



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Student Transfer Processes and Labour Market Outcomes: A Life Course Analysis of the Class of '73

Project Lead: Dr. Paul Anisef, York University

Collaborators: McMaster University

Project Summary

In this report, we explore cohort data spanning over 46 years to examine the historical patterns of transfer among Ontario post-secondary students. More specifically, we employ the Class of '73 longitudinal database –spanning a time frame from 1973 to 2019 --to explore the antecedents, covariates, and long-term outcomes experienced by students who moved through the Ontario post-secondary system in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is important to recognize that the experience of student transfer is not new, and as our data analysis reveals members of this cohort participated in some kind of transfer, whether it was from college to university or university to college, or between universities or colleges. The study fills an important gap in the transfer literature around the historical practices of post-secondary transfer by using data from the longest running cohort study to date in Canada. Data collected in 1973 (high school), 1975 (when many young people had chosen to enter a post-secondary institution), 1979 (when members of the Class of '73 were about 24 and most likely to have completed post-secondary), 1988 (when members of the Class of '73 were about 33 and participating in the labour market) and 1995 (22 years after high school, around 40 years old and in mid-career) were employed to create a descriptive analysis of the detailed post-secondary pathways of cohort members. Insofar as that the Class of '73 cohort study employs a longitudinal design, we were also able to establish a sequence of events with respect to their choice of post-secondary institution(s) and employment outcomes (e.g., occupational prestige, income, and job satisfaction).

We had two research questions:

1. Did the characteristics of students that chose to transfer differ substantively with those that did not transfer over the course of the Class of '73 study? and
2. Did the short and longer-term labour force consequences of students that engaged in transfer differ substantively from those that did not transfer over the course of the Class of '73 study?

Project Rationale

In this report, our primary objective is to explore cohort data spanning over 46 years to examine the historical patterns of transfer among Ontario post-secondary students. More specifically, we employ the Class of '73 longitudinal database –spanning a time frame from 1973 to 2019 –to explore the antecedents, covariates, and long-term outcomes experienced by students who moved through the Ontario post-secondary system in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is important to recognize that the experience of student transfer is not new, and as our data analysis reveals members of this cohort participated in some kind of transfer, whether it was from college to university or university to college, or between universities or colleges. The rationale of this study is to fill an important gap in the transfer research literature around the historical practices of post-secondary transfer by using data from the longest running cohort study in Canada.

Methods

The research methods employed in our secondary analysis of longitudinal data from the Class of '73 study consisted of three components. The first component consisted in an exploration of descriptive statistics intended to introduce the reader to the key characteristics of the sample employed. The second is a bivariate analysis of 'between wave' transfer and 'total' transfer, which provided a description of the prevalence of different kinds of transfer among respondents participating in waves 1 through 6. This analysis provided a basic impression of how certain background characteristics (e.g., sex, SES) relates to the experience of student transfer. Finally, we conducted a multivariate analysis in two parts. In part one, we employed multinomial logit models of 'between' wave and 'total' transfer with our socio-demographic variables as independent predictors. These models afforded us an opportunity to analyze the extent to which certain background characteristics affect the probability of an individual transferring between types of post-secondary education (i.e., are women more likely to transfer than men). These models are also useful in that they allow us to control for the effect of other variables included in the model. This, for example, allowed us to rule out the possibility that a difference in the probability of transferring between those with high grades versus those with low grades was actually due to a difference in SES that itself, is correlated with grades. The assessment of the actual effect of grades in these models is estimated by holding the effect of SES constant. The second part of our multivariate analysis employed growth curve models to determine if transfer students have lower average incomes and experience slower rates of change in income over their life course than non-transfer students.

Main Collaborators

The main collaborators in this project are Professor Karen Robson, Department of Sociology, McMaster University and Erika McDonald, Ph.D student, Department of Sociology, York University.

Research Findings

The analyses revealed some notable findings, including:

- In total, transfers made up only 24% of the total of educational pathways across waves 2 to 6, indicating that transfer students comprised a minority of all respondents in our sample. Within this small minority, it is also clear that University to CAAT transfers are the most common type of transfer overall.
- Women modestly outnumbered men in all of the transfer categories especially in CAAT to University. We suggested that the women in our cohort study commonly appear to have taken a different path into university than men--namely by transferring from CAAT

to University. However, by later phases of the cohort study sex differences became trivial.

- Among those with lower grades, transfers were predominantly other or CAAT to University (though with notably smaller overall numbers). Among those in the 60% to 69% group, transfers are more evenly distributed between CAAT to University and University to CAAT. Finally, among those with the highest grades, transfers were predominantly from University to CAAT.

Among the results of the multinomial logistic regressions that are noteworthy:

- For transfer from college-to-university, it was found that females were more likely to report this type of transfer, that high SES individuals were less likely to report this type of transfer, and that those with higher grades were less likely to report this type of transfer.
- For transfer from university-to-college, we find no sex or SES effects, but a negative odds ratio associated with high grades (relative to average grades).

The growth curve analysis revealed the following noteworthy findings:

- In terms of occupational prestige over time, we observed higher rates of return for university-to college-transfer compared to college-to-university transfer. In fact, cohort members who experienced a university-to-college transfer had later-life occupational prestige scores similar to those with university-only pathways.
- In terms of income over time, the college-to-university pathway showed the greatest returns in laterlife, again with trajectories similar to those who had university-only pathways. While there were significant income differences by sex, this did not change the relative impact of the type of pathway on predicted income.
- We found no differences in later-life job satisfaction by pathway type.

Future Research

Our study has provided a historical baseline for the practice of post-secondary transfer in Ontario in the late 70s and early 80s, demonstrating that it is not a new practice and that there are some notable associations with transfer-type and later-life employment outcomes. Given that our current social discourses around the utility of generalized liberal education tend to be repeating themselves some 50 years later, policy makers must recognize that transfer in all its forms can have promising later-life associations. While the implied desirable pathway that is emphasized through bridging programs and the default understanding that “transfer” implies from college-to-university, we have observed the benefits of the opposite pathway that has outcomes which are comparable to a university-only trajectory. Longitudinal data on more recent graduate cohorts would be able to establish if such patterns have remained consistent or have changed. However, such resources are largely absent in the Canadian data landscape. One way of understanding the decisions of our cohort members would be to contact them and undertake qualitative interviews with them about their transfer decisions earlier in life. As we have their contact information, this would indeed be a viable future project.

Student Outcomes

While the current practices continue to favour college-to-university transfer as the natural and desirable pathway (as evidenced by many bridging programs) and the often internalized shame and feelings of failure of students who leave university to go to college, it should be noted that this latter pathway has demonstrated later-life employment outcomes in our cohort that are on-par with university-only pathways.

One of the benefits of research that document the antecedents and outcomes of student transfer to students in the post-secondary system relates to guidance and shoring up of self-esteem. Thus, if students who leave universities to attend CAATS experience shame and feelings of shame and then come to understand that their later life employment outcomes are on par with university-only pathways, these feeling may be significantly reduced or eliminated. Thus, research that focuses on who actually transfers and the later life employment outcomes of student transfer pathways can act as a guidance tool and inform students of the potential benefits of transfer. As already mentioned, our study does have limitations, particularly with regard to the numbers of transfer students across the waves, and other more complete research studies are needed if they are to provide the sorts of information that would be helpful to students planning to transfer during their post-secondary career.

Tips/Advice

The analysis presented in this report reveals the value of secondary data in examining the antecedents, covariates, and long-term outcomes of student transfer. It would be important to identify other researchers in Ontario and other parts of Canada that have conducted similar research studies in the past that can add to this pool of knowledge. For example, we know of researchers in British Columbia and Alberta that have also conducted longitudinal studies and their datasets may contain information on student transfer and outcomes.

These studies may offer a comparative basis for more broadly evaluating employment outcomes. ONCAT could act as a facilitator/sponsor of secondary data analysis of research studies that contain information relevant to the antecedents, covariates and employment outcomes of student transfer. Such studies may either be cross-sectional or longitudinal and offer the opportunity to build a more complete knowledge base than is presently available. Furthermore, it would be both interesting and important to develop a meta-analysis of datasets with the help of sophisticated and competent data analysts. Knowledge gleaned from a meta- analysis of different dataset may result in information that is useful for the purpose of student guidance and may also help in the creation of strategies at the post-secondary level for building a more seamless transfer system in Ontario.