

Transfer Students in Ontario: How Are They Faring?

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Outline of the Study

This study tracks the performance of a cohort of Brock University baccalaureate students between 2008/09 and 2011/12 to determine the comparative success of direct entry and college and university transfer students. The study's data set shows "Brock students' course attempts, withdrawal, academic credits, grades, graduations and other outcomes" during this period. The report includes helpful contexts drawn from other recent literature on the subject.

Findings and Discussion

The research report's findings include the following:

Persistence:

- College transfer students are significantly less likely than 'non-transfer' and 'university transfer' students, to persist to year 4. There are big differences across major fields of study, with Undeclared and General Studies students exhibiting much lower persistence rates. But the difference between college transfer and non-transfer students is robust to controls for major.
- University transfer students have the same or higher persistence rates as non-transfer students in years 1, 2 and 3 BUT a significantly lower rate in year 4.

Credits Earned:

- On average, college transfer students earn fewer credits in each year than non-transfer and university transfer students. The difference from non-transfer students is more than one full credit in Year 4.

Cumulative Grade Averages:

- Cumulative grade averages of college transfer students are lower than non-transfer students, but the differences are small and only statistically significant in the 3rd year. The differences are smaller and statistically insignificant when controls for gender and major are added.

Credits Earned:

- On average, college transfer students received 2.7 transfer credits and university transfer students received 3.8.
- During years 1 and 2, college transfer students were able to convert course enrollments into credits at the same rates as non-transfer students, but in years 3 and 4, their performance on this measure declined. This occurs because college transfer students had a higher course withdraw rate in year 4 and much higher 'fail' and 'course repeat' rates in years 3 and 4.
- College and university transfer students attempt fewer credits than non-transfer students in each year of baccalaureate study. The largest difference is between

college transfer and non-transfer students in 4th year. This partly reflects the higher proportion of college transfer students who were enrolled on a part-time basis but also fewer course attempts by students classified as full time.

Degree Completion:

- Both college and university transfer students are significantly more likely than non-transfer students to complete a degree in 3 or 4 years. The rate of degree completion in 4 years is highest for university transfer students and lowest for non-transfer students. Of those students who qualified for graduation, a significantly greater proportion of non-transfer students completed an Honours degree.

Academic Probation, Remediation or Suspension:

- College transfer students' eligibility for academic probation, remedial programming or suspension was not significantly different than non-transfer students. University transfer students were less likely to be eligible for academic suspension.

Drawing from other recent related literature, the report considers the socio-economic differences between college transfer students and those defined as non-transfer and university transfer. On average, the college transfer group is more mature, and more likely to include students from lower-income families, with disabilities, aboriginal students, and first generation in college. The report suggests that further study is needed to ascertain links between these differences and their performance in baccalaureate study.

Conclusions

The study concludes:

- University transfer students performed similarly to non-transfer students.
- The performance of college transfer students "was very similar to that of non-transfer students over the first 2 year of study" but, in the 3rd and 4th year "college transfer students showed significantly poorer achievement". They "were much less likely to persist to year 4" and "earn academic credits from their course attempts." This difference relates to a greater propensity to withdraw from courses before completion and from failed and repeated courses.
- All transfer students attempt fewer courses in every year with the largest difference being in the 3rd and 4th year. However, this difference is more than offset by transfer credits earned.
- On average, transfer students used their transfer credits to graduate earlier and with 'lower level degrees' than non-transfer students.
- The rates of academic suspension, participation in remediation programming, and graduation rates with pass degrees all suggest that college transfer students are, in general, capable of completing degrees in good time.