

Executive Summary

The ability of Ontario college students to transfer credits to the university sector in Ontario has been an ongoing issue for many years. Progress toward a more seamless postsecondary education system has been slow and steady (CRSM, 2015), culminating in the announcement in 2011 by Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) of a new provincial credit transfer framework, committing \$73.7 million over five years.

This report describes provincial trends in college transfer to university using data from the Ontario College Graduate Satisfaction Survey (GSS) for the years 2007 to 2015. The study tracked the volume of graduates moving between college and university, and their characteristics and experience of transfer. Of the 694,379 graduates, 444,451 participated in the GSS, for an average response rate of 64%.

The research questions include:

1. What are the trends in transfer to further education after graduation?
 - a. Which institutions and programs are college graduates choosing? Has the distribution changed among institutions, credentials or programs?
 - b. Are graduates entering programs that more closely align with their college credential? Has the amount of reported transfer credit changed?
 - c. What is the student profile of college graduates who transfer?
 - d. Why do college graduates transfer to university?
 - e. What information sources on transfer are graduates using?
2. Are college transfers to university satisfied with their academic preparation and transition experience?
3. What factors, including socioeconomic and transfer-specific characteristics, influence the transfer rate and satisfaction with the transition experience?

The study incorporates new variables including disability and Aboriginal self-identity to test whether students who are under-represented in the direct entry pathway to university, are also under-represented in the college-to-university transfer pathway.

The first section of this report shows the full complement of transfer pathways for all college graduates. The remaining sections focus on transfer to university programs for college graduates of one-year certificate and two- and three-year diploma programs, excluding college degree and graduate certificate programs.

Results

Transfer rates

The overall percentage of college graduates furthering their education has been fairly stable at approximately 26%. However, the percentage transferring to a university program has decreased, from 8% in 2006–07 to 5.5% by 2014–15. In contrast, the share transferring to a college program has increased, from 17% to 19.1% over the same period. When graduate certificate and college degree programs are excluded from the analysis, the transfer rate declines from 8.3% to 6.3%. Controlling for any changes in the composition of students, programs, or college profiles, the regression models show that

the graduating years of 2012 to 2015 had significantly lower transfer rates than the 2007 reference year. Factors that may have contributed to this trend include: the increased number of students, particularly international students, entering college with a degree; the increase in pathway options to a degree, such as college degree programs and access programs in university; increased student spaces in universities due to shrinking demographics; and greater awareness of the career options for graduates with a college credential (non-degree).

Ontario college graduates who were less likely to transfer were female, older, international, originally from neighbourhoods that were low-income or where English was the first language, and graduates whose campus of college graduation was beyond a commuting distance to university. Graduates who reported a disability were slightly more likely to transfer, and Aboriginal students were equally as likely to transfer. Graduates of advanced diploma and community service and preparatory/upgrading programs were more likely to transfer. Transfer largely occurred within related fields of study.

Major shifts in regional transfer rates occurred in 2007 to 2015. In 2007, Metro Toronto and the surrounding Central Region had much higher transfer rates than the rest of the province; by 2015, however, their rate was similar to that of other provincial regions. La Cité collégiale continues to have the highest percentage of graduates who transfer, at 14% in both 2007 and 2015, whereas Durham College has experienced the highest rate increase and now has the second highest rate in the province at 9% vs 6.6% in 2007. In terms of absolute numbers of transfers, the larger Metro Toronto colleges still predominate, with Humber, Seneca, and George Brown ranked in the top three. York and Ryerson universities continue to rank first and second in the volume of transfers received, with University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) moving toward a tie with the University of Ottawa for third place. However, when the amount of transfer is weighted to enrolment, the Northern universities are receiving a much larger share of transfer students compared to other Ontario universities across the province.

Transfer experience

Overall, university transfers reported being satisfied with their academic preparation (85%), the college-to university transition (81%), and their college education (87%). These values have been stable since 2007.

University transfers who made use of information were more satisfied with their transition experience, particularly those who used college sources (5 percentage points more likely to be satisfied) or university sources (3 percentage points more likely). Graduates who transferred for academic or program related reasons were more satisfied with their transition experience, whereas those transferring due to encouragement from others, or to advance their careers or employment outlook, did not differ in their satisfaction level.

As might be expected, transfer credit that either met or exceeded expectations is a very large influencer on satisfaction with the transition experience. As well, receiving transfer credit and transferring to a related program area are also positive influencers on transfer. The timing of notification of credit is not significant.

Conclusions

The study of transfer rates, the transfer experience, and trends over time is a complex endeavor, particularly in a dynamic environment with shifting student aspirations and demographics, a proliferation in new program offerings at colleges and universities, and changing labour market demand. Further research should focus on areas such as the role of college-university transfer for groups traditionally under-represented in university, and the effectiveness of current transfer agreements to support students. The creation of data infrastructure using the Ontario Education Number can provide central tracking of transfer rates, so that transfer can be measured by student demographics, region, transfer credit, and student retention and success after transfer. Administrative data, however, cannot capture the student perspective, and an ongoing reliance on survey data such as the Ontario College Graduate Satisfaction Survey, together with other qualitative research, will be required.