



## PROJECT SNAPSHOT

### Education City transfer mobility analysis: Exploring experiences of transfer students in the Ottawa Region

**Type:** Research

**Project Number:** 2019-25 or R1925

**Project Lead:** Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

**Collaborators:** Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology, University of Ottawa, Carleton University, La Cité Collégiale, Université Saint-Paul.

**Deliverables for website (if applicable):** Education City Transfer Mobility Analysis: Exploring Experiences of Transfer Students in The Ottawa Region

### Project Summary

This project intended to map the patterns, motivations, and experiences of transfer students in the Ottawa region. The intention was to contribute to removing barriers and improving support systems through strong institutional collaboration and the development of innovative pathways and student opportunities (e.g. personalized program or course opportunities, targeted transfer pathways and agreements).

### Project Rationale

Little is known about the experiences and barriers experienced by transfer students. The few existing studies that include qualitative data on transfer students, have been carried out on an institution-to-institution basis with only small amounts of participants (Decock & Janzen, 2016). The collection of institutional data on transfer students would inform to what extent students transfer between participating institutions in general, and more specifically, make use of developed articulation agreements, dual credits and credit transfer opportunities. Focus groups will be employed to collect additional data to provide insights into the expectations and experiences of these students. Additionally, factors that potentially influence the transfer experience can be explored. Findings could help institutional leaders and student advisors to

identify the ways in which students' experiences do not map the intended design of services or agreements. It will help to identify areas where there is the greatest need for improvement which will in turn provide insights into the factors that contribute to a positive or negative transfer experience. This information can contribute to the development of informed collaborative articulation agreements and policies, and collaborative information collection throughout Ontario.

## What research methods were used?

This project intended to adopt a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Quantitative data collection was planned in the form of a survey of transfer students as well as the collection and analysis of secondary data sources, such as data on transfer students from each institution's student information system joined with student application data from the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) and the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS); and two Ministry of Colleges and Universities surveys that are administered to recent postsecondary graduates, the Ontario University Graduate Survey (OUGS) and the College Graduate Satisfaction Survey (CGSS). The survey was also intended to be a vehicle for recruiting participants for qualitative data collection.

Qualitative data collection was planned to be based primarily on focus groups, to be conducted with a diverse group of students who had varying transfer experiences. The focus groups could be used to elaborate upon themes generated out of the quantitative data collection, and the protocol was developed to explore a variety of aspects of the transfer student experience with their transfer process, including barriers to mobility, the rationale for their decision-making, their expectations, and their experiences with and needs for support systems at their pre- and post-transfer institutions. The focus group data was to be supplemented by responses to the long answer questions gathered during the survey.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent suspension of in-person activities, a hold was placed on any surveying of students at many of the participating institutions. Institutions who were open to having a survey were concerned that the unpredictable nature of the time, for both students and institutions, would negatively affect the response rate of the survey. These factors led to holding off on launching the survey.

Since Algonquin College had already completed its survey data collection, planning for focus groups for the 93 survey participants who had indicated that they would be interested in participating had begun. Once all on-campus activities were suspended, the planning of the focus group was cancelled, and resources were shifted away from their administration to the institution's coronavirus and COVID-19 impact mitigation strategy. Similarly, collection of the secondary data was also put on hold in consideration of not wanting to commit institutional capacity to respond and provide data that would be needed elsewhere during this time. At the suspension of this project, the preparation work for data collection was completed— instrument development, testing, and piloting; obtaining approval to conduct research at each institution; recruitment for focus groups in the case of Algonquin College—the institutional responses to coronavirus and COVID-19 put a halt on their execution.

## Describe any limitations

The limitations encountered in this project were mainly data collection related. Access to analogous data from participating institutions was a challenge to obtain as each institution gathers student data in different ways. In addition, the access to OUAC, OCAS, OUGS and CGSS data was also limited.

## Main Collaborator Contributions

1. Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology - Algonquin College led this research project from a project management and research capacity.
2. University of Ottawa - the University of Ottawa co-led this project and was a partner in the collection and analysis of the qualitative data.
3. Carleton University - provided input and support to the project and assisted in data collection from their respective institution.
4. La Cité Collégiale - provided input and support to the project and assisted in data collection from their respective institution.
5. Université Saint-Paul - provided input and support to the project and assisted in data collection from their respective institution.

## Research Findings

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent suspension of project activities, there were no findings, conclusions or recommendations made for this research project at this time.

## Future Research

In the future (post COVID-19 impact), resumption of Phase I and II of the project can be completed based on the initial work completed to date (the survey instrument and focus group questionnaire). Phase I includes collecting data on incoming transfer students at the five institutions using application data from OCAS and from OUAC. Phase II involves gathering qualitative data through focus groups. The outcomes of the focus groups, together with the quantitative data gathered in phase 1, could result in recommendations for the development of targeted and feasible agreements and integrated support for transfer students at the institutions in the Ottawa region.

## Student Outcomes

In the current suspended state, there are no observations or recommendations at this time. With the above mentioned future research option, research in this area can inform a better targeted approach to transfer agreements in the Ottawa region. In addition, recommendations for better integration of support for transfer students at the institutions in the Ottawa region can be made.

## Institutional Outcomes

This research process provided insight on the need to develop agreements between institutions to recognize research ethics board approvals. Multisite approval for Ontario Colleges does not extend to universities (or La Cité in this case) and consequently leads to redundancy with multi-institutional research projects.

## Sector or System Implications

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent suspension of project activities, there are no insights, cautions or recommendations at this time.

## Tips/Advice

For others interested in conducting research in this area we would recommend gathering data from participating institutions well as from OUAC, OCAS, OUGS and CGSS concurrently with obtaining Research Ethics Board approvals. Given our methodology was to obtain REB approvals prior to assembling the data, the delay in both areas of the research was compounded.

## Tools and Resources

The survey instrument and focus group questionnaire which was developed as a part of this project have been included in the Research Supporting Documents section of the Follow Up Packet.

