



**Credit Where Credit is Due: Understanding the Credit Transfer
Experience at Ontario Colleges**

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ABSTRACT

During the summer of 2013, in the course of preparing Durham College's ONCAT Data Availability Report, the Office of Research Services and Innovation determined that 1,124 applicants who applied to Durham College during the 2011-12 reporting year possessed prior postsecondary experience and thus were eligible to apply for credit transfer; yet, only 298 of those applicants applied for credit transfer. Almost three quarters of students who could have applied for credit transfer did not. There was interest in exploring whether this might be the case at overall provincial level as well as why.

The purpose of this research study is to understand why some students do not apply for credit transfer and for those who do, to understand their experiences in applying for credit transfer. The study explores patterns of student mobility, student expectations on credit transfer, prevalent credit transfer practices and procedures, and institutional challenges. The goal of the study is to produce a report that will identify best practices to improve the credit transfer process for students in Ontario colleges.

This study was the result of collaboration between 22 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) in Ontario led by Durham College. The research team used data from Ontario College Application Service (OCAS), and a survey of the students across all 22 CAAT colleges who were eligible for credit transfer prior to enrolling in a postsecondary program in September 2014. Students were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey and offered the opportunity to volunteer for group discussion. Findings from the survey were analyzed and the quantitative data was further enriched with student focus groups conducted onsite at most of the 22 participating CAAT colleges, and phone interviews conducted with the Registrars or designates at each of the participating colleges.

Using applicants' voluntary self-disclosure on the OCAS admissions application, it was determined that approximately 30% of first year students enrolled at a CAAT college in September 2014 declared having a prior postsecondary experience. These students were

invited to participate in a survey. Respondents were divided into three categories: those that were not aware of credit transfer, those that did not apply for credit transfer, and those that did apply for credit transfer.

Not aware of credit transfer (27.8%)

- Eighty-one percent of these students indicated that they *would have applied* for credit transfer if they had been aware of the possibility; and
- The remaining 19% of students reported that their *perception* of whether they are enrolled in a related program would play a key role in their decision to apply for credit transfer.

Did not apply for credit transfer (28.9%)

- *Thirty eight* percent of the respondents assumed that since they are pursuing a different program, there would be no credit transfer possibility and did not apply; and
- Applicants often do not explore the possibility that even in the case of a subsequent unrelated program, there might be a possibility to transfer some elective courses.

Applied for credit transfer (43.2%)

- *Seventy-seven* percent of students indicated that they pursued a subsequent postsecondary program at a different institution;
- Developing robust inter-institutional credit transfer possibilities is *especially important*;
- Students with prior *university experience* indicate that attending a different postsecondary institution as an opportunity to build on their postsecondary experience as a major reason;
- Student with prior *college experience* indicated the location of their current institution as a major reason for attending a different postsecondary institution;
- Colleges' websites (25.8%) were resourced *most* as a source of information in addition to the informal information from peers or family (22.6%);
- *Sixty-four* percent of respondents indicated that they would prefer to receive the credit information at the same time as (when they receive) their admissions package;

- Almost forty percent of respondents indicated that they submitted *multiple applications*;
- Access to documentation and financial cost for credit transfer application were found to be *primary barriers* in the application experience;
- Almost one-sixth of the respondents consider *less than 3 days* a reasonable length of time to process an application, an additional forty percent consider less than 1 week to be the appropriate length of processing time;
- There is a *significant gap* between applicants' timeline expectations and current prevalent practices at a number of colleges;
- Of the respondents who expected to receive credits, but were *denied*, just over half – 56.2% received an explanation of the reason;
- There appears to be a *communication gap* when students are denied credit, which often leaves applicants feeling confused and treated unfairly;
- Classroom visits and assistance by program coordinators was found to be *very helpful*; and
- Often the credit transfer process resides in the Registrar offices while the credit transfer decision-making resides in the school offices. If the transfer efforts in the two units are not well-coordinated, it leads to a *significant amount of frustration* and time-delay for student.

Predictors of Credit Transfer Applicants

- Students who are older are *less likely* to apply for credit transfer;
- Students who are enrolled in a diploma or advanced diploma are *more likely* to apply for credit transfer than those in certificate program;
- Students who were enrolled in a prior diploma, advanced diploma or degree program were *more likely* to apply for credit transfer than those who were enrolled in a prior certificate program; and
- Students who had graduated from their prior postsecondary program were *more likely* to apply for the credit transfer.

Predictors of Credit Transfer Recipients

- Students who are on international study permit and have enrolled in prior postsecondary in Ontario, are *more likely* to receive credit transfer;
- Students who submitted credit transfer applications closer to start of the classes, or during the first weeks were *less likely* to receive credit;
- Students who submitted multiple credit transfer applications were *less likely* to receive at least one credit transfer; and
- Students who found the collection of requisite documents easy were *more likely* to receive credit transfer.

Predictors of Credit Transfer Satisfaction

- Students who found the first point of contact easily were *more satisfied* with the process;
- Students who clearly understood the credit transfer requirements were *more satisfied*;
- Students who could easily access the requisite documentation such as, course outlines and transcripts were *more satisfied*; and
- Students who deemed the processing time for the application to be reasonable were *more satisfied*.