

University to College Transfer Students

Exploring Motives and Characteristics

Executive Summary

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It has become progressively more common for students to transfer between postsecondary institutions in Ontario. Several studies that have examined mobility trends and transfer student characteristics indicate that the pathways students use to access postsecondary education are becoming more diversified. To date research has generally focused most on college students who transfer to university, but relatively less is known about the movement from university to college. Therefore, Confederation College conducted this study to focus on students who transferred to Confederation College from university between 2010 and 2012.

The main objective was to discover why students choose to attend college after attending university. Other important themes were also examined, including student characteristics, academic performance, program choice, transfer experience, and students' overall experience. Data was collected via online surveys and two focus groups. Participants included students who are either currently enrolled at, or had previously attended, Confederation College and who had any amount of previous university experience.

The survey questions were guided from both the research objective and previous research into university-college student mobility. From a total of 234 potential transfer students, 30 completed the survey, for a response rate of 13%. The survey also included an invitation to participate in one of two focus groups, each with a moderator to guide the discussion. A total of 17 students participated in the focus groups.

The data show that in university, most students had been enrolled in the social sciences or humanities (50%), education (20%), or science and mathematics (16.7%), with a small number in business or natural resource programs. In contrast, in college most students enrolled in programs in the School of Health and Community Services (56%), followed by the School of Business, Hospitality and Media Arts (20%), the School of Aviation (13%) and the School of Engineering Technology and Trades (10%).

When asked about factors motivating program choice, students most often stated that they chose their university program due to general interest (46%), followed by specific career related goals (36%). The most common response for choosing their college program was for career related goals (66%). More than half of students stated that their college program was related to their university program. A high proportion of students (80%) reported that they were not employed in a job related to their program after university and believed that university did not prepare them for employment; however, 100% of respondents feel that college is preparing them for employment.

In terms of the transfer experience itself, students gave a variety of responses. Some were able to transfer credits quickly and easily, while others experienced difficulties or disappointment such as when courses were refused for transfer that they felt should have been accepted. The findings of this study will be used to further improve the transfer processes at Confederation College.

A recommendation for future research is to further investigate the findings on academic performance. The groups in this study consisted of both transfer students who had received a university degree and those who had some university experience but had not completed a credential. More informative results and differences may emerge by looking at students who have completed university and students who have not completed as two separate groups.