

Transitioning to University: Best Practices for College Transfer Bridging Courses

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Introduction

The intent of this project was to develop a series of best practices and guidelines to inform the creation of bridging curricula and tailored supports that enhance the success of college to university transfer students while supporting all types of institutional transitions in the context of Ontario's post secondary education system.

A previous ONCAT funded project (Lakehead, 2012) identified that college transfer students entering Lakehead University through block transfer pathways had the highest retention rates and Grade Point Averages in comparison to transfer students entering with advanced standing or other types of post secondary credit. The study recommended follow up work into the characteristics and experiences of college transfer students to better understand differences in success and retention rates.

As a result of this project, we found that Lakehead University has a rich and varied context of transfer students in which to examine bridging processes including:

- College to University Block transfer with summer transition programming and curriculum (e.g. Engineering, Natural Resource Management)
- College to University Block transfer directly into various year levels (e.g. Applied Life Sciences, Business, Social Work)
- Advanced Standing students across programs with credit transfer assessed on an individual basis
- Varied and unexpected transfer students whose educational context includes:
 - Partially completing some university before transfer to Lakehead
 - Partially completing some college and some university before transfer to Lakehead
 - Partially completing a college diploma then completing a full university degree¹ before transferring credit to Lakehead University.

To unpack the characteristics and experiences of Lakehead University transfer students, apply this to scholarly research and place it within the context of the Ontario post secondary environment we engaged in the following steps:

1. Complete an annotated bibliography (Appendix A)

¹ Filtering methods for sending out the online survey related to this study were intended to exclude students who had a completed university degree however in some instances students with a completed degree and varying amounts of college credit were sent and completed the survey.

2. Complete a **literature review** regarding a) student satisfaction with and success resulting from university transfer processes and bridging curriculum and b) qualitative research on the lived experience of college to university transfer.
3. Complete an **environmental scan** of college to university bridging practices, programming and online resources and practices in Ontario, Canada and Internationally
4. Develop a formal mixed methods research process to **inventory current practices** at Lakehead University entailing:
 - a. An online survey sent to 1655 transfer students
 - b. Multiple focus groups with block transfer and advanced standing students
 - c. Individual interviews with administrative, support staff and faculty members who deal directly with transfer students and bridging programs.
5. Form a Working Group on Best Practices in Bridging for faculty and staff at Lakehead University to review preliminary research results and advise on the development and implementation of three **pilot projects**:
 - a. IMPACT college to university transfer student mentorship program
 - b. Enrolment Services Project (series of videos to educate students on using information captured by the myInfo online system)
 - c. Piloting a web based Curriculum Assistant application to facilitate information sharing across all university services and faculties serving transfer students