MAPIT 2.0

REVIEWING TRANSFER CREDIT PROCESSES AT ONTARIO POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGY ASSOCIATES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank the project leaders at the participating institutions for your engagement, including your help in coordinating consultations and your feedback regarding our findings. We would also like to thank all of our interviewees and discussion group participations, including administrative staff members, faculty members and students. We appreciate the hard work of all of those involved and hope that our findings may support your efforts to further enhance the transfer credit experiences of students in Ontario.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) first commissioned HESA to undertake an exercise with ten Ontario post-secondary institutions mapping out their transfer credit processes. The objective of the MapIt 1.0 project was to help participating institutions identify strengths and areas for improvement in their transfer credit processes, while also providing ONCAT with ideas for supporting institutions. HESA completed the project in June 2020, providing an overall report and facilitating workshops with all participating institutions.

MapIt 2.0 repeated many elements of the MapIt 1.0 exercise with another nine Ontario post-secondary institutions:

- Centennial College
- Collège La Cité
- Lakehead University
- Northern College
- Sault College
- Sheridan College
- Trent University
- The University of Guelph
- The University of Windsor

Over the course of the project, HESA consulted 81 administrative staff members, 45 academic staff members and 66 students across these nine institutions. Following initial interviews, many administrative staff participated in focus groups where they discussed preliminary findings, which had been summarized in process maps. Academic staff interviews focused on the evaluation of course equivalencies.

This report is the primary output of the project. It first provides an overview of transfer credit, the processes in operation at different institutions, and the staff involved. The report then identifies strong performance and challenges around four dimensions: timeliness, student centredness, rigour and efficiency. The report ends with a discussion of what we call “foundations of excellence" in credit transfer, both at the institutional and system levels. In appendices, we provide general process maps for universities and colleges from the institutional and student perspectives, as well as a summary of general notes from student consultations.

In addition to this report, HESA provided each participating institution with their own specific report, and delivered workshops in late June, 2021. The institution-specific reports included detailed process maps and organizational charts.

OVERVIEW OF TRANSFER CREDIT

This section provides a brief overview of transfer credit processes, and which institutional employees play a role in transfer credit.

PROCESS

There is considerable diversity in transfer credit processes. Nevertheless, we can identify overall patterns or stages in processes that are common amongst institutions. These processes may have some overlap. For more detail on processes in general, see Appendix 1.

The first stage of the transfer credit process is the information-gathering stage, which generally begins before a student even applies for admission. At this stage students are looking to determine whether and where to apply for post-secondary studies, and the likely implications of doing so. There is public information available on institutional websites to indicate whether students might receive credits and to understand how the transfer credit process works. Lists of previously recognized equivalencies are available on the websites of some institutions, or at ONTransfer.ca. At a narrower set of institutions, students can contact admissions staff or faculty/program coordinators to receive pre-assessments which provide a sense of what courses a student might transfer over. Finally, a few institutions deliver transfer student recruitment fairs where they provide on-the-spot pre-assessments of students’ transcripts against previously assessed equivalencies.

The application stage is next. Many institutions require that students specifically apply for transfer credits. All institutions – even those where students do not formally apply for transfer credits – require that students provide outlines for courses they’ve previously taken, especially if they have not been previously assessed. Student may also be required to provide their transcripts separately for transfer credit assessment. If documents are not provided in English or French, they may need to be officially translated.

Once credit transfer applications are received – or when transcripts are automatically assessed if applicable - there is an initial processing stage. This stage often involves reviewing whether documentation is complete and requesting any missing materials, running transcripts against a database of previously assigned credits, and preparing materials for review by subject-matter experts for courses not previously assessed.

In the next phase, subject-matter experts evaluate equivalencies based on course outlines. Their assessments usually focus on similarities in content covered, as well as learning outcomes and assessment strategies, seeking to gauge both breadth and depth. Subject-matter experts may return their decisions with explanations, or not.

In the final post-assessment stage, administrative staff process assessments from subject-matter experts. Administrators need to ensure that student files are updated with credit transfer decisions, that students are informed, and that course equivalency databases are updated. Students may be directed to seek out academic advising and may also, in some cases, appeal decisions through informal and/or formal processes.

STAFF INVOLVED

A number of different employees are involved in the transfer credit process across the nine participating institutions. There are clear patterns in how these staff are organized – with common variations based on institution size and whether it is a university or a college.[1]

The primary locus of the transfer credit process is the Registrar's Office. Often, these offices include staff overseeing recruitment and staff overseeing admissions. Recruitment staff can provide information to students on transfer credit pathways, give an indication of credits in transfer credit databases, or may simply direct students to where they can find more information.[2] Admissions staff often are directly responsible for processing students' transfer credit applications and/or other materials. In some cases, all admissions staff share responsibility for transfer credit, while in other cases there is a specifically assigned transfer credit coordinator – but even in the latter case, other admissions staff may retain a role.[3] Relevant staff may have various ranks, including both coordinator or officer-type roles, and assistant roles – some of whom may be part-time student hires at peak points in the admissions cycle. Staff specifically focused on records may help to integrate transfer credit decisions into databases.

Academic units are the next most important locus of activity in transfer credit assessment. Deans are often the most senior academics who play a role in credit transfer, but at most institutions they are only contacted if subject-matter experts are not responding in a timely fashion. At universities, department chairs are usually the most important academics when it comes to transfer credit assessment, either because they assign the credits themselves or assign the most relevant colleagues.[4] In colleges, program coordinators typically exercise the same functions. On occasion, there are administrative staff assisting in academic offices, who either redirect transfer credit assessment requests or respond themselves.

Academic advising staff have a role in transfer credit, sometimes assessing equivalencies as subject-matter experts but more often providing advice to students awarded transfer credits. Academic advisors may fall under academic

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[1] Although we do not include them directly among those involved in transfer credit processes, staff responsible for information and communications technologies (ICT) play a critical role in transfer credit processes. The significance of these roles, and institutional capacity in these areas, will be highlighted throughout this report.

[2] Recruitment may also fall outside of the responsibilities of the Registrar's Office in some institutions.

[3] Often, recruitment or admissions staff may also have specialised responsibilities for certain kinds of students, such as international students, undergraduate or graduate students, with implications for their involvement in transfer credit processes.

[4] In business programs, this responsibility may fall to the chair under the overall degree, such as accounting or human resources management.

faculties, operate in centralized services, or function under both structures or in an entirely different structure – such as within Oxford-style colleges.

Finally, there are often specific staff responsible for overseeing the development of articulation agreements. These staff may fall under the Registrar's Office, but they may also be under a separate reporting structure, for instance focused on partnerships or special projects. Academic staff are involved at least in verifying equivalencies for articulation agreements but may be even more involved in initiating and negotiating the agreements.

At the highest of level of an institution, academic vice presidents are typically responsible for the rigour of equivalency assessment and the academic success of transfer credit students, while other executive leaders may be responsible for recruitment and admissions goals with which transfer credit is associated.

ASSESSING CREDIT TRANSFER PROCESSES

From MapIt 1.0, there are four principal criteria for assessing the performance of credit transfer processes: timeliness, student-centredness, rigour and efficiency. With regards to each of these criteria, this section will discuss two key dimensions of performance. In addition, we outline circumstances of hypothetical students to provide a sense of the impacts of challenges in credit transfer processes and identify certain best practices. The latter are not exhaustive and should not be taken as models of perfection given that the key to true excellence is continuous review and improvement.

TIMELINESS

Timeliness is critical because students need to have information on their transfer credits to be able to make informed decisions regarding whether to enroll, and which courses to select. In some cases, delivering transfer credits late may be no better than failing to provide credits at all. We identify two key dynamics affecting timeliness: timing of transfer credit assessment and the speed of assessment of course-by-course equivalencies.

THE TIMING OF TRANSFER CREDIT ASSESSMENT

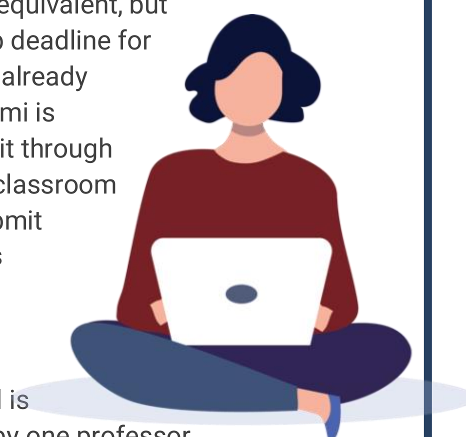
From a timeliness perspective, the earlier transfer credit assessment begins, the better. HESA generally classifies assessment of transfer credits as being either at-admissions or post-admissions.

Colleges generally operate under a post-admissions models, but as we found in MapIt 1.0, so do some universities. The most sub-optimal models require not only that prospective students have accepted their offer of admissions, but that they be even more formally enrolled, perhaps even having paid fees. All of these delays increase the likelihood that students will not have credit transfer determinations until after the start of the semester, in which case students may have to sit in a course from which they will be exempt, or students may not receive their transfer credits before the add-drop date. These possibilities of delays are more acute where students need to apply for transfer credits and may not submit their applications until late.

Usually institutions with at-admissions models automatically run the transcripts that students provide when applying for admission against their transfer credit database. The institution can then communicate to students which credits they will receive automatically, and which syllabi or course outlines they need to provide for course-by-course evaluation. This communication often occurs when students receive their offer letter but may occur beforehand – right after the institution receives the student's application. This then begins the process of equivalency assessment, waiting only for students to provide necessary documents. There can still be delays in students providing their course outlines and such, but this is largely outside the institution's control.

Scenario #1

Naomi Nagata applies for admission to a business diploma at Ontario College (OC) after previously having completed 13 credits in general arts at Ontario University (OU). After receiving her letter of admissions and enrolling, Naomi does not notice an email inviting her to apply for transfer credits. Beginning her classes in September, after two weeks she realizes that two courses in which she has enrolled cover material she has already studied. She contacts the college and receives information on applying for transfer credits, but it takes her time to secure her course outlines from OU and complete her full application. Ultimately, OC does provide her an assessment indicating that her previous courses are equivalent, but the add/drop deadline for courses has already passed. Naomi is required to sit through 72 hours of classroom time and submit assignments addressing material she already knows – and is reproached by one professor multiple times for surfing Instagram in class.



Institutions may also offer some forms of preassessment even before students apply. The most common thing for institutions to do is to share their database of course equivalencies on their website, or through ONTransfer.ca so that students can do a pre-assessment for themselves of what equivalencies they might expect to receive. At Trent University, recruitment staff can further do pre-assessment from the course equivalency database at specific transfer student recruitment events, though these events reach only a small number of students each year. There are several issues with students using online databases for themselves. Databases are often not up-to-date and may be difficult for students to navigate and interpret. For example, one student consulted during the project assumed that all courses not included in the database would be rejected. If this is a widespread misunderstanding, it could significantly undercut the extent to which students apply for transfer credit. HESA considers that it should be possible to automate the interpretation of databases for prospective students, so that students can input their transcripts or the specific courses they have previously taken and receive a report on equivalencies, rejected equivalencies and courses that would require assessment. This would open to prospective students the same automated mechanism that institutions use to run transcripts against their transfer credit databases.

One other mechanism used by some institutions, particularly small colleges that charge fees for transfer credit applications, is pre-assessment of course-by-course equivalencies by faculty or staff. These are very informal processes, whereby students provide information on requests and the faculty or staff member offers their perspective as to which equivalencies they could expect to receive. Although this may provide timely information, it has complex implications for rigour and efficiency, which we will discuss later.

THE SPEED OF ASSESSMENT OF COURSE-BY-COURSE EQUIVALENCIES

The turnaround time for assessment of course-by-course equivalencies is the second critical issue affecting timeliness. This is especially critical for post-admissions transfer credit models where the beginning of the process is delayed, but still important for at-admissions models given that students may submit their materials late or wish to have transfer credit assessments complete before making a final decision on enrolling. We can separate out the time course-by-course equivalency assessment takes due to administrative staff and academic staff.

Scenario #2

Alex Kamal has applied to complete a BA in Social Work at Ontario University (OU), having previously completed six first-year arts courses at Alberta University. Alex is admitted to the (OU) program and receives a note that he needs to submit syllabi for the courses he has taken elsewhere, which takes Alex a couple of weeks to pull together. It is late August and Alex is required to select his courses, but after three weeks he still has not heard back about his transfer credits. Alex enrolls in all of the required first-year courses, taking a precaution that he may not receive any transfer credits. When Alex receives notice that he is exempt from taking four first-year courses, just before the start of class, he moves to switch his course selection. There are specific courses he is most interested in taking, but unfortunately the sections that do not clash with his part-time job are all completely full. He enrolls in courses that he is not particularly excited about, but that will at least help him to accumulate credits for his degree.

In general, automation can help to reduce the time required for administrators to handle transfer credit applications. For instance, automatic transfer credit assessment helps to accelerate turnaround because there is no delay to wait for students to submit applications, and no need to process applications. Of course, the turnaround between when the institution receives the students' transcripts and sends out the request for syllabi/course outlines where needed may vary. Additional automation can include effective portals to receive materials from students and convert them into packages for evaluation, easy transmission of these packages to faculty, and easy conversion of faculty evaluations into final decisions for students. There is little to distinguish these last issues from measures to raise efficiency, and so we will address these issues in more detail later in the report.

The most complex issue in turnaround time relates to consultation with subject-matter experts. In many cases, subject-matter experts respond to requests to assess course equivalencies within 24 hours – either from commitment to supporting students or out of worry that if they do not respond immediately, they will forget to do so at all. At most institutions, however, there is unevenness in the responsiveness of faculty based on the department or even the individual. It is difficult to hold faculty accountable for replying promptly to assessment requests. Administrative staff can also delay transfer credit assessment if they send incomplete materials to faculty or send requests to the wrong faculty member based on a misunderstanding of courses.

It seems to us that the industry standard turnaround time for course-by-course equivalency assessments is two weeks or less. We cannot assess how many of the institutions we have consulted meet this threshold with great confidence – institutions should be able to audit this internally.

BEST PRACTICES

Whenever possible, Trent University automatically runs applicants' transcripts against the university's transfer credit database to identify possible equivalencies, which are assigned automatically. This is easiest with transcripts provided through the standard OUAC application, but the University has recently purchased equipment to also allow automatic electronic processing of images and paper transcripts. Once initial assessment is complete, students are invited to provide documentation necessary for assessment of courses not covered in the database, and this assessment may begin even before a student receives their offer of admissions. The turnaround time for course-by-course equivalency assessment is two weeks or less, with rare exceptions.

STUDENT-CENTREDNESS

Student centeredness is about making all reasonable efforts to ensure students are informed, respected, and treated fairly throughout the transfer credit process. It supports an emphasis on delivering a high-quality student experience, which in the case of credit transfer often means an experience that reasonably minimises students' active involvement.

REQUIREMENTS TO APPLY FOR TRANSFER CREDITS

The first element of student-centredness is the ease of applying for transfer credits. There is considerable variability amongst institutions in this regard.

To start, some institutions – particularly universities – do not require students to apply for transfer credits at all. Where institutions simply assess students' transcripts, assign credits from the transfer credit database, and then request students to provide materials for courses not previously assessed, the process is greatly simplified.

Where institutions require that students apply for transfer credits, there are a number of pitfalls. The applications themselves are often confusing or difficult to use. Some institutions allow students to apply through online portals, but others rely on PDFs that students can find unwieldy. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some might have required students to apply on paper. Students at some institutions must submit a separate application for each course they wish to transfer over. It is common for colleges to require that students match the specific credit they would like to receive for each course they've previously taken, whereas at other institutions (particularly universities) this matching is done entirely through the database where applicable, or by the person assessing the equivalency.[5] Some institutions that do this matching do not provide easy access to their own course outlines, which amplifies the difficulty. This matching exercise has implications for rigour and efficiency that we will discuss later. Finally, at least one institution required that students apply for transfer credits before each semester in which they would apply, necessitating far more attention from students – and having implications for timeliness and efficiency.

Another common issue is for institutions to require that students submit documents unnecessarily. At least one institution we reviewed requires that students attach their transcripts to their credit transfer application – even if they already submitted transcripts when applying for admissions – because the information cannot be shared between those responsible for admissions and for credit transfer. It is more common for an institution to require that students submit syllabi/course outlines for all courses that require assessment, though this should be unnecessary for courses that have previously been assessed and remain valid in the credit transfer database. Such unnecessary requirements are critically important given that students identify obtaining documents from previous institutions as one of the greatest difficulties of the transfer credit process. One possible policy that we have heard about, though not encountered, allows students to opt to receive only general credits for certain courses rather than specific credits. This means they do not have to provide syllabi/course outlines for these courses, which is particularly relevant for potential elective courses, though this has the disadvantage of not building out an institution's credit transfer database.

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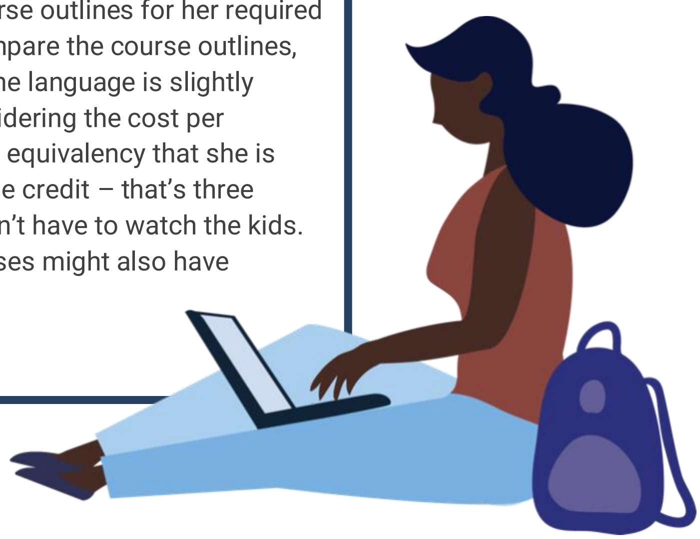
[5] Their greater capacity to discern which course or combination of courses could be equivalent across a program of study is amongst the greatest benefits of having faculty members complete equivalency assessment.

A final issue is that some institutions require that students pay a fee, which is always a source of frustration from the student perspective. Not only do fees impose a cost, but they vary in how many steps they require students to take based on payment methods. The ways that institutions charge fees can matter. A number of universities simply add some kind of a documentation evaluation fee or transfer credit fee to the initial application fee for students with prior post-secondary education, in which case our impression is that students may not realise they are being charged for transfer credits.[6] In these cases, transfer credit fees become subsumed in the larger issue of application fees, which are beyond the scope of this project to discuss.[7]

Scenario #3

Camina Drummer has just enrolled in Ontario College (OC). She previously completed four courses at Other Ontario College (OOC), and is intrigued when she receives a note inviting her to apply for transfer credits. However, as a mature student with two young kids, it is hard for Camina to find time to put together an application, and money is tight. The application requires that she secure her course outlines from OOC, compare them against those of courses at OC, and indicate specific equivalencies. And on top of that, she will have to pay $25 for each equivalency request. After searching the website and sending a number of emails, Camina pays $20 to secure her course outlines from OOC. She talks with an employee at OC and secures course outlines for her required courses there as well. As she sits down to compare the course outlines, however, she finds that they look similar, but the language is slightly different. How similar is similar enough? Considering the cost per request, in the end Camina applies for just one equivalency that she is pretty sure is right. She is relieved to receive the credit – that's three hours per week in the fall when her mother won't have to watch the kids. She pushes from her mind whether other courses might also have transferred over.



[6] We can speculate that it may be that notifying students that they have paid a fee to have their transfer credits assessed might encourage them to seek out documents required for course-by-course equivalency evaluation.

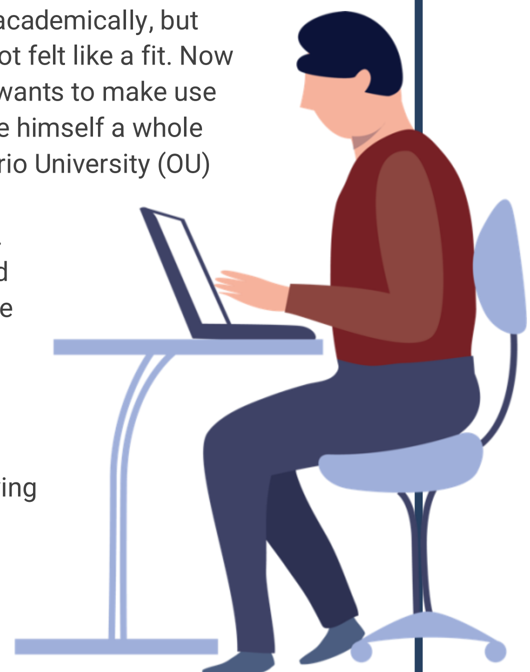
[7] There is substantial literature on the effects of application fees on choices to apply and pursue post-secondary education.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS

The second crucial area in terms of student centredness relates to how an institution communicates with students about the credit transfer process.

Scenario #4

Amos Burton is nervous but also excited to think about going back to university. His first time around he got through first year but then decided to work for a time, not because he couldn't succeed academically, but because the program and the school ultimately did not felt like a fit. Now he knows what he wants to study – criminology. He wants to make use of the credits he obtained previously, and maybe save himself a whole year. He has been checking out the websites of Ontario University (OU) and Other Ontario University (OOU) to try to figure out if they might recognize his transfer credits. OOU provides a pretty clear sense of the process, and actually has a list of equivalent courses on its website that includes half of the courses Amos took before. OU's website really doesn't seem to say much about credit transfer, basically it seems like they just get in touch once you are admitted. Amos is starting to get excited about OOU, but he's on the fence about applying to OU at all.



Credit transfer processes are complex and often not intuitive to understand – this can be the case even for the most streamlined and student-centred process. Institutions need to continuously review and improve how they are communicating to students the information that they will need about transfer credits. Key issues include: how to apply or how the institution reviews applicants' transcripts automatically for equivalencies; how to obtain materials needed for course-by-course equivalency assessment; the timeline for credit transfer assessment and how this affects the start of term; the criteria upon which transfer credit assessments are made; options in the event that the students wishes to dispute a transfer credit determination; etc. In all of these areas, poor communication can not only undercut the extent to which students feel informed, respected and treated fairly, but can also undermine timeliness, rigour and efficiency. Common concerns include students missing messages entirely or misunderstanding the institution's transfer credit jargon.

Some institutions offer more personalised support to students throughout the transfer credit process. This is often very positive, although in some cases this engagement can reflect poor communications which require students to seek out more information.

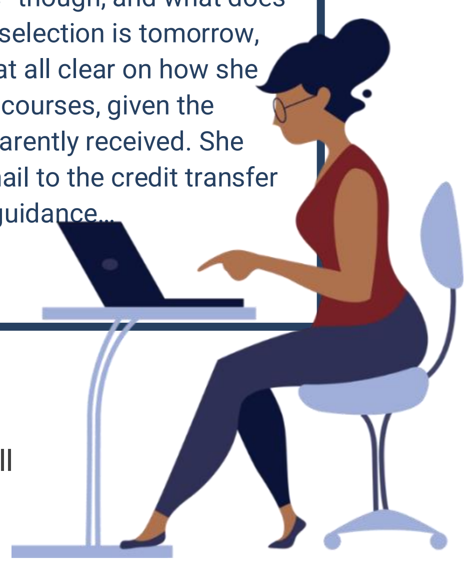
The effective use of the institution's student portal is key. We suggest portals provide an easy platform for not only explaining the process to students, receiving their materials where needed and providing the ultimate results, but also providing information to students on the state of transfer credit requests in progress. Students often express frustration that they have little information in the time between when they submit materials for transfer credit assessment and receive final determinations of equivalency.

Many institutions engage informally with students following credit transfer determinations. This can include connecting them with the faculty who conducted the assessments, so that the faculty members can reconsider their assessment or provide a more detailed explanation. Our impression is that such efforts are often successful in assuaging students' concerns.

It is also important for institutions to help students understand the implications of transfer credit determinations. Transfer credit does not merely reduce the number of courses students are required to take, it also affects the sequencing of their overall program and may affect their full- or part-time status, with notable implications for student financial aid. Moreover, some equivalencies granted may not even count towards a student's degree, though students may not realise and consequently be very confused. Many institutions instruct students who receive transfer credits to seek out an academic advisor, although accessing advice can be difficult given academic advisors are often fully booked at the start of term, when students receive their transfer credit determinations. Assigning transfer credits more quickly may help to address this issue by allowing transfer students to access advisors well before the start of the semester when they have greater availability.

Scenario #5

Chrisjen Avasarala is anxious and frustrated. She was excited to study political science at Ontario University (OU), but eager to at least get some credits for the business diploma program she previously completed at Ontario College (OC). After being accepted, Chrisjen eagerly followed the instructions to obtain and submit course outlines from OC, and she knows she paid a fee for credit transfer with her admissions application. She emailed the transfer credit person each week after applying. Finally, after just over three weeks, she received 12 courses worth of credits, which was about as good as she feels she could have expected. Some of the equivalencies are just recorded as "unassigned credits" though, and what does that mean? Course selection is tomorrow, and Chrisjen is not at all clear on how she should plan out her courses, given the credits she has apparently received. She sends one more email to the credit transfer person, hoping for guidance...



Finally, student-centred institutions can recognize the difficulty of accessing syllabi/course outlines and make theirs accessible for their students in case they wish to study elsewhere in the future. Some colleges -- such as Sheridan -- are leading the way in posting course outlines publicly on their website, while at least one university that we reviewed has made syllabi available to current and former students through a password-protected system.

RIGOUR

It is important that the transfer credit process be rigorous, with regards to both the dual goals of:

1. Ensuring that students learn the material and skills required for their academic program and embodied in the credential provided at the end of the program; and

2. Ensuring students do not need to cover material that they already know from previous coursework (accounting for residency requirements).

These two goals imply a delicate balance.

BEST PRACTICES

Lakehead University, Trent University, the University of Guelph, and the University of Windsor do not require that students apply for transfer credits. Instead, they automatically assess equivalencies against students' transcripts provided at admissions. Trent University also offers transfer credit assessment free of charge, automatically communicates to students the status of applications for transfer credits through the student information portal.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO MAXIMISE THE LEARNING ASSESSED

A number of barriers actively prevent students from having all of their previous coursework recognized. What we can classify as *de jure* barriers include:

- Residency requirements as to the share of credits that must be obtained at the home institution to receive a credential. At colleges, these are often as low as 25%, but at universities the standard is often 50% or higher.
- Preferences in admissions for students without transfer credits, which in competitive university programs can prevent any credits being recognized given the students will not be admitted.[8]
- Transfer credit applications must be received and processed before a certain date.

There are also *de facto* barriers that are often related to aspects of the transfer credit process that discourage students from seeking transfer credits.

[8] Such policies can also affect timeliness, in that transfer students are not admitted until the last minute when there are clearly no more non-transfer students to admit.

Perhaps the most significant *de facto* barrier to transfer credits, though one that is very difficult to measure, is the extent to which an institution fails to communicate effectively what is required of students to obtain transfer credits. We simply do not know the number of students who do not receive transfer credits because they do not realise it is an option at institutions that require that students apply for all transfer credits. Other students may miss out on credits because they fail to follow the necessary steps on-time or efficiently and become discouraged.

The difficulty of applying for transfer credits is another barrier. This includes, most especially, the difficulties of obtaining documentation from previous institutions. We are confident that a share of prospective transfer students do not obtain transfer credits because of the difficulty of obtaining the necessary documentation, or obtaining documentation of sufficient quality. This further reinforces the importance of minimising how much students must require such documentation and advising them on how to secure it where necessary. Other challenges with applying for transfer credits that we discussed under student-centredness could also have important effects.

We found that fees are another barrier to transfer credits. This is because students may not realize that transfer credit is typically financially rewarding, or they may view fees as something of a lottery without knowing their likelihood of receiving transfer credits. At colleges, where tuition fees are often based on full- and part-time status, students may not appreciate the time they will save from not having to be in class and only see that they will be paying extra to receive less instruction.

A further financial disincentive to transfer credits is that students may receive considerably less financial aid if transfer credits reduce their course-load to part-time status. This creates an incentive for students to retake content they already know, entirely contrary from the interest of government to avoid this. Institutions could avoid this disincentive by offering other courses to students under these circumstances, which might for instance count towards a micro-credential, or simply provide complementary general skills courses -- assuming the student cannot take other courses of direct relevance to their academic program. Institutions could also consider adopting a policy whereby students who fall to part-time status due to credit transfer may still receive full-time financial aid – which would also be relevant to government programs, as we discuss later.

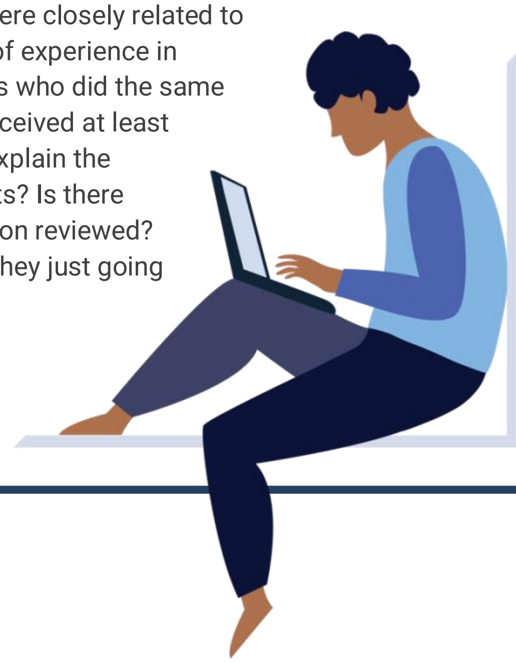
One important approach to maximizing the recognition of student learning is through articulation agreements. Institutions are aggressive in pursuing articulation agreements largely because the incentives are strong – the agreements help both to attract students to colleges (typically) with the promise that they could continue into a university and help universities attract these same students. A further positive step is to design programs from the beginning with articulation in mind, which depends on foresight among faculty developing programs and strong relationships with articulation partners.

QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY OF EQUIVALENCY ASSESSMENT

Where students seek transfer credits, institutions need to conduct equivalency assessment with high levels of quality and consistency. The presence and use of guidelines on how to assess equivalency, balancing flexibility and rigour, seem to vary greatly between higher education institutions -- although these guidelines are generally better established at colleges. At institutions without such guidelines, or where subject-matter experts are unaware of guidelines, we observe considerable variation in the degree to which assessors believe courses need to cover the same content, as well as other dimensions of how faculty assess equivalency. With this greater variability comes greater risk of bias in equivalency assessment.

Scenario #6

Klaes Ashford is about to start a nursing degree program at Ontario Polytechnic (OP). They previously worked as a community care assistant, with a diploma from Ontario College. Klaes followed the full process to request transfer credits for their previous diploma, including providing and matching their course outlines, and paying a fee. In the end, Klaes just received a short message letting them know they would only receive credit for three courses. Klaes is angry and confused. They have no idea why they have received so few credits, given that they believe their previous studies were closely related to nursing. Not to mention their four years of experience in long-term care, and that they have friends who did the same thing as them at other institutions and received at least twice as many credits. Why doesn't OP explain the basis for their decision on granting credits? Is there anything Klaes can do to have this decision reviewed? If they write to the OP administrator are they just going to think Klaes is whining?



Another important question is whether faculty should conduct equivalency assessment, or whether administrative staff, or even graduate students could do it. Some courses in some disciplines may be very standardized - at least within Canada -- and therefore could be readily assessed by staff with lesser qualifications and familiarity with the academic program in question. For other courses, equivalency assessors need to have considerable knowledge about the curriculum of the relevant study program or the disciplinary offerings at the receiving institution. Some interviewees suggested that without such knowledge, assessors may be less generous in granting equivalencies than faculty would be. It is also often easier to assess courses transferring between domestic universities (perhaps even for colleges) than from domestic colleges or foreign institutions. Policies on who can assess what type of course likely often need to be set at the departmental level.

Preassessments by subject-matter experts present another important issue for rigour, as they are almost intrinsically less rigorous than full assessment. One risk is that subject-matter experts hold to preassessment equivalencies upon full assessment for fear of flip-flopping, and then these equivalencies become integrated in the transfer credit database. The other possibility is that pre-assessments never reach full assessment and therefore are not integrated in the credit transfer database, creating risks of inconsistency.

To reinforce the quality of equivalency assessment, some institutions allow students to appeal determinations under their formal academic appeal process. Such formal appeals are nevertheless rare, but offering a recourse appears appropriate given the potential significance of credit transfer determinations for students' academic programs.

Other elements crucial to quality and consistency of equivalency assessment relate less to course-by-course equivalency assessment. Using course equivalency databases according to consistent rules – such as the length of time that equivalencies remain valid – ensures consistency in assessments for all students who took the courses covered. Another policy at one institution is to require that all assessed equivalencies be indicated on the student's transcript to provide a rigorous reflection of the student's academic record – even if this frustrates some students who might wish to conceal that they previously studied at another institution.

The greatest challenge in rigorously assessing equivalency is the difficulty of interpreting syllabi/course outlines from other institutions. This is something over which receiving institutions have little control, aside from shifting students who have inadequate outlines into essentially a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process. What institutions can do is to ensure that their own syllabi/course outlines provide all information they could reasonably expect their students to need to transfer elsewhere. A number of institutions have implemented such standards in recent years – though not necessarily with a focus on transfer.

Finally, equivalency assessment, for course-by-course equivalency and even in the context of developing articulation agreements, always has risks of being flawed. It is possible that students who receive transfer credits may prove less successful. With this in mind, one university we reviewed was tracking the results of transfer and articulation students. This tracking helped to identify where students were doing well and communicate this to faculty to assuage skepticism about accepting transfer students or recognizing credits. The tracking was also used to review the performance of articulation agreements, and in one case led to the modification of an articulation agreement where students were not having success.

BEST PRACTICES

Sheridan, Centennial and Sault colleges have each developed strong guidelines for faculty use in assessing equivalency, balancing demands for flexibility and rigour. Moreover, faculty consistently report being aware of these guidelines.

Trent University has been gathering detailed data on the study success of transfer students. This tracking allows the university to make more evidence-based decisions surrounding transfer credit and articulation agreements.

Scenario #7

Professor Fred Johnson is regularly called upon to review equivalencies for courses related to the Ontario University Microbiology program. It is not really a core part of his job, or something that he enjoys, but he appreciates that it is necessary. Requests can arrive in his email inbox at any time, even Friday at 4pm, with expectations that he will provide assessments as soon as possible. The workload can be heavy at times, especially at the start of the semester, when he is also finishing preparing his courses and receiving more outreach from students. Requests at times are incomplete, or much more suitable to other departments such as environmental science, chemistry, or chemical engineering. He came up with his own approach to assessing equivalency, inspired in part by what the previous program chair did. He finds that this works alright, except that the course outlines he receives are so vague that he struggles to assess equivalency, especially when outlines come from foreign institutions, or even from Canadian colleges. Overall, he considers credit transfer assessment to be an annoyance that he will happily pass on to someone else when his rotation as program chair is finished.

EFFICIENCY

As our last criterion, institutions seek to maximise the efficiency of resource- and time-use in the transfer credit process. They do this through automation of tasks, and in other ways in which tasks are organised.

AUTOMATION OF TASKS WITHIN THE TRANSFER CREDIT PROCESS

The foundation of efficiency in credit transfer is automation. Automation is the use of technologies to reduce the need for labour. Information and communications technologies (ICT) are a critical type of technology, but "technologies" can also refer to ways of organising information administratively.

Credit transfer databases are the fundamental technology for automating credit transfer. They essentially allow the replication of already completed transfer credit assessments. Often these equivalencies were initially established through course-by-course assessments, but they can also build up by integrating bulk course equivalencies from articulation agreements. Some institutions do not have transfer credit databases, while others keep them in Excel spreadsheets – which can create a number of difficulties.

ICT comes into play in deploying the transfer credit database, as we have mentioned earlier. Institutions are developing digital tools to scan students' transcripts and run them against transfer credit databases, including by using new technology that can read transcripts from non-standard images or from paper scans. Often, these technologies only work for transcripts from Canadian institutions, but some institutions are even making advances with regards to international transcripts.

Perhaps surprisingly, it can be a challenge for institutions to identify students covered by articulation agreements. This information is not necessarily gathered by standard OUAC applications for instance, and identification is especially difficult where students may have previously attended multiple institutions or programs. Institutions might be able to further develop the ICT surrounding their database to automatically match students' transcripts to the block of courses under an articulation agreement.

Automation is also relevant with regards to communications in the transfer credit process. Strong information-management systems can facilitate:

- Communications with students, including requesting and receiving materials, indicating the status of an application, communicating determinations, and indicating to students how they can appeal or access academic advising;
- Communications between staff and faculty, including transmitting applications for transfer credit assessment and receiving assessments from subject matter experts; and
- Updating key systems based on transfer credit assessments, including the institutional transfer credit database used in processing and posted on the

public website, updating ONTransfer.ca, updating students' course records, etc.

Automating communications has notable value in terms of efficiency, provided the communications are well received. At multiple institutions, we have heard about how progress on this file can reduce the amount of time staff must spend communicating basic information with students or amongst themselves.

Larger institutions have generally gone the furthest in terms of automation, which is to be expected given that automation generally entails high up-front costs and low economies of scale. For smaller institutions, much automation may be less realistic, but there is often still at least some progress possible, for instance through better use of transfer credit databases.

ORGANIZATION OF TASKS IN THE TRANSFER CREDIT PROCESS

There is also scope for efficiency in the organisation of tasks in the transfer credit process. In particular, administrative staff can put a lot of work into helping faculty to be able to complete transfer credit assessment more efficiently. Efforts include creating templates that faculty can use to complete assessment more effectively, or extensive preparation for faculty being asked to review transfer credits on bulk to establish an articulation agreement.

There is also considerable scope for staff to support subject-matter experts, speaking to issues that we identified earlier. Faculty indicate that staff could provide more basic information to them when requesting assessments, such as a translation of grades and credits or simply better ensuring they send courses for assessment to the correct subject-matter expert with all the necessary materials fully complete. We also heard from some faculty that they find requests for transfer credit assessment disruptive as they can come at any time during the week and may or may not be consolidated together. It may be possible to standardize when requests are sent out, say on a certain day of the week, and consolidate requests together on this basis, without unduly compromising the timeliness of assessment.

The absence of guidelines on how to assess equivalencies may also have some negative impacts on efficiency. Certain subject-matter experts may take considerably longer than others to complete assessments and may even suggest that credit transfer should be done via committees. Subject-matter experts conducting preassessments may also be very inefficient, in requiring them to look over material multiple times. As we noted earlier, it may also be possible to save resources in the transfer credit process by having non-faculty members complete assessments in certain specialized cases. However, beyond the rigour concerns we identified earlier, it is possible that the lower wages of non-faculty will not fully compensate for greater time needed to complete assessments.

Further to these points, many of the challenges we noted earlier with regards to student-centredness have implications for efficiency. Processing applications for transfer credit generally requires more effort per transfer student than assessing equivalencies automatically. Separate applications for each equivalency may take more time to process. Where students have to match course equivalencies for themselves, they may apply multiple times until they get the right match, or advising resources may need to go towards helping students make their matches. Receiving applications from students multiple times, at the beginning of each semester, is surely less efficient than processing a single application all at once.

A final consideration with regards to efficiency centres relates to timeliness. Where credit transfer processes have to focus narrowly at the start of term, this surely amplifies pressures on the receiving institution. This can have impacts on efficiency in terms of the ability of staff at the institution to fulfill their responsibilities of all sorts at a high level in the time available to them. Spreading more of the burden of transfer credit over other points in the year could help raise institutional performance at critical moments in the calendar.

Scenario #8

Juliette Mao is the credit transfer officer at Ontario College (OC). After students are admitted to OC, they receive instructions on how to apply for transfer credits, along with contact information for Juliette. The weeks leading up to and just following the start of the semester are a rush. Juliette receives students' transfer credit applications by email. She must review that each is complete, run them against the transfer credit database, prepare application packages for courses not previously assessed, and then send these application packages out to the appropriate subject-matter experts (and remember herself to send reminders or reach out to deans where necessary). When subject-matter experts provide their responses, Juliette reviews these, updates the students' information in banner (which thankfully sends an automated notification to the student), and then updates the transfer credit database, as well as ONTransfer.ca when she gets the chance. Throughout all of these steps, Juliette is also often corresponding with students who are confused as to what they need to provide, or eager to know the status of their application. Juliette does her best, though mistakes happen given the volume of files she is required to track and process. She thinks the work she is doing is important, but she is also convinced that stronger communication with students and stronger information management systems could almost certainly reduce her workload markedly, while lessening students' frustration.

BEST PRACTICES

Of any institution reviewed, Trent University has gone the furthest in developing and deploying its transfer credit database using digital technologies. Not only does the University run transcripts against the database largely automatically, with a new tool expanding this to unconventional document formats, but the database itself is updated automatically as is ONTransfer.ca.

Trent University, along with Sheridan College and the University of Windsor, have also automated much of their communication with students and much of the internal management of files to enhance efficiency. For instance, status updates through the student information portal provide an indication of the state of files when in processing.

To conclude this report, we will discuss foundations of excellence in credit transfer. We will first address these foundations at the level of specific institutions, before discussing system-wide foundations.

INSTITUTION-LEVEL FACTORS

A number of institution-level factors underlie excellence in credit transfer. We would emphasise strong registrarial services, buy-in from academic staff, and strong institutional incentives for emphasising transfer credits.

A key finding of MapIt is that strong credit transfer processes reflect broader excellence in registrarial services. Such excellence begins with high-quality leadership that fosters a vision for excellence, continuously reflects on obstacles to achieving this vision, and identifies and pushes forward innovations to tackle these obstacles. Excellent leadership helps to strengthen the broader team of administrators in registrarial services, through strategic hiring but also by motivating strong performance, setting a tone for continuous improvement, and helping staff to build their competencies – though excellent staff should be recognized as more than just a reflection of their leaders. Lastly, excellent registrarial services recognize the importance of information management systems and apply themselves to continuously making these systems more fit-for-purpose. All of these strengths are relevant not just to credit transfer, but to the full set of activities in which registrarial services engage. We therefore expect that many of the institutions that perform best in transfer credit perform best in the full set of recruitment and admissions activities.

Having buy-in from academic staff in particular - for both the recognition of students' learning and the rigorous verification of that learning - is critical. Without such buy-in, administrative staff can only go so far in assuring timeliness, student-centredness and rigour. Buy-in for credit transfer amongst academic staff tends to vary widely between institutions, or even between departments within institutions. The institutions or departments that do best likely have a broader ethos around serving students, and more humility about classroom learning in their own programs and respect for other ways of learning. Fortunately, these traits are the norm for the most part amongst institutions that have participated in MapIt 1.0 and 2.0, though we would argue all institutions should seek to continually foster a service ethos and humility around learning among their faculty and staff.[9]

It helps to bolster both excellence in registrarial services and buy-in from academic staff when credit transfer is a key component of an institution's overall recruitment strategy. This creates incentives for excellence. Receiving transfer students tends to be more important to polytechnics and universities that are well outside of the U-15. The 3+2 or 2+2 articulated degree model is the basic driver of this openness, as suitability for this model often leads these institutions to receive far more transfer students. Receiving more transfer students also creates potential economies of scale from automating registrarial processes. On the other hand, the most prestigious universities, be it on the administrative or the academic side, may see little need to accept transfer students given their competitiveness in recruiting from other pools. In fact, these institutions often place transfer explicitly at the back of the line for admissions. These institutions may also suffer from complacency that students will be fortunate to attend them regardless of the quality of their transfer credit processes.

The other type of higher education institutions in Ontario are community colleges – as in colleges that provide few if any bachelor's degree programs. These institutions often have less interest in inbound credit transfer because they have relatively few programs into which students can continue from elsewhere, and their programs tend to be less adaptable for students who are exempted from some courses.[10] They are also often relatively small, and so can achieve limited economies of scale through automation. Yet, these institutions may place relatively high emphasis on recognition of prior learning (RPL) focused on informal and non-formal learning, from their mandates to support adult learning and other non-traditional learners. It merits further analysis whether shifts in patterns of education, including growing numbers of university graduates pursuing college programs, warrant a shift in approach for community colleges.

Given all of these findings, it is clear that higher education institutions do not achieve excellence in credit transfer overnight. Strong leadership, strong staff, strong information management systems, strong buy-in among faculty, and supportive strategic environments combine and build symbiotically with time. Excellence comes from continuous hard work to strengthen staff and faculty culture, and review and improve processes on an ongoing basis.

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[9] We again should highlight as an excellent practice the way that Trent University has tracked the performance of transfer students to be able to demonstrate to faculty that they are successful, while also enabling adjustments where students are less successful.

[10] Often, they place considerable emphasis on outbound transfer, as their students can benefit from 2+2 or 2+3 articulated degree models to continue their education at universities or polytechnics.

SYSTEM-LEVEL FACTORS

The MapIt process tends to emphasise the institution-level in thinking about how to improve credit transfer. However, credit transfer is a system challenge, and we do derive lessons from our research about the system as a whole.

Facilitating students' access to useful course outlines is one system-level challenge, largely because this is an area where difficulties relate more to the institutions sending transfer students than to those receiving them. The core issues are how to make course outlines accessible, and how to ensure that they provide the information that subject-matter experts require. As we have noted, a number of institutions – particularly colleges – have worked to make course outlines available to their current and former students. Even in these cases, however, students may have some difficulty finding where course outlines are available. ONCAT has been building a new tool to give students direction as to where they can find course outlines for their past institutions, which should provide a useful asset to which receiving institutions can direct students, or through which these institutions might obtain course outlines themselves. In the future, it may be possible to create a central database of course outlines, perhaps under ONCAT, from which institutions can draw automatically where they wish to assess course-by-course equivalency. This seems to be an easier sell for colleges than universities, where there can be debate as to whether course outlines belong to institutions or to individual faculty members.

The other issue is that subject-matter experts often report that it is difficult to interpret course outlines to assess their equivalency. Almost all subject-matter experts report this with regards to international credentials, which is understandable and not an easily remedied problem. However, we also heard this often from university faculty with regards to college course outlines.[11] Some institutions – universities and colleges – have established requirements for course outlines within their institutions. A province-wide conversation about standards for course outlines, accounting for transfer credit assessment as well as other concerns, would be helpful. ONCAT has initiated an effort to strengthen course outlines, while another possibility might be requirements from the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) and the Ontario College Quality Assurance Services (OCQAS). These efforts would not assist with course outlines from other provinces, but it is possible that if Ontario led the way other provinces would pursue similar initiatives. This would leave only international course outlines as an area of difficulty still difficult to resolve.

There is also considerable scope for facilitating the transmission of transcripts. In our understanding the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC) and the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS) have made considerable progress on this file. For students who apply through the primary channels, transcripts from prior post-secondary institutions in Ontario can be attached automatically. For students who apply through other channels, it could be helpful if institutions could

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[11] When we raise this concern with college staff, they frequently argue that university course outlines also have shortcomings, such as an absence of clear learning outcomes. However, subject-matter experts at colleges do not raise these same concerns as often.

request transcripts through OUAC and OCAS all the same – through a set-up that nevertheless protects students' privacy.

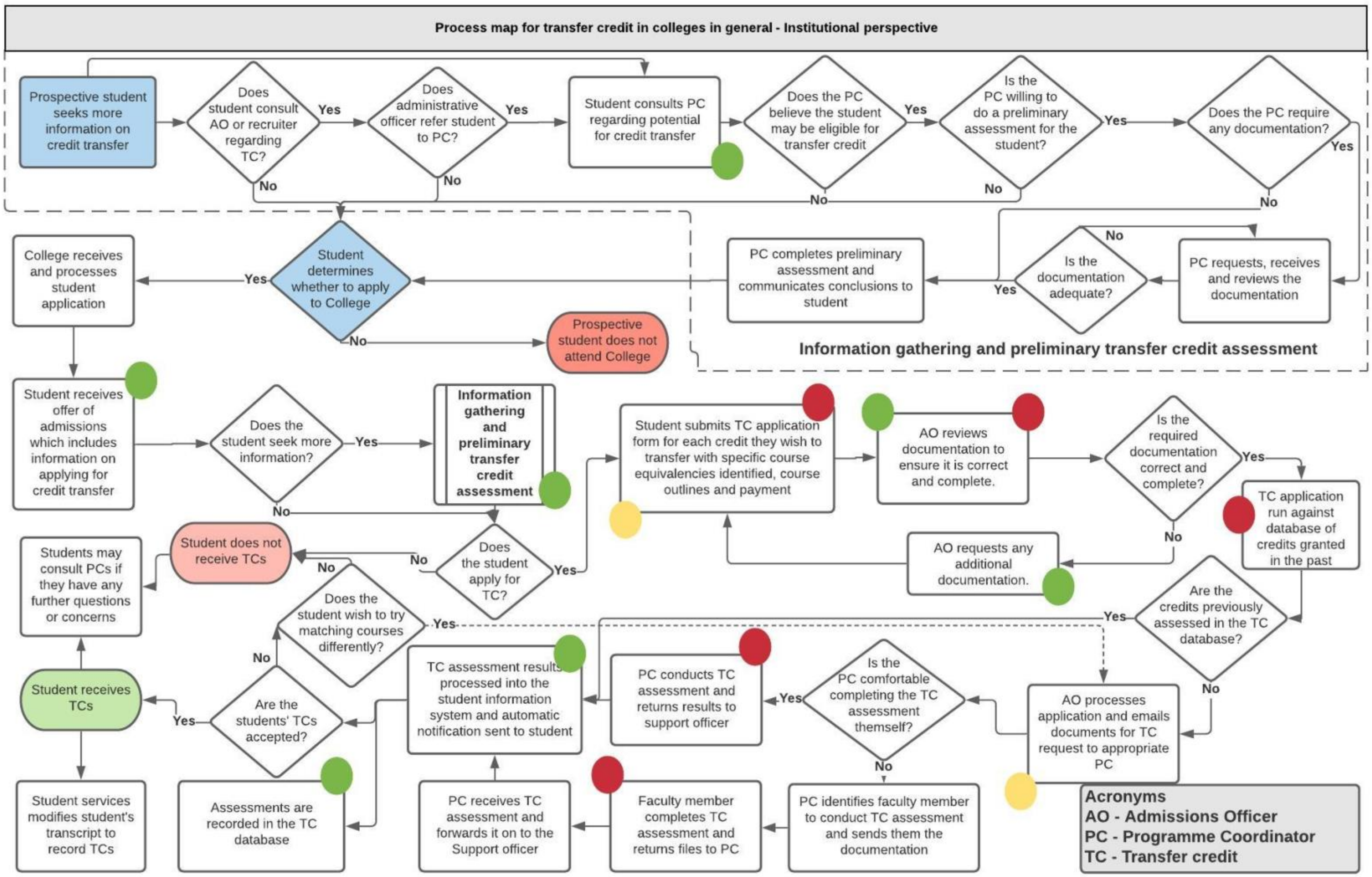
A key challenge in improving transfer credit processes is to expand automation, which depends in large part on the development and use of strong information management systems. These systems are overwhelmingly institutionally based, but there may nevertheless be opportunities for system-level initiatives or institutional collaborations. Given that automation depends largely on economies of scale, this could be especially important for smaller institutions. One option is joint purchasing, of entire student information management systems perhaps for smaller institutions, or perhaps even if narrow technologies such as a tool to automate processing of images and paper transcripts. Another option might eventually be to have the ONTransfer database become the core database for all institutions in the province, rather than more narrowly focused on providing information to students. Such a model might provide additional efficiencies, such as automated triangulation of equivalencies, whereby:

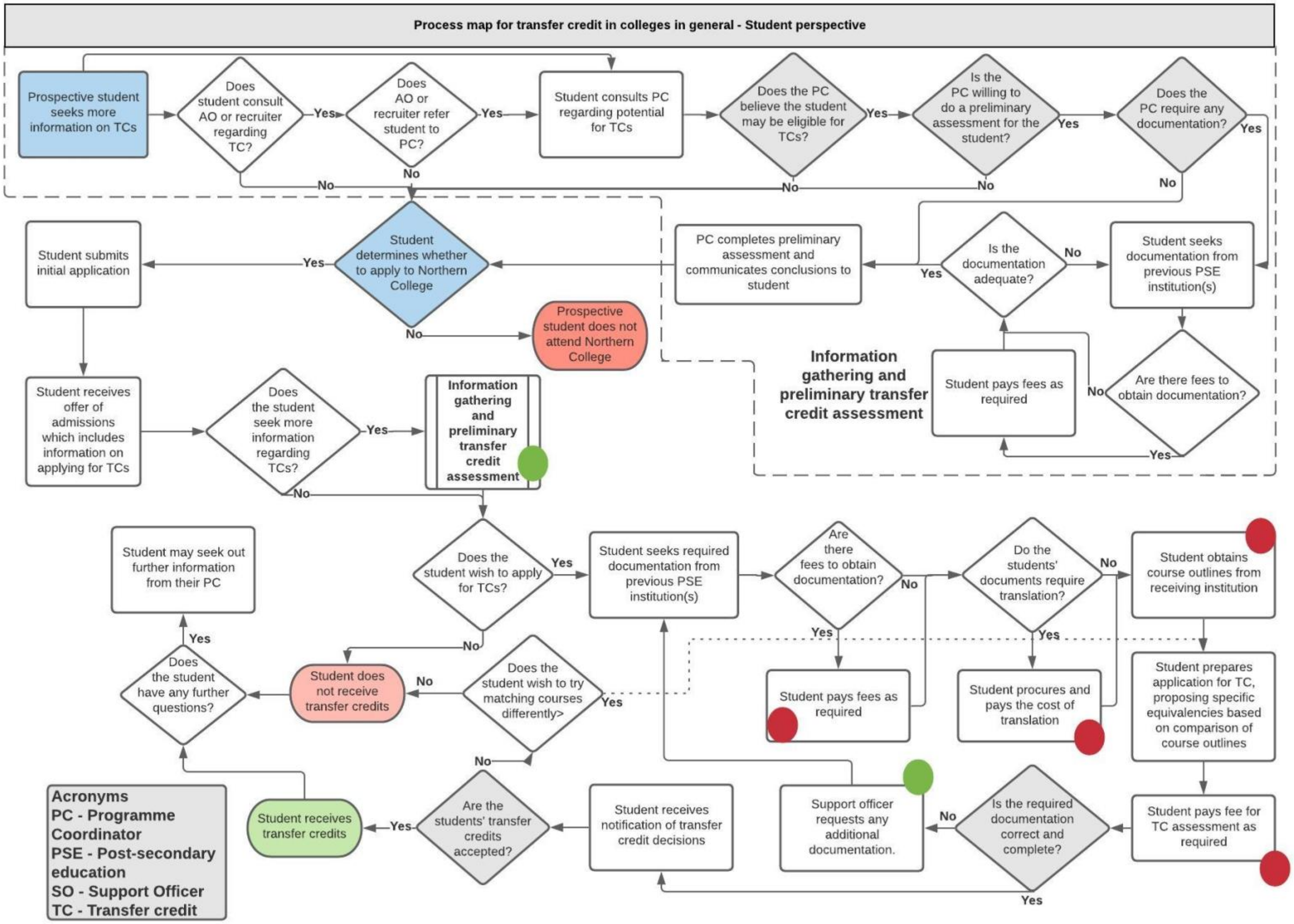
- If Course A at Institution A has been assessed as equivalent to Course B at Institution B; and,
- If Course A at Institution A has been assessed as equivalent to Course C at Institution C; then,
- Institution B might automatically assign equivalency for Course B to Course C at Institution C, and vice versa.

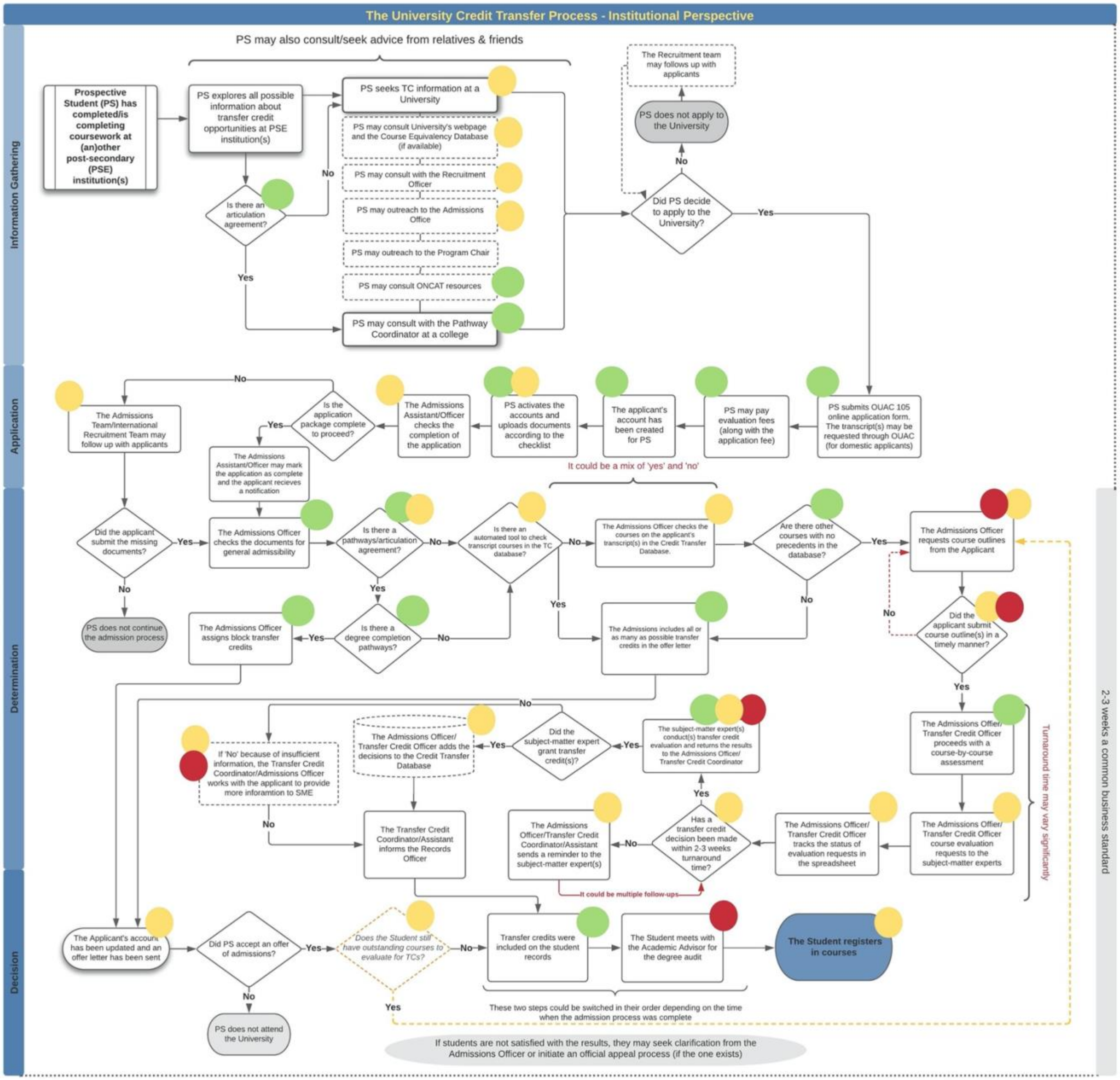
System-level pressures may also be necessary for institutions to better support their students and former students to be able to transfer elsewhere. This is particularly true at universities, as colleges appear to be more committed to supporting students transferring out. In fact, some colleges we have consulted place greater emphasis on transferring their students out than on receiving transfer students. The Provincial government could set higher expectations of students through tools such as strategic mandate agreements, or indirectly by influencing quality assurance conditions. Another option would be to condition institutions' participation in tools that facilitate the entry of transfer students on their adoption of certain policies or activities that facilitate outbound transfer.

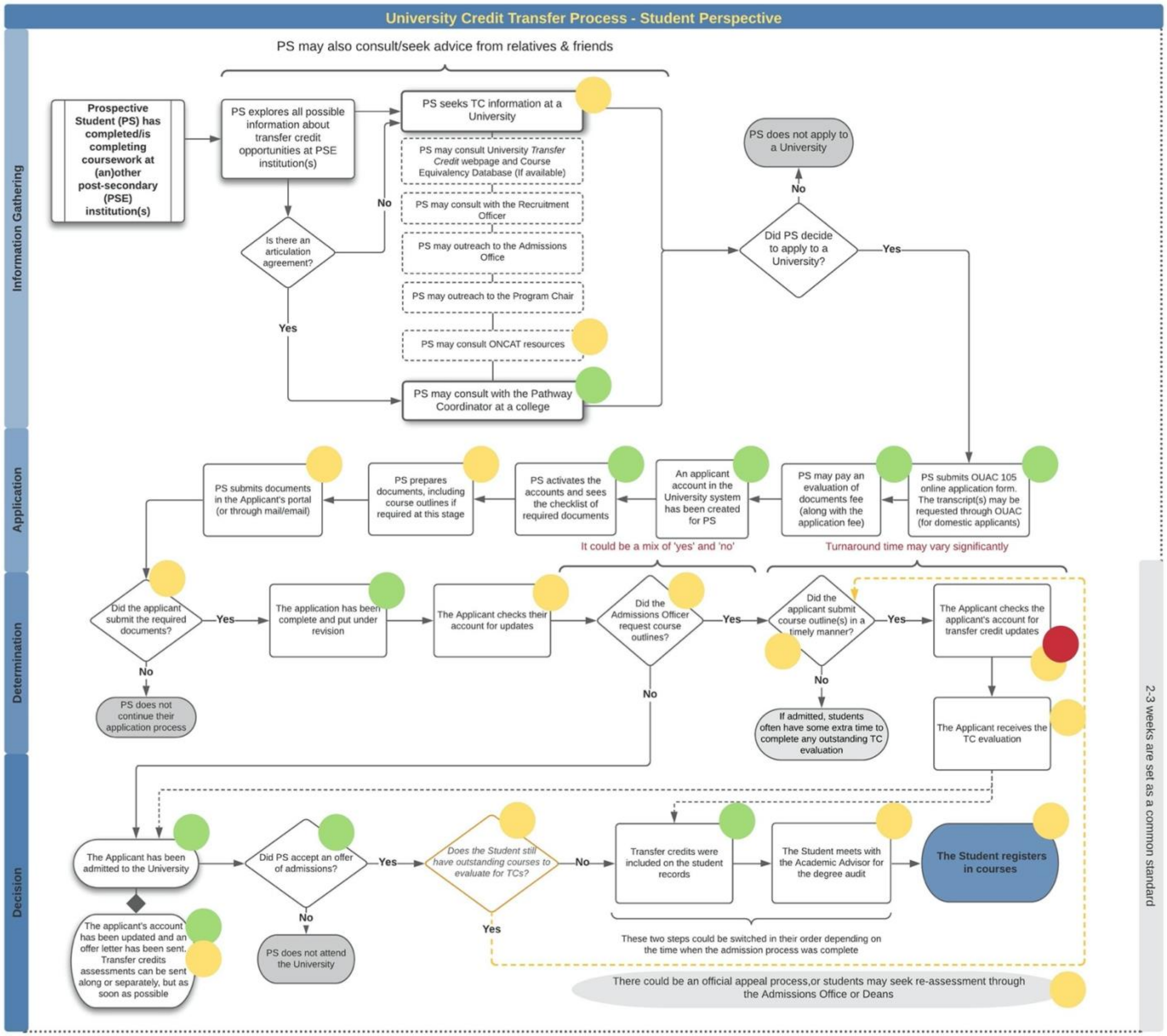
Finally, we would recommend that the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) revise their policies to allow students to maintain full-time status for funding purposes if they fall to part-time status due to transfer credits. Such a policy might save money for these programs, as the students' expenses would nevertheless be reduced as their fees fall from full- to part-time, and along with this the aid provided to the students. Additional benefits of such a policy might include the benefitting students spending more time in paid employment, and greater incentives for would-be transfer students to indeed pursue further education.

APPENDIX 1: TRANSFER CREDIT PROCESS MAPS




Process map for transfer credit in colleges in general - Student perspective
Prospective student seeks more information on TCs
Does student consult AO or recruiter regarding TC?
Does AO or recruiter refer student to PC?
Student consults PC regarding potential for TCs
Does the PC believe the student may be eligible for TCs?
Is the PC willing to do a preliminary assessment for the student?
Does the PC require any documentation?
Student submits initial application
Student determines whether to apply to Northern College
PC completes preliminary assessment and communicates conclusions to student
Is the documentation adequate?
Student seeks documentation from previous PSE institution(s)
Prospective student does not attend Northern College
Information gathering and preliminary transfer credit assessment
Student pays fees as required
Are there fees to obtain documentation?
Student receives offer of admissions which includes information on applying for TCs
Does the student seek more information regarding TCs?
Information gathering and preliminary transfer credit assessment
Student may seek out further information from their PC
Does the student wish to apply for TCs?
Student seeks required documentation from previous PSE institution(s)
Are there fees to obtain documentation?
Do the students' documents require translation?
Student obtains course outlines from receiving institution
Does the student have any further questions?
Student does not receive transfer credits
Does the student wish to try matching courses differently>
Student pays fees as required
Student procures and pays the cost of translation
Student prepares application for TC, proposing specific equivalencies based on comparison of course outlines
Acronyms
PC - Programme Coordinator
PSE - Post-secondary education
SO - Support Officer
TC - Transfer credit
Student receives transfer credits
Are the students' transfer credits accepted?
Student receives notification of transfer credit decisions
Support officer requests any additional documentation.
Is the required documentation correct and complete?
Student pays fee for TC assessment as required
Yes
No


The University Credit Transfer Process - Institutional Perspective
Information Gathering
Application
Determination
Decision
PS may also consult/seek advice from relatives & friends
Prospective Student (PS) has completed/is completing coursework at (an)other post-secondary (PSE) institution(s)
PS explores all possible information about transfer credit opportunities at PSE institution(s)
Is there an articulation agreement?
No
Yes
PS seeks TC information at a University
PS may consult University's webpage and the Course Equivalency Database (if available)
PS may consult with the Recruitment Officer
PS may outreach to the Admissions Office
PS may outreach to the Program Chair
PS may consult ONCAT resources
PS may consult with the Pathway Coordinator at a college
The Recruitment team may follows up with applicants
PS does not apply to the University
No
Did PS decide to apply to the University?
Yes
PS submits OUAC 105 online application form. The transcript(s) may be requested through OUAC (for domestic applicants)
PS may pay evaluation fees (along with the application fee)
The applicant's account has been created for PS
PS activates the accounts and uploads documents according to the checklist
The Admissions Assistant/Officer checks the completion of the application
Is the application package complete to proceed?
No
Yes
The Admissions Team/International Recruitment Team may follow up with applicants
The Admissions Assistant/Officer may mark the application as complete and the applicant recieves a notification
It could be a mix of 'yes' and 'no'
Did the applicant submit the missing documents?
Yes
No
PS does not continue the admission process
The Admissions Officer checks the documents for general admissibility
Is there a pathways/articulation agreement?
No
Yes
Is there an automated tool to check transcript courses in the TC database?
No
Yes
The Admissions Officer checks the courses on the applicant's transcript(s) in the Credit Transfer Database.
Are there other courses with no precedents in the database?
Yes
No
The Admissions Officer requests course outlines from the Applicant
Did the applicant submit course outline(s) in a timely manner?
No
Yes
Is there a degree completion pathways?
Yes
No
The Admissions Officer assigns block transfer credits
The Admissions includes all or as many as possible transfer credits in the offer letter
The Admissions Offier/ Transfer Credit Officer proceeds with a course-by-course assessment
The Admissions Offier/ Transfer Credit Officer course evaluation requests to the subject-matter experts
The Admissions Officer/ Transfer Credit Officer tracks the status of evaluation requests in the spreadsheet
Has a transfer credit decision been made within 2-3 weeks turnaround time?
Yes
No
The Admissions Officer/Transfer Credit Coordinator/Assistant sends a reminder to the subject-matter expert(s)
It could be multiple follow-ups
The subject-matter expert(s) conduct(s) transfer credit evaluation and returns the results to the Admissions Officer/ Transfer Credit Coordinator
Did the subject-matter expert grant transfer credit(s)?
Yes
No
The Admissions Officer/ Transfer Credit Officer adds the decisions to the Credit Transfer Database
If 'No' because of insufficient information, the Transfer Credit Coordinator/Admissions Officer works with the applicant to provide more inforamtion to SME
No
The Transfer Credit Coordinator/Assistant informs the Records Officer
Turnaround time may vary significantly
2-3 weeks a common business standard
The Applicant's account has been updated and an offer letter has been sent
Did PS accept an offer of admissions?
Yes
No
PS does not attend the University
Does the Student still have outstanding courses to evaluate for TCs?
No
Yes
Transfer credits were included on the student records
The Student meets with the Academic Advisor for the degree audit
The Student registers in courses
These two steps could be switched in their order depending on the time when the admission process was complete
If students are not satisfied with the results, they may seek clarification from the Admissions Officer or initiate an official appeal process (if the one exists)


University Credit Transfer Process - Student Perspective
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PS explores all possible information about transfer credit opportunities at PSE institution(s)
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PS may outreach to the Admissions Office
PS may outreach to the Program Chair
PS may consult ONCAT resources
PS may consult with the Pathway Coordinator at a college
Is there an articulation agreement?
No
Yes
PS does not apply to a University
Did PS decide to apply to a University?
PS submits OUAC 105 online application form. The transcript(s) may be requested through OUAC (for domestic applicants)
PS may pay an evaluation of documents fee (along with the application fee)
An applicant account in the University system has been created for PS
PS activates the accounts and sees the checklist of required documents
PS prepares documents, including course outlines if required at this stage
PS submits documents in the Applicant's portal (or through mail/email)
It could be a mix of 'yes' and 'no'
Turnaround time may vary significantly
Did the applicant submit the required documents?
PS does not continue their application process
The application has been complete and put under revision
The Applicant checks their account for updates
Did the Admissions Officer request course outlines?
Did the applicant submit course outline(s) in a timely manner?
If admitted, students often have some extra time to complete any outstanding TC evaluation
The Applicant checks the applicant's account for transfer credit updates
The Applicant receives the TC evaluation
2-3 weeks are set as a common standard
The Applicant has been admitted to the University
The applicant's account has been updated and an offer letter has been sent. Transfer credits assessments can be sent along or separately, but as soon as possible
Did PS accept an offer of admissions?
PS does not attend the University
Does the Student still have outstanding courses to evaluate for TCs?
Transfer credits were included on the student records
The Student meets with the Academic Advisor for the degree audit
The Student registers in courses
These two steps could be switched in their order depending on the time when the admission process was complete
There could be an official appeal process,or students may seek re-assessment through the Admissions Office or Deans

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF STUDENT CONSULTATIONS

The following are our notes from consultations with students. HESA consulted 66 students for the MapIt 2.0 project, through 11 focus groups and 20 one-on-one interviews.

TIMELINESS

- Most delays that students see happen due to external communication to do with retrieving old course outlines, requesting official transcripts, etc. This adds significant frustration if/when a student cannot reach a staff member they need to.
- Timeliness is particularly important when a student has to stay registered in the course until the final decision. Notifying students about the final decision quickly and clearly is critical.
- Student feedback suggests that they do not often pursue TC as a primary factor in choosing their institution and program – it is rather an “add-on”.
- At-admission assessment is preferred, yet it brings questions for students. What counts towards my degree? How do I use the credits? How can I plan my degree? Students also suggest that it is common for at-admissions assessment to introduce errors that students subsequently appeal informally.

STUDENT CENTREDNESS

- For students, this is all about communication, automation, and access to information.
- While most steps in the information gathering stage tended to be voted green, students repeatedly commented on needing opportunities to speak to a “real” person.
- Common complaints at sessions were: “I am getting tossed between people”, “I keep being forwarded”, “You’re just a number to them”.
- In most cases, students are not aware of the average/anticipated processing time, so they suggest adding such estimations to the status bar updates (or email codes).
- There is significant confusion amongst students between PLAR, Waivers and transfer credits.
- In most cases, mature and international students were not familiar with institutional terminology for transfer credits or are not aware of the process at all.

- Institutions with more automated processes, i.e., more user-friendly platforms, naturally, have more positive feedback.
- The majority of institutions require students to map the courses on their own. However, it is challenging to do so when students are not given full information from the institutional side, such as course outlines or descriptions; academic advising.
- Where students need to identify specific course matches for transfer, they are especially confused by options for transferring two courses for one or vice versa.

RIGOUR OF ASSESSMENT

- Many students voiced concerns about transparency in criteria for equivalency evaluation
- Appeal processes are often not communicated well, in the views of students. In some cases, students reach out to a staff/faculty member outside of the TC assessment team, seeking to override initial decisions.
- Students believe that granting “too much” credits is a matter of maintaining profits from tuition fees
- Applying for one course using two courses, or splitting one course into two courses, are processes that confuse and concern students.
- The difference between university- and college-level courses is not defined: students believe that there is a paradigm where university courses get transferred by default.
- Out-of-province students suggest that transfer credit assessment is more complex and, in some cases, unfair.