

RESEARCH BRIEF

Basic Insights: Transfer Rates, Sources, and Temporal Differences Across the TDSB-UT Linkage

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In our last brief, we gave you a 'bird's eye view' of the TDSB-UT dataset, including a description of how it was produced, the variables it contains, as well as some of its limitations. Today, we'll start sharing some findings from our exploratory analysis. In particular, we review the number and sources of TDSB transfers into UT, as well as fluctuations in these numbers across time. We also provide brief commentary on some of the institutional and social processes that likely explain the trends we highlight.

Rates of Incoming Transfer

Looking across the data,¹ we see that roughly 4.35% (1,223) of TDSB students in our sample who enrolled in an undergraduate program at the University of Toronto do so via transfer. It is interesting to note that this figure is larger than estimates we have for transfer flows into UT via Credit Transfer flag reports that ONCAT has access to via the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). Such reports estimate that, in recent years, roughly only 2% of all UT undergraduates are transfer students. This discrepancy is likely due in part to the type of transfer indicator that we use, which is derived from a manual coding of a last institution field in the UT records. This indicator identifies all students with **any** previous PSE experience recorded. Meanwhile, the CT flag adopts a much narrower definition of transfer; in other words, it identifies only students originating from another public college or university in Ontario who have received transfer credit at their current institution.

To be clear, each of these metrics has their merits and drawbacks. Using the last institution field, we obviously get broader coverage of incoming student flows, but we cannot ascertain if these individuals have been granted transfer credit at UT. As such, they are certainly **mobile** students, but not necessarily transfer credit **recipients**. Meanwhile, the CT flag usefully identifies those who are transfer credit recipients but misses all of those originating from outside of the province's public PSE sector, including from Ontario private career colleges or private universities (e.g., Redeemer, Tyndale, etc.).

Even with our artificially inflated estimate of UT transfer rates, it is worth noting that UT still comes in at a lower number than the CT counts of neighbouring GTA universities,

1. For this and subsequent analyses, our sample is composed exclusively of students who entered UT as undergraduates. This excludes all those who entered UT via graduate (e.g., M.A., PhD), professional (e.g., B.Ed, J.D., DPharm) or certificate programs. Our analyses also exclude students for which we were missing data across pertinent measures. No imputation was performed on any of the variables of interest.

including York (~9%), OCADU (~11%), and Ryerson (~15%). We are unable to pinpoint the factors contributing to UT's lower transfer numbers but have one hypothesis that seems plausible. Perhaps the limited number of existing articulated pathways into UT serves as a barrier for prospective transfer students. Combined with neighbouring universities' (e.g., York) more proactive approach to transfer student recruitment and pathway development, this barrier could be influencing the observed disparities in transfer student flows across GTA universities. Of course, further research is required for us to validate such a hypothesis.

Sources of Transfer Students

What sorts of transfer pathways do students in our sample travel into UT? We see that roughly 56% (689) originate from another Ontario university, with leading sources being geographically proximate southern Ontario peers like York (143), Ryerson (105), Waterloo (61), Western (51), McMaster (55), and Guelph (55). The next largest source of transfers, coming in at 22% (275), are Ontario community colleges, with leading senders being the GTA's Centennial (70), George Brown (64), Seneca (57), and Humber (41). Another 14% came from universities in other Canadian provinces. A further 5% came from international universities, including primarily the United States, but also an array of institutions across countries in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The remaining <1% (21) transferred from other colleges, including community colleges in other provinces and Ontario private career colleges.

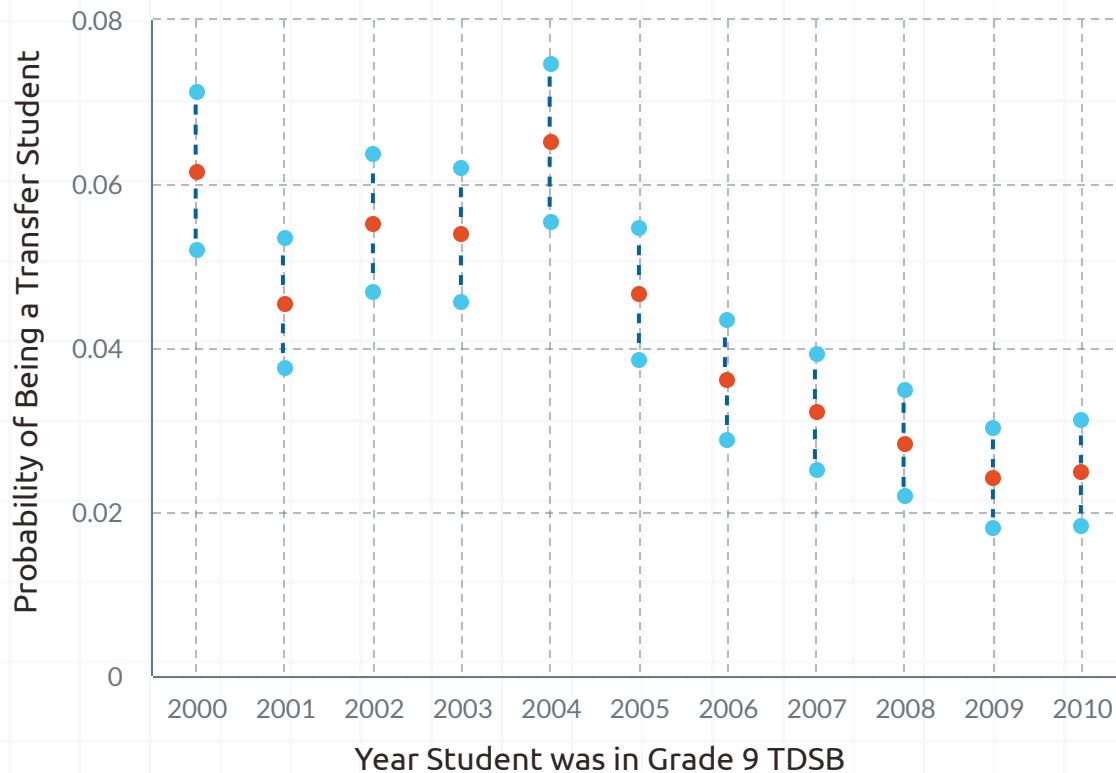
This, of course, is not just a dynamic specific to transfer or UT. There are dozens of studies that note the importance of geographical distance during student decision-making. All other things being equal, students are less likely to select schools that are far from their homes, especially in jurisdictions like Ontario where all our public institutions are of comparable quality. Staying at home allows many students to share living costs with their families and to benefit from the support that comes from close social networks. Future research would certainly do well to examine the rationale behind these 'boomerang' trajectories, where TDSB students initially enroll in colleges and universities outside of the GTA, only to transfer back into UT or other local options later.

Differences across Time

Do rates of TDSB student transfers into UT fluctuate over time? Figure 1 shows that later

cohorts had substantially lower rates of transfer. The four youngest cohorts—those that started Grade 9 in the Fall of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010—had transfer rates in the 2.5–3% range, while rates for the five oldest cohorts (2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004) ranged from 5–7%. Thus, the later cohorts' transfer rates were roughly half than those among earlier cohorts.

Figure 1: Probability of Transfer by Cohort



There are two potential ways to explain these observed differences. It may be that earlier cohorts have had more time for their educational trajectories to play out, and to eventually have the opportunity or need to engage in transfer. Following such reasoning, we would expect later cohorts to exhibit similar transfer rates as time passes. On the other hand, there may be something about younger cohorts—or the period in which they graduated—that makes them less likely to transfer. We can't definitively answer this question based on our data. However, we aren't aware of any significant changes among TDSB students or the sector that would support the second explanation. Of course, further research is needed here, too.

Summary

Looking across the TDSB-UT dataset allows us to derive a series of basic insights about transfer at UT. Now, it is important to note that—assuming your administrative systems comprehensively track students' previous institutions—many of you working in transfer advising offices (or roles) should be able to access the type of information we have presented in the first two sections of this series. Indeed, those sections draw only on UT records and do not require any sort of cross-sector linkages. We're only going to start leveraging the full potential of the TDSB-UT linkage in the next brief. All this to say: you are able to generate lots of transfer intelligence with your in-house data.

Next time, we start getting into the good stuff: including profiles of transfer vs. direct-entry students!



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oncat.ca/en/projects/tdsb-ut-linkage-and-transfer-project



Established in 2011, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) was created to enhance academic pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's public colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes.