



## **Transfer Pathways: Strategies for Success in the Transition from College to University in BScN Collaborative Programs**

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## Executive Summary

In 1999, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care announced that a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) degree would be mandatory as the entry to practice for nursing graduates (Council of Ontario Universities [COU], 2013). As a result of this decision, the government funded collaborative partnerships between university and college nursing programs across the province. The delivery structure of the collaborative partnerships are guided by a variety of factors such as previous relationships among the partners, geographical distances, and available resources (Zorzi et al., 2007). The York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative BScN Program is an example of such a partnership. It is considered an articulated program with an integrated curriculum, characterized by delivery of the first two years at either Seneca or Georgian College, and the last two years at York University.

At York University, nursing students in the Collaborative program were demonstrating signs of having difficulties with transitioning from the colleges to the university, despite a seamlessly integrated designed university curriculum. They were also less successful in the nursing registration exam than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entry BScN Program at York, and other schools of nursing in Ontario.

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the current transition difficulties experienced by the York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative nursing students as they transition from the college sites to the university setting. Strategies to better facilitate the transfer process and foster student success were also explored. There are critical reasons for better understanding the transition challenges of Collaborative program students. At the individual level, students have invested emotionally and financially, as much as \$60,000 over four years of education. For the University, it is important to successfully retain students as the inability to do so has serious financial and reputational implications. In addition, the Ontario Government has made a large investment in educating nursing students in order to address the continuing human resource challenges in the health care sector. Thus it is imperative that students are as successful as possible in transferring from the college to the university, in graduating from the program and ultimately in passing the nursing registration exam. A secondary purpose of this research was to offer generalized recommendations based on the findings, to foster successful college-university partnerships and transition practices for other programs.

Over the last two decades, more research has focused on student success in institutions of higher education. There is a growing institutional interest in establishing conditions for student success as a focus on student success and retention are critical as institutions face an increasingly competitive environment, higher expectations to demonstrate measurable performance to governments and accrediting bodies, and a diminishing fiscal climate.

Through 11 focus group interviews, comprised of students and faculty from the three partner sites, qualitative data were gathered on the transition experience from the college settings to York University. Perceived differences and expectations between a college and university setting were also explored. Students and faculty were then asked to either identify whether they felt they were prepared to transition in year three, or make recommendations as to how better to support successful transition and student success.

Using Lizzio's (2006) *Five Senses of Success Conceptual Framework* to guide the data analyses, the findings indicated that many students felt uncertain about the transfer process; were concerned about the university level academics; and had a sense of not being connected to the York community. This resulted in feelings of loneliness and disconnection that can lead to confusion regarding their own student identity and purpose. However, it is important to note that some students did not find the transition as difficult as others. These students, while reportedly maintaining previous college ties, demonstrated a different perception of the university experience, in that it offered new opportunities for becoming part of a larger community. In order to assist students to develop a sense of purpose, recommendations were made by focus group participants on how to emphasize similar academic and teaching expectations and experiences across the four years. To assist in feeling connected with the new academic environment, they also recommended such activities as mentorship programs, a strong orientation process, campus tours and welcome events when transitioning to the university site.

A sense of resourcefulness is important to develop in order to navigate the university setting. Students identified how it would be beneficial to be exposed to well-organized, timely, accessible, and consistent communication, systems, procedures and resources that would foster self-directedness. Learning the academic culture and core scholarly values and expectations is central to fostering a successful transition. Students and faculty expressed concerns in the difference of academic standards, such as scholarly writing, between the college and university settings. Partnership infrastructures that enable all three partner institutions to have consistent expectations, shared academic data and teaching across sites, communication, and coordination of the delivery of a single curriculum in an articulated collaborative program were identified as being very important for fostering an academic culture across all four years.

The findings from this study have implications not only for collaborative nursing programs but could also inform student transitioning support structures in other college-to-university academic programs. The challenges of student transition related to inter-university and college-to-university transitions have recently prompted political changes. Since 2011, the Ontario government began focusing more on the changing learning needs of students and labour market demands (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU], 2011). As a result, the Ontario Credit Transfer System was developed to improve transparency and access to student transfer pathways, and enable more choices for obtaining post-secondary education (MTCU, 2011). One of the goals of the credit transfer system is to assist students transfer their course credits and transition from college to university programs. While there is evidence that broader changes are being undertaken, the

findings of this study may contribute to strategies that support student success during transitional experiences.

While this report outlines recommendations specific to the York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative BScN program, the following are more generalized recommendations based on the findings to foster successful college-university partnerships and transition practices.

## **1. Structural Conditions for Collaborative Institutional Success**

- Enable clear and transparent expectations regarding the delivery of collaborative programs, by developing a mutually agreed-upon Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that describes the expectations of each partner, related responsibilities, decision-making and conflict resolution processes, governance, communication structures, admission requirements and procedures, program requirements, financial arrangements etc.;
- Form committees such as an Advisory, Executive, and Policy and Curriculum Committee, etc., to support clear and transparent expectations. Membership should consist of appropriate representatives from all partners and student representatives where appropriate;
- Ensure consistent and regular committee meetings take place, involving all representatives and stakeholders, and where outcomes are communicated across sites, as applies;
- Explore the feasibility of one central communication point that provides students with a 'one stop' location for all program-related information across the 4 years;
- Ensure consistency and transparency in admission processes and standards by utilizing one application centre such as the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). Where this is not possible, it is recommended that representatives from both the university and college partners participate in a single application and acceptance process across all sites.
- Establish structures and systems for an integrated, pan-institutional academic database or similar systems, to better share registrar and student information over the 4 years; and
- Institute pan-institutional teaching and a schedule of visiting lectures to ensure curricular continuity and foster collaboration, student transition and academic success.

## **2. Student Services/Support and Community Building**

- Create mentorship programs that could link upper year students with those transitioning into the university setting. This practice can provide transferring students with critical transition information to lessen their degree of uncertainty and stress, as well as provide an anchor to their new academic home;
- Enable students to access university services such as the libraries and athletic programs prior to transitioning to the university setting.
- Develop communication strategies to ensure consistent and timely information across all four years. Multiple communication vehicles are recommended, such as a common program website for all 4 years (both for admissions and in-program information),

establishment of an e-newsletter, regular and timely emails, and a transitioning student handbook and 'next steps' fact sheets;

- Establish campus visits and opportunity to participate in transitional activities such as program and professional development activities, program specific orientations, tours of the university, welcome events focused on assisting them to acclimate to the larger university campus;
- Provide opportunities for students to meet with friendly and informed students and faculty from the university prior to the transition period and specifically just prior to the actual transfer time;
- Assist students in achieving school/work/home life balance through communication of additional scholarship opportunities, workshop offerings, as well as ways to connect during the regular school day as well as through electronic means;
- Provide supports and information for 'first-generation' students and their families as they adapt to the rigours of a university program; and
- Provide students with a structured transition program such as the recently introduced YU START program at York University and providing incentives for students to complete the program during the summer of their transitioning year.

### **3. Academic/Curricular Changes**

- Ensure consistency and collaboration in the program and integrity of the curriculum throughout the 4-year program, through practices such as ensuring consistent learning objectives, sharing of course syllabi, shared teaching across sites, and consistent expectations and evaluation processes over the four years;
- Introduce specific student success strategies/modules into the beginning of Year 3 academic course curriculum and provide incentives such as participation marks to ensure students learn quickly about using learning resources at the University;
- Offer specific workshops (i.e., on scholarly writing skills, writing multiple choice exams) to equip students with the necessary skills and tools needed to foster their transition from the college to the university;
- Establish agreed-upon learning outcomes and methods of evaluation across the curriculum.
- Enable students to experience university by opening doors to the possibility of taking university electives during the first two years of study; and
- Provide opportunities for strategies as cross teaching, cross appointments or team teaching across sites to facilitate continuity in the program and the student's academic experience. These strategies would also enable a better understanding of the expertise within each of the partners' faculties.

## **Future Research**

As post-secondary education pathways with college and university partnerships are becoming more widely accessible, it is important to continue to implement research on the types of delivery structures, and the successes and challenges experienced by students and institutions. While there has been a proliferation of research in student success during the transitional period, almost all focuses on students entering university from high school. Some minor efforts have been made to better understand the mature student experience and strategies that support success for this cohort. Nevertheless, there is a marked gap in research pertaining to students transitioning between institutions, particularly between Colleges and Universities.

Common strategies to foster student success and ways to improve program delivery need to be identified. Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and longitudinal studies of all four years of the program in terms of student outcomes are recommended. Quantitative data such as students' admission GPA, length of program completion, number and type of courses dropped or repeated and GPA accumulated across four years may provide insight into predictors of academic success. Qualitative studies can glean more insight into the student experience and how it changes across the program. Only through comprehensive analyses of all four years of student achievement, across partner sites, will collaborative programs be better able to understand academic and system barriers and strategies to foster success.

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# Setting the Context

## Introduction

In 1999, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care announced that a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) degree would be mandatory as the entry to practice for nursing graduates (Council of Ontario Universities [COU], 2013). As a result, collaborative nursing programs, which are partnerships between colleges and university schools of nursing, were formed. Currently, there are 14 BScN programs offered in Ontario, of which 12 are Collaborative programs offered through college-university partnerships (College of Nurses of Ontario [CNO], 2013).

Ontario-based institutions offer a variety of types of collaborative nursing programs. The Ontario College University Consortium Council (CUCC) Report (2007) described the different collaboration models and partner relationships that exist. In some program collaborations, students complete their first two years at a college site and then transfer to a university setting to complete the final two years. This structure has been referred to as an *articulated*, or '2+2' model. Other collaborations not only offer this '2+2' model, but also offer a separate 4-year BScN program structure at the university site. Still, other collaboration structures involve a 4-year program that is offered at each of the college or university sites. Lastly, in some collaborative structures where the college and university sites are close in proximity, students will proceed through the program together, taking some classes at the college site, and other courses at the university site (Zorzi, Engman, Barry, Lauzon, MacCoy & Yen, 2007).

There are also a variety of practices in delivery structures for faculty. In some collaborations, faculty teach only at their own site, while others teach at more than one site. Some faculty were also identified as teaching only at their partner's site (Zorzi et al., 2007).

Many different types of relationships between partner organizations and the interface with students were identified. For example, the access to resources and services for students differed, where in some collaborations, students only had access to resources at their site, while others had access to the services offered by all partners in the collaboration. Graduate affiliations differed in that in some collaborations, the students were only affiliated with the degree-granting university, while in others the graduates were affiliated with all the partners (Zorzi et al., 2007).

Some similarities were found in that almost all collaborations had a formal agreement and/or memorandum of understanding that outlined the expectations and structures among the institutions for implementing the program. Most had established joint committees for decision-making purposes, and an integrated and consistently-delivered curriculum, where the students were exposed to the same content, regardless of their setting. Usually, the university's academic policies and procedures were followed; however, the hiring of faculty was done independently at the college and university (Zorzi et al., 2007).

The York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative program was the first collaborative nursing program to be established in Ontario in 1999, and currently has one of the largest nursing enrollments in the province. As the first collaborative program in nursing in Ontario, the design team from the participating Colleges and the University faced many structural barriers. At the time, College-University collaborations were almost non-existent. Working within existing constraints, the development team elected to use an articulated model with an integrated four-year curriculum. All four years of the curriculum including all courses, program outcomes, and program philosophy were agreed to by the partners and a commitment was made to ensure the consistent delivery of the program.

As an articulated program, students select one of two college collaborative partner sites (Georgian or Seneca) for the first two years, at the time of application to the program, and then transfer to York University for the third and fourth years. Georgian College is located in Barrie and Seneca College's nursing program is offered at its King City campus (north of Toronto).

As time evolved, more and more collaborative programs were established with varying structures as previously discussed. Concerns about the transitioning experiences of nursing students and their success have become the focus of interest of some researchers. Research suggests that the transition from college to university can be challenging for all students. Cameron (2005) describes the transition period from college to university as a time of uncertainty in which students must adapt to a new environment, and alter their routines and relationships. Students can often face a number of challenges such as differences in size of schools, cultures, class sizes, and academic achievement (Cameron, 2005; Bell, 1998; Kaylor & Rewey, 1998; Lizzio, 2006).

At this time, there is limited research exploring the transition experience from community college to a university setting or with respect to predictors for success among Collaborative BScN Nursing students. Instead, the research that is available identifies admission and cumulative grade point average (GPA), sciences courses' GPA, previous degree attainment, reading comprehension and math skills, as predictors for student success (Lewis & Lewis, 2000; Robichau-Ekstrand, et al., 2011).

## **Purpose of the Study**

At York University, nursing students in the Collaborative program were demonstrating signs of having difficulty transitioning from the college to the university settings, despite a seamlessly designed university curriculum. In addition to a change in the academic setting, they were experiencing much less success in the Ontario nursing registration exam when compared to the Second Entry BScN program students at York University.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Second Entry nursing students complete a full or partial university degree in any discipline, and meet specific program admission requirements, prior to entering the program, and complete a similar, compressed nursing curriculum as the Collaborative students.

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the transition difficulties currently being experienced by the Collaborative nursing students as they transition from the college site to the university setting. In addition to better understanding collaborative nursing students' experiences, the findings may also inform other programs who are considering college-university partnerships on how to build and sustain successful college-university partnerships and positive transition processes for their students

## **Literature Review**

The literature review focuses on research and theory related to student success during the transition to university and specifically to those who physically relocate from the college to university campus at the end of year two as part of their degree program. Theoretical approaches and frameworks useful to understanding the transition to university were reviewed, to identify specific transitional issues faced by college to university and Collaborative BScN students (in particular), and to offer a framework upon which to analyze and compare the qualitative findings of the study.

Over the last two decades, much research has focused on student success in institutions of higher education. There is a growing institutional interest in establishing conditions for student success because success translates into the institution's reputation and its ability to attract and retain high quality students. A focus on student success and retention are critical as institutions face an increasingly competitive environment, higher expectations to demonstrate measurable performance to governments and accrediting bodies, and a diminishing fiscal climate.

The findings in the area of student success research have emphasized that success in the First Year has been found to foretell the success of a student throughout the university experience. Conceptually, the First Year begins with the period of transition to university. This period is a time when the foundation of personal growth and academic success is made marking the beginning of a new educational experience. It is therefore a critical phase for both students and the institution (Mullendore and Banahan 2005, cited in Rogers, 2014). Although much of the research has focused on transition of students from high school to university, some limited research has been with other populations such as mature students, international students and college transfer students.

Research related to student success, retention and persistence have broadly addressed student characteristics, growth and development, and the institutional climate. Hardy and Cox (2010) suggested that the dominant theoretical paradigms cluster into the 'student development theories' and the 'campus environment theories'.

## **Student Characteristics**

Characteristics such as age, gender, first generation, family support, high school GPA in addition to internal factors such as intrinsic motivation have all been associated with student success as measured by academic performance, persistence and retention (Rogers, 2014). While these characteristics, particularly GPA are strongly associated with success, there is also evidence that intentional student success strategies such as mentorship programs, learning communities and co-curricular programs can augment student capacity for success (Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert & Pascarella, 2006 cited in Kuh et. al. 2008 cited in Rogers, 2014). While grades remain the strongest predictor of academic success, high quality student programs can act as effective moderating influences.

## **Student Development Theories**

For more than 30 years, research has addressed the developmental needs of transitioning students to institutions of higher education. Beginning with the seminal work of Victor Tinto (1975;1993), theories have focused on tasks students need to develop for successful integration into the university, both academically and socially. Tinto theorizes that a student's success is influenced by the student's commitment to the academic institution, and academic and career goals (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Those students who academically and socially integrate into the campus community increase their commitment to the academic institution and are more likely to graduate (2007). Tinto's student development theory is often used as a framework for student services programs in recognizing that the transition is a process and not a specific point in time.

In Tinto's (1993) model 3 stages of transition are described as students navigate the transition process into the university setting. The transition process begins with students leaving and distancing themselves from past relationships and membership in a community such as in the college setting. Once arriving at the university they often feel lost, confused and stressed as they learn the new environment and feel like they don't belong. The final stage occurs when students begin to learn the new system and focus on meeting the new challenges (Cameron, 2005). The Student Development Theory highlights the fact that the transition process is not a specific point in time and normalizes the process of uncertainty, exploration and a new identification. In order for students to be successful in the transition, they need support in developing new approaches and a new identity.

Victor Tinto could be said to be the grandfather of student success theory coming from a developmental perspective. Many other theorists and researchers have extended his work or offered additional models within the developmental paradigm. Here we will focus on the work of three notable contributors to student success research and theory, including Chickering, Schlossberg and Lizzio.

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development (1969, 1993) is one of the most comprehensive models used to understand the development of student identity. In his theory, he describes seven vectors of student development in identity formation. Chickering chose not to describe this process as a linear process of stages, as he believed students are too diverse and respond in different ways. Instead, vectors have direction and magnitude, with students going through each vector at different rates. There is also the possibility of issues interacting with more than one vector at the same time (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2009; & edld579 opensource). The seven vectors that contribute to the development of identity are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward inter-dependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity (edild579coulglasopensource). While vectors are not rigidly sequential, they do build on each other to support identity formation (Evans et al.). Movement from one vector to another represents an increase in skills, strengths, confidence, awareness, addressing complexity and integration into the university setting (edld579opensource).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a theory of adult/student development that examines events which affect various aspects of an individual's life and their societal role. This psychosocial theory has been identified as being helpful in understanding and working with students in transition (Evans et al. 2009). In this theory, transition can be defined as "any event, or non-event (events that are expected to occur but don't), that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p.33). The transition itself is only defined by the person experiencing it (Evans et al.). To understand individual transition experiences the type, context, and impact of the transition need to be considered (Evans et al.). Goodman et al. defines transition as being anticipated, unanticipated and non-events. The meaning of the transition is also related to the context and the effect of the event.

Alf Lizzio (2006), an Australian academic has proposed a conceptual framework of student success that has been extensively used in Australia and is currently being applied and evaluated at York University in a pilot new student transition program called YU START<sup>2</sup> (Rogers, 2014). Lizzio's model of student success focuses on Five Senses of success. The Senses include; 1) a sense of resourcefulness or the knowledge of and ability to use appropriate university resources to support success, 2) a sense of capability or the skills and capacity to take action to support success as the student adjusts to the new demands of university work, 3) a sense of connectedness or the development of relationships with peers, upper year students, faculty members and staff all of whom can contribute to success, 4) a sense of purpose or clarity about what the student seeks to gain from and contribute to university life, and 5) a sense of academic culture including the unique culture of a given institution and the academic skills that accompany higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> YU Start is a New Student Transition Program designed to support the first year student experience. Through this comprehensive program students learn how to enrol in courses, connect with fellow classmates, student leaders, faculty members and student services staff, and become more familiar with campus life, supports and resources available to them.

Developmental theorists emphasize the importance of the transitional period as students enter the university in terms of students' psychosocial development and their need to adapt to a new environment. Their work has effectively drawn attention to the fact that transition to university can be filled with challenges as students navigate the change, develop a new identity (as a university student) and master the difficulties of environmental and psychosocial transitions. This need to adapt to their new environment and form a new identity is paramount to student success.

## **Campus Environment Theories**

The early years of research in the area of student transition to university focused on students themselves and the skills, knowledge and values they require to successfully achieve the developmental tasks that relate to academic, personal and social success. Recent research has shifted the focus from students per se to the institutions and the conditions they need to create in order to support student success. Astin (1993), as well as Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) began the shift in focus to environment. Most recently, the work of Kuh has drawn attention to the concept of student engagement as a powerful predictor of student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006). The specific benchmarks associated with student engagement have become well known with the widespread use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Trowler (2012) suggest that "Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution" (p.3). The definition points to the reciprocal nature of student success as it must engage both students and the institutions in which they learn. Both have responsibilities for success.

The research on student success has personal characteristics, developmental tasks and the institutional conditions that support success. But as noted, most of the research has been conducted with students entering university from high school. But what of the students who transfer from college to university and those students who transfer from college to university who are in nursing programs?

Cameron (2005) applied the work of Tinto to explore transitional experiences of collaborative nursing students as they move from the college to the university. She noted that students often face a number of challenges such as differences in size of the school, culture, class sizes, and academic achievement. They are faced with having to develop new skills and abilities as they negotiate new roles and relationships to become fully integrated into the new institution. This time of uncertainty where students adapt to their new setting including altering routines and relationships can be described as transfer shock (Cameron, 2005, Hills, 1965).

Cameron (2005) reported that students expressed challenges applying nursing knowledge at the university level. They described the transition process as stressful and while they adapted to the university environment and expectations, they did not feel part of the university community.

Cameron identified this as transition stress where geographical relocation, academic shock, and professional transformation all interact to create transition stress. Students who were successful in the transition reported going through a process of separating from the community college, moving through the transition stress and adapting to the university. They adapted to the new environment through the development of new skills and relationships and an overarching commitment to obtaining a baccalaureate nursing degree. The process was supported by interactions students experienced with peers, faculty and staff within the university which were deemed to be crucial to the concept of integration and persistence to succeed.

Cameron's findings were supported in a 2007 report by the College University Consortium Council (CUCC) entitled *Implementation Evaluation of Ontario's Collaborative Nursing Programs-Final Report*. In this report the transition issues faced by collaborative nursing students were examined (Zorzi et al. 2007). Students were surveyed to assess their satisfaction with the transition from a college to university setting. Of the 5 schools where students begin their studies at a college and then transfer to a university campus, none expressed satisfaction with the transition process and some found the transition difficult. The student comments indicated that they would recommend more information be provided in advance in regards to university registration and expectations; support and guidance during the transition process; more opportunities for interaction with university faculty and staff prior to the transition; and the ability to meet with students from other sites in the program before and after the transition (Zorzi et al.).

Deepening an understanding of the transitional experiences of students, Berger and Malaney (2003) examined how pre-transfer activities with community college students along with post-transfer experiences affect the adjustment to the university setting. They found that individual student characteristics, community college experiences and university experiences all played an important role in adjustment and all should be considered when planning strategies to improve the transitional processes. Their findings indicated that students who have been actively prepared during their college experience and when communication is clear about the nature of transition, students are more likely to be more academically successful and satisfied in the university experience.

In 2011, McMaster University and Mohawk College published a report called *Building Successful College and University Partnerships* (2011). The authors examined indicators of student with a focus on the overall integrated experience. The report describes how students can often have difficulty with social and academic integration following the college to university transfer. The authors underscore the point that both the sending and receiving institutions have a responsibility to prepare and support students throughout the transition process.

One of the challenges faced by students transitioning from college to university settings is the perceived differences in institutional cultures between colleges and universities. For example, students reported the significant differences between college and university expectations, methods of teaching and evaluations. As Schein (2010) has pointed out, institutional culture provides



students with a set of glasses through which their experiences can be interpreted and actions determined. It is an understanding of institutional culture that enables individuals and groups to learn how to successfully cope with the challenges of adaptation thereby enabling a more effective institutional integration. Students who are in a Collaborative nursing program with an articulated structure experience the cultural variations in an asserted way. Not only are they needing to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be academically successful in Year 3 but they are also required to develop a working knowledge of the new culture including new expectations, new processes, new physical campus, new resources, new policies and procedures. The demands on students who are transitioning from college to university are complex yet effective negotiation of those challenges is essential to their ultimate success.

In summary, student success is a complex phenomenon (Wiggers & Arnold 2011). While research is proliferating particularly in relation to students entering university directly from high school, there remain many unanswered questions about transition among specific cohorts such as college transfer students. The literature consistency identifies student characteristics, the developmental challenges (personal, academic and social) that university brings, and institutional conditions as the dominant factors affecting effective student transition and success. The research that has been done with collaborative nursing students in programs that are articulated has clearly illustrated the challenges of learning a new culture, rising to new expectations, orienting to new physical environments, acquiring an understanding of resources and establishing new relationships. What appears to be understood is that transition is a process that straddles the college and university experiences. When seen as process and when intentional actions are taken in the pre-transfer and post-transfer phases, students are more likely to be successful.

## **Qualitative Research Methodology**

The purposes of this study were to explore the transitional experiences of collaborative nursing students who were involved in the York-Georgian-Seneca Bachelor of Science in Nursing program and to put forward recommendations derived from students and faculty with respect to how to better support student transition and success.

A total of 11 focus groups were conducted at the three collaborative partner sites, comprised of students and faculty, from April to July 2012. Two focus groups occurred at each of the two college sites (Georgian and Seneca Colleges), with Year 2 students, for a total of four focus groups. The research team decided to conduct two focus groups at each site, to provide the opportunity for balanced input. The decision was also made to only interview Year 2 students, as first year students, who may still be coping with the transition from high school to the college setting, could unintentionally contribute perspectives that were not specific to the college-university transition experience.

Two focus groups also took place with Year 3 and 4 students from each college site for a total of four focus groups. The rationale to combine both Year 3 and 4 students was to learn from those who have just transitioned into the university setting and from Year 4 students who may be more reflective of their experience as they prepare to graduate. In order to compare the transition processes, the decision was made to separately interview Year 3 and 4 Georgian and Seneca college students. Three focus groups were also conducted, interviewing faculty from each site. In total, there were 73 participants in the focus groups (see Table 1).

The focus groups explored the following areas related to a successful transfer from a college to university setting:

- The experience of starting a baccalaureate program in a community college and then transferring at the beginning of the third year to complete the program in a university setting;
- The perceived differences between studying at a community college vs. a university setting;
- Whether students feel prepared to transition in the third year of their program; and
- Identifying current strategies and recommendations that would support the transition from a community college to university setting.

Students and faculty were recruited through a general email invitation, sent to all registered (second, third, and fourth year) Collaborative BScN students and teaching faculty at all three partner institutions, to participate in a focus group. The invitation outlined that the research project was examining the experience of starting a program in a community college and then transitioning to university and identifying strategies and recommendations that would support the transition from college to university.

The focus groups and transcription of the data were conducted by York University Institute for Social Research (ISR). During the focus groups, no member of the research team was present, in order to avoid bias and to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. While transcripts of the sessions were provided to the research team, names were replaced by a participant number by the ISR prior to distribution of the files.

In addition to the 11 focus groups, two members of the research team (i.e., both of whom teach in the Collaborative Nursing program at York University and had leadership roles in the undergraduate programs) were invited to provide their written response to the discussion questions used at the faculty focus groups. The two individuals were asked not to participate in the actual focus group so as to avoid both conflict of interest and bias; however, it was felt that their insights would be invaluable to the study and thus considered as part of the data collected. Table 1 summarizes the dates, locations, and participants in each of the focus groups.

**Table 1: Summary of Focus Groups Conducted**

<b>Date of Focus Group</b>	<b>Location of Focus Group</b>	<b>Type of Participant</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
April 10 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Upper-year students (Georgian College cohort)	5
April 10 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Upper-year students (Seneca College cohort)	8
April 17 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Upper-year students (Georgian College cohort)	9
April 17 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Upper-year students (Seneca College cohort)	5
May 16 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	York Collaborative BScN faculty	7
May 28 <sup>th</sup>	Seneca College (King campus)	Seneca College Collaborative BScN faculty	7
June 4 <sup>th</sup>	Georgian College (Barrie campus)	Georgian College Collaborative BScN faculty	7
July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Incoming (Year 3) students (from Georgian College)	3
July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Incoming (Year 3) students (from Georgian College)	3
July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Incoming (Year 3) students (Seneca and Georgian)	11
July 4 <sup>th</sup>	ISR office (York U)	Incoming (Year 3) students (from Seneca College)	8
<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b>			<b>73</b>

The Collaborative Program has a diverse student population. To better understand the demographics of the students participating in the focus groups, they were asked to complete a demographic survey. The survey examined such factors as age, prior education level before entering the Collaborative Program, housing accommodations, parent’s educational background, student employment and the number of dependents.

Profiles were only requested from student focus group participants (with the option to not respond). The following section will provide demographic data on the 52 Collaborative BScN students who participated in one of the eight focus groups.

### **Demographic Data**

Of the 52 students who participated in the focus groups, 27 were upper-year (years 3 and 4) and 25 were currently transitioning from year two (at one of two college sites) to year three at York University. Specifically, 24 students had completed their first two years at Georgian College; while 28 had completed years one and two of the program at Seneca College. Table 2 demonstrates the age ranges of participants. With respect to gender, of the 52 student participants, six (12 %) were

male and 46 (88 %) were female. This gender distribution is to be expected based on nursing continuing to be a predominantly female profession.

**Table 2: Age Ranges of Student Focus Group Participants**

Age Ranges	19 – 21*	22 – 25	26 - 30	31 +	Did Not Respond
<b>Totals N=52</b>	21	12	8	4	7
<b>% Age</b>	40	23	15	8	14

\*No student participant reported being less than 19 years old.

As Table 2 demonstrates, most of the focus group participants fall within the 19-21 year old age range. Table 3 below outlines the educational background of focus group participants. Specifically, it summarizes any prior post-secondary education achieved by the respondents prior to entering the Collaborative BScN program.

**Table 3: Summary of Prior Education of Student Focus Group Participants**

Educational Background	Participants	%
Enrolled directly from high school (i.e.: no other post secondary experience)	21	47
Prior completed/incomplete university studies	6	13
College-level upgrading (in pre-health or chemistry)	10	22
Other (unspecified) post-secondary	8	18
Did not respond	7	--
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

In summary, 47% of focus group participants who responded to this question on the demographic profile indicated that they entered the Collaborative BScN program directly from high school. Thirteen percent indicated having completed some prior university studies; while 22% indicated that they completed college level upgrading in pre-health or chemistry programs prior to beginning the program. Another 18% indicated having some other post-secondary experience. The finding of 53% of the participants having another entry route than entering directly from high school indicates the changing profile and needs of post-secondary students.

In terms of housing accommodations, 25 (56%) of the 45 students who responded to this question indicated that they lived at home with their parents; while 20 (44%) reported that they live outside of their parents' home. Seven focus group participants did not respond to this question. Moreover,

six respondents indicated that they also supported dependents ranging from one to three dependents.

Table 4 examines the academic background of the parents of the student focus group participants. Of the 45 students who responded to this question, 44% indicated that both parents had attended post secondary education (either college or university); 24% had one parent with post secondary education; and 31% indicated that neither parent had attended post-secondary education. This latter group is commonly referred to as ‘first generation’ or ‘first in the family to attend’ in student service sectors. Seven students did not answer this question.

**Table 4: Parent’s Educational Background**

Level of Parent’s Education	Participants (n)	%
Both attended post-secondary	20	44.4
One parent attended post-secondary	11	24.4
Neither parents attended post-secondary	14	31.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 outlines the number of hours per week that students reported that they worked outside of school hours. In total, 26 students reported that they worked; 19 indicated that they do not work; and, 7 abstained from answering the question.

**Table 5: Total Number of Hours Worked Per Week by Student Focus Group Participants**

Number of Hours / Week	Participants (n)	%
1 – 14 hours	8	31
15 – 20 hours	10	38
21 – 30 hours	6	23
31 + hours	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>

A total of 69% of student participants indicated that, in addition to their enrolment in a full time and challenging academic program, they also worked up to 20 hours per week. Adding to this is the fact that many students reported (during the focus group sessions) that they commuted up to one hour to their classes and/or clinical placements.

## Qualitative Research Results

As noted in the literature review, a number of theories address issues of academic and social integration and their importance in helping transferring students adjust to and succeed in their new environment. Lizzio's Five Senses of Success Conceptual Framework was chosen to guide the focus groups data analyses as it is particularly relevant to this student transition study. Lizzio's (2006) framework identifies five senses that describe student transition and promotes success in the university setting. The five senses are: *Sense of Capability, Sense of Connectedness, Sense of Purpose, Sense of Resourcefulness, and Sense of Academic Culture.*

These five senses describe unique challenges that transitioning students experience as they adjust to university life. The framework outlines practices that contribute to facilitating students' satisfaction, engagement and perseverance in transitioning to a university setting. As this framework provides actions and steps that can be used to assist students' transition to their new context and be successful, it has been chosen to guide the data analyses and discussion of the report. While Lizzio's (2006) framework was designed to support students transitioning from high school to university, it is equally relevant and effective in terms of transfers into university from a college setting. Using Lizzio's (2006) *Five Senses* framework, the experiences of students during the process of transfer and following the transfer were able to be explored and specific needs that foster success were identified.

The research team individually analyzed the focus data transcripts and thematized the data under the five senses. Validity of the findings was achieved through investigator data triangulation. Individual research team members first analyzed the data using Lizzio's (2006) framework and then a comparison of findings occurred amongst the researchers.

While the experiences documented are specific to collaborative BScN students, some of the observations and recommendations may also be applicable to other articulated programs, thus making the scope of this section broader than the specific and narrow focus of the research study.

### Sense of Capability

Lizzio (2006) describes students' success at university depends on their **sense of capability**. Specifically, he points out that, "Students who are better prepared for the roles and tasks of university study (viz., 'learning ready') tend to have greater early academic success and are consequently more satisfied and persistent with their studies" (p.2). A sense of capability is developed through institutional identification, student-staff and student-student relationships.

To understand how well students understood the academic expectations, student focus group participants were asked to what extent they understood that they were in a university baccalaureate program rather than a college program. They were also asked to describe how prepared (or not prepared) they felt with respect to the transition to university. At the same time,

faculty members from both the colleges and the university were asked similar questions. The aim was to gain a clearer understanding of the degree to which students felt they were prepared in terms of the academic expectations as well as the perception of faculty members regarding students' skills and possible deficits.

It is clear from the focus group data that students are experiencing some challenges to their sense of capability as they approach the transition from college to university. Several students reported **feeling uncertain about the transition**. Comments such as, *"I just didn't know what to expect when we were transferred,"* and *"there is fear of the unknown...more chance of failing"* reflect this concern. One student currently transitioning from years two to three noted: *I'm scared that we're going to be all on our own and won't be able to ask questions or get that help or we won't know where to get that help";* while another student added that *"what I've been told is that it's a lot more intense; a lot more involved"* [at university]. A few indicated they had received conflicting messages about what to expect *"we've been told so many different things by so many different people; I don't know what to believe and what not to ... I don't have enough information"*. At the same time, some students acknowledged that any change is challenging, and conveyed less concern about the transition. As one commented: *"it takes time. Whenever you walk into a new building, new place you're going to feel awkward. That's even with new jobs or anything. You're always going to feel awkward when you're new. I think over time...you will warm up to people and you'll get a feel for what every day is going to be like"*.

Some students expressed specific **concerns about university-level academic requirements**. One student recalls reacting to this concern as the transition was about to occur, *"okay, get ready to be a very independent learner ... I knew it was going to be me sitting in a room self-studying everything...."*. Other students just about to transition, expressed the expectation that the overall number of students and class sizes at York would reduce the level of personal attention. As one student stated *"... come to university, nobody will have the time because it is so busy and...so big."* Several students also expressed concern about a lack of curricular continuity or integration between the first two and last two years of the program. One noted that, *"at the college it was very practical, but they did bring in the theory a little bit. We had knowledge of self as a nurse and we did reflect on things..... but at university it was purely theory. I'm not saying I didn't enjoy my experience at university, but it was definitely like being in two different nursing programs"*. Another student commented that *"... I found... this huge disconnect between what we learned in first and second year and what we have been learning at university"*. Yet, a few students de-emphasized a lack of continuity between the college and university settings. One reported that *"... at the college level there were more assignments worth less and here, fewer assignments worth more. I think it is what you prefer."* A few students argued that the academic requirements were more difficult at York. One fourth year student, for example, noted that *"the workload didn't get harder...it was different but it wasn't harder"*.

Faculty members also identified a lack of continuity between the academic expectations at the colleges and the university. A York faculty member offers one description of that difference in the

following, *“(T)hey come here and there’s a lot more theory, a lot more application, a lot more abstract thinking, and there’s a critique that this is wasted time... slowly it starts to change..”* Another concurs, stating that: *“university expectations are that there’s going to be a lot of self, independent learning.”* Several faculty members underlined the importance of closer collaboration between the partners in order to improve continuity. As a Georgian faculty member comments, *“It would be... helpful for us to see the syllabi for semesters five and six, so we can...orient how we are doing.”* There were also recommendations about regular and improved communication between the institutional partners to assist students in preparing for and navigating the transition period. As one faculty member stated: *“Information is power. If we have information, we can disseminate to the student”*.

**Engagement or involvement within the academic partner communities** is also linked to developing a sense of capability (Lizzio, 2006). A few students reported having difficulties accomplishing this. As one noted, *“I wasn’t a part of anything, just coming, going to my class, going home, even though I wanted more and I wanted to be a part of something .... I never got any sense of community, any sense of belonging. I don’t know why, but it just never happened...”*. A few faculty members identified a relationship between size and developing a sense of community. As one college faculty noted, *“... They talk about York being such a huge place... say it’s not a community...Seneca was a community... because it’s smaller. Everybody knew everybody, at York it is different.”* There were also comments capturing how the additional time to travel to York challenges engagement even more. As one faculty member noted, *“the drive... it takes for some people at least two hours out of their day. The fact that many of them have jobs and so to juggle the job and the drive is something they never experienced or thought they would...”* Family responsibilities add yet additional constraints to students’ time for engagement.

While several students and faculty members identified a fear of the unknown, a degree of discontinuity between the collaborative partners and the lack of involvement as hindering their sense of capability, their comments also identified several concrete steps that would facilitate a better transition. Regular and early information sessions (leading up to the transition year), print and electronic communications (including a collaborative website, e-newsletter, new student ‘check lists’ and regular emails), early orientation and dedicated transition staff, mentorship opportunities and on-site visits to the university as key vehicles to helping them develop their sense of capability and prepare more effectively for the transition.

## **Sense of Connectedness**

Fostering successful transitions depends on students’ **sense of connectedness**, and the “quality of relationships with peers, with staff, and their feeling of identification or affiliation with their School or University” (Lizzio, 2006, p. 2). Connectedness can be developed through good working relationships between fellow students and with staff, and involvement with the university community. As such, Lizzio (2006) emphasized the importance of helping transitioning students make personal connections with other students, to develop a sense of solidarity and membership in



a student cohort. In this study, this need to create community was aptly summarized by one college faculty member who stated *“our students want relationships”*.

Nevertheless, several students pointed out that they had experienced a feeling of **loneliness and disconnection** during their transition with one student noting that: *“I think everyone felt very alone”*. This was underscored by another student who stated that *“transitioning from second to third years was the worst; you had no one to talk to.”* As a result, many students stated that they continued to rely on and identify with their initial cohort from their respective colleges. Some expressed confusion and disinterest with respect to developing connections with students transitioning from the other partner college. One student stated that transitioning students stayed in *“distinct groups”*; while another expressed frustration, stating that *“... there was always this tug-of-war kind of sort... it's confusing. You're a York student, but you're at a college”*.

Similarly, some students indicated **confusion regarding their own student identity**. For example, one student commented: *“I didn't really understand that I was still a York student but I would be at a different campus”*, while another added that *“when I applied to the program at York I assumed that I was going to be on the campus at York as a York student and more integrated in the York community. I didn't find out until later in my second year that I could actually get a YU card and go into the gym here still participate in activities at York”*. Several comments indicate that this approach seemed to result in confusion and place barriers in terms of building an identity and affiliation with institution/program in their final two years, which is a critical element in terms of fostering a smooth transition according to Lizzio (2006). As such, it is not surprising that one faculty member participant noted that students' identification *“remains very much with their college as opposed to the university”*. As suggested by the McMaster-Mohawk (2011) report, these observations could be pointing to an inherent weakness in the very nature of the articulated collaborative program model (i.e.: two separate cohorts undertaking the first two years of the program at distinctive colleges and then merging together to the university for the final two years).

On the other hand, other students expressed a **desire to be part of a bigger community** while not losing their previous ties. For example, one student who was in the process of transitioning from second to third year stated that:

What I'm hoping will stay the same are the relationships within the student body. In Seneca because the classes were so small and we were basically with the same people from first year, we all became really close and developed really strong bonds. I'm hoping that when we transition to York, even though there'll be more students and bigger classes and we might not be in the classes, that that will stay the same.

In addition to their own identity, part of students' challenges with connectedness involved **faculty and student relationship-building**. Lizzio (2006) noted that student-staff relations and fostering an atmosphere of collegiality and approachability is key. However, several students expressed their trepidation regarding these new relationships and thus might have actually impeded their transition

(i.e. their perception could become their reality). For instance, one transitioning student stated *“the relationships with the professors are probably not going to be the same because the classes are so big”*; while another felt that *“there is no one here within the Faculty that was really willing to help students with stress”*.

To the contrary, some students who began their transition period with a different perception might have, arguably, helped in their transition. For example, one upper-year student stated that *“I had an old idea of what I thought university was going to be like and when I came here, I realized how privileged I was, like the technology. Really, I found coming to York a lot easier... because I could talk to the teachers. I never thought that I couldn’t”*. This willingness to embrace and connect was also expressed by another upper-year student who noted that *“there was more excitement leading up to coming to York for me being on this campus because that’s where my expectations were – to be on a large university campus”*.

## **Sense of Purpose**

As Lizzio has argued, the “students’ sense of purpose depends on their sense of vocation, their engagement with their discipline of study and their capacity to set personal goals” (p. 2). Indeed, this sense of purpose, while a key element of success, is also challenged by some of the tensions within a collaborative nursing program. These include the ongoing tensions between the college and university settings, as well as those between the theoretical and practical aspects of the program.

The interviews reflect how important it is for students to have a **clear sense of purpose** about their place within the collaborative program. This not only means understanding the organizational specifics of the program, but also recognizing and accepting why the program is organized as it is. Focus group comments from both faculty and students emphasize the importance of this understanding, and also uncover some of the gaps in this sense of purpose. A few comments suggest that some students do not experience the program as collaboration between three sites. As one faculty member noted, *“my overall impression is that they (students) had the understanding that they did two programs – more of a hybrid than a single and unified program”*.

A few students identified **differences in teaching approaches** between the college and university sites as interfering with their sense of program integration. A subset of these students reported concern with the more theoretical approach encountered in the university setting, compared to the more practical approach at the college. A few students questioned the need to incorporate theoretical frameworks at all, arguing that it detracts from the practical elements of their nursing education. As one student commented, *“I really think for all intents and purposes that nursing is a very practical profession and ... they may be trying to go very far the opposite extreme, to make it more academic and theoretical. The entry-level nursing profession is a very practical one”*. Similarly, another student commented that:

There's a practical application of theory, it's not just purely theoretical. ... going into my placement [in third year], I felt prepared to discuss theories of philosophy and transcending patterns of rhythmical being, but I didn't really know much about what was going on in my patients' body or what the medications did which I should have.

In contrast to students who reported difficulty in connecting the practical and theoretical aspects of the curriculum, others applauded its relevance but offered the observation that it could be better integrated. As one upper-year student noted, *"If that client-centred care and that psychosocial aspect of nursing were integrated from day one, you wouldn't need two year's worth. ... I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed my experience in most courses, but it needed to have been integrated better"*. This sentiment was echoed by another upper-year student who suggested that: *"Maybe if they cut down the theory courses or... implemented those in years one and two it would have helped us better apply what we learned"*.

Several faculty members emphasized the critical need for students to make the connection between the theoretical and practical aspects of the program in order to **foster a sense of relevance** in their program as well as enable them to develop as nurses. As noted by one faculty member: *"students' ability to think critically and reflectively is what we do here –critical thinking and reflective thinking around everything from a clinical scenario to an ethical scenario ... we're always asking the students to think reflectively"*.

Another important aspect of fostering a sense of purpose lies in what Lizzio (2006) terms *"sharing enthusiasm and excitement in the program ..."* (p.8). A few students shared concerns about having less laboratory time at the university (compared to their college experience), less choice in terms of securing clinical placements, and the gap in having hospital-based clinical placements. As one student noted,

...not having a placement when you come to the university that first semester is completely disadvantaging to us as students – not having that experience...then you go into community and that's a whole year potentially that you're not in the hospital...nurses on the floor are going to expect 110% from you and you can't give it because you have been out of it for eight months.

Other students identified the importance of having other, **extracurricular opportunities** in the university setting that serve to foster professional and personal development, and strengthen a sense of purpose. One upper-year student commented on the benefits of becoming involved in student association activities, stating that: *"My only wish is that everybody had the same opportunity as me to go to the Canadian Nursing Student Association ... it was an amazing experience.... it's so national. That really gave me a sense of belonging. When I got back from that trip suddenly I changed completely. I wanted to be so much more involved"*. Similarly, another student observed the following, *"When I came to York, I was really surprised about the*

*opportunities and the leadership that I can take – being in the Nursing Students’ Association at York and doing events. That was something that was unexpected and that I really liked”.*

Yet a few students also reported that the intensity of the nursing program combined with the added stresses of commuting and other familial responsibilities made this difficult. This difficulty did not appear with the transition to university, for, as one student shared, even during the college years, *"almost none of us were in any extracurricular activities because we just didn't have the time for it and also the college campus was really far from everything"*. But, a few students shared that the size of York and the added commuting time discouraged their participation in extracurricular activities.

## **Sense of Resourcefulness**

A sense of resourcefulness, as identified through student feedback, was another point of concern. This “ability to navigate the student system and to get the information they need, willingness to speak up if they have a problem and an ability to balance work, life and study commitments” (Lizzio, 2006, p. 2) is a necessary skill for program success.

A key feature of developing a sense of resources can be found in understanding how to navigate institutional systems, procedures and practices as well as be able to access this information in “organized and readily available formats and locations” (Lizzio, 2006, p.9). Several students commented on the **difficulties of having to adapt to new processes** upon transferring to the university. As articulated by one transferring student, who stated, *“You get used to the system then you're almost done. You're always in this disoriented type of situation. You don't know where to grip or where you have to connect. Then you move on. You're always trying to start over all the time"*. This frustration was similarly expressed by other students, often in the context of the different size of the partner institutions and thus the level of personal support experienced. For example, one upper-year student noted that at the university *"you have to be more independent, actually seek the information. At the college it was more like everything was just told to you. University is more you have to find out, you have to be more independent. That's what people weren't used to"*. This reflects the nature of the current collaboration structure and the move to a new campus and institution.

Specifically, students expressed concern about particular institutional processes, such as grades/records transfer from the college to university systems, differing enrolment procedures, marking schemes, citation requirements (i.e., perceived variations in interpretations of APA referencing between instructors, courses, and institutions), scholarship availability, and processes with respect to the Clinical Preparedness Permit. As one student pointed out, *“In our fourth semester we were told that our grades from the college would not count towards our transcripts at university... a number of students were quite upset because they had been working very hard to have good grades, but then on our transcripts it's just a "P" for pass"*.

Several students commented that the adjustment to a more automated system at the university was challenging with one student noting that they were just told to “*go to the website*”; adding that “*you were just staring at the space trying to figure out your way out through the labyrinth*”. To complicate matters, some students reported experiencing frustration when attempting to access university resources. For example, with respect to year one and two students located at the college site and accessing university resources, one upper-year student commented that “*they kept saying we did have access, but that they wouldn't release our student number which was very frustrating for us...We're paying university tuition fees, we should have university access, not just colleges' because it is a big difference*”. This experience was underscored by another transferring student who added that in second year “*I always thought that we'd have access to the stuff at York, like the online stuff....but we just didn't have all the resources that could have been there for us*”.

Access to “just-in-time information through regular emails and announcements” (Lizzio, 2006, p.10) as a way to promote students’ sense of resourcefulness; however, many students expressed frustration and confusion resulting from lack of coordination between the partner institutions as well as insufficient information and resources during the transition period. As stated: “*A lot of things were very confusing. I think there needs to be more clear communication between the people that have the information and the students...we need a solid source of information that is one hundred percent concrete*”. Interestingly, students turn to peer groups and social media sites such as *Facebook* in lieu of asking nursing faculty for clear information. One student noted potential discrepancies, in stating, “*One person might go here but another person might have to go over there, but they're telling different information. I find, as good as the group is, it's more confusing than anything, so I take it with a grain a salt because it's just tough to know.*”

In addition to resources and accessing information, several students commented on the **differences between the college and university setting**, often pointing to the differences in physical size and the diversity of the student body. As one college faculty member noted: “*one of the things I've heard from students is that they talk about the physical environment and the psychological environment. They talk about York being such a huge place. It is not... and they think it's not student-friendly. They say it's not a community; whereas college was a community for them because it's smaller. Everybody knew everybody*”.

The need for **student-friendly advising practices** and procedures was underscored by several students who commented that communication from the university is key to ensuring that they came prepared for their initial enrolment appointment. While this concern was reflected in the comments of some transferring students, those who had taken the initiative to visit the campus prior to the start of third year offered a different perspective. For example, one upper-year student reported that they felt prepared “*because I had come to York during the summer and taken a couple of tours. I was able to come here and take a look around. The enrolment appointment was helpful. I think just knowing the university and having a plan was very helpful.*” Similarly, one college faculty member noted that: “*lectures are audio taped ... at York – they (sic: students) like that. They can listen again; that is one thing that I've heard that's positive*”.

In summary, in order to develop a sense of resourcefulness, students feel they must be exposed to well-organized, timely and accessible systems, procedures and resources that foster self-help. However, many students reported a lack of communication and accurate information that compounded their frustration in having to adapt to new institutional processes. Moreover, while many transferring students reported higher levels of stress and confusion during their transfer process, many upper-year students reported having overcome these barriers by their fourth year.

## Sense of Academic Culture

Students in the focus groups identified issues associated with a sense of academic culture, which Lizzio (2006) described as learning “how things are done” (p. 2) and understanding what are core values and principles in a new academic setting. Generally, upper year students commented on the **different academic standards** to which they were being held at the university campus when compared to those experienced at the college campuses. Some commented that this inconsistency made it difficult to transition to higher standards in years three and four. One student noted that during their first two years professors “*weren’t consistent. Every professor was different and some just spoon fed you while others would make you work extra hard, which is not fair, because some of us are prepared and some aren’t. When you go to York, you’re like, ‘What happened? I’m not ready for this’.*”

Students also mentioned specific examples of challenges with academic cultural competence. **Scholarly writing** was identified as a significant concern in the transition from the college to the university campus. For example, the varied application of referencing systems was noted by the students as a difference between college and university faculty. As noted by one transferring student, “*I’m scared for a lot of papers and essays. I heard that at university they’re really strict on the APA citation.*” The inconsistent expectations of proper citation formatting in their first two years was also highlighted by several transferring students one of whom stated, “*I hope at York it’s more of a black and white when it comes to APA format*”. These observations were echoed by faculty members. Those teaching in third and fourth year commented that some students seemed not as well prepared in terms of their understanding of the university culture and its associated academic expectations for writing. For instance, one faculty member noted that, “*I was quite taken aback by some of their writing skills. They’re not even, in my expectation, at a high school level...even in their analysis of the literature. They’ll just basically use copy/paste technique where they just copy the sentence out of the research and just paste it into their paper*”. Interestingly, first and second year faculty identify a specific focus on writing skills in early courses, and think that due to the recent heavier focus on increasing licensing exam pass rates in the upper years, less scholarly writing is occurring.

Other issues raised that contribute to variances in the academic culture of learning related to **grades and grading**. Students in the first two years sensed they were in a university program based on course progression requirements: *"The college courses the passing was 50, so I knew it was the university courses because you need 60 and 65"*. However, focus group discussions raised uncertainties regarding transitioning students' knowledge of expectations. *"I thought I got the expectations, but when I got the marks back [at York] it was a completely different picture. I was like, 'Oh, okay, I didn't."* The values and principles of the university were not clear.

Faculty also voiced awareness that grading was a concern for students, stating that when students transfer and *"hear that marks decline...they're concerned."* In the same vein, student progression to the next term is a significant issue that weighs on faculty, and was related to maintenance of numbers. With regards to failing students one faculty member commented, *"I think it's a culture – and I'm not going to say just college....nobody fails in the college or if they do fail then there's a discussion at a higher level on how to make sure that the seats are filled."* In the upper years, faculty agreed there was an *"entitlement culture of everyone passing."*

**Consistent communication** and its role in establishing clear expectations for behaviour and performance in the academic settings varied, according to both students and faculty. Students generally agreed that transition would be facilitated by more communication *"between the people that have the information and the students,"* particularly with regards to placements, coursework activities and program expectations. Faculty observed other items to be communicated, in order to facilitate success, such as underlining that *"it's no longer fun and games.... it is truly a university program and usually that discussion is around some kind of evaluation process and sometimes around...classroom conduct."* The use of professional language was referred to as an example. They also voiced challenges concerning the influence of the *"culture of the organization"* and how *"learning and doing"* were not similar between sites and so *"deconstructing that thinking"* was necessary. Lastly, the views of faculty-student relationships coloured communication and the learning culture. Upper year faculty commented on the college culture of *"we're all buddies"* and *"sitting in the cafeteria socializing with students"*. Such differences were noted also by students and often attributed to large class sizes. Aspects of communication relate also to some aspects of the overall collaborative relationship.

The importance of the **partnership infrastructures** in forming the academic culture was expressed by faculty members from all three partner institutions. Challenging aspects of the collaborative partnership included a lack of communication and, in some cases, a lack of coordination in the delivery of this articulated program. This resulted in frustration. For example, one faculty member commented that *"collaboration ... is very, very challenging"*, while another questioned, *"Do [university faculty] really value what we teach here at a college?"* These concerns were not limited to teaching faculty; students also sensed the cultural differences within the partnership structure. One transferring student commented, *"it would be a pretty seamless transition, considering it's York's program in the first place and I would expect there'd be communication between the two"*

*parties". Another student added, "I just don't like the segregation, because it's kind of like two years there, two years here. You're not connected at all, so you have to find a way to bridge that".*

Both transferring students and faculty members expressed concern with respect to students' preparation for and understanding of the academic culture and the differing academic expectations between the colleges and the university. While some of this can be explained by the differing institutional policies and expectations, given that this is a single baccalaureate four year program, it raises questions with respect to the adequate and consistent student experience and environment. At the same time, it could also point to a lack of information, conveyance of expected standards to students and partnership collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

The qualitative findings indicated a variety of issues and concerns that could be improved upon to support the student's transition process from the college to university setting. Students identified the transfer process as being confusing with issues related to fear of the unknown; a perception of different academic requirements and expectations between the college/university portions of the program; and, the need to improve communication and the seamlessness between the two parts of the program. Recommendations to improve strategies for success within the BScN Collaborative Program based on Lizzio's (2006) conceptual framework and findings will be discussed.

### **Sense of Capability**

Lizzio (2006) recommended that to develop a student's sense of capability activities should be designed and implemented clarifying expectations, supporting the development of academic entry skills and engaging students as partners in a learning community. One way to achieve this is through "deliberate redundancy" where key messages are repeated in different ways and at different times. This can be achieved through such strategies as emails, web sites, and providing timely updates.

The findings also point to the need to enhance communications between the institutional partners with a goal of improving curricular integration as well as exploring the possibility of team teaching across institutions. Helping students to understand what is expected and providing the tools to enable them to understand the differences between the two parts of the program as well as integrating the theory and practical aspects to a greater degree may result in students who feel better prepared and capable to navigate the transition period.

A key factor to improving experience and student success lies in strengthening the institutional relations and communication between the three partners. An example of some initiatives that could achieve this is strengthening established committees (with partners and student representatives) to meet at regular intervals to discuss issues of mutual importance. It is felt that the institutional partnerships could benefit from holding more consistent and frequent meetings both between the university and the respective partners as well as with all three partners around



the same table. This would enhance collaboration, ownership and consistency in terms of program design and implementation.

Lizzio (2006) also pointed to the need for ensuring that students feel connected to their new academic home and recommended that *“voice and ownership by students of their program”* (p.7) is evident. To that end, several efforts have already been undertaken and are being expanded at the School of Nursing to foster this engagement and partnership. For example, inclusion of students on specific committees as well as at key events (such as the spring visit to transferring students at both college partner sites), are helping to integrate students in key ways. Students are sent regular email updates with information at the end of Year 2 moving into Year 3 on important dates and processes they need to complete prior to the beginning of Year 3.

At the same time, Lizzio (2006) noted that successful transitions are characterized by ‘early Independence...and getting active and starting self-managing study as soon as possible’ (p. 6). As a starting point, the School of Nursing has identified the need to discuss both their definition of and approaches to fostering self-directed learning across the four years of the program.

### **Sense of Connectedness**

The need for students to connect with their new academic home, develop effective peer relations beyond their existing cohort and be able to access helpful support are critical elements to helping students transition successfully. To foster this, students pointed to several recommendations such as mentorship, an enhanced York presence at their colleges as they prepared for the transition (i.e., in Year 2) and a strong social orientation process at the beginning of year three. Many transitioning learners noted that having an experienced upper-year mentor during their last semester at the colleges would have provided them with critical transition information as well as an anchor to their new academic home, thereby lessening the high degree of stress and uncertainty faced during the transition period. Some of these approaches have already been undertaken at York, namely in the form of an enhanced student orientation for incoming BScN students as well as the exploring establishment of a robust and sustainable mentorship program.

Students pointed to the need to ensure transitional activities such as program-specific orientations and welcome events aimed at helping them to acclimate to the larger university campus. To assist in developing a new program identity, students expressed their desire for relevant information offered through different vehicles. Along a similar line, students pointed to the need to meet with friendly and informed university representatives during the transition period, and specifically suggested visits to the college near the end of their second year (i.e., immediately preceding their completion of the fourth semester). Similarly, invitations to visit and/or tour the university campus as well as to participate in program-based activities and professional development events were also recommended by transferring students. Activities involving students at all three sites was also suggested by both students and faculty participants as a means to enhance program spirit and identification as well as foster stronger bonds between the teaching faculty at the partner sites.

Both students and faculty identified access to York services as an issue and questioned why students in the first two years of the program are consistently faced with barriers in terms of accessing extracurricular and academic resources. Students highlighted the fact that even with a York card, but without a York timetable, they are unable to access library resources, the gyms or participate in varsity athletics. Thus, it is recommended irrespective of their year level or site location, the 3 sites explore how students can access the resources and benefits as a York student. It is felt that doing so will greatly enhance students' identification with the institution.

In order to foster new relations and connections, Lizzio (2006) pointed out the need for students to "access experience...[and] get to know and learn from the experience and modelling of senior students" (p.4). Several students highlighted the importance of nursing peer support and some pointed to the usefulness of Facebook, explaining that "*...third and fourth year students set-up a group on Facebook for the transition where we can go on and post questions and they would answer it for us...the Facebook group was very helpful ...*". Although Facebook groups have been established by most student cohorts and are valued for the connection and communication it provides, there is concern about the accuracy of the communications. One student stated, "*It would be nice if we had a more formal person making the statements because students will say one thing and then you hear another thing from another student.*"

Enhancing consistent and timely communications is imperative when facilitating the transition process and assisting students to feel connected and part of one program, instead of two. While Facebook and social media sites are an excellent medium for student support and connectedness, as mentioned previously, there is a need to develop effective, consistent, academically-focused communication strategies across all three sites from the School of Nursing. This will assist students to feel connected and informed of consistent and relevant information and activities as a unified program across the four years.

## **Sense of Purpose**

It is important that transitioning students view their program as relevant, understand the various components, and develop a sense of identity and enthusiasm with their chosen profession (Lizzio, 2006). Focus group participants shared several suggestions about how to achieve a smoother transition. One faculty member recommended the need for "*cross-teaching... cross-appointments and cross-pollination*". A few faculty member acknowledged that such an approach would help build continuity in the program and in students' academic experiences. Students and faculty alike suggested more collaboration between the institutional partners, earlier blending of theory and practical courses, additional professional development opportunities and the need to better understand and appreciate the rationale for the structure and organization of the collaborative program. At the same time, focus group participants pointed to the need to more closely integrate elements of the entire program over the four years and with all partners to ensure a more seamless academic experience. As noted by one transitioning student, "*we were at the college for two years*

*getting used to the teachers, we know what they were like, what they expected. Going to university, we're expected to do more and be more professional."* In summary, the findings indicate that students feel that it is critical to their success and growth as practitioners that the program be more consistent and clear in terms of blending academic and professional expectations throughout the program as well as providing opportunities for engagement and professional development.

## **Sense of Resourcefulness**

Assisting students to develop their resourcefulness skills will support their success within the university setting. Students can be assisted to more easily utilize resources by providing clear and accessible role information, procedures and resources, and encouraging timely help-seeking behaviours.

As suggested previously, a *Facebook* site run by York's School of Nursing was suggested as a possible means to access reliable and timely information. A student stated, *"It'd be nice if York setup a Facebook group and it was just constant updates about this is what you do if you want to file your OSAP, this is the days where you have to book the appointment if you're curious about transit, or this is the scheduling."*

To improve the sense of resourcefulness during the transfer and beyond, several students suggested improvements, through a pan-institution program website, an e-calendar for transferring students which lists critical dates and procedures, overall improved communications, and more opportunities to get acquainted to the university campus and processes (i.e., through visits, tours, and regular emails) before the start of third year.

Several students and faculty commented on difficulties with respect to transitioning from one higher education system to another. Thus, it is imperative that students be equipped with the skills and tools needed to foster their transition from the college to the university as well as ensure consistent expectations across the four years of the program. Building on the recommendations of student and faculty focus group participants, it is recommended that the university develop and offer a series of workshops to transitioning students (beginning in year two of the program) around specific topics, most notably APA citations, scholarly writing skills, and writing multiple choice exams. These workshops could be offered at the three program sites as well as accessed electronically. Specific student success strategies/modules could be introduced into the beginning of Year 3 academic course curriculum. Incentives such as participation marks should be considered to motivate students to complete the modules and facilitate students learning quickly about using learning resources at the University.

Student participants identified multiple challenges they faced that affected their ability to balance life and school. In fact, 69% of focus group participants reported working up to 20 hours per week (outside of school) and several commented that they were unable to participate in student life or related professional development activities given familial or other demands on their time. The

School (across all 4 years) needs to explore ways to assist students to strike a balance in their school/work/home life which may include seeking additional scholarship supports as well as finding ways to connect during the regular school day using electronic means. Similarly, it is recommended that the program find ways to support the growing number of 'first-generation' students and their families as they adapt to the rigours of a university program.

## **Sense of Academic Culture**

Both transferring students and faculty members expressed concern with respect to students' preparation for and understanding of the academic culture and the differing academic expectations between the colleges and university. Focus group participants helped to identify some of the underlying problems which have hindered the effective transition by underscoring the need for pan-institutional collaboration and partnership. While some of these issues are inherent in a model that spans two kinds of post-secondary institutions, recommendations to lessen challenges and augment collaboration and cooperation of the institutions involved can be identified.

Specifically, students expressed concern that the institutional registrar systems did not allow for grades/records from the first two years of the program to be transferred to their York transcript. As a result, a cumulative program GPA is not available. This is a potential disadvantage to students when applying to graduate programs in the future. In order to ensure transfer of important student data, it is recommended that the registrar representatives of the three partners move forward on the development of an integrated, pan-institutional registrar database or a similar system in order to be able to collect, record and analyze student records over the four years at all three partner sites.

Student success hinges on reducing the perception of three different programs and increasing academic seamlessness within one, unified program. Accordingly, several initiatives have been identified as a result of this research project. Specifically, by ensuring consistent learning objectives throughout the four years of the program, sharing course syllabi with all program partners and establishing consistent marking/grading protocols, as well as establishing other 'checks and balances', it is believed that student outcomes and a better senses of academic culture can be improved.

In summary, some of the techniques and individual actions reported and already undertaken by some students in order to facilitate a smooth transition to university and the understanding of culture were discussed. Some of these include: familiarizing themselves with the university campus and resources prior to the actual transfer; developing support relationships (with peers and upper-year students); refining their time management and study skills; familiarizing themselves with university policies prior to the transfer; using all available resources (such as time management and study skills workshops at the university); and, accessing other student supports (such as academic advising, skills and personal support counsellors). Some students also commented on the importance of a balanced lifestyle as well as recognizing that all transitions can be challenging and

thus the need to maintain an optimistic and positive outlook. In the end, while students pointed to a variety of external conditions that may have hindered their transition, many also acknowledged the importance of self-preparation for the transition and taking responsibility for their own academic success.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. In terms of the qualitative aspect of this study, it is important to acknowledge that given the nature of the focus groups (a general invitation was sent to all registered (second, third and fourth year) Collaborative BScN students as well as teaching faculty at all three partner institutions) there exists an inherent self-selection bias evident in the focus group participants. The insights of focus group participants may not be representative of the entire student and teaching body, but rather embody the opinions of those who elected to respond to the invitation to participate. As such, the viewpoints expressed in the focus groups cannot be generalized. With that said, the insights gained through their participation may be invaluable to the understanding of some of the issues related to the program and transition process, and the resulting general recommendations may increase awareness of similar issues occurring in other comparable programs in Ontario.

The original research grant proposed quantitative analyses of the academic performance of students over the four years in relation to success on the CRNE. However, challenges in terms of incompatibility of the three data systems, highlighted as an issue from the qualitative data, prevented this from occurring. It is important to note that this analysis will be undertaken in the future (i.e., once systems become more compatible) as an on-going effort to identify early indicators of success.

Lizzio's (2006) *Five Senses* framework was developed in the United States and in the context of a direct-entry student (i.e. students transferring directly from high school to university). As such, this model could be subject to two limitations: 1) a bias inherent in an American (not necessarily Canadian) perspective; and 2) its focuses on the experiences of direct entry students (i.e., not the transfer experience of students moving from a community college to a university setting, as was the focus in this research study). With that limitation stated, it was nevertheless felt that Lizzio's framework was sufficiently robust and relevant, and thus was used as the analytical framework of the qualitative portion of this study.

## Summary and Future Directions

In 1999, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care announced that a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) degree would be mandatory as the entry to practice for nursing graduates (Council of Ontario Universities [COU], 2013). As a result of this decision, the government funded collaborative partnerships between university and college nursing programs across the province. The delivery structure of the collaborative partnerships are guided by a variety of factors such as previous relationships among the partners, geographical distances, and available resources (Zorzi et al., 2007). The York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative BScN Program is an example of such a partnership. It is considered an articulated program with an integrated curriculum, characterized by delivery of the first two years at either Seneca or Georgian College, and the last two years at York University.

At York University, nursing students in the Collaborative program were demonstrating signs of having difficulties with transitioning from the colleges to the university, despite a seamlessly integrated designed university curriculum. They were also less successful in the nursing registration exam than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Entry BScN Program at York, and other schools of nursing in Ontario.

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the current transition difficulties experienced by the York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative nursing students as they transition from the college sites to the university setting. Strategies to better facilitate the transfer process and foster student success were also explored. There are critical reasons for better understanding the transition challenges of Collaborative program students. At the individual level, students have invested emotionally and financially, as much as \$60,000 over four years of education. For the University, it is important to successfully retain students as the inability to do so has serious financial and reputational implications. In addition, the Ontario Government has made a large investment in educating nursing students in order to address the continuing human resource challenges in the health care sector. Thus it is imperative that students are as successful as possible in transferring from the college to the university, in graduating from the program and ultimately in passing the nursing registration exam. A secondary purpose of this research was to offer generalized recommendations based on the findings, to foster successful college-university partnerships and transition practices for other programs.

Over the last two decades, more research has focused on student success in institutions of higher education. There is a growing institutional interest in establishing conditions for student success as a focus on student success and retention are critical as institutions face an increasingly competitive environment, higher expectations to demonstrate measurable performance to governments and accrediting bodies, and a diminishing fiscal climate.

Through 11 focus group interviews, comprised of students and faculty from the three partner sites, qualitative data were gathered on the transition experience from the college settings to York University. Perceived differences and expectations between a college and university setting were

also explored. Students and faculty were then asked to either identify whether they felt they were prepared to transition in year three, or make recommendations as to how better to support successful transition and student success.

Using Lizzio's (2006) *Five Senses of Success Conceptual Framework* to guide the data analyses, the findings indicated that many students felt uncertain about the transfer process; were concerned about the university level academics; and had a sense of not being connected to the York community. This resulted in feelings of loneliness and disconnection that can lead to confusion regarding their own student identity and purpose. However, it is important to note that some students did not find the transition as difficult as others. These students, while reportedly maintaining previous college ties, demonstrated a different perception of the university experience, in that it offered new opportunities for becoming part of a larger community. In order to assist students to develop a sense of purpose, recommendations were made by focus group participants on how to emphasize similar academic and teaching expectations and experiences across the four years. To assist in feeling connected with the new academic environment, they also recommended such activities as mentorship programs, a strong orientation process, campus tours and welcome events when transitioning to the university site.

A sense of resourcefulness is important to develop in order to navigate the university setting. Students identified how it would be beneficial to be exposed to well-organized, timely, accessible, and consistent communication, systems, procedures and resources that would foster self-directedness. Learning the academic culture and core scholarly values and expectations is central to fostering a successful transition. Students and faculty expressed concerns in the difference of academic standards, such as scholarly writing, between the college and university settings. Partnership infrastructures that enable all three partner institutions to have consistent expectations, shared academic data and teaching across sites, communication, and coordination of the delivery of a single curriculum in an articulated collaborative program were identified as being very important for fostering an academic culture across all four years.

The findings from this study have implications not only for collaborative nursing programs but could also inform student transitioning support structures in other college-to-university academic programs. The challenges of student transition related to inter-university and college-to-university transitions have recently prompted political changes. Since 2011, the Ontario government began focusing more on the changing learning needs and demographics of students and labour market demands (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU], 2011). As a result, the Ontario Credit Transfer System was developed to improve transparency and access to student transfer pathways, and enable more choices for obtaining post-secondary education (MTCU, 2011). One of the goals of the credit transfer system is to assist students transfer their course credits and transition from college to university programs. While there is evidence that broader changes are being undertaken, the findings of this study may contribute to strategies that support student success during transitional experiences.

While this report outlines recommendations specific to the York-Seneca-Georgian Collaborative BScN program, the following are more generalized recommendations based on the findings to foster successful college-university partnerships and transition practices.

## **1. Structural Conditions for Collaborative Institutional Success**

- Enable clear and transparent expectations regarding the delivery of collaborative programs, by developing a mutually agreed-upon Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that describes the expectations of each partner, related responsibilities, decision-making and conflict resolution processes, governance, communication structures, admission requirements and procedures, program requirements, financial arrangements etc.;
- Form committees such as an Advisory, Executive, and Policy and Curriculum Committee, etc., to support clear and transparent expectations. Membership should consist of appropriate representatives from all partners and student representatives where appropriate;
- Ensure consistent and regular committee meetings take place, involving all representatives and stakeholders, and where outcomes are communicated across sites, as applies;
- Explore the feasibility of one central communication point that provides students with a 'one stop' location for all program-related information across the 4 years;
- Ensure consistency and transparency in admission processes and standards by utilizing one application centre such as the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). Where this is not possible, it is recommended that representatives from both the university and college partners participate in a single application and acceptance process across all sites.
- Establish structures and systems for an integrated, pan-institutional academic database or similar systems, to better share registrar and student information over the 4 years; and
- Institute pan-institutional teaching and a schedule of visiting lectures to ensure curricular continuity and foster collaboration, student transition and academic success.

## **2. Student Services/Support and Community Building**

- Create mentorship programs that could link upper year students with those transitioning into the university setting. This practice can provide transferring students with critical transition information to lessen their degree of uncertainty and stress, as well as provide an anchor to their new academic home;
- Enable students to access university services such as the libraries and athletic programs prior to transitioning to the university setting.
- Develop communication strategies to ensure consistent and timely information across all four years. Multiple communication vehicles are recommended, such as a common program website for all 4 years (both for admissions and in-program information), establishment of an e-newsletter, regular and timely emails, and a transitioning student handbook and 'next steps' fact sheets;



- Establish campus visits and opportunity to participate in transitional activities such as program and professional development activities, program specific orientations, tours of the university, welcome events focused on assisting them to acclimate to the larger university campus;
- Provide opportunities for students to meet with friendly and informed students and faculty from the university prior to the transition period and specifically just prior to the actual transfer time;
- Assist students in achieving school/work/home life balance through communication of additional scholarship opportunities, workshop offerings, as well as ways to connect during the regular school day as well as through electronic means;
- Provide supports and information for ‘first-generation’ students and their families as they adapt to the rigours of a university program; and
- Provide students with a structured transition program such as the recently introduced YU START program at York University and providing incentives for students to complete the program during the summer of their transitioning year.

### **3. Academic/Curricular Changes**

- Ensure consistency and collaboration in the program and integrity of the curriculum throughout the 4-year program, through practices such as ensuring consistent learning objectives, sharing of course syllabi, shared teaching across sites, and consistent expectations and evaluation processes over the four years;
- Introduce specific student success strategies/modules into the beginning of Year 3 academic course curriculum and provide incentives such as participation marks to ensure students learn quickly about using learning resources at the University;
- Offer specific workshops (i.e., on scholarly writing skills, writing multiple choice exams) to equip students with the necessary skills and tools needed to foster their transition from the college to the university;
- Establish agreed-upon learning outcomes and methods of evaluation across the curriculum.
- Enable students to experience university by opening doors to the possibility of taking university electives during the first two years of study; and
- Provide opportunities for strategies as cross teaching, cross appointments or team teaching across sites to facilitate continuity in the program and the student’s academic experience. These strategies would also enable a better understanding of the expertise within each of the partners’ faculties.

### **Future Research**

As post-secondary education pathways with college and university partnerships are becoming more widely accessible, it is important to continue to implement research on the types of delivery structures, and the successes and challenges experienced by students and institutions. While there

has been a proliferation of research in student success during the transitional period, almost all focuses on students entering university from high school. Some minor efforts have been made to better understand the mature student experience and strategies that support success for this cohort. Nevertheless, there is a marked gap in research pertaining to students transitioning between institutions, particularly between Colleges and Universities.

Common strategies to foster student success and ways to improve program delivery need to be identified. Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and longitudinal studies of all four years of the program in terms of student outcomes are recommended. Quantitative data such as students' admission GPA, length of program completion, number and type of courses dropped or repeated and GPA accumulated across four years may provide insight into predictors of academic success. Qualitative studies can glean more insight into the student experience and how it changes across the program. Only through comprehensive analyses of all four years of student achievement, across partner sites, will collaborative programs be better able to understand academic and system barriers and strategies to foster success.

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