

MEASURES OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE FOLLOWING UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE TRANSFERS IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO: FINAL REPORT

Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology with Data Provided by Lakehead
University
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1. Outline of the Study

This study investigates transfer student characteristics, patterns and experiences drawing on data from the Graduate Satisfaction Survey, Confederation College and Lakehead University student registration and performance tracking datasets, transfer student surveys and focus groups. The datasets were developed for Lakehead and Confederation students enrolled during the 2005 – 2010 period. These included such variables as previous education, age, aboriginal and first generation status, amount of credit granted and program of study.

While best efforts were made to ensure comparability of the datasets, there were some differences that limited comparative findings and conclusions about trends in student transfer success in college and university and comparisons of full- and part-time students. Recommendations for future data collection and research are proposed.

2. Findings

2.1 Findings from Data Analysis

Inbound transfer confirmations to Confederation College have grown by an annual average of 6% over the 5 year period of this study. A higher proportion of transfer students have come from university than college and the number of transfers from Lakehead increased 7% in 5 years. The age of these students ranges from 18 to 60 with most being in the 20 to 23 cohort (p. 23). Somewhat more females (56%) than males (44%) transferred. Self-disclosure may underestimate the level of aboriginal (12%) and first generation (6%) participation.

The completion rates of transfer students entering Confederation exceeds the college's "2010-2011 KPI overall graduation rate" (61%) by 12%. Average GPAs of transfer students are slightly higher than direct entry students (3.4).

Transfers from Confederation to Lakehead remain steady over this period: they tend to be female (61%) and, based on self-disclosure, 22% aboriginal and 24% first generation.

Twenty eight percent of Confederation-to-Lakehead transfers received credit for their prior study (an average of 4 credits each).

Graduate Satisfaction Survey data suggest that the typical time transferring students take between institutions ranges between 1.5 and 3.5 years, the shortest being Confederation to Lakehead transfers and the longest being from all other institutions to Confederation.

2.2 Focus Group Findings – Transfers to Confederation College

The findings drawn from the focus groups tended to confirm or enrich those from the data analysis and surveys.

When transfer students compared their Confederation experience with their prior institution, they note **institutional differences** including the college's smaller class sizes which offer a more personal learning environment and connections to classmates and professors. The college pace of learning is seen as slower, the workload greater but the assignments less demanding. The college program was described as having "prepared them well for a career". (p. 20) Also, the college tuition is lower and the more free time allows them to pursue part time work.

The **credit transfer process** into the college was seen as "simple, timely and effective" and granted the anticipated transfer credits. Suggestions for improvement include online submission of credit transfer applications to reduce line-ups, moderation of special transfer fees, enhanced availability of 'course outlines for discontinued courses' and 'transfer keys'. (p. 20)

2.3 Focus Group Findings – Transfers to Lakehead University

Based on a smaller sample (n=4), the study considered transfers from Confederation to Lakehead.

The **differences** related to class size and composition, cost and the nature of workloads. Transfer students noted the significantly younger student body in first and second year classes as compared to older and more diverse 3rd and 4th year classes. They particularly noted the additional pressure from different expectations; particularly, the university's "more independent readings per course" and "fewer assignments with much heavier weights".

Satisfaction with the college-to-university transfer experience was mixed. Some found the process "lengthy and frustrating", "did not receive the amount of credit they had expected", expectations were unclear and registration processes presented barriers. They recommended that a university representative present to prospective transfer students in college, approval letters include "information on which credits transfer" and

the online availability of transfer credit information. Most felt they were well-prepared for their course work. Transfer students recommended orientation programs that afford opportunities to meet professors and classmates; understand specific courses and coursework; and get advice on formats of tests, study methods, and the proper referencing and formatting of papers.

Students transferring into Lakehead were motivated by career priorities.

2.4 Survey Findings

Survey results from 12 respondents transferring from Confederation into Lakehead concluded that most were satisfied with the transfer experience, found their new program “very related” and felt academically prepared. Their major source of transfer information was the university’s website and staff/faculty.

Survey results from 10 respondents transferring into Confederation concluded that most were **satisfied** with the transfer experience. They felt academically prepared, transferred for career reasons and confirmed that their main source of information was the website

3. Results and Conclusions

The number of transfers into Confederation is increasing and proximity plays an important role in that choice.

The majority of transfer students are satisfied with their transfer experience, are female and fall between the ages of 20 and 23.

The study concludes that transfer students into Confederation achieve a better GPA than direct entrants. Those who hold a degree achieve both a better overall GPA and are more likely to graduate than other transfer students.

The study “identified a number of transfer issues that should be explored further in order to help improve the experience for students”. (p. 23)

4. Recommendations:

- As an aid to prospective transfer students, Confederation College should develop a transfer key or guideline for each program and make it available on the program webpage and in acceptance letters.
- Increase the number of transfer agreements.
- Make currently available transfer agreements easier to find on the website.

- Develop better tracking of transfer students including exemptions and credits earned.
- Further research might include:
 - Further examination of why roughly 75% of Confederation College transfers to Lakehead University receive no transfer credits at Lakehead;
 - Analysis of the number of graduates and non-graduates that transfer from Confederation College to Lakehead University and the level of affinity between programs;
 - Segregating full and part time transfer students to investigate patterns in GPA and graduation rates; and
 - Investigate ways to link individual records from Ontario College Admission Service (OCAS) and Ontario University Admission Centre (OUAC) to examine and research program affinity and measures of success such as GPA and graduation rates to allow meaningful comparisons.