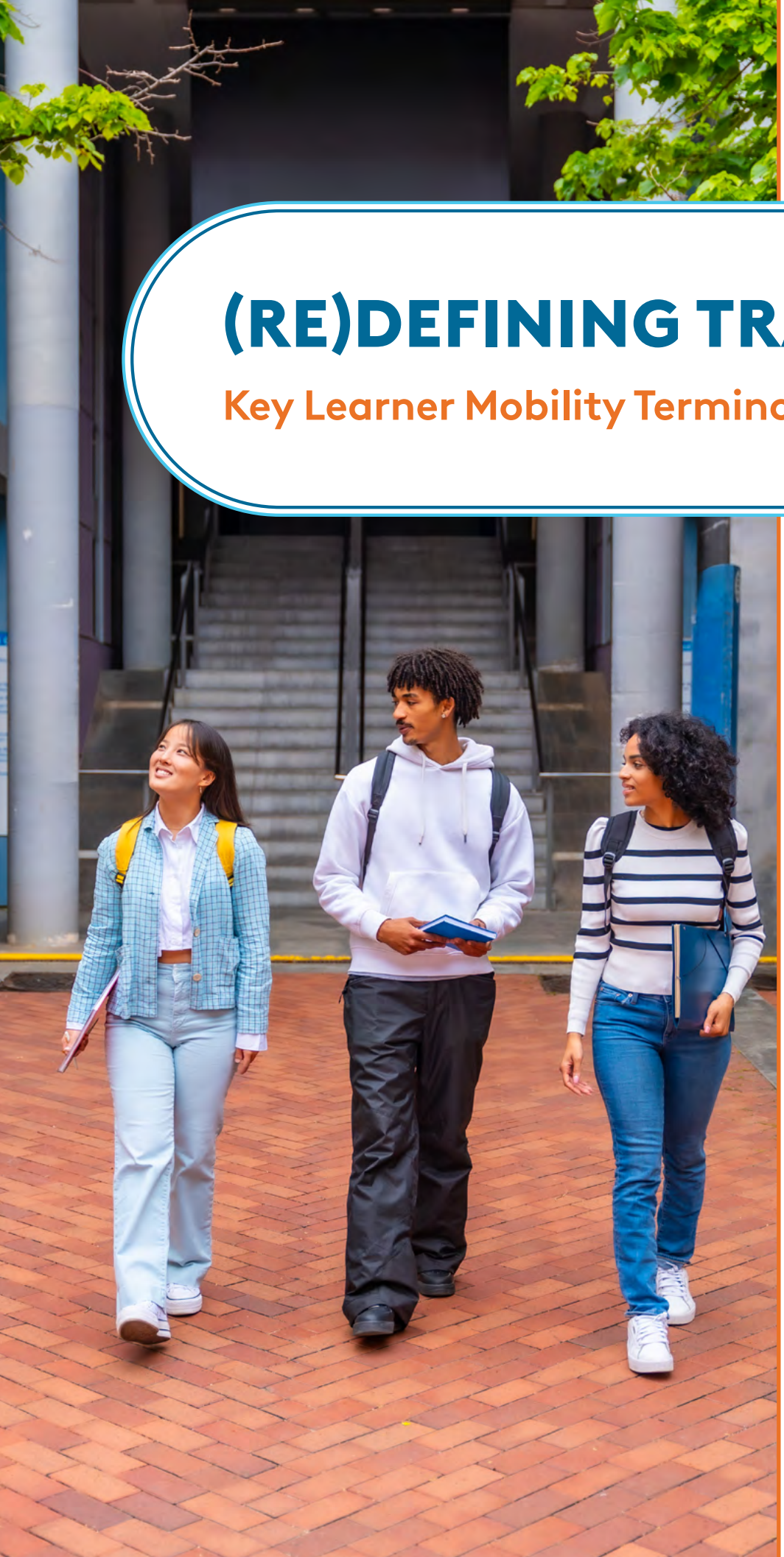

oncat

(RE)DEFINING TRANSFER:

Key Learner Mobility Terminology in Ontario

NOVEMBER 2025

(RE)DEFINING TRANSFER:

Key Learner Mobility Terminology in Ontario

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Executive Summary

In ONCAT's work with Ontario postsecondary stakeholders, we have encountered challenges in communicating about learner mobility topics due to the lack of a common vocabulary. While there are various resources with extensive definition sets, these occasionally conflict with one another or omit important terms. In response to the situation, we present a set of ONCAT-recommended definitions for key learner mobility concepts and associated terms intended for use across Ontario's postsecondary sector. These definitions were developed through a five-step process that involved analyzing over 150 publications and websites to establish core definitions, which were then refined in consultation with key postsecondary education stakeholders. Details about the methodology and rationale behind each definition are available in our supplemental report (LaCroix & Napierala, 2025).

The goal of this project was to provide a definitional framework to address longstanding ambiguities surrounding learner mobility terminology. Broader adoption of this framework will improve communication among stakeholders in transfer and mobility and facilitate increased linkages between research and practice.

The complete set of definitions is organized into three categories:

- Key Learner Mobility Concepts
- Mobility patterns
- Mechanisms of learner mobility

Key Learner Mobility Concepts are presented below, whereas terminology related to mobility patterns and mechanisms of learner mobility are discussed in greater detail in the body of this report.

Key Learner Mobility Concepts

These concepts relate to the ways in which learner mobility is discussed and defined, which include the following:

- **Learner Mobility:** The ability of learners to transition between postsecondary programs of study or to begin/resume postsecondary study after a pause in their formal or informal learning.
- **Mobile Student:** A current postsecondary student who has transitioned between postsecondary programs of study or has begun/resumed postsecondary study after a pause in their formal or informal learning.
- **Transfer:** A mechanism of learner mobility whereby a student begins/resumes postsecondary study and receives transfer credit from their receiving institution.
- **Transfer Student:** A postsecondary student who has begun/resumed postsecondary study and received transfer credit from their receiving institution.
- **Pathway:** A route that postsecondary learners follow from one program of study to another.
- **Transfer Pathway:** A defined route that postsecondary students follow from one program of study to another that specifies eligibility requirements or how transfer credits will be accepted and applied at the receiving institution.

Policy Implications

- Postsecondary staff, researchers, and policymakers should consider how the terminology they regularly use compares to the standards in the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms. Broader acceptance and consistent usage of these terms across the sector will foster the development and implementation of more learner-friendly practices, policies, and pathways.
- Postsecondary institutions should conduct regular reviews of the terminology in their public-facing materials and update their definitions as needed. We recommend this approach because we found that institutions sometimes retain outdated terminology. A regularly scheduled review for consistency, using the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms, can help ensure that terms are kept up to date
- Postsecondary institutions should streamline the use of terminology across their websites and publications. During our review, we found that different resources from the same institution sometimes used terms interchangeably. This disparity can create confusion and difficulty for mobile students, who often rely on institutions' websites (LaCroix & Napierala, 2025b).
- Student mobility researchers should clearly define how mobility and transfer are operationalized in their studies and, where possible, use the definitions in the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms. When applicable, they should consider the implications of using samples that do not conform to ONCAT's recommended terminology. In doing so, researchers' recommendations will be more applicable to transfer practices at institutions and more comparable across studies.

Introduction

In ONCAT's work with Ontario postsecondary stakeholders, we have encountered challenges in communicating about learner mobility topics due to the lack of a common vocabulary. While there are various resources with extensive definition sets, these occasionally conflict with one another or omit important terms. Some of these resources were developed specifically for other jurisdictions and can conflict with Ontario usage. Additionally, terminology differences and ambiguities are prevalent in learner mobility research—particularly ones influenced by the American postsecondary system—which creates difficulties in using research to inform policy and practice in Ontario. The goal of this project is to develop a set of clear and concise definitions based on existing resources and refine them through an iterative consultation process. In doing so, our revised definitions will ease communication among stakeholders and facilitate increased linkages between research and practice.

Background

ONCAT staff have identified various issues with the use of key learner mobility concepts and terminology across the postsecondary sector. In particular, the key concepts of *transfer, mobility,* and *pathway,* as well as some associated terms, are common sources of miscommunication. In some instances, these definitions are misaligned between stakeholder groups with different functions, such as policymakers, researchers, and staff at postsecondary institutions. In other instances, key terms are left undefined, are constructed solely around administrative processes, or are defined according to convenience. There is a clear need to provide a consistent framework to unite stakeholders and streamline our collective work.

This confusion can be partly attributed to the complex learner mobility system in Ontario, which involves multiple stakeholders. There are at least three main identifiable stakeholder groups that undertake different functions in the mobility system: ministerial staff and policymakers, researchers, and staff at postsecondary institutions (e.g., admissions staff, transfer professionals, and leaders). Among these stakeholders, professionals engage with—and support—mobile students in a wide variety of ways at different points in the transfer journey, from investigating transfer opportunities to graduation. For example, in postsecondary institutions alone, staff can perform administrative tasks related to program admission and transfer credit assessment or interact directly with students by providing bridging programming or support services. As a result, definitions for learner mobility terms can become narrow or highly specialized to fit specific cases. To ensure inclusivity in our discussion, we use the term “learner” instead of “student” when discussing people who are/were engaged in learning outside formal postsecondary institutions.[1]

In addition, much of the existing learner mobility terminology used in academic research has been imported from the United States. Unlike Ontario, the American transfer system focuses primarily on community college-to-university transfer among public postsecondary systems that are centralized in individual states (utilizing 2 + 2 transfer arrangements). Imported terms can sometimes create confusion for transfer students and reinforce misunderstandings about Ontario’s unique postsecondary system. For example, American postsecondary education researchers often use the term “vertical transfer” to describe college-to-university pathways and “reverse transfer” to describe university-to-college pathways. These terms do not apply in a postsecondary system such as Ontario’s, which is deliberately differentiated.

[1] Note that *learner* is a broad concept that includes students or individuals currently enrolled at an educational institution, as well as anyone else who is actively engaged in learning.

Project Steps

To address the numerous issues surrounding learner mobility terminology, this project used a five-step process to develop a universal set of definitions. Key details of the steps are provided below, followed by the final set of definitions and rationales for their construction.

Step 1. Define the Project Scope

We limited our inquiry to three key concepts and closely related terms: mobility, transfer, and pathway. In line with the purpose of the project, these terms were most likely to be used differently among postsecondary stakeholders in Ontario. In addition to the three key concepts, we included related terms (e.g., advanced standing, articulation agreement, and transfer credit), particularly when their use was inconsistent or problematic across the sources consulted (see below for a full list).

Step 2. Collect Data

We searched for the three key concepts in three types of sources broadly pertaining to our three main stakeholder groups: academic, policy, and institutional sources (see Table 1). When available, we recorded how these concepts were used and how they were defined. We followed the same process for associated terms. For a detailed discussion of the data and methodology, see the supplemental report at ONCAT.ca (LaCroix & Napierala, 2025a).

TABLE 1
Literature Search Strategy

	Academic literature	**Policy literature**	**Institutional websites/ policies**
Sources	*Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Community College Journal of Research & Practice, Community College Review, Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice, Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education*	ACAT, BCCAT, CampusNB, CICIC, Government of Canada, HEQCO, ONCAT, ONTransfer.ca, MCURES, MyNSFuture, PCCAT	Publicly assisted colleges and universities in Ontario
Total number of sources	n = 96	n = 71	n = 47

Step 3. Analyze Data and Synthesize Definitions

The analysis examined commonalities and differences between sources in two ways: looking at the concepts and definitions within each literature type and then focusing on differences between the key concepts and closely related terms. This strategy allowed us to compare and contrast key elements of the concept definitions to better understand the relationships between them and how they are used across sources. Next, we crafted our recommended definitions using five principles:

- Ensure definitions fit with the common understanding of stakeholders in Ontario while aligning with their usage across Canada.
- Avoid overly technical jargon or minute case scenarios.
- Use clear and unambiguous language.
- Avoid redundancy between definitions (i.e., synonymous definitions that allow terms to be used interchangeably).
- Create definitions that are agnostic to institution type, thereby reflecting—and ultimately useful for—the transfer practices of colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes.

Applying these principles to the data compiled from the three types of sources resulted in our initial set of definitions.

Step 4. Refine Definitions Through Consultation

The next step was to consult internal and external ONCAT stakeholders. The goal of this stage was to ensure that the definitions would be suitable for the work of professionals in a wide variety of roles in the Ontario learner mobility system. We engaged with individuals and professional groups in Ontario and across Canada through various means, such as sharing documents for feedback, delivering presentations, and participating in conference activities. Through this process, two additional terms were identified (“PLAR” and “bridge program”) that required inclusion in this project to ensure that our framework would address the full range of mechanisms through which students are mobile. To this end, definitions were selected from available sources and added to our list.

Step 5. Disseminate Definitions

The final set of definitions will be disseminated beginning in Fall 2025 via multiple outlets. Moving forward, ONCAT resources will be updated to reflect the definitions presented in this report.

Definitions

In this section, we provide ONCAT's recommended definitions for three key learner mobility concepts—mobility, transfer, and pathway—along with two groups of associated terms related to mobility patterns and the mechanisms for learner mobility. Accompanying each definition, we offer illustrative examples, explanatory notes, and references to terms associated with the definitions in the document. We also provide the rationale for each definition, derived from an analysis of the transfer literature and conversations with postsecondary stakeholders. In addition, the applicable definitions from the ONCAT.ca Glossary (ONCAT, n.d.a),[2] the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms (ONCAT, n.d.b), and the ARUCC and PCCAT Glossary (ARUCC & PCCAT, n.d.), where available, are included in the Appendix for comparison purposes.

Key Concepts for Learner Mobility

The final set of definitions will be disseminated in Fall 2025 via multiple outlets. Moving forward, ONCAT resources will be updated to reflect the definitions presented in this report.

Learner Mobility

Definition: The ability of learners to transition between postsecondary programs of study or begin/resume postsecondary study after a pause in their formal or informal learning.

Note: Learner mobility includes changing postsecondary institutions, resuming study with previous postsecondary experience, or beginning postsecondary study after periods of employment or informal learning (with or without previous postsecondary experience).

See Also: Mobile Student, Transfer, Transfer Student, Pathway.

Rationale: Mobility is underdefined both in postsecondary institutions and in the academic and policy literature. Our definition is intentionally broad and accounts for a multitude of scenarios through which learners engage with postsecondary education. This approach contrasts with PCCAT's definition, which focuses more on the administrative mechanics of mobility (e.g., noting the documents required for movement).

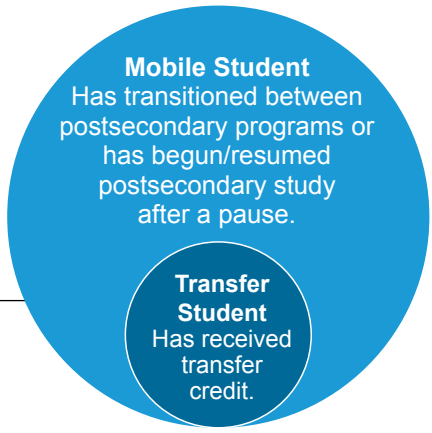
Mobile Student

Definition: A current postsecondary student who has transitioned between postsecondary programs of study or has begun/resumed postsecondary study after a pause in formal or informal learning.

See Also: Learner Mobility, Transfer Student.

Rationale: See Learner Mobility.

FIGURE 1
Comparison of Mobile and Transfer Student Concepts



[2] As part of this project, the ONCAT.ca Glossary was taken down in October 2025. We direct all readers to the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms for the most up-to-date terminology.

Transfer

Definition: A mechanism of learner mobility whereby a student begins or resumes postsecondary study and receives transfer credit from their receiving institution.[3]

Note: Transfer occurs after students pause their education, provided they receive transfer credit.

See Also: Learner Mobility, Mobile Student, Transfer Credit, Transfer Student.

Rationale: This definition reflects many existing institutional and policy definitions of transfer and fills some gaps in those definitions. For example, colleges tend to focus on the different ways a learner might gain entry into college without explicitly defining transfer, while universities tend to define transfer as an admission category or type of applicant. In academic and policy reports, transfer is often categorized according to the "direction" of transfer (e.g., university-to-university) without considering transfer credits. Through this definition, we address three key ambiguities of existing transfer concepts by clarifying that (a) transfer is a mechanism of learner mobility, (b) it can be immediate or occur after a break from postsecondary studies, and (c) it involves the allocation of transfer credit.

Transfer Student

Definition: A current postsecondary student who has begun/resumed postsecondary study and has received transfer credit from their receiving institution.

See Also: Mobile Student, Transfer.

Rationale: See Transfer.

Pathway

Definition: A route postsecondary students follow from one program of study[4] to another.

Note: Pathway is a general term that can describe many different types of movement within or between postsecondary institutions. In other contexts, pathways can refer to the routes learners take to postsecondary education or the labour force. When possible, pathway should be combined with other terms—in particular *transfer* (i.e., Transfer Pathway; see below)—or other modifying terms that define the processes associated with the pathway (e.g., an admissions pathway includes admission requirements at the receiving institution).

Example 1: A university offers a pathway to their bachelor of science program specifying that any graduate with a diploma in biotechnology from an Ontario college can apply for admission if they meet specific eligibility criteria.

Example 2: A student followed a college-to-university pathway on their way to completing a bachelor's degree.

See Also: Articulation Agreement, Transfer Pathway.

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[3] As previously defined in the ONCAT.ca Glossary, a receiving institution is an "institution to which a student transfers during a program or level of study; not the first institution where the student enrolled" (ONCAT, n.d.a).

[4] As defined in ONTransfer.ca Key Terms, a program of study is "an approved set of credit courses leading to a credential such as a certificate, diploma, or degree" (ONCAT, n.d.b).

Rationale: This is a broad definition that aligns with ARUCC and PCCAT's term (ARUCC & PCCAT, n.d.). It applies in all situations in which the term is currently used to discuss learner mobility.

Transfer Pathway

Definition: A defined route that postsecondary students follow from one program of study to another, specifying eligibility requirements or how transfer credits are accepted and applied at the receiving institution.

Note: This is the preferred term for describing predefined pathways, rather than *program pathways* or other related terms. Unlike articulation agreements, transfer pathways do not require formal or official agreements between institutions. They often apply to multiple sending institutions and one or more receiving institutions, and they often involve the completion of one or more credentials.

See Also: Transfer, Pathway, Articulation Agreement.

Rationale: This definition builds on the general *pathway* term by adding more technical administrative requirements that allow students to build on their previous learning through a pathway. There are minor differences between the definitions and usage of *program pathway* and *transfer pathway*—which are often used interchangeably or without definition—that we attempt to reconcile with this single term.

Mobility Patterns

This set of terms is commonly used in the academic literature to describe the ways that students move between institutions. In these terms, we use "students" instead of "learners" because the people described by these terms are typically enrolled in postsecondary institutions. For each term, an associated key concept—either *mobility* or *transfer*—should also be used in the definition, depending on the circumstances. More specifically, for instances in which students receive transfer credit from the receiving institution, the key concept of transfer should be used, while in other instances, mobility should be used (e.g., *lateral transfer, internal mobility*).

Additional terms are used to describe mobility that we do not specifically define here (e.g., *college-to-university transfer*) but can easily be derived from the terms presented in this report.

Cross-Type Mobility

Definition: The transition of students between postsecondary institutions with different institutional types (e.g., colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes).

Note: This term is a shortened form of *cross-institution-type* mobility. Cross-type mobility is neither contingent on first completing a credential (e.g., discontinuing progression toward a university degree to pursue a college diploma) nor on receiving transfer credit.

Example: A student completes a college diploma and transfers to a university to continue their studies in a degree program.

See Also: Learner Mobility, Mobile Student, Transfer, Transfer Student.

Rationale: Cross-type mobility is a new term to replace two concepts commonly used by American postsecondary education researchers—*vertical transfer* and r*everse transfer*—to describe college-to-university and university-to-college pathways, respectively, which are not

appropriate in the Ontario context. Unlike the US, colleges and universities in Canada are non-hierarchical in esteem and differentiated by design. In other words, Canadian universities are not viewed as being "above" or "in front of" colleges. Additionally, vertical and reverse transfer do not appropriately include Indigenous Institutes, which function as an important third pillar of the Ontario postsecondary system.

Lateral Mobility

Definition: The transition of students between postsecondary institutions of the same institutional type (e.g., college, university, or Indigenous Institute).

Note: Lateral mobility is not contingent on completing a credential (e.g., discontinuing progression toward a university degree to pursue a different university degree) and occurs regardless of the credential type of the program (e.g., diploma or degree).

Example: A student begins a degree at a university and then transitions to a different university to continue their studies.

See Also: Learner Mobility, Mobile Student, Transfer, Transfer Student.

Rationale: Our definition is consistent with the academic and policy literature, in which lateral transfer is defined as occurring between the same type of institution.

Internal Mobility

Definition: The transition of students within one postsecondary institution.

Note: While the term internal transfer is sometimes used to describe all movement of students within institutions, it is recommended only when students are awarded internal transfer credit during this process. In other instances, internal mobility should be used.

See Also: Cross-Institution Mobility, Lateral Mobility.

Rationale: Although we did not conduct a fulsome review of this term as part of the project, we include it here with a definition to reflect a broader spectrum of mobility patterns.

Swirling

Definition: A pattern of learner mobility whereby students transition two or more times between at least two postsecondary institutions.

Example: A student completes a college diploma, begins a university degree, and then decides to transfer to a new diploma program at a different college.

See Also: Learner Mobility, Mobile Student, Transfer, Transfer Student.

Rationale: Swirling is less commonly studied and therefore less commonly defined. Researchers have tended to focus more on the other "classic" mobility patterns, likely due to the limited availability of data on students' educational histories. While American research focuses on back-and-forth enrolment at different institution types as a defining characteristic of swirling, Canadian research tends to focus on the number of institutions or the types of institutions involved. In our definition, we focus on the movement between institutions, regardless of institution type.

Mechanisms of Learner Mobility

The following are the key technical terms needed to describe the administrative processes around learner mobility.

Advanced Standing

Definition: A status granted to students when entering a program of study beyond the conventional first-semester entry point.

See Also: Block Transfer, Credit Transfer, Transfer Credit.

Rationale: Advanced standing is sometimes used synonymously with *credit transfer/transfer credit.* However, these terms are distinct. The credit transfer process—and therefore the number of awarded transfer credits—allows students to achieve a particular level of advanced standing.

Articulation Agreement

Definition: An agreement between two (bilateral) or more (multilateral) postsecondary institutions, which establishes the terms and conditions for a transfer pathway between programs of study.

Note: These agreements specify program eligibility requirements, which may include how a student's previous credits are assessed, any bridging programs they may be required to successfully complete, or their level of advanced standing at the receiving institution. Articulation agreements may vary widely between institutions in terms of their level of formality and detail.

Example: College A has an official agreement with University B whereby graduates of its diploma program in bitoech are admitted with 10.00 transfer credits into any of University B's bachelor of science program. Applicants must also possess a specified admission average and have completed any prerequisite high school courses (e.g., calculus) required of direct-entry applicants to the degree program.

See Also: Pathway, Learner Mobility.

Rationale: These agreements hinge on a process of articulation whereby there is a rigorous assessment of programs at sending and receiving institutions to determine credit equivalency and how transfer credits are awarded. Participating institutions officially recognize these agreements. Both colleges and universities—as well as the consulted literature—share this interpretation. This definition acknowledges two forms of articulation agreements: bilateral and multilateral. The term also clarifies that articulation agreements specify particular aspects of the transfer process.

Block Transfer Credits

Definition: A set of credits that a receiving institution awards to students in recognition of previously completed courses.

Note: Typically, block credits are awarded based on the completion of an approved credential or program at another recognized postsecondary institution. These arrangements can consist of general credits (e.g., 6.0 elective credits at the 1000 level) and/or credits for specific courses (e.g., 6.0 credits for PSYC 101).

See Also: Advanced Standing, Articulation Agreement, Credit Transfer, Transfer Credit, Pathway.

Rationale: Whereas transfer credits are awarded to transfer students on a one-to-one basis, block credits are credit groups awarded based on a student's transcript. While students can accumulate numerous transfer credits via the transfer credit process, block credits are distinct in that the evaluation process is based on a preexisting relationship (e.g., transfer pathway) between institutions (or among a number of institutions). In this case, a student presents with a completed cluster of courses from one institution, which allows them to enter a receiving program at a predetermined level of advanced standing.

Bridge Program

Definition: A course or program constructed to provide remedial and/or transition support for students to facilitate eligibility to enter a program or profession.

Note: There are various forms of bridge programs (e.g., credit bearing, non-credit, and a combination of credit bearing and non-credit), and each typically offers a unique focus (e.g., linguistic competence, remedial support, or prerequisite preparation). Variations of this term include *bridge courses, bridging courses*, or *bridging programs.*

See Also: Advanced Standing, Articulation Agreement, Credit Transfer, Transfer Pathway.

Rationale: This term was out of the scope for the initial data collection and analysis for this project. However, to present a complete framework for the mechanisms of transfer in this report, we include this term and its definition from the ARUCC and PCCAT transfer glossary (ARUCC & PCCAT, n.d.).

Credit Transfer

Definition: The administrative process conducted by a receiving institution to evaluate courses or credentials for equivalency. This process may result in the student being awarded individual or block transfer credits.

Note: An alternative term for this process is *credit evaluation*. The rules and regulations of this process differ between institutions but typically involve evaluating the course hours, the course content, and the learning outcomes between courses or credentials. Prior learning and recognition (PLAR) and bridge programs are separate processes that may also be used to facilitate learner mobility.

See Also: Advanced Standing, Transfer Credit.

Rationale: Occasionally, *credit transfer* and *transfer credit* are used interchangeably on college and university websites. Here, we specify that credit transfer is the registrarial process used to evaluate credits for equivalency. Therefore, credit transfer is the administrative process, and transfer credits are the outcomes of this evaluative process.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Definition: A process that uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate, and demonstrate past learning. Prior learning can be acquired through study, work, and other life experiences that are not recognized through the formal transfer of credit mechanisms.

Note: Learners typically demonstrate their prior learning through processes like the following:

***Challenge Process*:** A method of assessment—other than portfolio assessment—developed and evaluated by subject-expert faculty to measure an individual's learning achievement against course learning outcomes. This process measures demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods for the purpose of awarding credit without requiring enrolment in a course.

***Portfolio Assessment*:** A method of assessment that involves the evaluation of an organized collection of materials developed by a learner that records learning achievements and relates them to personal, educational, or occupational goals—in this case, achievement of stated learning outcomes of college courses or programs.

See Also: Credit Transfer, Bridge Program.

Rationale: This term was out of the scope for the initial data collection and analysis of this project. However, to present a complete framework for the mechanisms of transfer in this report, we include this term and its definition from the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security resource page on PLAR (Government of Ontario, 2023).

Transfer Credits

Definition: Academic credits that a receiving institution awards to students in recognition of previous learning experiences (e.g., a course a student previously completed or skills they developed through work).

Note: This term includes all credits awarded to students at a receiving institution regardless of their source (e.g., a dual credit program, PLAR).

See Also: Advanced Standing, Block Credit, Credit Transfer.

Rationale: This definition combines slightly disparate definitions between colleges and universities. Colleges sometimes use the terms *transfer credit, credit transfer,* and/or *block transfer credit* interchangeably. Universities tend to differentiate transfer credit by the type of sending institution. Our definition is broad enough to apply to both contexts. Because there are differences in this process between postsecondary institutions, we avoid distinctions based on the documents required for equivalency evaluations, the level of overlap between courses that institutions use to determine equivalency, and how transfer credits may be used to fulfill program requirements.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

For this report, we developed definitions that we recommend for three key student mobility concepts and 15 associated terms. These terms were derived from a comprehensive analysis of three types of student mobility sources—academic, policy, and institutional—and refined through a consultation process with stakeholders.

Following this process, we offer the following recommendations to ensure that these definitions will have the most positive effect on the sector:

- Postsecondary staff, researchers, and policymakers should consider how the terminology they regularly use compares to the standards in the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms. Broader acceptance and consistent usage of these terms across the sector will foster the development and implementation of more learner-friendly practices, policies, and pathways.
- Postsecondary institutions should conduct regular reviews of the terminology in their public-facing materials and update their definitions as needed. We recommend this approach because we found that institutions sometimes retain outdated terminology. A regularly scheduled review for consistency, using the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms, can help ensure that terms are kept up to date
- Postsecondary institutions should streamline the use of terminology across their websites and publications. During our review, we found that different resources from the same institution sometimes used terms interchangeably. This disparity can create confusion and difficulty for mobile students, who often rely on institutions' websites (LaCroix & Napierala, 2025b).
- Student mobility researchers should clearly define how mobility and transfer are operationalized in their studies and, where possible, use the definitions in the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms. When applicable, they should consider the implications of using samples that do not conform to ONCAT's recommended terminology. In doing so, researchers' recommendations will be more applicable to transfer practices at institutions and more comparable across studies.

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Appendix

Below are all the available definitions for key concepts and terms presented in this report from the (discontinued) ONCAT.ca Glossary (ONCAT, n.d.a), the ONTransfer.ca Key Terms (ONCAT, n.d.b), and the ARUCC and PCCAT Glossary (ARUCC & PCCAT, n.d.), as of July 2025. These definitions were instrumental for crafting those in this report and are preserved here to help interested readers understand the evolving definitional landscape of learner mobility.

Advanced Standing

ONCAT.ca Glossary Definition
"A student who gets advanced standing is admitted to a second or higher term or year of a program because of transfer credits granted for courses completed at another institution."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
"Refers to the recognition of prior studies or experiences where granting a student access to a higher level of postsecondary studies or an exemption is appropriate rather than specific credit. The previous learning could have been completed through different forms of credit work (formal learning) and/or through informal and non-formal learning such that an array of courses, prerequisites, or requirements for a degree or diploma are awarded. The term Advanced Standing has particular utility in the context of the world of prior learning assessment/recognition of prior learning and in situations that do not always lend themselves to the awarding of specific credit. Assigning Advanced Standing helps students achieve educational goals by satisfying specific requirements for a credential, course prerequisites, and progression through a program; and/or by affecting a student's enrolment priority (through the advanced access to upper level courses or levels in a program)."

Articulation Agreement

ONCAT.ca Glossary Definition
"Official agreement between two (bilateral) or more (multilateral) postsecondary institutions that defines the terms and conditions enabling students to transfer between specific programs. May also determine which courses or programs taken at the sending institution will apply to graduation requirements at the receiving institution."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Articulation Agreement—Also known as Transfer Agreement
"Refers to signed Agreements between postsecondary institutions that specify the amount of credits granted for prior studies at the partner institution and the length of time required to complete the final credential. These Agreements can also be between postsecondary institutions and allied organizations. Articulation Agreements can be reciprocal or one-way."

Block Transfer

ONCAT.ca Glossary Definition
"Advanced standing for a group of credits or courses at one institution based on their equivalence to a defined set of course or program learning outcomes at another institution. Block credit enables students to enter a program at a receiving institution at an advanced level."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Block Credit, Block Transfer
"Refers to a form of advanced standing. It is granted when institutions compare whole programs and award credit on the basis of total hours or credits, rather than for individual courses."

Bridge Program

ONCAT.ca Glossary Definition
Bridge Course/Program
"Also referred to as Bridging courses or programs. Course or set of courses that students take to fill gaps in their learning from one program in order to enter another program, for example from a diploma to a degree program in the same area of study. Some bridging course/programs are designed to prepare internationally educated professionals to write certification examinations to practice in Canada."

ONTransfer.ca Definition
Bridging Program/Course
"Bridging refers to a course (or set of courses) taken to fill gaps in learning from one program in order to enter another program (for example, from a diploma to a degree program in the same area of study). Some bridging courses and programs are designed to prepare internationally educated professionals to write certification examinations to practice in Canada."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Bridge Program—Also known as Bridge Course or Bridging
"Refers to a course or program constructed to provide remedial and/or transition support for students to facilitate eligibility to enter a program or profession. There are many different forms of bridging programs (e.g., credit bearing, non-credit, a combination of credit bearing and non-credit) and each typically offers a unique focus (e.g., linguistic competence, remedial support, prerequisite preparation, and so forth)."

Credit Transfer

ONTransfer.ca Definition
"Credit transfer refers to the process of acceptance (or recognition) of credit by an institution for courses or programs completed at another institution."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Transfer Credit, Credit Transfer
"Refers to the granting of specific course credit for previously completed postsecondary level credit studies achieved in formal learning settings. The Transfer Credit awarded may apply to core courses or to elective courses. It can take the form of assigned credit, which is credit for a specific course, or unassigned credit, which is elective credit in a specific subject and year level. Transfer Credit may result in achieving a higher level of studies at a subsequent institution. Assigning Transfer Credit helps students achieve educational goals by satisfying specific requirements for a credential, course prerequisites, and progression through a program; and/or by affecting a student's enrolment priority (through the advanced access to upper level courses or levels in a program)."

Pathway

ONCAT.ca Glossary Definition
"Defined route from one program or institution to another program or institution that specifies eligibility requirements and how transfer credits will be accepted and applied at the receiving institution. Usually applies to multiple sending institutions and one or more receiving institutions. Does not require formal signed agreement between institutions. NOTE: this is defined as a Transfer Pathway."

ONTransfer.ca Key Terms Definition
Program Pathways
"Program pathways are defined routes from one program or institution to another program or institution; they specify eligibility requirements and how transfer credits will be accepted and applied at the receiving institution. Program pathways apply often to multiple sending institutions and one or more receiving institutions. They do not require formal signed agreements between institutions."

Transfer Pathway
"A transfer pathway is a defined route from one program or institution to another program or institution that specifies eligibility requirements. It also specifies how transfer credits will be accepted and applied at the receiving institution. Transfer pathways usually apply to multiple sending institutions and one or more receiving institutions. They do not require formal signed agreements between institutions."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Pathway
"Sometimes [this is] referred to as Transfer Pathway. Refers to the route a student takes from one program or institution to another program or institution."

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

ONCAT.ca Definition
Prior Learning Assessment
"Process to evaluate learning from work experience or independent study and translate into academic credit. Usually accomplished through portfolios or challenge tests/exams. Sometimes called Learning Assessment Recognition (LAR), Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
Portfolio Assessment—PLAR/RPL
"Refers to an assessment process that measures the candidate's prior learning against course outcomes, so that the student may obtain course credit or advanced standing. A subject-expert faculty supervises and guides a Portfolio Assessment."

Student Mobility

PCCAT Glossary Definition
"In the context of postsecondary transfer pathway initiatives and transcript standards, [student mobility] refers to the ability of an individual to move from one institution to another aided by documents such as official academic transcripts, diplomas, and by established inter-institutional partnerships, transfer systems, agreements, and pathways."

Transfer

ONCAT.ca Definition
"The movement of a student from one postsecondary institution to another with credit granted by the receiving institution for courses taken at the sending institution. Provides academic mobility for students while maintaining the quality of educational programs and credentials."

ONTransfer.ca Key Terms Definition
"Transfer refers to the movement of a student from one postsecondary institution to another with credit granted by the receiving institution for courses taken at the sending institution. Transfer provides academic mobility for students while maintaining the quality of educational programs and credentials."

PCCAT Glossary Definition
"Refers to the movement of a student from one postsecondary institution to another, where the receiving institution grants credit for courses the student took at the sending institution or advanced standing. It provides academic mobility for students while maintaining the quality of educational programs and credentials."

Transfer Credits

ONTransfer.ca Key Terms Definition
"Transfer credit is granted by one program or institution for courses taken at another program or institution. Transfer credit may apply to core courses deemed equivalent in content; they may be used to fulfill optional elective course requirements as well."

Transfer Student

ONTransfer.ca Key Terms Definition
"A transfer student moves from one institution to another and receives credit at the receiving institution for work completed at the sending institution."

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