of the articulation agreement their college course (or courses) was deemed to be equivalent to a university course (or courses); in this case, the student would be exempt from having to take the specific course at university. The student's record shows that they had been given a transfer credit for a specific university course. For example, an articulation agreement may state that "if a student had successfully completed college courses x, y, and x, they would be given specific credit for university courses x, y, and z."

Sometimes the notation for the "degree completion" creates confusion for students, employers and post-secondary institutions because in the university portion of their transcript, only the university credits are listed. Since this number of credits may only total 15, those reading the document assume that the student has a three year versus four year degree; a difference that has significant implications

for salaries, position, and placement.

ii) "Other Students." Finally, there are college transfer students who are granted transfer credits but who come to university from college programs from which there is no articulation agreement. In this case, decisions on the number and types of transfer credits are done on a case-by-case basis after a thorough review and comparison by university staff and faculty of the college courses taken and the university program applied for.

Generally, it would seem that articulation agreements create a considerable amount of confusion for students. According to one staff member, "there's a lot of misinformation out there, rumours are just crazy." She went on to say that sometimes students believe:

...that unless they're part of the articulation agreement they CAN'T come. So, articulation doesn't include, for example, the E business programs at [named] college, so E business students think they can't come or students who are- who are at college try to find universities that their college has a- has an articulation with, because they think they can't go somewhere that doesn't have an articulation.

Cultural norms and expectations of university versus college

Many staff members reported that the college experience strongly shapes transfer students' perceptions and expectations regarding university administrative processes. Administrative staff reported that students came to the university with expectations that registration and timetabling processes at the university would be the same as those at college. As one staff suggested:

I find that they tend to be very CONFUSED because they're funneling all this information THROUGH their college frame of reference and it just confuses the situation. They'll show up here in September and they'll come to the main office and say, "No one ever mailed me my timetable."

In a similar vein, another staff member expressed her concern regarding the challenge she faced when trying to explain the process for course selection at university:

I had a conversation with a couple of girls one time and it's like they LITERALLY had a wall that they put up and it was they weren't going to understand it and they just kept looking at me and shaking their heads and saying, "We don't get it, we don't understand." I think they put-put those walls up themselves.

In another situation, a staff member reported that upon learning that students were responsible for generating their own timetables, the student commented that, "so I have to do your job for you?" This student's comment illustrates one extreme of the perception held by some college transfer students with respect to timetable preparation.

This experience was common to another university staff member

who said that: They-they talk about how it's A LOT different from college. College is so much different and usually it's not necessarily a positive comment. They get quite frustrated with the idea that they have to make their own timetable. That really gets them and, it's frustration and they're ANGRY about it. I mean in some cases, some of them are-willing to learn about it and others they're totally closed minded about the whole thing.

While autonomy in selecting courses and programs may be seen as a good thing by some individuals, staff reported that many college transfer students do not see it this way. For instance, one staff member reported that:

Transfer students have a hard time understanding courses and credits and the fact that their program is not totally planned out for them. What they've been used to in community college, say they were in Law and Security or Graphic Arts, is that they didn't have a lot of choice. So they had to take most of their required courses and maybe they had a couple of electives. So when they come here they are quite overwhelmed in picking a program. They don't always see that as a positive thing.

The comments made by these staff members highlight the residual strength of college protocols. For at least a subgroup of college transfer students, there are some challenges to understanding university protocols. The source of this challenge could be from the university's explanations for registration, student past experiences with a different protocol, or some combination of institution and student factors.

Student identities and decision strategies

Staff reported a number of differences between college transfer and high-school direct registrants with respect to some of the issues that they are concerned with and how they make decisions. Generally, staff noted that college transfer students, "transfer students have a pretty good idea of where they want to end up in their careers, more so than the high school students." As a result of a clear career, focus as well as a focus on expediting graduation, staff reported that college transfer students rarely ask for information about social events and clubs on campus; instead, college transfer students "want to know which buildings their classes are going to be in, it's very kind of UTILITARIAN. It's what do I need to know to get this piece of paper and get me out of here?"

In comparing high school direct and college transfer students, one staff member observed that:

High school students in first year don't seem as concerned about grades [as college students who ask] 'What do I have to get to pass?' 'What does my GPA mean?' 'What do I have to take to get in and get out?' It's their [high school direct students'] first year and they are into learning. But the college students are very focused on their goal of getting their degree. And so they don't want to waste a lot of time taking things they don't need. They've already spent a significant

amount of money on getting a diploma.

In addition, one staff member speculated that the reason that college transfer students may be more direct in their questions is because, "transfer students may be paying for their educations themselves, and so they are consumers, whereas for many of the high school students, the parents are paying."

While one staff member reported that college transfer students seemed more mature and confident than high school students, many more staff members suggested that college transfer students were concerned about their performance and their ability to perform well at university. One staff member indicated that:

I have college transfer students who are asking me things about "How do I log onto [the computer network system]?" How do I log onto my e-mail? How do I pick my courses electronically? From those sorts of technical kinds of things to academic things. They seem to be REALLY stressed about essays. So an academic essay in a college is somehow different than an essay in university and the academic expectations. A lot of them come to me, and they don't have the background and the study skills that are needed to be successful in university and there are personal concerns, the whole socially fitting in. Not feeling like they belong here. Okay, so, I'm okay....I'm good enough for college, but I'm not good enough for university.

Another staff member had the perception that:

They're [college transfers] a WHOLE different crowd. They're much more needy than high school students in a way, like, because they don't have a way of GETTING this information. For high school students all the liaison officers COME, their guidance counselors are holding them by the HAND, so by the time they get to me, they're usually more complicated questions, and there are not that many of them...But the college students tend to not have a place to go where they can get reliable information, so they go right to the source, which is GOOD, because you hear all these, kind of rumours and things.

Another distinction between college students and students who enter university directly from high school is their approach to making decisions about courses and programs at university. A staff member observed how college transfer students tend to use a group-based approach to decision making, not typically seen among high school students. As one staff member said:

They also do this funny thing where they'll have one person who's in charge of the pack. So they'll have a pack of students. I assume they knew each other when they went to College A, or maybe not, and they'll have one sort of spokesperson so that person might come to see me, and we'll talk about things and then they'll go back and tell their friends, and they'll all register together. Sometimes they ALL come in together as a group and they're all doing the exact same thing. They're taking the exact same classes. It happens all the time or sometimes I never even SEE the rest of the group, but it's one person who comes in and then they go back to their group and tell

them what I've said and they all take the same thing.

This approach to decision making may be driven by the students' experiences in the college system where students reported that they engaged in considerable group work, and take the majority of their classes in a program as part of a set cohort of colleagues (Gawley & McGowan, forthcoming). Hence, the group approach to decision making becomes an accepted approach. Alternatively, as one staff member suggested, students often carpool from their home community to the university and they plan their timetables so that they can travel together on specific days.

Finally, relative to high school students, staff report that the time required to assist college transfer students is significantly higher than it is for high school students; yet, college transfer students stay at the university for approximately half the length of time as high school-direct students.

At the institution under study, there are a considerable number of reported differences in expectations, experiences, and foci between high school students and those transferring from college. Some of these differences are attributable to chronological age, while other differences reflect student past experiences (such as extensive group-based work) with post-secondary institutions. These past experiences have a direct influence on the challenges and ease of transition to a university setting. These issues are discussed in the following section.

Transitioning to the university environment

In contrast to the staff member who observed how college transfer students seem unsure about processes at university, a staff member who serves as an initial contact point with college students suggested that they are very self-confident about their ability to perform at university:

Many of them don't SEE a particular difference in terms of the challenges that they might face at university. They have those extra years of maturity, they know how it feels to- to study and spend time doing academic work at the post-secondary level so a lot of them seem to be quite prepared... there seems to be a maturity level there, they seem to be fairly confident that they can handle things. How they do when they get here is- is another question...

This staff member's concern is borne out by the observations of many staff members who assist college transfer students post-admission. One staff member reported that some college transfer students feel unsure about their place at university because they did not gain admission to university through a traditional academic path (e.g., from high school). The staff member suggested that the perspective that some students bring to the situation is that:

I'm here as a transfer student. I didn't get in the regular way. I got in the BACK door. I wasn't good enough to apply the regular way to go to university. And so this is the only way that I can GO to

university. "So here I am, right? I don't really deserve to be there". That's their perception. I don't deserve to be here. And so they're telling themselves this. It's a confidence, self-esteem thing that I'm seeing here.

This staff member reported that a number of college students view their entrance into the university system as different than that of students who started university directly after high school. Staff report that some transfer students indicate that their high school marks were poor and would not have gained them entrance to university. As a result, these students were pleased that they had the opportunity to go to college as a way to improve their marks and gain admission to university; in other cases, students have reported to staff that they were simply not ready (either financially, or in terms of maturity, or in terms of knowing what they wanted to study and why a university degree would be beneficial to their careers) to start a university program.

For transfer students at university, essay writing is one of the major areas of concerns. Staff reported that students:

Seem to be REALLY stressed about essays. An academic essay in a college is somehow different than an essay in university. A lot of them don't have the background and the study skills that are needed to be successful in university.

The staff member also stated that:

I think generally, they don't feel prepared for the whole experience whether it's academic or social and I don't think that they feel prepared for the expectations academically...they tell me they are DIFFERENT for them. They're very different. Their hand is not held as much at the university as it is in college.

These differences point to the need for university staff to develop programs and practices that facilitate the integration, progression, and academic success of college transfer student. It should be noted that at the institution under study, university staff have recognized these challenges and have successfully implemented a number of pre- and post-admission programs including full-day university information sessions throughout the summer, essay writing skills and study skills workshops offered through the academic year.

Establishing internal and external administrative networks for managing college transfers

Processing college transfer applications and admissions involves a fairly broad internal network of staff and faculty members including the registrar's office, the Dean, the recruitment/high school liaison officer, and computing services. For some university staff members, managing college transfer students also involves developing linkages with external constituents, namely, college staff members. Some university staff members visit guidance counselors at

community colleges to share information about the articulation agreements and programs at the university. Staff reported that confusion over college transfer credits is not limited to college students; staff report that there is some uncertainty regarding university transfer credit policies on the part of college counselors. The information is fairly complex and staff report that information becomes misinterpreted by staff at the partner institution, mistaken information which is inadvertently passed along to students; this creates difficulties for students and staff at both institutions. It is likely that articulation agreements vary significantly across institutions and those articulation agreements have terms and conditions that are idiosyncratic to specific institutions – all factors that influence the effectiveness and efficiency of information flow among colleges, universities and students.

At the university under study, staff reported that while they do have some communications with external parties, their contact is limited. As one staff member who processes applications indicated:

I don't have a lot. I do have some connections with the folks at [College X], based on our articulation agreement, so I have a little bit of that but otherwise no I don't have an awful lot of that. I may contact the college from time to time to get clarification on something I see on the transcript. You know that- that sort of thing but no, there's no a whole lot of contact

Based on the experiences at this institution, the interorganizational linkages between colleges and universities are minimal. These linkages, according to researchers who have studied campuses that have long-term and large-scale involvement with transfer situations, are essential to success. In the following "Discussion and Recommendations" section, suggestions regarding the need to develop strong and effective communications and relationships between college and university staff are addressed.

Discussion and Recommendations

A number of suggestions designed to assist administrative staff in managing college transfer issues emerge from this study. It is recognized, however, that as Poisel and Stinard (2005) state, "moving from awareness of these factors to addressing them on a day-to-day basis at a busy urban university can be as daunting for staff as it is for the students they serve" (p. 137). Yet, effective programs and policies are key to the academic success and graduation of college transfer students at university (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Poisel & Stinard, 2005; Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000).

For administrative staff, the current study suggests that there are a number of unique attributes of college transfer versus high school direct entry students. First, there is the issue of understanding the experiences through which college transfer students filter their expectations and perceptions regarding university studies. Increasing awareness that the college experience has strongly shaped college transfer students' expectations about the administrative procedures within universities, would help university staff develop programs and

procedures that ease the transition between colleges and universities. The staff at the institution under study, for example, have already taken initial steps to ease the transition for college transfer students. It should be noted that staff at the institution under study have designed and implemented a number of college-transfer specific programs such as summer orientation sessions, academic skills sessions and social support groups for students. Awareness of students' self-perception of "belonging" in university and their sense of self-efficacy regarding their capacity to do work at a university level can be addressed at these or in individual counseling sessions. Given the number of studies that have found that college transfer students do, as Poisel and Stinard (2005) state, "face a daunting array of adjustments when they first enroll in the transfer institution" the experiences and perceptions of the administrative staff in the current case study provide important insights into the management of college-articulation agreements at the university staff level.

One of the outcomes of the current study as well as the companion paper by Gawley and McGowan (forthcoming) are the insights regarding the challenges that the transfer experience presents both to students as well as to university administrative staff.

With respect to the college student experiences, the current paper highlights the perceptions and concerns that college transfer students bring to the administrative offices of universities. Without connections between these two post-secondary institutions (colleges and universities), college staff may not be well-aware of the kinds of challenges their graduates face when applying to and entering university. The current paper provides an overview of academic and social issues involved in the transfer process; some of these need to be addressed by the university, and college staff can play an important role in preparing college students for the changing expectations and requirements of university.

The importance of developing strong college-university liaisons cannot be overstated. Depending on the size of the college transfer population, a staff person (either full- or part-time) could be devoted to managing college transfer students and the administrative questions associated with those students (e.g., registration questions, procedural questions, etc.) or, in the case of larger college transfer programs an "Office of Transfer Services" (Poisel & Stinard, 2005) could be developed. A dedicated university-college liaison staff member would serve as an important link between the organizations and this liaison role would help to provide consistent and clear messages to students regarding procedures, policies and expectations at the university. Through these roles, information on transfer credit policies could be clearly communicated to the staff at colleges; college staff could share the concerns regarding university life that students bring to their office. Similar interorganizational linkages have been established in other institutions with an extensive college transfer population (c.f., Poisel & Stinard, 2005) The ultimate goal should be to have a staff specialist at the university whose job responsibilities focus on college transfer students. Modeled on the Central Florida University experience, this specialist would be responsible for pre-admission advising, orientation workshops,

developing website updates, etc.

Development of a web link on both the college and the university webpages would facilitate preliminary information access for students. It is recognized that this will be a difficult task, given the range of articulation agreements, however, information on student experiences and life at university, etc. may help potential students in their transition to university life.

A standard student record system for listing and categorizing types of transfer credits should be adopted across all university-college articulations. The uncertainty (both for students, staff and external post-secondary institutions) is a source of confusion and frustration for all parties affected by articulation agreements. Building on the standard categorization system used on the Ontario Colleges and University Transfer Guide website (www.ocutg.on.ca) which includes information on agreements by type (multilateral, bilateral, and direct entry programs) and by category (concurrent, consecutive, degree completion, accelerated intensive, joint/integrated, or credit transfer/advanced standing) would be beneficial. The challenge in implementing this suggestion is recognized since this would involve multiple parties within the university including department heads, IT specialists, the registrar's office and faculty.

Specific orientation programs that target college transfer students should be maintained. The results of this study support Laanan's (2001) assertion that "transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process academically, socially, and psychologically because of environmental differences between two- and four-year institutions" (pg. 11). College transfer students, as can be seen by the results of this study, have unique needs that may be best met with information and support sessions that recognize their past academic experiences. Through the development of group-based sessions which may include college transfer students who are nearing completion of their university studies, would afford incoming college transfer students with an opportunity to meet other transfer students and potentially develop informal support networks among themselves.

Given the amount of energy and time consumed by students and administrative staff on calculating the number of granted "transfer credits," some consideration should be given by senior educational administrative personnel to issues of equivalency of credits (both between university and college, as well as between universities). Currently, this is an extremely labour-intensive process which involves administrative, student, and faculty time to review, assess and make determinations regarding allowable transfer credits. Establishment of a data base at each university and college which includes course information such as number of instructional hours, course topics, textbook and/or readings package used, as well as points of evaluation (e.g., essays, multiple choice tests, presentations, case analyses, etc.), would be helpful to university staff in making preliminary assessments on course equivalency. With respect to textbooks used, for instance, a ranking system could be incorporated; the ranking system would consider issues such as range of topics covered, extent of theory coverage, etc. Some aspects of database

development, such as the textbook evaluation will likely require faculty input. The establishment of a database would facilitate a preliminary determination of the equivalency of courses by administrative staff. For instance, if a college-level course was a one-term course, and the university course was a two-term credit, then it would likely mean that the college course would not be eligible for credit.

This system, however, would not be without challenges including, the costs to input and update the materials on an annual (or term basis), the variability across instructors with respect to the detail that topics are covered (and this may be more the case in the university setting than for the colleges), and reluctance of instructors to share this information (some faculty may see this as proprietary information) Despite these challenges, once in place, a database system would potentially decrease the time to make determinations regarding course equivalencies and, it may, highlight the similarities (rather than the differences) between some college level and university level courses which may help overcome the “not-invented-here” phenomenon.

There is one final note regarding the funding implications of these suggestions. The authors recognize that many of these recommendations require additional funding to cover increases to staffing, web development and the printing of information packages. It has been suggested that there is limited financial incentive for Ontario universities to accept transfer students (Skolnik, 2005); financial limitations may extend to a university’s capacity to find additional funding to support administrative programs that target college transfer students. College transfer students, however, are a growing presence on university campuses and with the increase in articulation agreements in Ontario, funding should be earmarked to foster the development and implementation of transfer-specific administrative positions and activities.

One limitation of the current study is its focus on a small sample of employees from a single academic institution. It is recommended that a follow-up comparative study of staff at universities with varying degrees of experience with processing college transfer student applications and supporting as well as counseling students post-admission. This future study would build on the insights of the current study. The case study described in this research offers some insights into the challenges facing a university that is fairly new to admitting college transfer students through articulation agreements. For universities considering entry into or expansion of their involvement in articulation agreements, strategies of the students and administrative personnel described in this paper and the companion paper on college transfer students (Gawley & McGowan, forthcoming) should serve as a foundation for discussion and program development.

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