

THE COST OF RECRUITING AND ADMITTING TRANSFER STUDENTS:

RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF ONTARIO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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Summary

The research questions addressed in this paper are: What are the costs that Ontario universities and colleges experience in recruiting, admitting and integrating transfer students? How do these compare with the costs of recruiting, admitting and integrating students directly from secondary school? Nine institutions were surveyed (4 colleges, 5 universities), and focus groups were held to solicit comments from survey participants.

The survey found that costs were higher for transfer students than for direct-entry students, by 72% per application and by 19% per registrant. This pattern was more pronounced for the universities surveyed than for the colleges. The cost difference was primarily attributable to higher admissions costs for transfer students. Institutional spending per applicant for recruitment was lower for transfer students than for direct-entry students. Spending per registrant for integration of transfer students (e.g. orientation and academic advising) was higher than for direct-entry students at universities and lower at colleges.

Participants in focus groups confirmed that applications from transfer students require greater manual processing than those from direct-entry students. The development of recognized pathways reduces admissions costs for students who adhere to these pathways, but a large share of transfer applicants do not follow established pathways and so require a customized evaluation. Participants in focus groups said that recruitment expenditure on transfer students was lower than on direct-entry students because there are fewer channels for reaching transfer students.

Expenditures for transfer students are probably under-reported in this survey due to difficulties in separating these expenditures from those for other students. Some participants in focus groups said that current expenditures on transfer students may not be well-aligned with institutional goals and strategies and so may evolve in future.

The survey data support the hypothesis that it costs more to recruit, admit and integrate a transfer applicant than to do the same for a direct-entry applicant. In addition, institutions are conscious that the potential revenue from a transfer student will be lower than for a direct-entry student, because the transfer student will spend fewer years at the institution before graduating. This incentive structure suggests the need for a continuing role for government in financially supporting universities and colleges in recruiting, admitting and integrating transfer students. Accurate data on unit costs, coupled with data on new transfer enrolments using the Ontario Education Number, may provide a formulaic basis for distributing government funds.