

The Bridge: Strengthening Transfer Student Success Through Credit-Bearing Transition Supports

Trent University

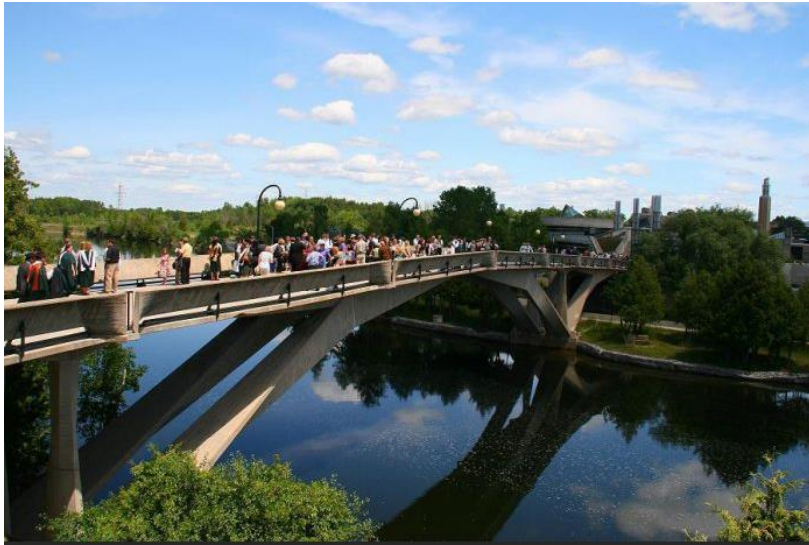


Inspiring educators, transforming learning



OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Land Acknowledgement



We respectfully acknowledge that we are on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Peoples for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

Nice to Meet You!

Melissa Fernandes, Manager, Student Affairs

anya gwynne, Student Equity and Success Programs Coordinator

Dana Capell, Senior Education Developer

Brandon Rimmelgas, Education Developer, Access, Inclusion, Transition

Stephanie Ferguson, eLearning Designer

2024 ONCAT Transfer Bridging Grant

- **Ease academic and social transition** for transfer students through a bridging program
- Build on an **existing successful program model**: "The Bridge Program"
- Address key challenges in **academic success and belonging**
- Deliver the program jointly through **faculty leadership and peer mentors**
- Co-design the program through **campus-wide consultation and strategic partnerships**
- Engage **student affairs professionals, curriculum designers, and educators** in program development

Project Scope and Timeline

I. Research (May to August 2024)

- Data assessment/research and focus groups with stakeholders
- Consulting with existing bridging programs at Trent (e.g., Foundations of Indigenous Learning Diploma)
- Engaging faculty members, student affairs, enrollment advisors, academic advisors and curriculum developers

II. Development (September to April 2025)

- Online course creation and syllabus: subject matter expert, eLearning designers, technologists, and multimedia specialists
- Integrating co-curricular components
- Hiring faculty member to deliver the course and peer-mentors (Bridge Guides) for co-curricular components
- Establishing key performance indicators

III. Pilot Delivery and Assessment (January to November 2025)

- Promotion (e.g., Open Houses, Recruitment/Enrollment Advisors, View Book, Academic Advisors)
- Screening applications and academic advising
- Monitoring pilot delivery and supporting faculty and peer-mentors
- Assessing key performance indicators
- Summative report for ONCAT and Trent University

Research on College Transfer Students



Research Process

- ONCAT grant allowed us to hire Jess Malcolm as a research assistant.
- Literature review of research on experiences/challenges/opportunities faced by students transitioning from college to university.
- Environmental scan of bridging programs at other colleges and universities.
- Interviews with 11 faculty/staff about transfer student needs/experiences; review of data from student interviews conducted by recipients of ONCAT capacity grant.
- Report and recommendations to inform Bridge course design.

Findings

Transfer Shock

Students who transfer to a four-year institution may experience a *temporary* decrease in GPA/marks and experience social and emotional challenges within their first semesters

High Risk Students

- Older age (25+)
 - 26+ individuals had particularly high dropout rates
- Under-represented and equity-deserving groups
- Programs
 - Business
 - Math/Science

Findings On Strengths



Findings on Challenges and Desired Supports

Challenges

- Finding accurate information on transfer
- Finding resources and supports
- Understanding expectations
- Social isolation
- Being unprepared/transfer shock

Supports

- Transfer-specific advising and supports
- Transfer-specific workshops
- Info/skill-development on skills necessary for university

Findings On Current Bridge Programming

- Most are intended to help students who could not otherwise be admitted gain entry to university
- Most are non-credit or offer credit at first-year level
- May target under-represented, equity-deserving groups
- Focus on developing skills to succeed in university
- Most span across several weeks like a typical semester

Implications for Transfer Bridge Program Design

- Research supported the needs and goals outlined in our proposal to create a program that could ease the academic and social transition of college transfer students.
- Findings suggested the need to create a course specific to college transfer students that focuses on learning in university, common assignments, and academic/personal skills.
- Provide second-year credit due to lack of degree flexibility
- Integrate opportunities for connection with campus resources
- Integrate advising into program structure

Designing and Building the Bridge



Summer 2026

The Bridge Program is a 14-day compressed, synchronous, fully online, program where students earn a 0.5 credit.

The program is offered in August just prior to the start of the academic year. The program is offered at no additional or advanced cost and is included as a part of the standard tuition fees for the academic year.

Students can withdraw at any time without academic penalty and any student projected to fail the course is withdrawn.

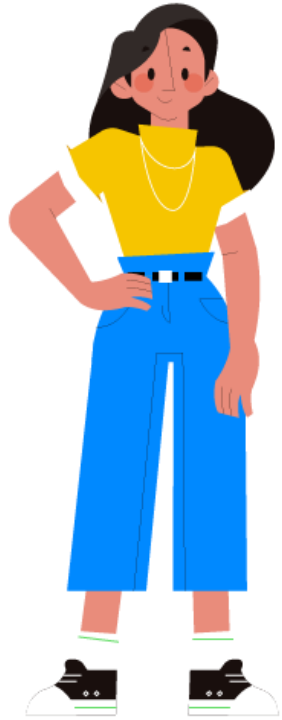
The goal is to give the students a kick-start to their year and allow them to take one less course in their first term.

Streams

The Program is offered in two streams, one for incoming first-year University students coming from high-school and one for college transfer students with no previous university credits.

Based on our success with the college transfer stream in 2025, we will be modifying the first-year stream course offering in 2026. Instead of selecting an arts or science credit, all students in the program will take the same interdisciplinary course.

The Course Design



- Meet Melody (or Mel for short)!
- Mel is a fictional college transfer student to Trent University who will be starting a new program at Trent this fall, The Art and Science of Music (also fictional)

Course Content

- **Module 1:** Identity, Experience, and the Pedagogy of Person
- **Module 2:** Ways of Knowing at University
- **Module 3:** Engaging with the Lecture
- **Module 4:** Reading at University
- **Module 5:** Analytical Thinking, Critical Reasoning, and Argumentation
- **Module 6:** Participating in Labs and Seminars
- **Module 7:** Communicating with Faculty and Student-Colleagues
- **Module 8:** Referencing and Academic Integrity
- **Module 9:** The Literature Review
- **Module 10:** Approaching Major Assignments at University**
- **Module 11:** Taking Tests at University
- **Module 12:** Academic and Life Skills at University



Daily Course Structure

- **9:00-9:15 am:** Zoom check in with the instructor
- **9:15-10:00am:** Work on online module for that day
- **10:00-11:00 am:** Skills labs synchronous Zoom meeting
- **11:00 am onwards:** Asynchronous work on remaining module work plus readings and digital activities.



Evaluation Structure



- Class Participation - **15%**
 - Skills Lab Attendance = 8%
 - Discussions = 6%
 - Digital Activities = 1%
 - Participation Bonus = 2%*
- Journal Reflections - **40%**
- Critical Article Review - **20%**
- Literature Review - **25%**

Course Tour!

DEV Site UNIV 2001 Making the Leap

Announcements

DEV Site UNIV 2001
Making the Leap

IMPORTANT INFO

Syllabus

W.W. Norton & Company
Digital Resources

COMMUNICATION

Announcements

Instructor Contact Info

Zoom Links

COURSE CONTENT

Welcome - START HERE!

Module 1

Module 2

Module 3

Module 4

Module 5

Module 6

Module 7

Module 8

Module 9

Module 10

Module 11

Module 12



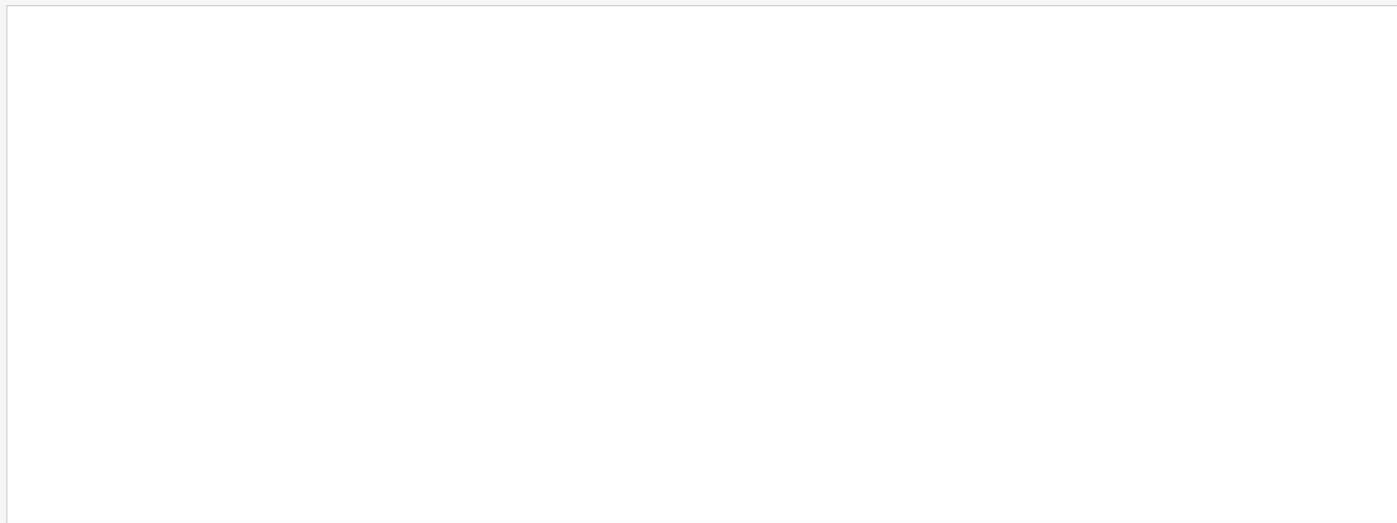
Making the Leap



Institution

Course

Announcements



Bridge Peer Mentors (BPMs)

The research told us that students wanted to hear from others who had shared experiences.

Peer Mentors attended class sessions and were available after class or during “study halls” for questions.

They aided in the Skills Labs, which provided additional instruction based on the research to complement the course material.

BPMs focused on success strategies, building social connection and highlighting resources.

Assessing the Bridge



Recruitment & Enrollment

- Recruitment emails were sent by the admissions team to all incoming college transfer applicants to Trent University
 - Post-cards were provided to the advising and recruitment teams
- Applications accepted via Microsoft Forms
- 40 total applications
 - Students were assessed for eligibility and moved between streams
- 32 students registered in the course
 - 9 students withdrew from the course prior to completion
- 23 students completed the program and earned a 0.5 credit

Students said...

"The Bridge peer mentors were so kind and amazing, they are quick to encourage you when you fell down in the quick pace environment. happy to work with you whenever you needed it. They were honestly amazing!"

"I enjoyed that we the skills labs didn't come with much homework but lots of resources. It was one of the low-pressure parts of the course I enjoyed most because the open discussions felt fruitful."

Later in the term, students mentioned

“HIGHLY recommended the Bridge course, I have already used so many of the tools we got there“

“The beginning of the semester went well for me. Although, I know the next few weeks are going to be very busy as deadlines all pile up along with exams. But I do think that the Bridge course helped to prepare me. Even just knowing a bit about Blackboard and Trent Omni for assignments was helpful since I wasn't joining *2nd* & *3rd* year classes completely blind.”

Impact of Bridge

"I think the course prepared me enough, and there isn't anything that I feel the course didn't teach me that I would need. I feel like the peer mentors prepared me the best, as they taught me the best ways to study and what resources to access when I need help. This course made me a lot more confident, as at the start I was more nervous for university than I am now. Overall, I had fun with this course and would highly recommend it to any new students. "

"This course pushed us to think critically, communicate with others, dig and learn on our own, all things that I now see are going to be exceptionally important in university"

Things we learned

- College Transfer Students wanted social opportunities to meet each other but did not attend the virtual events. Students wanted to be able to meet in person, which is a constraint of the virtual program.
- The course was set up to encourage self-directed learning with the instructor available, but some students needed more in-class time before taking on tasks. We learned that college transfer students had diverse learning experiences which impacted their confidence.

Long-Term Challenges

- How to create a course representative of a typical university course during a compressed term: It is difficult to create a credit-bearing course that is compressed into 12 days but still represents a typical course.
- Future-proofing the program: It is difficult to sustain resource-intensive programs in difficult budget years.

Questions?

trentu.ca/thebridge

bridge@trentu.ca

CHALLENGE THE WAY YOU THINK