

CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS:

Internal Communications for Improving Campus Supports



BACKGROUND



Waterloo always had a robust Transfer Credit and Admissions Policy. Students who wished to apply could be admitted. But we worked in low volumes.

We had only one department on campus working on articulation agreements.

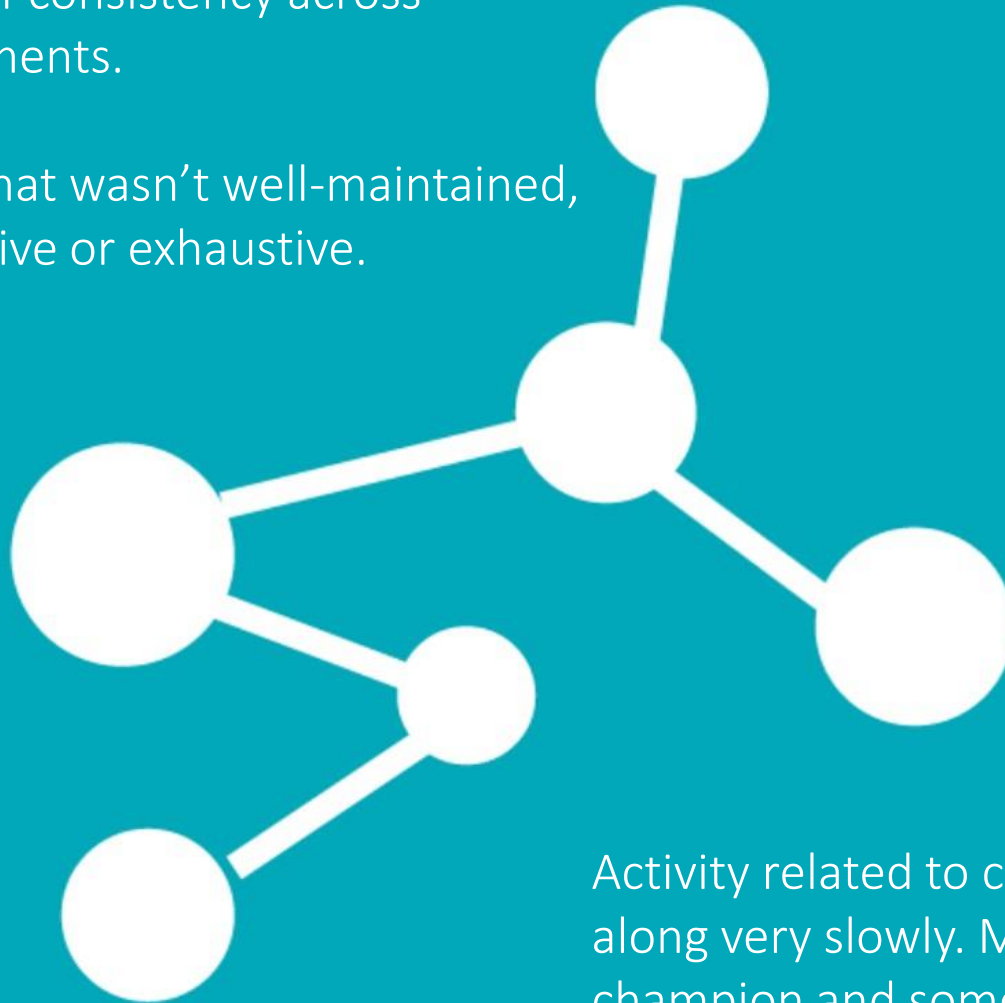


When the Credit Transfer Institutional Grant (CTIG) became available, Waterloo hired several staff and began to work in earnest on improving transfer pathways, policies and support.

In terms of campus structure, it was disorganized.

There was not a lot of consistency across faculties and departments.

We had a database that wasn't well-maintained, was not comprehensive or exhaustive.



Activity related to credit transfer moved along very slowly. Mostly due to a lack of a champion and someone in place to keep momentum going on ideas and activities.

Things moved VERY slowly. Just a few weeks ago I received an email that had a thread going back to January 2010!

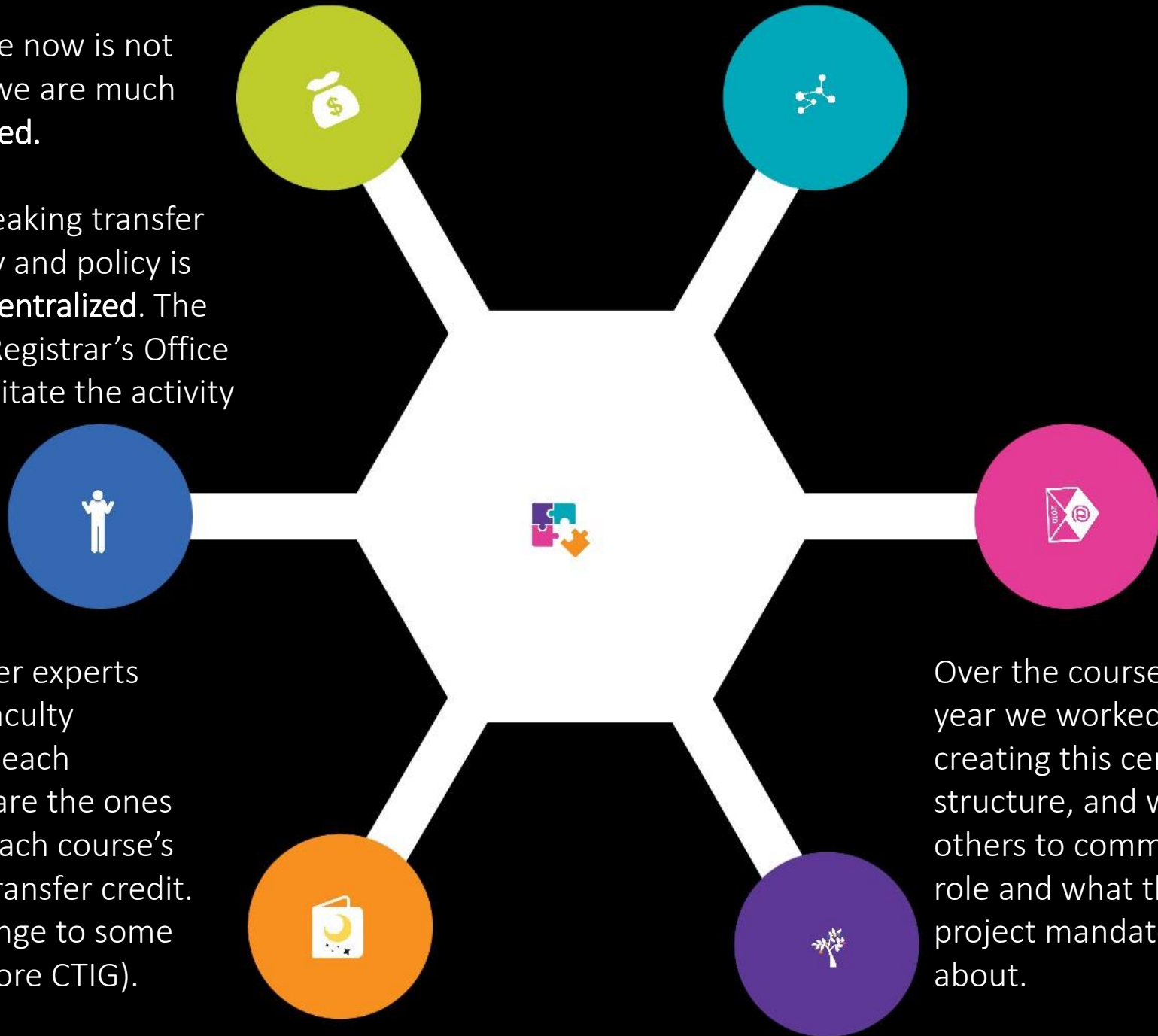


Where we are now is not perfect, but we are much **more organized**.

Generally speaking transfer credit activity and policy is **much more centralized**. The team in the Registrar's Office works to facilitate the activity on campus.

Subject matter experts (appointed faculty members) in each department are the ones who assess each course's content for transfer credit. (This is a change to some practices before CTIG).

Over the course of my first year we worked towards creating this centralized structure, and working with others to communicate my role and what the CTIG project mandate was all about.



In the beginning, our strategy was to go after “low-hanging fruit”.

We approached:

- Faculties and departments who had expressed an interest in credit transfer
- Areas that were already making strides towards transfer-friendly policies
- Those who were looking for new sources of students.



I met with lots of people from across campus to understand their needs and determine how this project could help meet those needs.

But even where we had great support and enthusiasm from the high levels (Academic Deans etc.) we weren't seeing the trickle down effect of our communications.

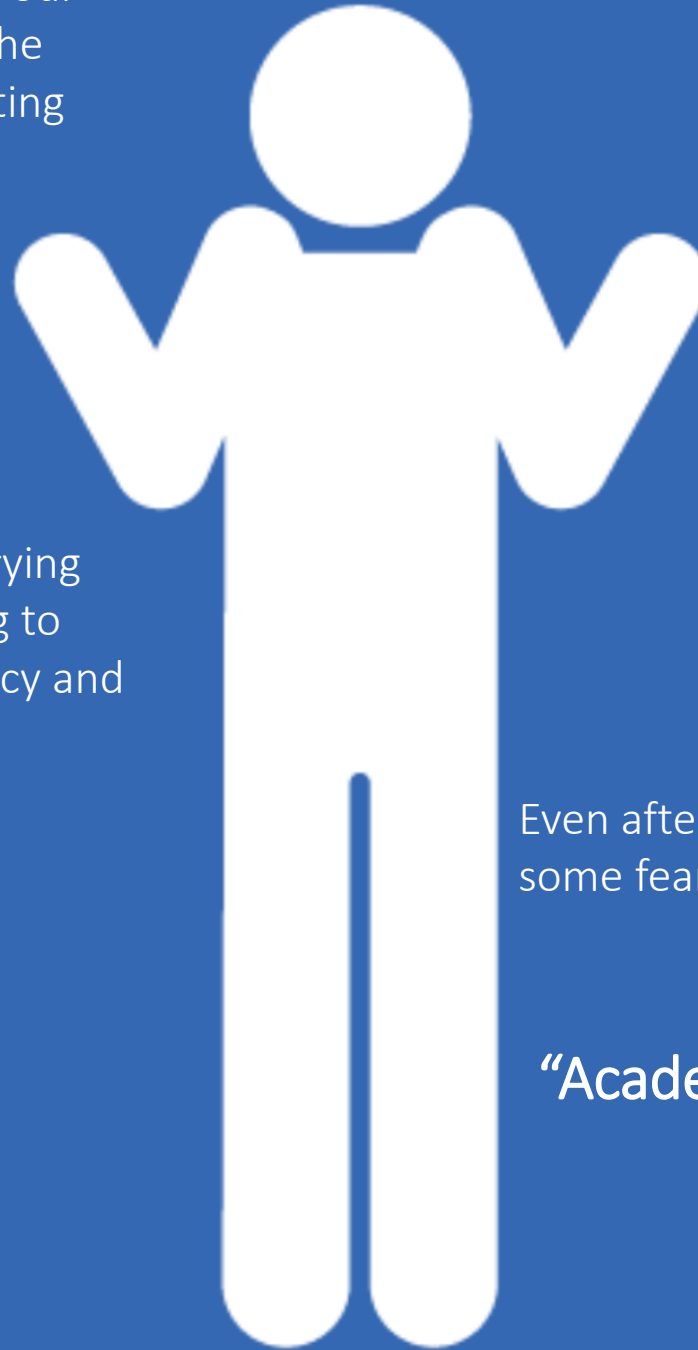
And we were telling the same story over and over again.



The people who needed to hear our message, were not necessarily the people our team had been meeting with.

Our subject matter experts are **one of our key partners** to making our centralized transfer credit model work.

If they don't know what we're trying to achieve, and how we're trying to achieve it, we will lack consistency and understanding across campus.



Even after many meetings, there was still some fear and misunderstanding.

I said,
“Academic integrity is not at risk”
a lot.

There was an obvious knowledge gap.



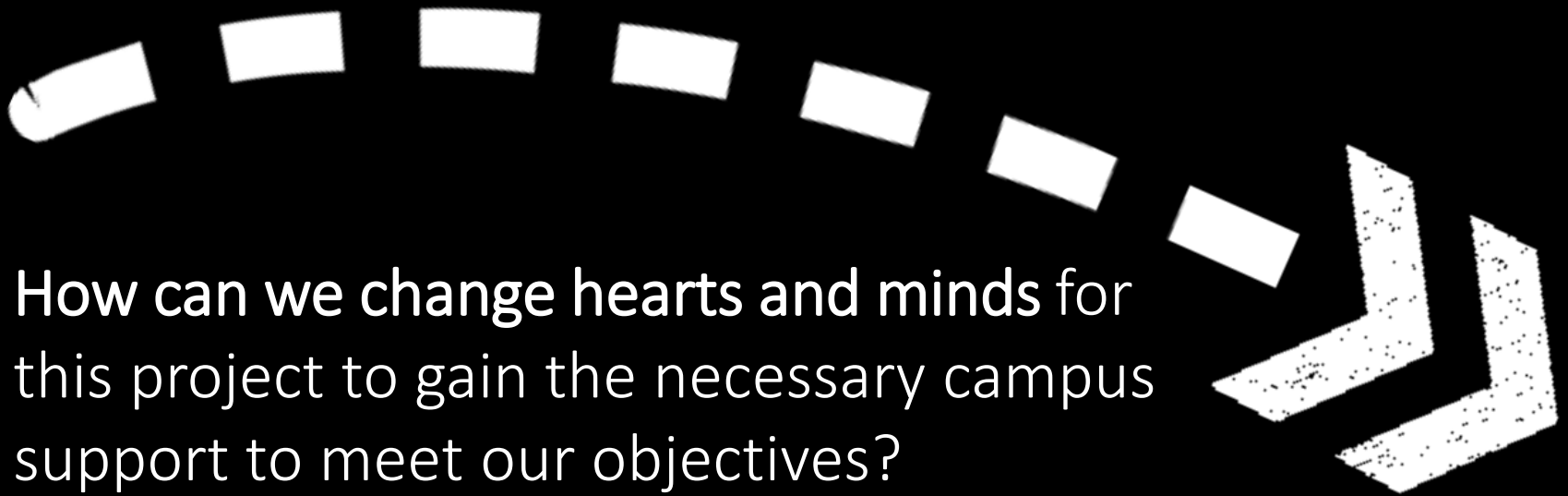
There's not enough hours in the day to meet with everyone involved in the project.

Communications gap

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS DON'T KNOW	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS NEED TO KNOW
Their impact	How assessments (and turnaround time) affect student enrolment
Why this project is important	The importance of classroom mix, demographic shifts, academic ability of transfer students
Their role in the whole project (across campus and across Ontario)	We trust them to make fair decisions
Our expectations around how to make consistent and fair decisions that set students up for success	Guidelines for determining equivalencies
What the Registrar's Office does	How we help facilitate the whole process
What the purpose of the transfer credit database is	How the database is helping us reduce their workload and improve turnaround times

BRAINSTORMING

How can we change hearts and minds for this project to gain the necessary campus support to meet our objectives?



Next Steps

We identified a knowledge gap.

We made assumptions about what gaps existed (by the questions we were asked, and the messages we were repeating).

Before we made a plan, we need to confirm our assumptions.

WE DID THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH METHOD (IN A NUTSHELL)

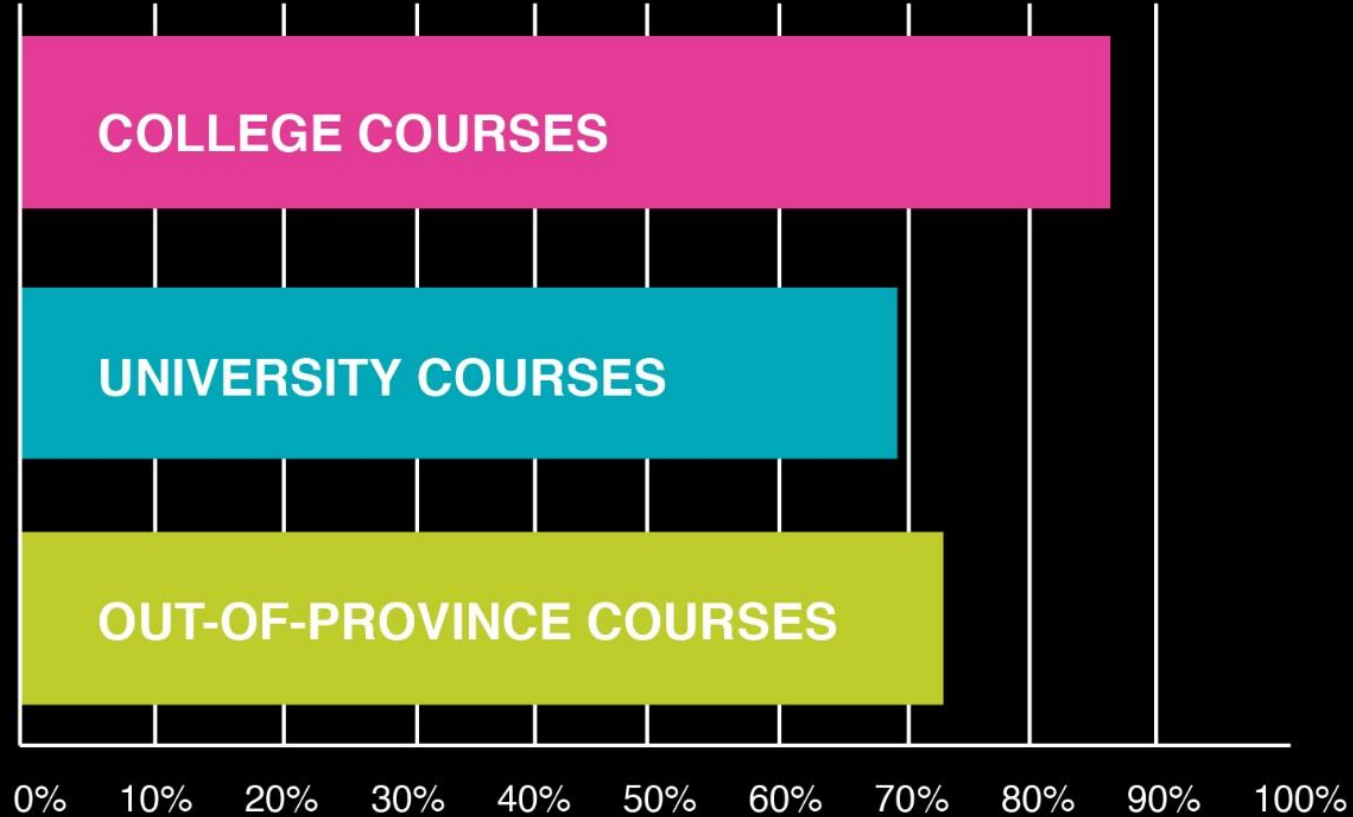
1. To formulate our questions we made some assumptions about what communication was lacking.
2. We made a guess about how we could address that shortfall, and asked preference questions related to that.
3. We polled all subject matter experts who had assessed a transfer credit in the previous admissions cycle.



Key Finding 1:

There was a self-reported lack of knowledge about how to assess college courses.

**Which topics would you like to have covered in a transfer credit workshop?
(Check all that apply)**



Key Finding 2:

Most people still didn't know what the purpose of the transfer credit database was.

We found this result, mostly in the qualitative comments of another question relating to the transfer credit database, and found that many SMEs were keeping their own records.

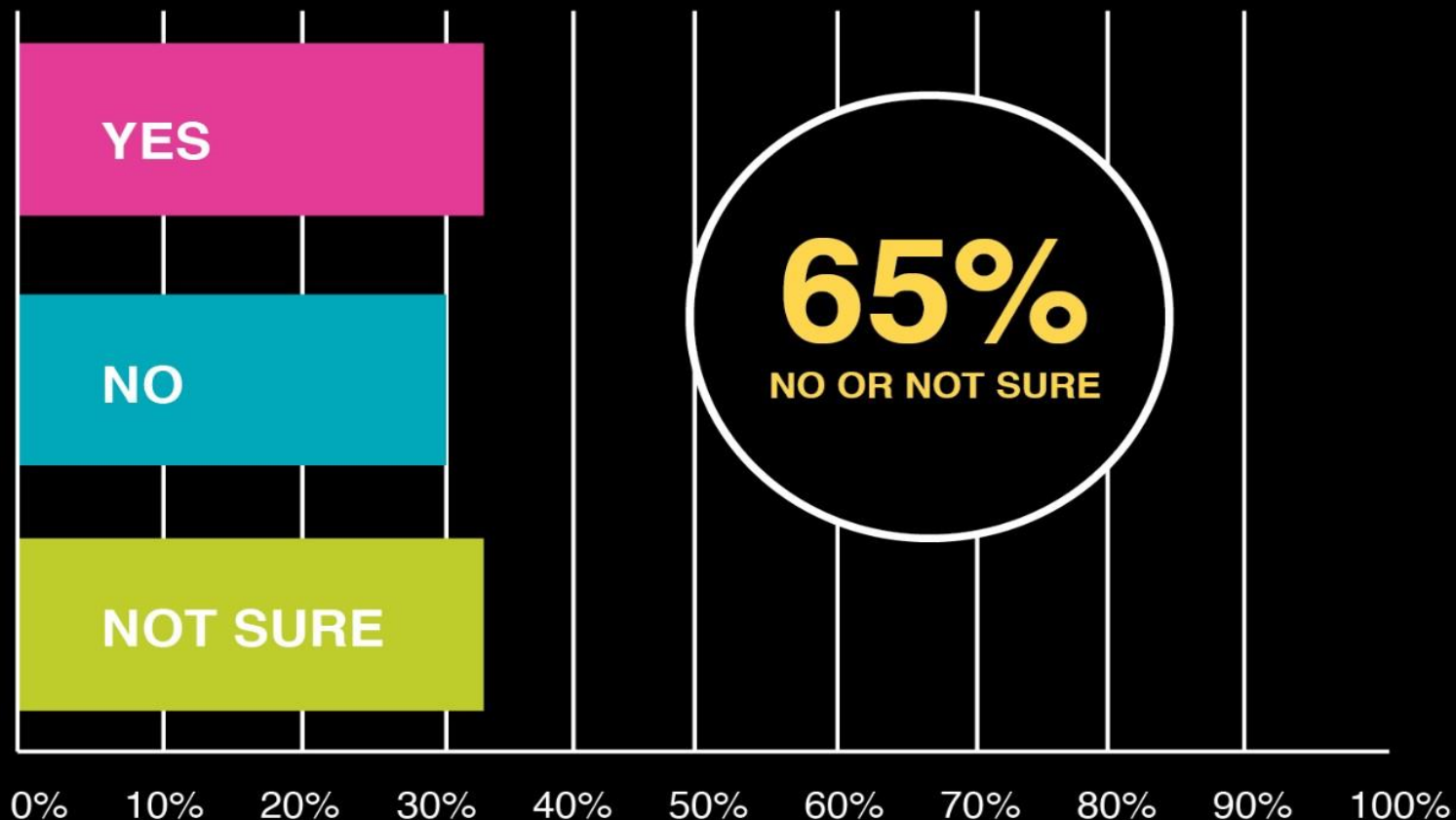


Tip: Leave comments open on some or all of your questions. It's amazing what you'll find out!

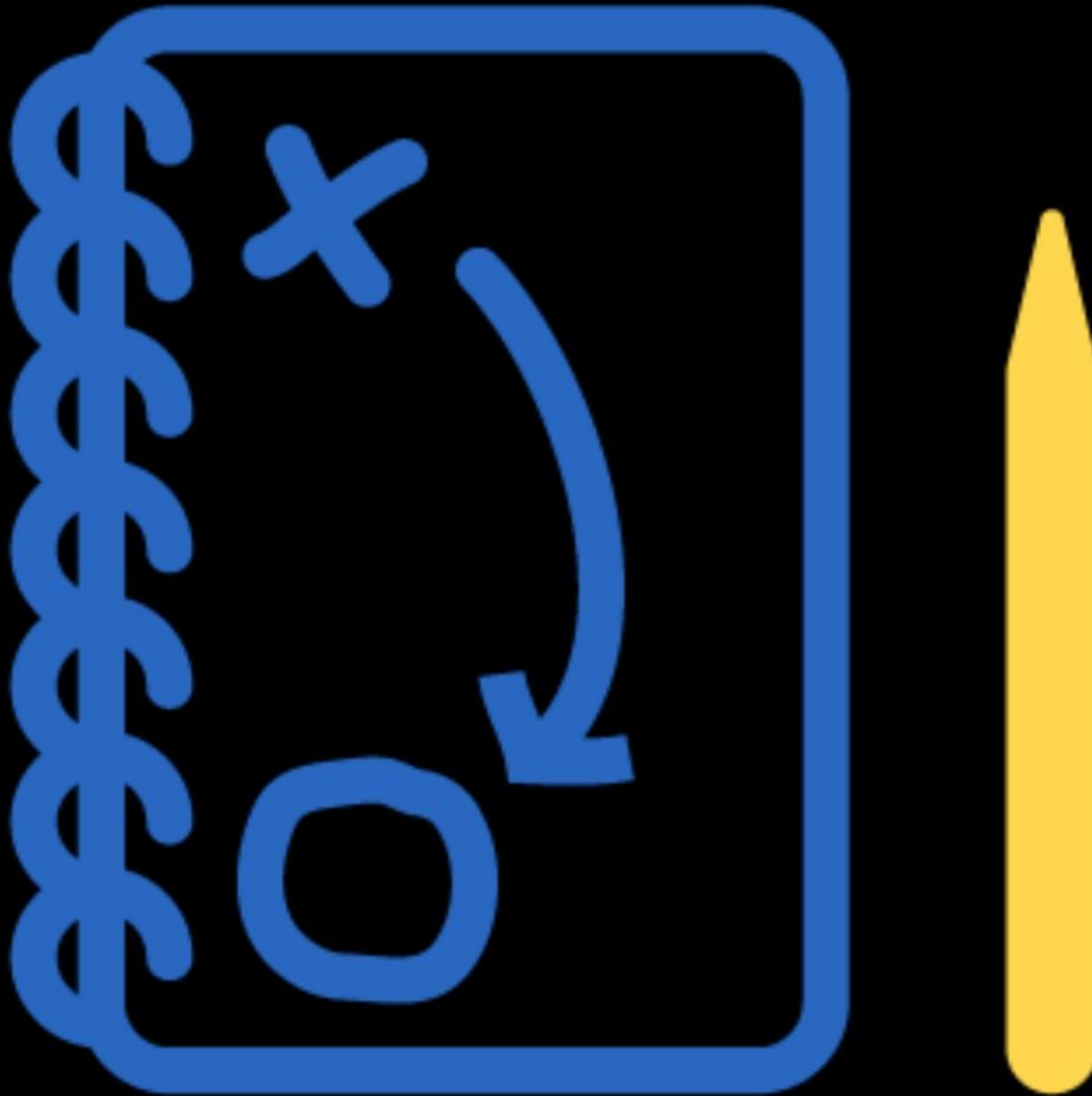
Key Finding 3:

There was little to no interest in attending a workshop to learn more.
Further 86% said if they did attend a workshop, they would only attend once.

Would you be interested in participating in a workshop that will provide guidance in assessing courses for transfer credit?



We needed a new game plan.



Our new idea was to take the same approach to our internal audience as our external audience (students) and developed a communications plan for our internal stakeholders.



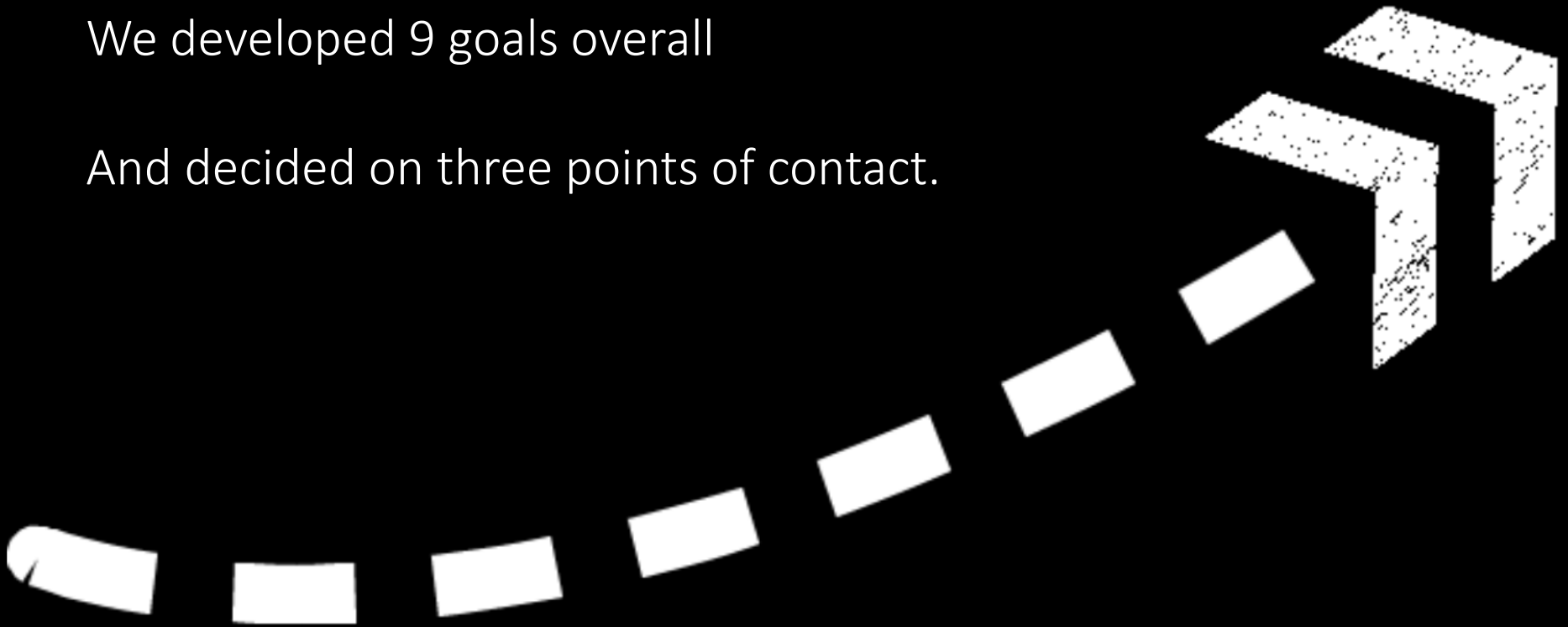
ideas
start
here®



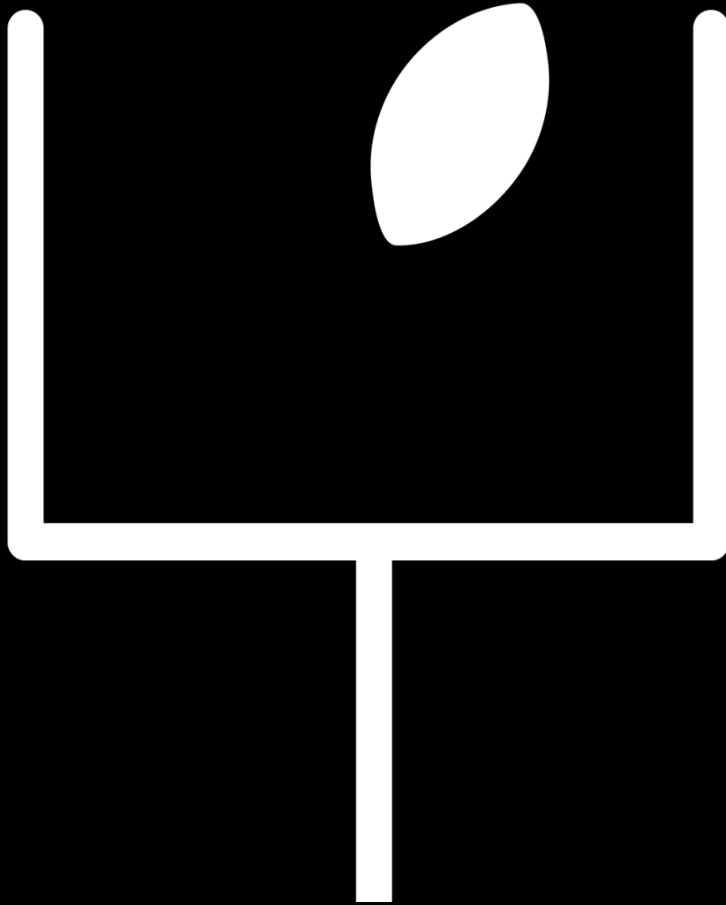
GOAL SETTING

We developed 9 goals overall

And decided on three points of contact.



Goals



- Build awareness amongst the stakeholders and audiences about the transfer credit projects on-going at Waterloo and where appropriate their part in those projects.
- Provide just-in-time, just enough information to campus partners.
- Explain the pillars of transfer student recruitment and goals of the transfer credit project
- Promote the value of a diversified applicant pool and classroom mix.
- Build awareness of the expectations and realities of the transfer student experience.
- Build awareness of transfer student transition support initiatives (summer transition tactics).
- Improve consistency in transfer credit assessments through education.
- Demystify the transition process from college to university and from university to university.
- Strengthen relationships with internal audiences.

OUR APPROACH



Three emails per year –
frequent but not constant.
Just enough. Just in time.



All via email so it was free for
us, and easy for the reader.



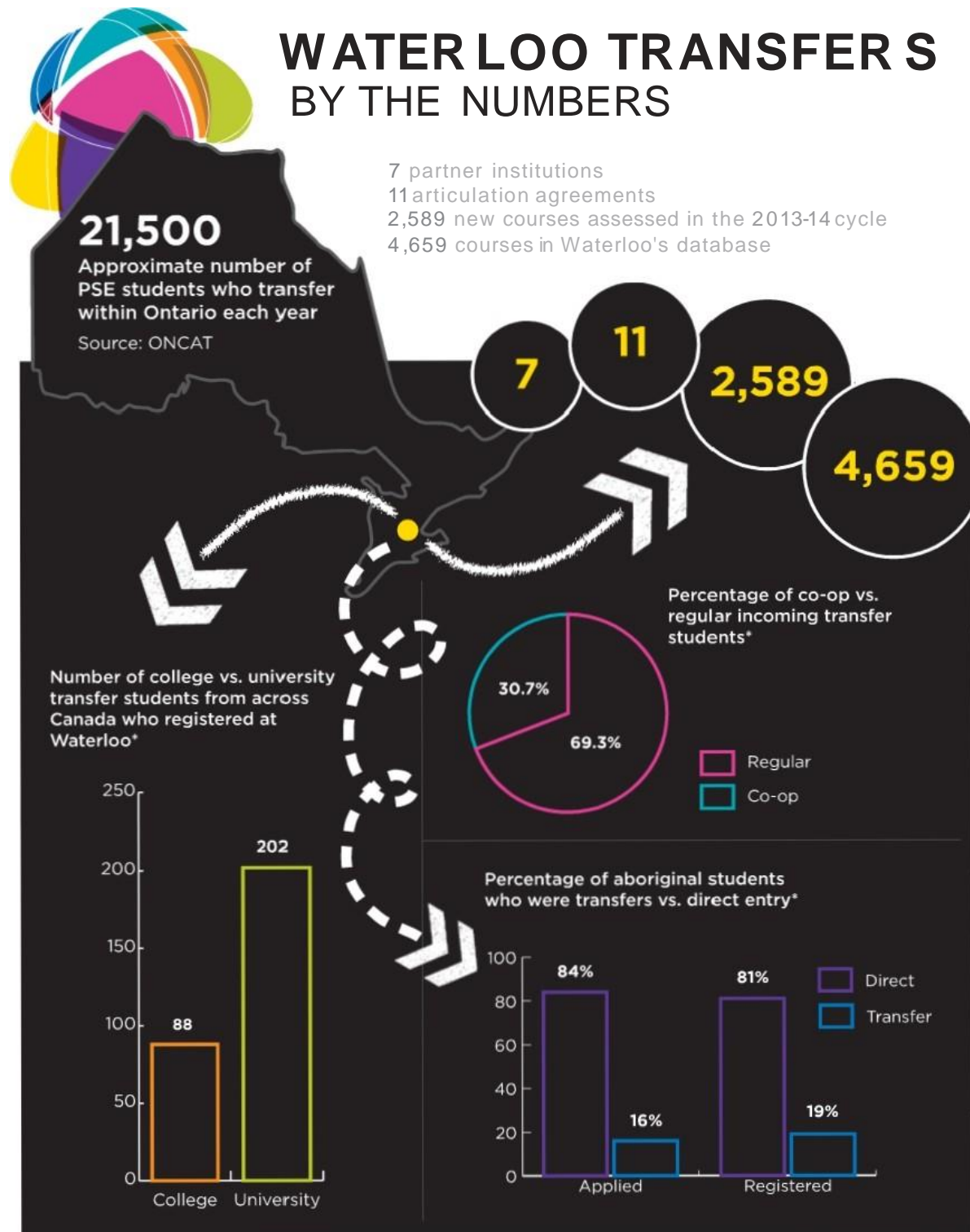
Each point of contact had
different (but sometimes
overlapping) goals.

GETTING BUY-IN

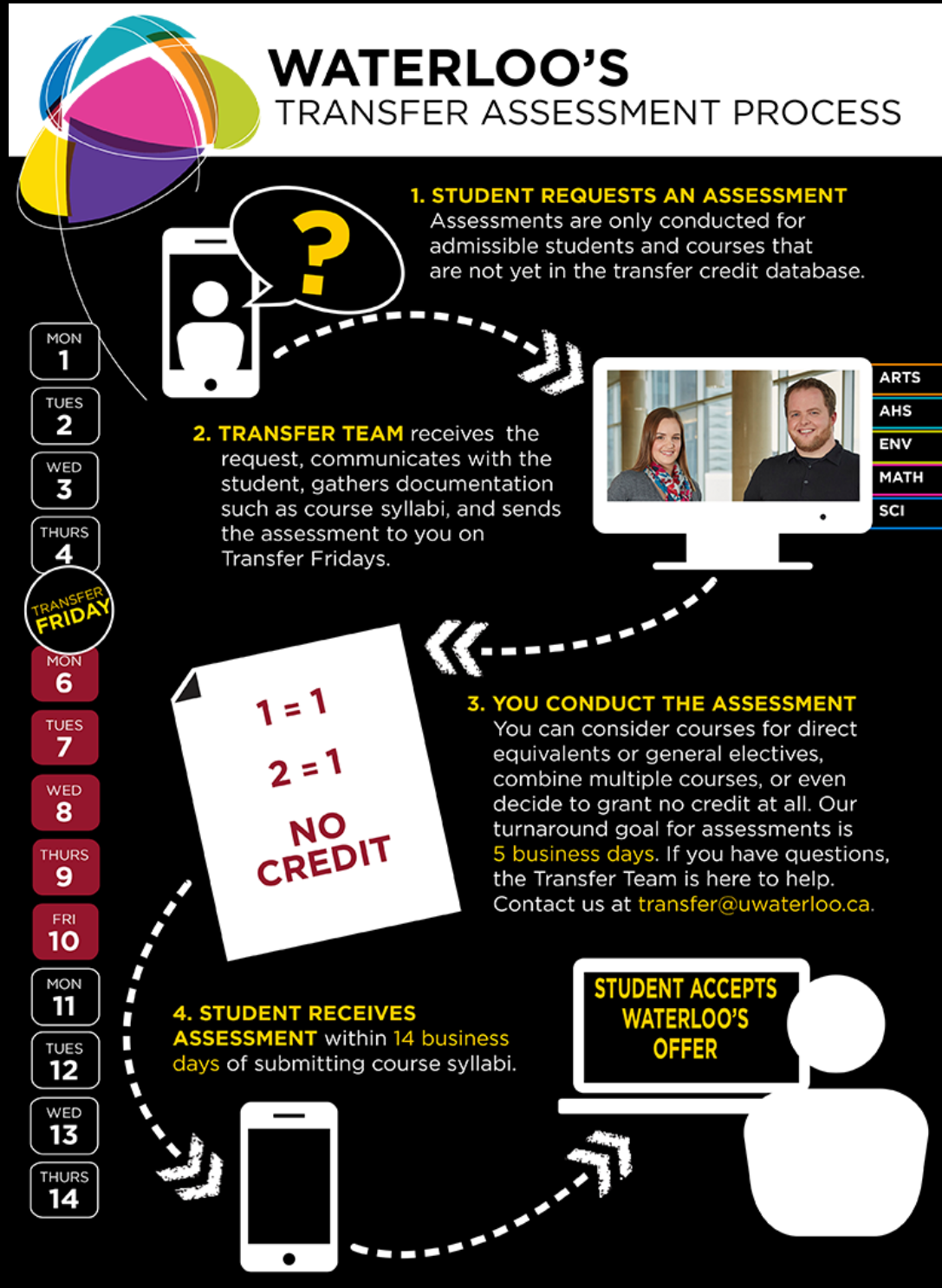


Before we acted on anything, we had the plan reviewed by our key stakeholders who were close to the audience we wanted to reach.

Example 1:

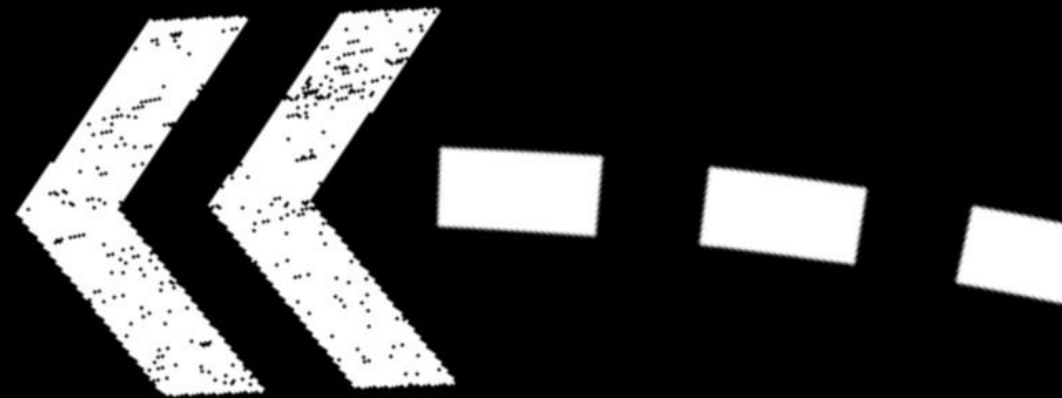


Example 2:






IDEAS YOU CAN TAKE TO THE BANK



A GOOD RELATIONSHIP
STARTS

WITH GOOD
COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION IS KEY



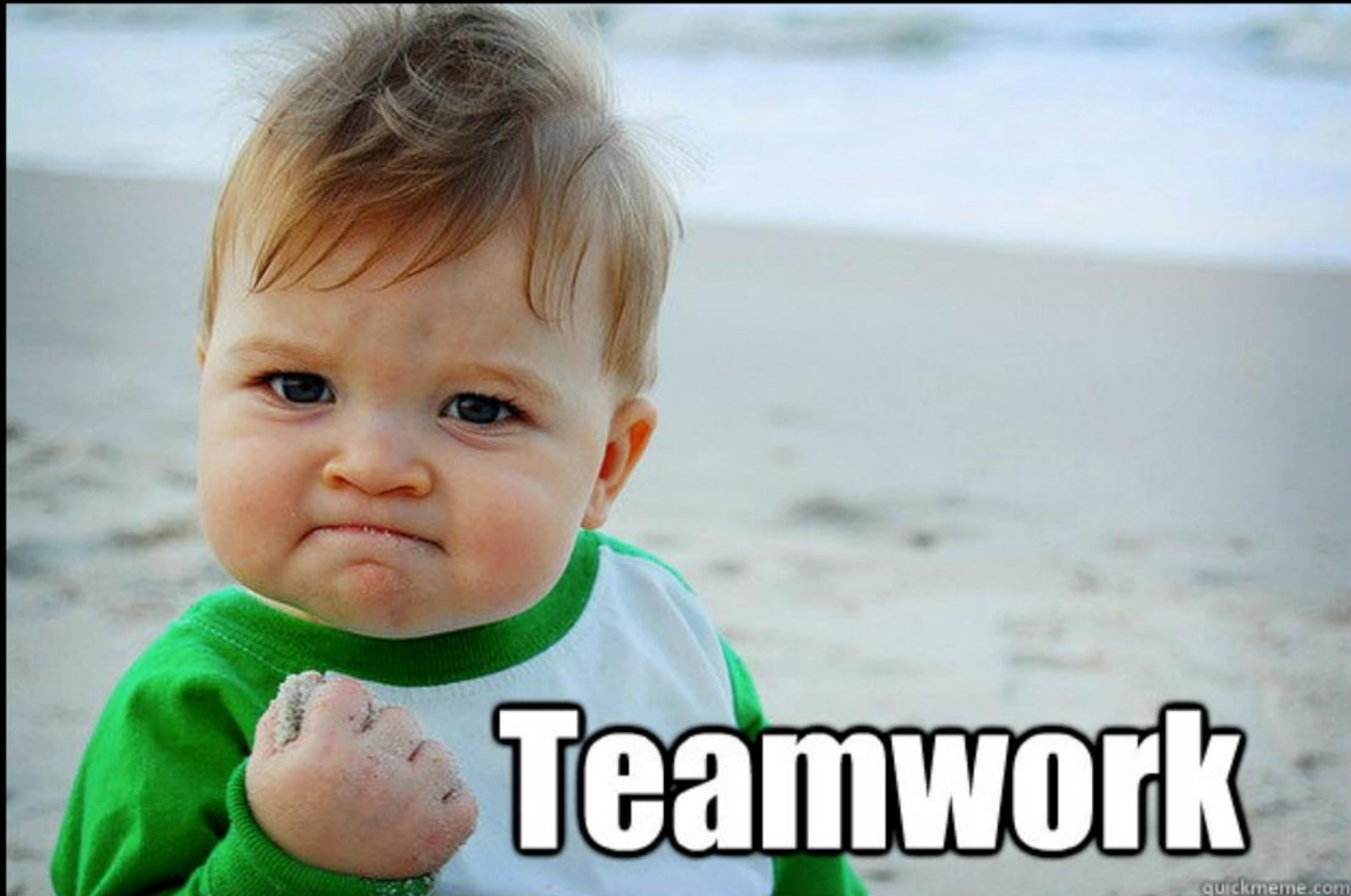
**DON'T
YOU
THINK
IF I
WERE
WRONG
I'D KNOW IT?**

DO THE RESEARCH

**MAKE IT SIMPLE,
BUT SIGNIFICANT.**

– DON DRAPER

MAKE IT EASY



GET BUY-IN

RESULTS SO FAR

- Much less chasing for transfer credit turnaround. Shorter wait times overall.
- Only positive comments and feedback about the infographics
- Frequent points of contact keep us connected and provide a great opportunity for us to receive feedback from our campus partners. Many reach out after our communications.
- Overall a greater understanding of how the process works.

THANK YOU

Heather O'Leary

Manager, College & University Partnerships

heather.oleary@uwaterloo.ca

