



PROACTIVE TRANSFER CREDIT COMMUNICATION

Examining the relationship between proactive credit transfer communication, applicant conversion rates and student persistence (ONCAT Project 2015-06)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Student mobility has become an increasingly prevalent topic of conversation throughout the post-secondary education sector. In addition to providing cost savings to students and government, recognition of prior education permits students to complete their credential at an institution that best meets their needs and contributes toward facilitating an education system that is both accessible and equitable (Zhou, Hamade & Camman, 2014).

Benefits of a Streamlined Transfer Credit Process

There are multiple reasons why institutions might wish to provide an applicant's transfer credit assessment prior to the applicant accepting or declining the offer of admission. Admissions and registrarial professionals in British Columbia suggest that provision of an early transfer credit assessment is positively linked with applicant conversion, thus providing value to both the institution and the applicant (BCCAT, 2015). According to Ott (2012), provision of late transfer credit assessments are akin to asking someone to purchase a product without being made aware of its full price. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) indicates that timely, fair, and clearly communicated assessment of transfer credit tends to improve outcomes at the receiving institution (Lane, 2012; Mulin, 2012; Tobolwsky & Cox, 2012). Additionally, the highest rated colleges tend to have streamlined transfer credit processes. This involves limiting paperwork and designing single-point of contact interactions in order to reduce complex processes for students (Usher & Jarvey, 2011). Finally, while streamlining the transfer credit process is important, provision of a complete transfer credit assessment at the point of admission can result in delayed offers of admission, and consumption of valuable resources without a guaranteed return on investment (BCCAT, 2015).

Practicality of an Automated Process

Institutions may also elect to wait for an applicant's commitment prior to initiating the transfer credit assessment process. Reasons for this include: an insignificant transfer population, uniqueness of academic programming and resource limitations, both human and technical (BCCAT, 2015). In a survey conducted by the British Columbia Council on Articulation and Transfer (BCCAT), administrators at smaller institutions indicated that automation of transfer credit is a desirable practice but often not practical. Instead, these institutions expressed a commitment to offering a high standard of service to students and encouraging organizational efficiencies whenever possible (BCCAT, 2015).

Utilization of Technology

The introduction of technology into the transfer credit assessment process is consistently referred to as a best practice. Ott (2012) identifies extended use of technology as a factor which increases the efficiency of transfer credit evaluation. This includes: document imaging, access to established transfer systems and automation of assessments. In fact, transfer credit assessments take three times longer at institutions without a published database (Ott, 2012; Paez, Byrnes, Blacker, Jackson & Dwyer, 2011). It is, however, important to note that while the effective use of technology aids but is not essential for a streamlined transfer credit process (Ott & Cooper, 2014).

1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

In a 2014 paper entitled: Student Mobility and Credit Transfer Pathways, published by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (Zhou, Hamade & Camman, 2014), transfer status timing was

summarized for each of Ontario's twenty universities (excluding the Royal Military College). This summary was based on phone interviews conducted with admissions offices at each institution. At that time, ten institutions indicated that they provided applicants with a transfer credit assessment at the point of offer. These institutions include: Brock University, University of Guelph, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, University of Ottawa, Trent University, Western University and the University of Windsor. The institutions that provided assessments after acceptance of an offer include: Algoma University, Carleton University, Nipissing University, OCAD University, Queen's University, Ryerson University, University of Toronto, University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), University of Waterloo and York University (Zhou, Hamade & Camman, 2014). Automated transfer credit assessments are typically based on previously articulated courses recorded in an institution's student information system. Missing courses tend to be manually assessed after the fact (BCCAT, 2015). It is also important to note that some of the aforementioned institutions have modified their practices between the survey date and present. Based on an in-depth review of institutional websites, the following universities have since transitioned to provision of an assessment at the time of offer: Algoma University, Ryerson University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology and York University.

2.0 RESEARCH TEAM

Adam Wingate, BComm (Hons)

Adam Wingate is an accomplished Enrolment Services professional with eight years of experience in the areas of admissions, credit transfer and recruitment. He currently holds the position of Manager, Undergraduate Admissions (Acting) at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). Adam is currently pursuing a Master of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. He is passionate about student mobility and intends to continue his work towards enhancing opportunities for student transfer in Ontario.

Kimberley McCartney-Young, BSc (Hons)

Kimberley McCartney-Young has over twenty years of experience in student services, academic advising, and post-secondary curriculum administration. She is currently the Curriculum and Pathways Analyst in the Centre for Institutional Quality Enhancement at UOIT and is a former Senior Academic Advisor. Her research and service focus includes innovative academic and academic advising program development, and student transition. Kimberley has worked on multiple student outreach and retention projects. She holds an Honours Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto and a post-diploma certificate from Centennial College.

Kathryn Navarro Suarez, BSc (Hons), BEd

Kathryn Navarro Suarez has six years of experience working in areas of recruitment, admissions, and transfer credit. She is currently the Senior Admissions and Transfer Credit Officer at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). Kathryn holds an Honours Bachelor of Science degree and Bachelor of Education degree from UOIT and is currently pursuing a Master of Information Management at Dalhousie University. She has a focus on information transparency for applicants, process improvement, and knowledge management.

3.0 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

With funding from the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) the researchers undertook a three-year study to examine the opinions and perceptions of those transferring from other universities or colleges to the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). The primary aspect being studied

in this multi-year analysis was a modification in the timing of the processes to inform students about the transfer credits that they could receive at UOIT. The standard process, or baseline, was that students received a transfer credit evaluation only after they accepted an offer of admission from UOIT. A baseline survey was completed in year one (Phase 1) of the study, which explored the basic perceptions of the currently existing manual, PDF and paper-based, system. The transfer credit evaluation and notification system was then revised to a semi-automated process that allowed applicants to receive transfer credit assessments in conjunction with an offer of admission via a self-serve applicant portal. Specifically, in Phase 2, applicants experienced the new semi-automated process for the first time, but received an incomplete assessment based on existing courses in a database. In Phase 3, additional improvements resulted in a more complete initial evaluation; the dynamic report can now differentiate between types of electives and core courses required for program maps. This new process and revisions therein were evaluated through a follow-up survey with nearly identical questions administered in both Phases 2 and 3.

The Social Research Centre, a UOIT based research centre affiliated with the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, was engaged to assist in the development of, and to program, administer, and analyze a sixteen question attitudinal survey. This survey explored the attitudes and perceptions of incoming transfer applicants to the student facing side of the transfer credit process as a whole, including communication and notification mechanisms. The survey consisted of demographic and classification questions, as well as a series of Likert scale (*To a Great Extent – Not at All* and *Excellent – Poor*) questions and open-ended questions. The surveys for each phase were programmed and administered through the online survey platform called Qualtrics. Qualtrics allows for a robust survey development, while making certain that the surveys are readily accessible by participants through a wide variety of digital platforms. Once the survey was programmed and edited, ethics approval was sought from the Research Ethics Board at UOIT. Ethics approval was received (REB # 15-054) and the survey was administered to all potential incoming transfer applicants for a time period of two weeks.

Given that the sample frame was defined as incoming transfer applicants to UOIT, the Social Research Centre was able to use a token system through Qualtrics, wherein each potential participant, every incoming transfer applicant, was sent their own individualized link to access the survey. By doing this, the Social Research Centre was able to track how many participants started or completed the survey, and how many had opted not to participate. The token system in place allowed for a reminder e-mail to be distributed to those who had not yet completed the survey at the midway point of the survey distribution. Between the token system and an incentive consisting of a prize draw for an iPad Mini, the average sample was approximately 25% of the sample frame, which is a positive percentage for a study of this nature. Existing literature on survey design and response rates identifies direct e-mailing the survey (a token based system) and incentives as two of the primary ways to ensure reasonable response rates on a community based survey (Fan & Yan, 2010). In the professional experience of staff at the Social Research Centre, a 25% response rate is quite positive among student respondents and this was achieved primarily through the above approaches.

In breaking down the sample from year to year, year one had a sample frame of 378 transfer applicants, of which 103 (27%) completed at least part of the survey. Year two had a sample frame of 437 transfer applicants, of which 111 (25%) completed at least part of the survey. Year three had a sample of 445 transfer applicants, of which 132 (30%) completed at least part of the survey. This study specifically excludes applicants to formal pathways, which provide predetermined blocks of credit based on a post-secondary credential, as they do not follow the traditional transfer credit process. Also excluded were engineering transfer applicants who follow a differentiated process due to accreditation requirements.

The data collected from the survey was analyzed by the Social Research Centre each year and compiled into a report. Quantitative responses were presented using bar chart visualizations, and qualitative responses were thematically clustered. Following the question-by-question analysis, cross tabulations were compiled to explore changes in perceptions/attitudes with respect to the transfer credit process. Based on the sample size, analysis shows trends only, and the results do not have statistical significance. Year to year comparative analysis was primarily achieved through simple logical observation of the data and results. T-tests were considered for more rigorous statistical analysis, but were not utilized. This decision was based on the small yearly variations in the sample, along with noticeably minor shifts in the results from year to year, which through simple observation was determined to have little to no chance of statistical significance.

In addition to data from the Social Research Centre, information was collected on application and conversion rates, student success and retention, and impact of the semi-automated process on internal business practices.

4.0 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

4.1 PHASE 1 SURVEY

The initial survey, administered January 7th - January 22nd, 2016, measured attitudes towards UOIT and the manual, PDF and paper-based, reactive admissions and transfer credit process prior to any changes. This baseline measure was then used in subsequent analyses to look for positive trends.

Although baseline analysis shows trends only, and the results do not have statistical significance due to the sample size, it is clear that some of the trends are representative of the participants' attitudes and behaviours as correlated through multiple questions, including free-form comments. Respondents overall were satisfied with UOIT and the transfer process.

The Overall Value of Transfer Credits

Transfer credits are of value to incoming transfer applicants and all respondents indicated they would prefer to receive an evaluation of their transfer credits prior to making a decision on an offer of admission to UOIT. Receiving the evaluation sooner provides greater clarity on the timelines for degree completion and any associated financial impact.

While all respondents indicated a preference for advance notice, many indicated higher priority in the programs offered at UOIT, the location of the school, and the learning environment. In general, those who accepted their offer of admission to UOIT held greater value in the role of transfer credits in their decision. There were a number of respondents who accepted their offer of admission, but indicated that transfer credits played little role in their decision. This seems to indicate that those who valued transfer credits were pleased with the end result and decided to accept the offer of admission, and those who didn't value transfer credits would have accepted the offer of admission anyway for a multitude of other reasons. Those who placed higher value on transfer credit also had a more critical perspective on the process as a whole.

Amount of Transfer Credits Received

A majority of respondents indicated that they received at least some of the transfer credits that they expected. There was a small group that indicated that they did not expect to receive any transfer credits

when applying to UOIT. The responses may indicate general satisfaction with the number of credits received, indicating that it is possible for applicants to be satisfied even if when they do not receive notification of their credits prior to their offer of admission.

Transfer Student Experience

There is an indication that applicants were pleased with the process of applying for and receiving transfer credits. There were particularly high satisfaction levels with the timeliness of offers of admission, the ease of the process, and the availability of information on the transfer credit process. There was less satisfaction in the timeliness of transfer credit information, although the responses were still generally positive.

Respondents were similarly distributed between *Yes* and *No* responses when asked if receiving the transfer credit notification before accepting the offer of admission would have impacted their decision to attend UOIT. There was a slight inclination to a *No* response, which may indicate this is difficult for an applicant to approximate, leading to not being certain of the impact.

Satisfaction Related to the Timeliness of Notification

Respondents overall indicated that the timeliness of transfer credit notification, and of their offer of admission, fell primarily in the *Fair to Good* range, with the negative responses of *Poor* and *Very Poor* appearing for those who held greater importance in transfer credits in deciding to apply for admission to UOIT.

Analysis of responses to attitudes of transfer credit before and after admission indicate that it is still possible for a participant to be completely satisfied with the amount of transfer credits they received, even though they did not receive the transfer credit evaluation in conjunction with their offer of admission. Furthermore, transfer credit information provided after the fact does not appear to impact attitudes toward the information provided throughout the process.

Those who applied to more than one institution, and who exclusively received their transfer credit evaluation only after receiving an offer of admission to all schools, were more satisfied with the timeliness of their offer of admission to UOIT in comparison to the other schools to which they applied. This is particularly noteworthy in comparison to those who received a transfer credit evaluation before receiving an offer of admission at any school. This could potentially indicate that those who received their evaluation beforehand had a swifter admissions and transfer credit process as a whole at another institution, thus impacting their ratings and evaluations of the timeliness at UOIT.

Satisfaction Related to the Ease of the Transfer Credit Process

Those who were not satisfied with the ease of the transfer credit process overall indicated that transfer credits played a larger role in their decision to apply to UOIT. It certainly makes sense that those who find transfer credits important will be more critical of the process for submitting the required transfer credit documents, and as such, this may be an area to evaluate further.

The ratings for the overall ease of the transfer credit process were also primarily dependent on how many transfer credits the participants received. This trend makes sense, as those who were more successful in the process would likely tend to be happier with it when reviewing it afterwards. Not all ratings were exceptionally positive, indicating that despite being satisfied with the overall outcome, there may still be room for improvement with the process itself.

Detailed results and analysis for Phase 1 can be found in Appendix “A”.

4.2 PHASE 2 SURVEY

Similar to Phase 1, the second survey, administered November 7th - December 5th, 2016, was designed to measure applicant and student attitudes towards UOIT’s admissions and transfer credit process. In particular, this survey is designed to capture attitudinal shifts that have taken place between the new and old processes. Like Phase 1, the results are directional in nature and do not have statistical significance due to the limited sample size.

The Overall Value of Transfer Credits

Regardless of changes in process and timeliness, respondents’ views on the value of transfer remain largely unchanged year over year. Many respondents appreciate receiving a transfer credit assessment prior to accepting or declining their offer of admission. Although the number of transfer credits awarded is an important consideration for many, similar to Phase 1, applicants are also apt to consider other elements when making a final determination of which post-secondary institution to attend. These include: quality of the academic program, proximity to home, word of mouth, and class sizes.

Amount of Transfer Credits Received

Similar to views on the value of transfer credit, satisfaction with the amount of transfer credits received is a variable that remains largely unaffected by this process change. As with Phase 1, the majority of respondents indicated that they were pleased with the number of transfer credits granted. There is an interesting trend stemming from a cross comparison between assessment timing and expectations surrounding the amount of transfer credits granted; it is still possible for a participant to be completely satisfied with the amount of transfer credits received, despite not receiving this information at the point of offer. Qualitative respondent feedback once again confirms that other factors come into play when making a decision as to which institution to attend, most notably: the quality of the academic program.

Transfer Student Experience

Survey participants were asked whether the receipt of a **complete** transfer credit evaluation prior to accepting or declining an offer of admission would have changed their decision. The responses were comparable to Phase 1 of the study. There was an even distribution of *Yes*, *No*, and *Not sure* responses. It is important to note that the number of *Yes* responses increased from 18 in Phase 1 to 26 in Phase 2. This may be indicative of the increased impact of early transfer credit evaluations on one’s decision to accept an offer of admission.

When asked about their experience with the new semi-automated process, respondents indicated that they were generally pleased. In particular, they expressed satisfaction with the ease of submitting required transfer credit documentation (e.g. course syllabi), the timeliness of notification of an offer of admission, and the overall ease of the transfer credit process. While respondents expressed satisfaction with certain aspects of the process, they noted a dissatisfaction with the timeliness of the evaluation. Although the semi-automated process summarizes transfer credits already present in UOIT’s transfer equivalency database, it does not serve to accelerate evaluation times for courses which have not yet been reviewed. This is typically in the six to eight week range. Dissatisfied respondents may have been expecting a **complete** evaluation at the time of offer or a shorter evaluation timeframe.

Satisfaction Related to the Timeliness of Notification

When compared to the timeliness of notification of an offer of admission, respondent's views as to the timeliness of notification of transfer credit evaluation was not as positive. According to the results of the Phase 2 study, most responses clustered in the *Good* to *Fair* range. These responses are comparable to Phase 1 of the study, which is discouraging despite the significant process changes which took place between the two phases. This could be attributable to the fact that initial evaluations are not necessarily complete assessments, rather they consist of preexisting credits in UOIT's transfer credit equivalency database.

Satisfaction Related to the Ease of the Transfer Credit Process

When comparing ones perceived ease of the process with the personal value attributed to transfer credits, it is clear that those who placed a higher value on transfer credits considered the overall process (e.g. submission of required documentation) to be easier. Conversely, those who saw little to no value in the transfer credit process were more likely to assign a lower rating to the process. One can infer that those who place less value on a process are less concerned about the outcome of said process and are less apt to assign a positive rating. Similar trends were witnessed during Phase 1 of the study.

As previously alluded to, the perceived ease of the transfer credit process appears to be directly proportional to the applicant's satisfaction with the amount of transfer credit granted. In other words, those who received all of their expected transfer credits were more satisfied with the overall ease of the process when compared to other groups. This is a logical trend as those who benefited the most from the process are more likely provide it with a positive review. Unfortunately, we were unable to determine the satisfaction (or lack thereof) of the decliners during Phase 2 of the study as none elected to respond to the survey.

Detailed results and analysis for Phase 2 can be found in Appendix "B".

4.3 PHASE 3 SURVEY

The final survey, administered September 27th - October 11th, 2017, was designed to measure applicant and student attitudes between the 3rd and 2nd phases, based on improvements to the system logic. In particular, this survey is designed to capture attitudinal shifts related to improvements in the new process. Like Phase 1 and Phase 2, the results are directional in nature and do not have statistical significance due to a limited sample size.

In Phase 2, applicants were able to submit directly to the applicant portal with no manual (email) intervention; in Phase 3 there was a time when students were obligated to submit via email or web form, as the submission functionality within the portal became problematic when more applicants submitted documentation. This survey is designed to capture attitudinal shifts that have taken place between the new and old processes, and may capture some impact from the portal malfunction.

The Overall Value of Transfer Credits

Transfer credits continue to be of value and respondents ideally would like information on their transfer credits prior to making a decision on an offer of admission to UOIT. The information allows for informed decision-making and provides greater clarity as to the trajectory of their academic career. While many students find the transfer credit information valuable, others find higher priority in program content, proximity to home, and the learning environment.

When asked why they accepted or declined the offer of admission, responses clustered into general reasons, with the first three responses repeating frequently:

- Primary Choice
- Specific Program Interest
- Proximity to Home
- Heard Positive Feedback about UOIT
- Provided Detailed Information about Transfer Process
- Amount of Transfer Credits Received

There has been a significant increase year over year in the number of respondents who replied *Yes* when asked if transfer credit assessments would impact their decision to transfer to UOIT. This may indicate an increase on the impact of early transfer credit evaluations on one's decision to transfer, however, it may simply be variation in responses based on sample size. A noticeable trend is that those who received their transfer credits in conjunction with their offer of admission were more likely to hold greater value in the transfer credits in making a decision on their offer of admission from UOIT.

Those who put some value in transfer credits to make a decision about accepting their offer of admission seemed to be content with the availability of information, rating mostly *Fair* or higher. For those who had minimal or lower value in transfer credits, they seemed to be less content with the availability of information, but this could simply be a result of their decreased value in transfer credits themselves. These results did not change significantly from year to year over the course of the study.

Amount of Transfer Credits Received

The majority of respondents indicated that they received some, if not all, of the transfer credits they were expecting. The response patterns for this question are very similar to the previous two phases of the study. There appears to be consistent distribution of responses across the *Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor* and *Very Poor* categories for timeliness of transfer credit notification for those who received less or only some of their expected credit. This indicates that the transfer credit assessments were not found to be as timely for those who received some of their expected credit. The results for this cross tabulation were not very positive from year to year, but for year three in particular they seemed to be on a more negative trajectory. That said, the results for those who received all of their expected credits were far more positive in nature.

Transfer Student Experience

Respondents were mostly pleased with the process and demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness of notification on admission offers, ease of submitting transfer credit documents, and the overall ease of the transfer credit process. The satisfaction was not nearly as high in the availability of information about the transfer credit process and the timeliness of notification on their transfer credit evaluation.

The ratings for the availability of information about the transfer credit process followed a mostly standard distribution for those who received at least some of their expected transfer credits. There were a number of *Poor* ratings for those who received none or some of their expected transfer credits. This is a logical response, as those who did not receive all of their transfer credits would be more likely to be less pleased with the availability of information about the transfer credit process. From year to year, the responses for this question seem to be following a similar trend, with the exception of a shift from *Fair*

responses to *Poor* responses from year two to three. The negative responses in the availability of transfer credit information may also have been a result of the challenges with submission through the portal and conflicting information, rather than lack of availability of information.

Satisfaction Related to the Timeliness of Notification

A large majority of respondents preferred receiving their evaluation before making a decision on their offer of admission, some respondents indicated they had no preference, and a few respondents indicated that they preferred receiving an evaluation only after they accepted their offer of admission. In Phase 1, all respondents indicated that they preferred receiving their evaluation before making a decision on their admission, while Phase 2 followed a similar trend to the current one. It is interesting that the respondents have more varying opinions on the issue now that they have transfer credit evaluations before making a decision on their offer of admission.

The transfer credit notification timing is still not seen to be ideal by many of the respondents in the study, regardless of the level of importance they placed in transfer credits. The timeliness of notification of the transfer credit evaluation in Phase 3 is the lowest ranked of all three phases of this study. Given the focus of the study on the timeliness of transfer credit evaluations, this is something that does not quite align with the expected results of this study and is possibly something that needs to be explored further.

Satisfaction Related to the Ease of the Transfer Credit Process

The ratings on ease of submitting required transfer credit documents had the majority of responses fall within the *Excellent* to *Fair* range. This did not change dramatically from year to year nor did it change whether or not a respondent received their transfer credit evaluation at the time of offer or after their offer of admission. This indicates that opinions and perceptions on the ease of submitting transfer credit documents are unlikely to be heavily impacted by the timing of the transfer credit evaluation.

Those who valued transfer credits highly felt that the process for submitting the required transfer credit documents was easier, while those who saw little to no value in the transfer credit process had a more average response. This is possibly due to the fact that these individuals do not have as much invested in the process. These same trends can be found from year to year over the course of this study. Those who received all of their expected transfer credits were also more satisfied with the ease of the transfer credit process, as compared to the other groups. While satisfied overall, those who received only some of their expected credit still responded with *Poor* and *Very Poor* a number of times. This trend makes sense, as those who were more successful in the process would logically tend to be happier with it.

While many thought that the ease of submitting transfer credit documents was high, others did not find this same result. These ratings took a bit of a drop from year two to year three, as there was a spike in *Excellent* responses in Phase 2, and this trend did not continue into Phase 3.

Detailed results and analysis for Phase 3 can be found in Appendix “C”.

4.4 TRANSFER APPLICANT STATISTICS

Table 1 – Transfer Student Acceptance Rate

Year	Offers*	Accepts*	Conversion Rate*
2014-15	740	285	39%
2015-16	700	298	43%

2016-17	727	309	43%
2017-18	766	298	39%

The number of offers and accepts relative to the respondents in this study are reasonably consistent year over year. When comparing the number of offers made and the number of accepts, the conversion rate increased during Phase 1 of the study, was stagnant in Phase 2, and decreased in Phase 3.

*Numbers are reflective of sample group (pathways and engineering applicants excluded).

4.5 IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION

Table 2 – Student Success

Cumulative Grade Range	Number of Students*	
	2015-16	2016-17
A- to A+ (excellent)	63	78
B- to B+ (good)	112	113
C to C+ (adequate)	50	65
D (marginal)	8	8
F (inadequate)	3	9

Survey respondents who attended UOIT showed success in their program. During the study, over 95% of these transfer students remained in good standing (a grade of C or higher). Approximately 70% of the students achieved an average of B- or higher.

*Grade data for the 2017-18 academic year was not available at the time of publication.

Table 3 – Student Persistence: Sample Group Active Today

Entering year	Percent of first year return	Percent of second year return
2015-16	99%	81%
2016-17	92%	N/A

Table 4 – Student Persistence: Secondary School Applicants

Entering year	Percent of first year return	Percent of second year return
2015-16	80%	73%
2016-17	81%	N/A

The persistence of survey respondents is higher than that of applicants from secondary school for both Phase 1 and Phase 2, and this trend continues into second year.

Table 5 – Reasons for Respondent Departure (when provided)

Reason for leaving UOIT	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Career goals changed	1	1	
Dissatisfied with program		1	
Family Responsibilities	1		
Felt in wrong program	4		
Financial	3	1	
Health	2		
Personal	2		2

Program didn't meet expectations	1		
Relocating	2		
Took a job	2		1
Transferred to other college or university	12	4	2

There are a variety of reasons that respondents gave upon leaving the institution. Reasons which may be related to transfer credits, such as 'transferred to other college or university', appear to have decreased after the implementation of the new process.

4.6 IMPACT ON INTERNAL BUSINESS PRACTICES

Despite mixed respondent feedback regarding the efficacy of UOIT's transition to a semi-automated proactive process, there were substantial strides with respect to internal business practices. Transfer credit staff experienced significant time-savings, as they were no longer required to type transfer credit assessments and e-mail multiple iterations of an assessment to every transfer applicant over the course of the admissions cycle. These functions are now largely performed by the system. These efficiencies permit staff to provide a higher level of service to an increasingly large applicant pool. Semi-automation also ensures that instances of human error are reduced, as preliminary evaluations are based on an automatic comparison of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) transcripts and UOIT's transfer equivalency database.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Applicant attitudes and perceptions

In every phase of the study, the responses indicate that quality is more important than quantity; applicants are happy to wait to receive an evaluation that is more complete. Moreover, it is still possible for an applicant to be completely satisfied with the amount of transfer credits granted, despite not having received a complete evaluation at the time of offer. For example: an applicant who receives significantly more transfer credits after a six week evaluation timeline may be more satisfied with the process in its entirety versus an applicant who receives fewer transfer credits at the time of offer.

Recommendation: One way in which evaluation timelines can continue to be improved is to introduce a workflow solution in which faculty members are more fully engaged and have access to a system which facilitates their work. Workflow is the definition, execution, and automation of business processes where tasks, information or documents are passed from one participant to another for action, according to a set of procedural rules (www.pnmssoft.com/resources/bpm-tutorial/workflow-tutorial/).

While the process in Phases 2 and 3 were more automated, the results are now available to students in a self-service portal. The overall change in process was a positive step forward, but there may exist an issue in the communication with applicants regarding the transfer credit process. Since the process change, applicants are required to take the initiative to log-in to their applicant portal in order view any updates made to their transfer credit evaluation. If the detailed offer letter is not read in its entirety, applicants may be missing the information, not realizing that they already have a transfer credit evaluation waiting for them with details on how to provide documentation in the case of missing credits. It could be that, while this automatic upload is beneficial from a staff perspective, the communication to encourage students to view the portal regularly is lacking. Students may or may not be receiving transfer credit notifications far earlier than they realize, but they are not checking the portal.

Recommendation: Effort is required to create an automated notification system to encourage students to visit the portal, and send reminders when new information is added. This can effectively be accomplished through the implementation of a workflow solution.

While the semi-automated process was improved for the final phase of the study, the challenges with document submission through the applicant portal required the institution to revert back to email and web form. It is possible that this technical challenge impacted the level of satisfaction with the ease of the submission process in that students who had expected to submit through the portal received an email asking manually for submissions, causing confusion. Additionally, those who did not submit documentation through the portal in a timely manner were also notified via email, which may have created confusion regarding preferred method of submission. The new system has great potential, but many of the improvements were unable to be fully or satisfactorily implemented due to limitations in the IT support available.

Recommendation: A review of improvements with respect to load times and usability for document submission should be conducted with IT Services. A web form submission functionality is a suitable alternative provided it occurs through the applicant portal so that the process appears seamless to applicants using the system.

Recommendation: It is important to recognize that this is an intensive multi-year IT-based project. As such, discussions must take place early within the process to ensure an adequate amount of human and technical resources are available for the duration of the entire process.

Applicants and Conversion Rates

Over the course of this study, the number of offers and accepts relative to the respondents was fairly consistent year over year, while the conversion rate decreased in Phase 3 after all changes to the transfer credit process were made. During the time of the study, in an effort to increase student mobility from college to university, UOIT has increased the number of formal pathway programs available and engaged in marketing for these programs. UOIT has witnessed an increase in applications, offers, and conversion rates to these formal pathway programs.

This increase in formal pathway enrollment may be a contributing factor to the decrease in respondent conversion during Phase 3 of the study. It is important to note that some applicants apply to the pathway program and the four-year version of the program as a backup. If they are accepted to both programs, the pathway program is often the preferred option due to the automatic transfer credit block awarded.

Student Success and Persistence

The success of respondents who attended UOIT and higher persistence rates in comparison to students that come directly from secondary school, may indicate that transfer students' prior experience in post-secondary institutions make them better prepared for the educational environment in comparison to the secondary school students.

Impact on Internal Business Practices

Despite the fact that applicants may not fully appreciate the implications of a new semi-automated system, one must consider the positive impact on staff productivity, which will ultimately impact the applicant's experience when applying to UOIT.

Recommendations: Any institutions with the time and resources to implement such a project should consider it a worthwhile endeavour, as the impact on applicants, students and staff are far reaching.

Project limitations

As a research team, we noticed inconsistencies in the response rate and potentially in the logic of the responses. This could be a consequence of the timing of the surveys which may have impacted the respondents' desire to complete the survey and their ability to accurately recall their experience.

It is difficult to conduct a multi-year study when working with disparate populations. There is a lack of continuity in their experiences and therefore in their survey responses. In an ideal world, a study of this nature would track one group of applicants who were exposed to the original process as well as subsequent improvements.

Efforts were made to increase formal pathway programs available at the same time this study was being conducted. This external factor may have influenced the results relative to the sample population. Ideally, any changes that may have unintended consequences for the study should be held until study completion to ensure data is reflective of only the changes being specifically monitored.

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7.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Phase 1 – ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER 2015-2016 REPORT

Appendix B: Phase 2 – ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER 2016-2017 REPORT

Appendix C: Phase 3 – ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER 2017-2018 REPORT