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PROJECT SNAPSHOT



MapIt: Reviewing Transfer Credit Processes at Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions

ONCAT
Higher Education Strategy Associates

Keywords

transfer students; transfer credit; processes; good practices; barriers; student-centredness; improvement

Audience

past participants of MapIt; registrars; transfer advisors/officers; pathways coordinators; faculty

Overview

In 2019, the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) 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 the participating institutions identify strengths in their transfer credit processes and most especially areas for improvement – while also providing ONCAT with ideas for supporting institutions. HESA completed the project in June 2020, not only providing an overall report but also facilitating workshops with all of the participating institutions. MapIt includes:

- an external consultant who generates process maps and institution-specific reports
- funding to support institutional participation
- Shared learning sessions across institutions to build capacity
- Summary reports for each cohort that provide aggregated findings

ONCAT and HESA identified four basic goals for credit transfer processes:

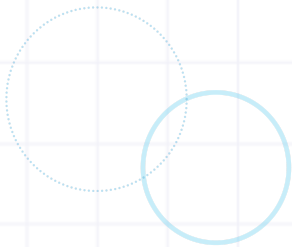
- To ensure students do not need to complete new coursework covering material they already know from previous coursework;
- To reach decisions on credit transfer as early as possible to permit students to optimise their decision-making and educational pathways;
- To ensure students feel informed, respected, and treated fairly at all times; and,
- To maximize the efficiency of institutional spending and other activity with regards to credit-transfer.

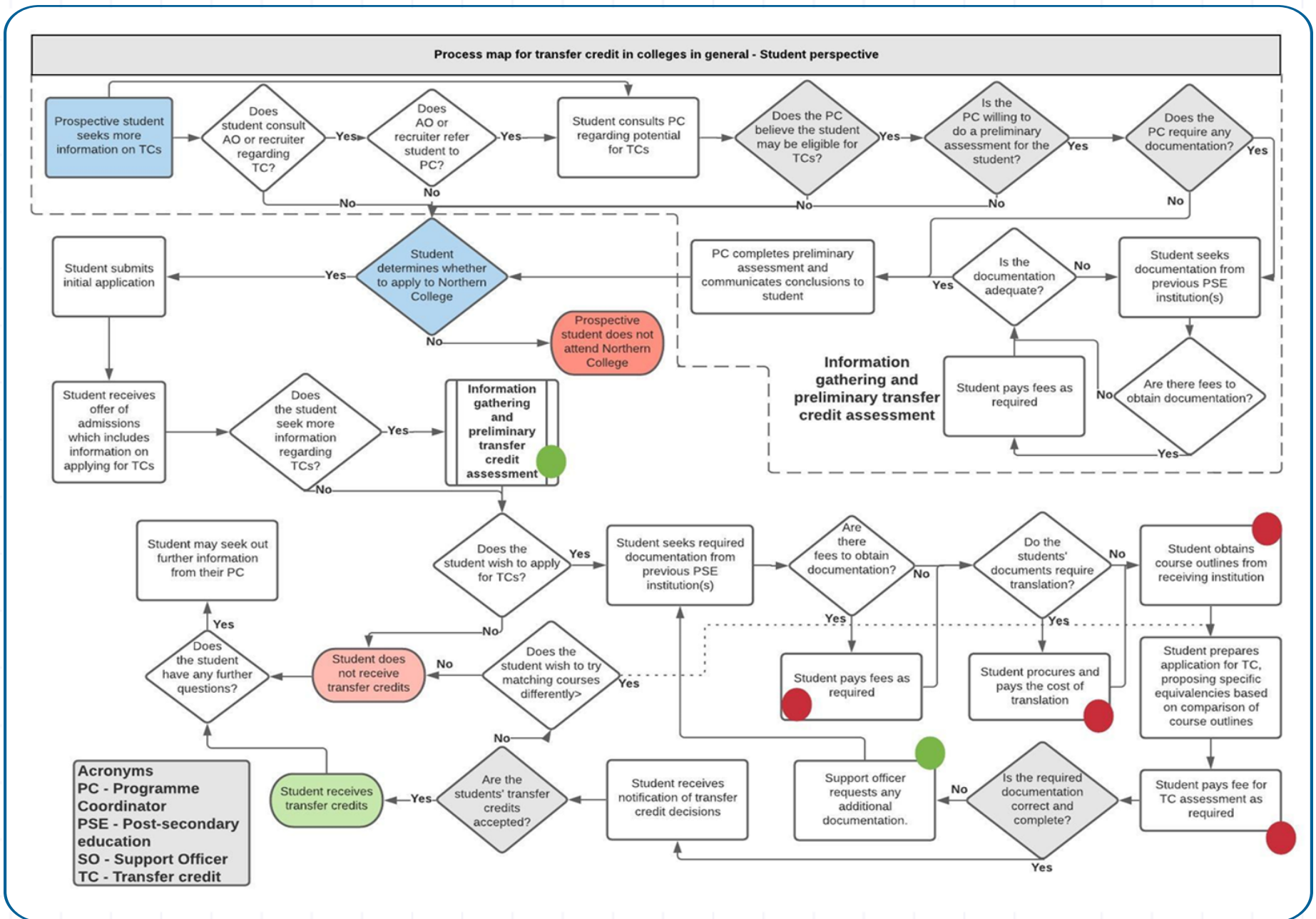
HESA repeated the exercise with a second round of participating institutions in MapIt 2.0 and is currently engaged in MapIt 3.0. This snapshot provides a brief overview of the generalized findings from MapIt 2.0. Findings presented are generalized and do not reflect any one institution. View the entire report [here](#).

Why It Matters

MapIt helps institutions identify and improve their transfer credit processes. Past participants have shared that having a third party organization evaluate their institutional processes allowed them to make the case for implementing system improvements.

“The mapping exercise was very useful. The facilitators were excellent. They listened, asked engaging questions, and came prepared to meetings with a robust template of our information which was already entered, allowing us the opportunity to provide feedback. The sessions themselves were well planned, facilitated, and were an appropriate duration. The shared learning session was valuable in that we learned we were of many struggling with the same issues, but some have creative solutions that we can adopt to our own processes.”
--Participant of MapIt





Generalized process map of Ontario colleges

Key Findings

Through the MapIt exercise, HESA identified four principle criteria for assessing the performance of transfer credit processes: timeliness, student-centredness, rigour, and efficiency.

Timeliness

Timeliness in the transfer credit process 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. Ideally, students should know which credits are likely to be transferred at the time of admission. When it comes to assessing course-by-course equivalencies, we recommend that subject matter experts strive to provide decisions within two weeks of receiving the application.

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 minimizes students' active involvement.

Barriers to student-centredness include requiring students to:

- Apply for transfer credit on paper or pdf files instead of an online application form
- Submit a separate application for each course they wish to transfer over and identify course equivalents on their own
- Find course outlines
- Gather duplicate information that could be shared between institutions (e.g., transcripts)
- Pay fees to have credits assessed

Rigour

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

- 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
- 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 PRACTICE

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. Further to this, Trent University offers transfer credit assessment free of charge, and in terms of communications automatically indicates to students the status of applications for transfer credits through the student information portal.

Use of Guidelines

The presence and use of guidelines on how to assess equivalency vary greatly between higher education institutions.

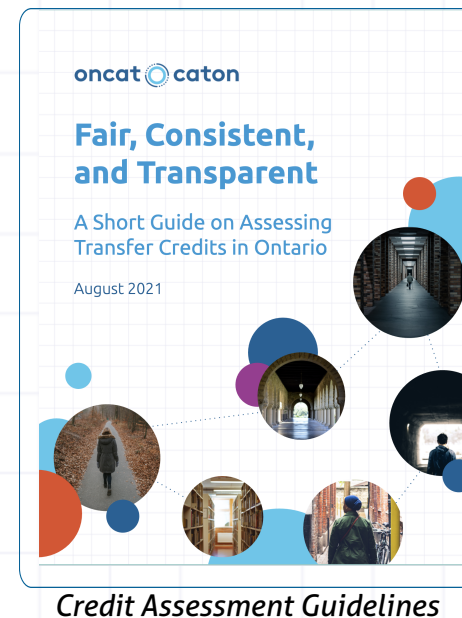
At institutions without such guidelines, we observe considerable variation in the degree to which assessors believe courses need to cover the same content, as well as other dimensions of how faculty assess equivalency.

With this greater variability comes greater risk of bias in equivalency assessment.

Efficiency

Institutions seek to maximize 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 organized.

Credit transfer databases are the fundamental technology for automating credit transfer. They 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.



BEST PRACTICE

Trent University has developed and deployed a transfer credit database using digital technologies. Not only does the university run transcripts against the database largely automatically, 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 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.

Summary

Timeliness is essential. A best practice to strive for is assessing credits at the time of offering admission so that students can make an informed decision before they enroll. With respect to course-by-course equivalency assessment, we recommend a turnaround time from subject matter experts of two weeks or less.

Transfer should be student-centred, which means (where possible) reducing the burden on students to provide duplicate information, making applications accessible and easy to use, minimizing fees, and ensuring that communication is clear and responsive to students' needs. It also may include explaining why transfer credit assessment is beneficial and worth their time.

To ensure the process is rigorous, use guidelines to assess credits. ONCAT's guide on assessing credits can help institutions develop and tailor their own guidelines.

Finally, there is room to increase efficiency in the transfer credit process. This goal can be accomplished by improving information management systems. Building a more sophisticated database of course equivalencies and pathway agreements would allow staff to find equivalencies more quickly. Some institutions are even able to run these searches automatically from student transcripts, which frees staff time for more important and fulfilling tasks, like communicating with students.

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To read the full report, please
visit: [https://oncat.ca/sites/default/files/media-
files/manit_-_final.pdf](https://oncat.ca/sites/default/files/media-files/manit_-_final.pdf)



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. ONCAT is funded by the Government of Ontario.

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