

Executive Summary

Seneca College is a recognized leader in the field of student transfer and pathways, both nationally and internationally, not just because of its focus on numbers of agreements, but also because of its comprehensive student advising, advocacy, assessment, and development of quality pathways. The Degree and Credit Transfer Office (DCTO) at Seneca provides a variety of integrated services to prospective and current students and alumni. These services include degree transfer advisement on new and existing program pathways – diploma to diploma, diploma to degree, and degree to graduate studies – and connecting students with other resources and information to support their academic goals.

The transfer outcomes of Seneca students who have used the DCTO services makes for an ideal case study, with findings that could benefit other colleges and universities. Seneca's DCTO was established in 2001 after some investigation pointed to a gap in the provision of information for students. At the time, nearly 44% of incoming students indicated that they planned on pursuing further education after completing their program at Seneca (36% at a university) and yet few services existed to support students interested in obtaining further education.

Previous reviews of DCTO services have focused on the experiences of students using the DCTO, particularly its flagship publication, the Degree Transfer Guide, providing the DCTO with useful but limited feedback. The purpose of the current study is to understand which segments of the Seneca student body are making use of the advising services, and which are not, particularly among those who indicated aspirations for university when they entered Seneca. Secondly, the study aims to understand the transfer rates and experiences of those who used the DCTO advising services versus those who did not. These two research components are discussed in Part 1 and Part 2, respectively, of this report.

Research questions

Part 1. What is the profile of students who use the DCTO transfer advising services?

- How do the sociodemographic and academic backgrounds upon college entry differ between DCTO users and non-users?
- Do motivations for college and program selection differ upon college entry for DCTO users and non-users?
- How many students who aspire to university use the DCTO services? How many students who use the services entered college without plans for transfer? How do the profiles of these groups of students differ?
- How do academic outcomes (graduation rates and grades) differ between DCTO users and non-users?

Part 2. Transfer rate to university and transfer experiences

- What is the transfer rate to university for those who used the DCTO versus those who did not?
- For graduates who transferred to university, did DCTO users differ from non-users in terms of their reasons for transfer, sources of information on transfer, or reported satisfaction with the transition experience?
- For transfers, does the choice of university or university program differ for those who used the DCTO versus those who did not?

Methodology

The study used a linked student-level database containing the full student population at Seneca. Students whose first semester was between the summer of 2007 and the fall of 2014, and whose first program was not a degree or a graduate certificate program, were included in the study. Visits to the DCTO were captured up until October 13, 2016. In total, 59,942 students fit these criteria and were included in the profile of DCTO users (Part 1 of study). Part 2 of the study, transfer outcomes, included a subset of the Part 1 sample of those who had graduated from a Seneca diploma or certificate program, had completed the provincially mandated Graduate Satisfaction Survey, and whose first visit to the DCTO was less than two months after graduation. This resulted in a sample of 13,607 graduates.

Results

Part 1: Profile of students who used the DCTO advising service

- Users of the DCTO were much more likely to have had plans for university when they first entered college, compared to those who did not use the DCTO services (65% vs. 37%).
- Younger students, females, and those with a parent with a degree were more likely to use the DCTO, whereas Canadian citizens and those whose first language was English were less likely. There were no differences by income or OSAP¹ receipt.
- Students who used the DCTO had somewhat stronger academic backgrounds, with 67% of users and 56% of non-users taking mostly university preparatory high school courses, and were somewhat more likely to have a high school average over 70% (50% vs. 45%). However, they were less likely to have previously attended college or university.
- Users of the DCTO were much more likely to have entered a three-year advanced diploma program compared to non-users (47% vs. 30%) and to have entered a business program (53% vs. 35%).
- Students who used the DCTO were much more likely to obtain higher grades at Seneca and to graduate, even when student aspirations, sociodemographic, previous academic, and program factors are taken into consideration.

Part 2. Transfer rate and experiences

- Overall, 58% of DCTO users furthered their education within six months of graduation compared to 25% of graduates who did not use the DCTO; 44% of graduates who transferred to university had used the DCTO advising services, whereas 10% of non-users transferred. This difference held true even when controlling for differences in academic performance, student aspirations and a variety of other factors.
- In total, 20% of transfers to university used the DCTO. Although this share differed little by student characteristics, 32% of university transfers from business programs and 29% of transfers from advanced diploma programs used the DCTO, compared to the average program rate of 20%.
- Of those who aspired to university at college entry, half of DCTO users transferred to university, compared to 22% of non-users.
- Overall, York and Ryerson predominate as universities of choice. Transfers who used the DCTO were much more likely than non-users to transfer to Ryerson (30% vs. 17%), with users and non-users equally likely to transfer to York.

¹ The Ontario Student Application Program (OSAP) provides eligible postsecondary education students with various types of assistance based on financial need.

- Graduates who use the DCTO are much more likely than non-users to transfer into business at university (52% vs. 25%) and less likely to transfer into humanities or the social sciences.
- Users of the DCTO are equally as likely as non-users to transfer into a related program.
- The reasons for transferring to university were similar between users and non-users, with career advancement and obtaining a credential cited by almost nine in ten transfers. DCTO users were more likely than non-users to cite the potential for higher income (76% vs. 70%) and the presence of a transfer agreement (55% vs. 49%) as major reasons.
- DCTO users make more use of most information sources, particularly college sources.
- Graduates' satisfaction with the transition experience (83%) and their academic preparation (87%) for transfer is high for both DCTO users and non-users, with little difference between the two groups.

Conclusions

Overall, students who use the DCTO services have similar sociodemographic and academic backgrounds to other college students, indicating that the services have a fairly equitable reach. However, users seem to be concentrated in programs with a large number of transfer agreements, and therefore the provision of outreach may be necessary for those who are navigating pathways with few or no agreements. Those who use the services perform extremely well academically in college compared to non-users, likely because they are highly motivated to obtain the grades required to transfer, and possibly because they benefit from DCTO advising services as well as referrals to academic advising. The most significant and positive finding of the study is the high transfer rates to further education and specifically to university for users of the DCTO advising services. Recommendations to enhance usage include reaching out to students (with aspirations for transfer) early on in their program, as well as to faculty and programs whose students are under-represented among DCTO users.