The Feasibility of a Flexible Pre-Major in Psychology

Report To BCCAT

On behalf of the BCCAT Psychology Articulation Committee

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Summary

The increasing complexity of the BC transfer system has created both opportunities and potential barriers for students who wish to transfer after completing two years of courses and complete a B.A. degree in Psychology. Although many receiving institutions have informal routes for those entrants who do not yet have all the requirements for their major program, these pathways are often uncertain and unclear to transfer students. A flexible pre-major program for B.A. Psychology has the potential to simplify transfer for many students and remove these barriers of uncertainty.

The BCCAT articulation committee for Psychology has initiated this project to examine the feasibility of a flexible pre-major and has expressed clear support for one model. (Appendix C) This model fits well with existing requirements and course offerings. All institutions contacted have expressed a willingness to see whether adjustments are needed to simplify the transfer process for students who choose to follow this model.

Given the feasibility of the preferred model, the preliminary recommendations of this report are to:

- Implement Option C for a B.A. Pre-Major program across the BC transfer system starting in September 2010.
- Provide information and support to receiving institutions that are reviewing their requirements and sending institutions that are reviewing course offerings to align with the pre-major program.
- Develop a timeline and information resource for the implementation of the pre-major program.

- Work with sending and receiving institutions to resolve any outstanding issues on individual course transfer that might create barriers for transfer students following the pre-major program.

1. Introduction and Process

The Flexible Pre-Major has been described by BCCAT as "a set of flexible requirements [that are] deliverable by sending institutions, acceptable to receiving institutions and deemed to fulfill the lower level requirements for the major" (see Appendix A). The emphasis is on the courses that are required for entry into the 3rd year of a major program by transfer students with 60 credits.

The outcomes of this project are to:

a) Identify the specific impediments to student transfer into the third year of a Psychology BA. or B.Sc. program.
b) Determine whether a flexible pre-major may overcome these impediments.
c) Determine the readiness of institutions to reach an agreement on the components of a flexible pre-major.

The process was to:

1. Collect and analyze information about degree requirements from institutions that offer a B.A. and B.Sc. degree with a major in Psychology.
2. Meet with representatives of these programs, as appropriate, to clarify how their programs align with others and to identify areas of flexibility.
3. Draw a conclusion about the willingness of institutions to agree upon a set of courses that would satisfy degree requirements at all institutions.
4. If there is some common ground, provide preliminary recommendations regarding a flexible pre-major curriculum.

An advisory committee has been established with representatives from the research universities, the regional universities, and the transferring institutions (Appendix B). A first draft version of this interim report was forwarded to BCCAT

before March 31, 2009. This final report is due at BCCAT on or before August 31, 2009.

Information has been gathered from all institutions that offer a B.A. or B.Sc. Major in Psychology. There have been meetings and discussions with advisory staff and program directors in many of the receiving institutions. An analysis has been carried out on the existing entry requirements, transfer arrangements and graduation requirements. The first version of this interim report was discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Committee on March 20, 2009 and possible models discussed at that meeting were included in a first draft of this report. The draft report was distributed and discussed at the Articulation Committee meeting in May, 2009. The committee expressed continued support for the direction of the project and a preference for one of the models. (Appendix C).

Following the categorization of projects by BCCAT, this is an 'Analysis' project to consider the feasibility and value of a flexible pre-major. It includes preliminary recommendations, but no decisions are finalized at this stage. If a decision is taken to initiate an 'Implementation' project, then agreements about courses would be established in this second stage.

2. The Changing Context

Over the last decade the number of Universities and Psychology programs in B.C. has grown substantially. There are now eight universities that receive transfer students into B.A. and B.Sc. Major Programs in Psychology: UBC, SFU, UVic, VIU, TRU (BA only), Kwantlen (BA only), UFV (BA only), and UNBC (B.Sc. only). In addition, the programs at UBC Vancouver are distinct from UBC Okanagan and the programs at TRU are distinct from TRU OL.

As the number of programs has increased, so has their diversity. Although the B.A. and B.Sc. Majors in Psychology contain the majority of Psychology Degree students, there are also a wide variety of programs that are based on a different model such as the B.A.A. at Kwantlen, the COGS program at UBC and the new Applied Degree at Capilano. Even within the main B.A. and B.Sc. programs the

differences have persisted and, in some cases, grown. Some B.A. programs require only 12 lower level psychology credits while others require 24. Some programs offer a wide range of 4th year electives and others offer very few. To some extent these differences reflect the scale of the programs. In 2008, for example, UBC had almost 1500 students pursuing a B.A. Major whereas some of the smaller programs had just a few cohorts. But there are also signs of some degree of specialization and focus within the B.A. and B.Sc. program structures. Given this diversity, it is increasingly likely that students will change their mind about the degree program that is most suitable for them, or decide to transfer to a 'non-local' university.

The diversity in the Psychology part of the Psychology Major program is amplified by a marked diversity in the overall Breadth and Distribution requirements. Although there are some common themes, there are also some clear differences in the specific courses that are required, and in the number of courses that are required to be outside of Psychology. Some B.A. programs require the student to take 60 credits of 'non psychology' courses, mostly in Arts. Other programs have much lower requirements or do not specify the requirement in this way. In some cases the student can satisfy more than one requirement with the same course, thereby increasing the range of potential course choices. These differences are usually the result of widespread discussion and policy development over an extended period within the institution.

Over the same decade, there has also been an expansion in the range of lower level Psychology courses that are available to transfer students within the first two years of their college program. Some of these courses reflect the types of courses that may be offered at the larger Universities, such as the first year 'Special Topics' course at SFU. But others reflect specific developments and interests in the Colleges. Most of these courses receive credit from at least one University and so they can be transferred within an Associate Arts framework to any other University, usually as unassigned credit. Most colleges currently offer between 9 and 18 different lower level Psychology courses and one college offers over 30 lower level courses.

3. Potential Barriers to Transfer Students

A student who has 60 credits from a College and wants to enter a Psychology Major is faced with a number of potential barriers. Assuming that they have the required GPA, they may still be faced with some immediate barriers and some that may affect their ability to progress and graduate. These barriers might include, the lack of a course required for entry into the Major program, lack of sufficient registration priority, lack of a prerequisite for an upper level course, lack of a lower level course required for graduation, lack of a specific course required for breadth requirements, and lack of sufficient courses outside of Psychology for breadth requirements. These barriers may sometimes compound each other. A student who has a large number of lower level Psychology courses that don't meet requirements for entry, prerequisites or graduation is also more likely to have difficulty with the breadth requirements. A student who is unable to find a way round these barriers may have to lose credit and take additional courses beyond the required 120 credits. Alternatively they may have to take courses over more semesters, increasing the costs and length of their program.

BA and B.Sc. programs are set up in a way which creates very different forms of barriers. All of the B.Sc. programs, except the program at UNBC, have specific lower level requirements that have to be completed before the student can enter the program and progress. In almost every case there is no effective alternative pathway. Because the lower level requirements of B.Sc. programs are quite specific, and because they differ between institutions, the feasibility of a flexible pre-major for the B.Sc. is uncertain.

In contrast, some of the B.A. programs have already developed more flexible entry pathways. In some cases, second year courses are required for graduation rather than for entry, allowing students to make up those courses after they have entered the Major program. In other cases, they can be admitted and make up the missing courses required for entry while still progressing with their program.

Consider some examples of informal pathways that accommodate transfer students.

- UBC, at the date of this report, requires the second year Psychology Research Methods and Statistics courses (217 and 218) for admission to the Major. But transfer students with 6 credits of assigned Introduction to Psychology courses (i.e., Psyc 101 and 102) may be able to transfer, make up a missing course and then declare a Major. While doing this they can still proceed with their program, as prerequisite structures have become more flexible. Students can take many 3rd year courses with just Psyc 101 and Psyc102, and at least 2nd year standing, provided they have sufficient registration priority.

- At SFU, transfer students can get easier access to program advising and other required second year courses provided that they have credit for Psyc 201 (Research Methods) and can declare Psychology as a minor. The most common prerequisite for 3rd year courses at SFU is Psyc 201 together with several specific Introductory 2nd year courses (e.g., Introduction to Social Psychology). So, if they have assigned credit for some of these introductory courses, the students can register in some 3rd year Psychology courses at the same time as they are making up any missing 2nd year courses.

- At TRU, students usually need both Research Methods (Psyc 211) and Data Analysis (Psyc 210) for entry to the Major, but they can be admitted and take some available 3rd year courses with just Psyc 211, sometimes as a co-requisite.

- At UVic, students have to have Research, Conceptual Foundations/History, and Biopsychology to be admitted to the Major, but if they are short of one of these courses they can be admitted to Social Science and declare their major when the course is completed. The main barrier at UVic is often the Math 12 prerequisite requirement for Psyc 300A and B (Statistics).

Although many of the B.A. Major Programs have developed more flexibility, employing strategies that enable transfer students with 60 credits to enter and progress without initially having all the required 2nd year courses, the apparent complexity of these pathways can also be a barrier. From outside the University, it

is often not clear what will be required and what is possible. Even after admission, unless the student has access to expert advising, it is easy for them to make errors of scheduling and course selection which result in lost time or credit. To some extent, the hard barriers of fixed entry requirements have been replaced by soft barriers of complexity and uncertainty.

4. Required Ist Year Courses for B.A. Programs

There is a shared view across all the receiving institution about the need for 6 credits of Introductory Psychology for entry into a Psychology Major and as a prerequisite. The only differences are in the way that the content is divided between courses. In many cases, particularly when transferring to UBC, transfer students need to transfer two courses together to meet the requirement.

There are still a few anomalies in the transfer system, however. For example, Camosun gets designated transfer credit to SFU and UVic but not to UBC for the same courses. Anomalies such as this can create major barriers for transfer students.

No other Ist year Psychology courses are required either for entry into the B.A. Major program or for graduation.

5. Required 2nd Year Courses for B.A. Programs

2nd year Psychology courses are required for entry in the major programs, for prerequisites and for graduation requirements. In most cases, specific courses are required, but SFU, Kwantlen and UFV also have an elective structure with distribution requirements. The following table summarizes current requirements for entry and graduation at 9 Universities. It does not include TRU –OL or Capilano (Applied Psychology).

The generic course labels are not exactly the same as the specific course descriptions at each institution. But they accurately reflect the transfer equivalencies in the system. In some cases, these transfer equivalencies still need to be fully implemented. For example, Research Methods courses from the

colleges which transfer to Research Methods at SFU, usually, but not always, transfer to Psyc217, Thinking Clearly About Psychology, at UBC.

Table 1 - Required 1st and 2nd Year Psychology Courses

Current Entry Requirements into the 3rd Year of B.A. Major Programs

	UBC Van	UBC Ok	SFU	UVic	UNBC B.Sc. [1]	UFV	Kwant	TRU	VIU
Introduction 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Introduction 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Statistics	X	X	X					X	
Research Methods	X	X	X	X				X	x[2]
History / Philosophy			X	X					X[2]
BioPsychology				X					X[2]

[1] The B.Sc. at UNBC has a similar structure to a B.A. at other universities. Students declare a major at the end of their first year. All transfer students declare a major. There are no specific requirements for 3rd year entry.

[2] VIU 'strongly recommends' these, but may admit students without all of them.

Table 2 - Required 1st and 2nd Year Psychology Courses

Current Graduating Requirements for B.A. Major Programs

	UBC Van	UBC Ok	SFU	UVic	UNBC B.Sc.	UFV	Kwant	TRU	VIU
Introduction 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Introduction 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Statistics	X	X	X			X	X	X	
Research Methods	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
History / Philosophy			X	X			E[1]		X
BioPsychology			E[2]	X		E[3]	X		X
Cognitive			E[2]			E[3]	X		
Abnormal			E[2]			E[3]	E[1]		
Social			E[2]				E[1]		
Developmental			E[2]			E[3]	E[1]		
Personality			E[2]						
Law and Psyc			E[2]						
Computer Apps				X	X				X
Total Lower Level Psyc Credits Required to Graduate	12	12	24	7.5 Units	15 [4]	18	24	12	15

[1] Kwantlen offers 2nd year courses in Child, Adolescence, and Adult/Ageing as well as Abnormal, Social and History. 2 of these electives are required for graduation.

[2] SFU requires 3 from these 7; at least one of these has to be either Cognitive or BioPsychology.

[3] UFV requires 2 from these 4.

[4] UNBC requires 2 additional 2nd year courses.

Based on Table 1, without any further changes in the system, the following courses would enable a student to enter a BA Major at any of these universities, but not necessarily progress as they might be missing prerequisites:

Introduction 1 (3)

Introduction 2 (3)

Research Methods (3)

Statistics / Data Analysis (3)

History / Conceptual Foundations (3)

BioPsychology (3)

Total = 18 Lower Level Psychology Credits

Based on Table 2, without further changes, the following courses would complete the graduation requirements for 1st and 2nd year courses in a B.A. Major at every University.

Introduction 1 (3)

Introduction 2 (3)

Research Methods (3)

Statistics / Data Analysis (3)

History / Conceptual Foundations (3)

BioPsychology (3)

Cognitive Psychology (3)

And one of:

Abnormal Psychology or Developmental Psychology (3)

Total = 24 Lower Level Psychology Credits

Although it might be possible for some students who are based on the main campuses of the larger Colleges to take this range of courses, for many students it would be far more difficult. As possible alternatives, the advisory committee discussed three possible alternative models for flexible pre-major courses. These models were included in the first draft of this report and discussed at the articulation committee in May 2009.

6. Breadth Requirements for B.A. Programs

Table 4 is a first attempt to map the variety of breadth and distribution requirements in broad categories. There is a rough correspondence between many of these requirements and the Associate Arts framework. However, breadth requirements are often more specific than Associate Arts requirements and do not fit neatly into the same categories. Whereas the Associate Arts categories are exclusive, adding to 60 credits, in some universities more than one requirement may be met, in places, by the same course.

Although there are some common themes and substantial overlaps in the requirements, it is very likely that a student who has focused on the breadth requirements for one university will be short of some specific breadth requirements for another university. This should not create too many problems provided that they have enough available lower level credits, or they can find upper level courses which meet breadth requirements and do not need specific prerequisites.

Perhaps the bigger issue involves the universities that require a student to have 60 credits outside of Psychology. (UBC – Van, TRU, UBC – Ok). In effect any additional lower level Psychology course transferred into these programs reduces the number of upper level Psychology courses that can be taken before credits are lost. Typically these programs advise their own students not to take more than 18 credits of lower level Psychology courses, unlike many of the other programs, (SFU, Kwantlen, UFV) which require students to take up to 24 credits of specified lower level Psychology courses. Because the breadth requirements of these other programs are more easily met, this creates no great difficulty. In both

types of program, however, undesignated lower level psychology courses fail to meet either program or breadth requirements.

Many of the colleges have already developed Associates of Arts in Psychology programs. These are often tailored to the requirements of the particular university to which students primarily transfer. For example, the Associate of Arts in Psychology framework from Camosun, is tailored effectively to the requirements of UVic. Similarly, the Associate Arts in Psychology framework from Douglas is tailored to the requirements of SFU.

Table 3 – Breadth Requirements for B.A. Programs

Credits

	UBC Van	UBC Ok	SFU	UVic	UFV	Kwant	TRU	VIU
English or Writing	6	6	3 LL 3 UL	3 Units	3	6	6 Eng 12 Write	6
Science, Math and Computing	6 (Sc.)	6 (Sc.)	6 Q 6 (Sc.)	1.5 Comp 3 Biol 1.5 Math/Log	4	9 Q	9 Science/ Formal Reas.	3 Math
Humanities and Fine Arts	6 Lit. and Lang.	6 Lit. and Lang.	6	9 Units 1.5 Units Phil.	6	12 (with SS) 6 Lang.	6 Lang.	3 Phil.
Social Science			6	3 Units	6	above		6
Other Breadth			12		3 Reas. 30 from 5sub.	12	12 Breadth 6 Dist.	
Minimum Credits Outside Psychology	60	60	30	22.5 Units			60	

7. Lower Level Requirements for B.Sc. Major Programs

As mentioned above, the requirements for B.Sc. programs are more specific and provide less room for flexible options. The program at UNBC is based on a different model and has been included in the B.A. analysis above. The others are based around a lower level general science program, with calculus, or sometimes finite mathematics, as required courses. UVic and UBC (Ok) are slightly less prescriptive, but UBC (Van) requires Psyc 260 (Biopsychology) at second year while VIU requires 6 credits of Biopsychology. There is much less general elective space in these programs, so it is difficult for transfer students to change their mind without having to take additional courses. It is not clear that a flexible pre-major is feasible in this situation or that it would benefit many students.

Table 4 Lower Level Requirements for B.Sc. Major Programs.

	UBC – Van	UVic	UBC – Ok	VIU	UNBC[1]
100 Level Courses	Eng 100 – 6cr Biol 111,112,140 Chem 111,113,123 Math 100, 101 Phys 101 Psyc100-6cr	Eng Biol190A,190B Comp Math100 Psyc100A Psyc100B	Eng – 6 cr Psyo 121,111 Biol 116,125 Chem111,113 Math100 Math101 Phys101,111	Eng 100 – 6cr Biol 121 Chem 111,121 Math100 Math101 Phys 111	CPSC 150 Psyc101 Psyc102
200 Level Courses and Electives	Chem 233,235 Psyc260 – 8cr 2 of Biol 200,205,201,204 Electives -6cr	Psyc201 Psyc210 Psyc215A Phil Soc. Sci. 18 credits Science/EPHE	Psyo270 Psyo271 18 credits Science and Computing	Chem 231,232 Psyc 200 Psyc 204 Psyc 205 Psyc206 Biol 200,201	Psyc 215 + 2 other 2nd year Psyc

[1] The B.Sc. Major at UNBC is based on a different model and has been included with the B.A. Major programs above.

8. The Feasibility of a Flexible Pre-Major for B.A. Programs

At the Articulation Committee meeting in May 2009, members of the committee were asked to indicate their views and preferences for the courses that might be included in a flexible pre-major for entry in B.A. Major programs. Most of the members indicated a preference for option C (Appendix C). This model was then compared to existing requirements and preliminary discussions were conducted with receiving institutions where any discrepancy was identified.

i) Feasibility Issues and Receiving Institutions

Model C meets the current entry requirements for UBC (Van), UBC (Ok), UNBC, TRU, UFV, KwantlenU and VIU. It doesn't meet the current requirements for History of Psychology at SFU or the requirements for Conceptual Foundations and Bio-Psychology at UVic.

a) SFU

SFU have had initial discussions on the place of Psyc207, Introduction to the History of Psychology. It is likely that they will decide to either make the course a graduation requirement or make it an elective. In either case, the course would not be required for admission into the Major program. The proposed flexible pre-major would then meet the entry requirements.

b) UVic

UVic have expressed a willingness to look at their current entry requirements as part of an internal review. They wish to retain the particular strengths, emphasis and integrity of their program and, at the same time, see if there is a way to align with the proposed flexible pre major.

At present, a student who transfers at the end of their second year, with the six courses identified in Option C, would have to become a Social Science student without a declared major. They would then take the missing courses over the next

few semesters and they would be able to take some 3rd year Psychology courses at the same time, provided they had the prerequisites. Once they had the missing courses, they would declare their major and be able to register in the required courses: Psyc300A and Psyc300B. It might be possible for transfer students to take this route without needing additional semesters or credits. But, if option C were introduced, the potential uncertainty and inability to declare a major would probably act as a barrier for many pre-major students unless there were additional changes in program entry requirements.

ii) Feasibility Issues and Sending Institutions

Most of the public sending institutions in the BC transfer system already offer all, or almost all, of the courses necessary for option C. Appendix D shows current transfer courses from 9 colleges in terms of articulation to the equivalent pre-major courses at SFU. The main gap at present is that some sending institutions do not yet offer an Introduction to Data Analysis course. However, two online data analysis courses are offered regularly in BC by TRU-Online and by UFV. Other institutions, such as Kwantlen and Douglas College, have also offered this course online in the past. If option C of the pre-major program is implemented, it is likely that versions of this course would be offered by more institutions.

9. Preliminary Recommendations

1. Implement Option C for a B.A. Pre-Major program across the BC transfer system starting in September 2010.
2. Provide information and support to all receiving institutions who are reviewing their requirements and sending institutions who are reviewing their course offerings to align more closely with the flexible pre-major program.
3. Develop a timeline and information resource for the implementation of the pre-major program. This may include a web site.

4. Work with sending and receiving institutions to resolve any outstanding issues on individual course transfer within the pre-major program that may create barriers for students.
5. Do not implement a pre-major for BSc. programs in general, but include the BSc. program at UNBC within the B.A. pre-major framework.

Appendix A

The Flexible Pre-Major Concept

BCCAT: Transfer Innovations Program

Beyond Course-to-Course Transfer: Flexible Pre-major Projects

What's the problem?

Even where there are comprehensive course-to-course articulations in place and published in the BC Transfer Guide, students may find difficulty in transferring at the third year level because they may be missing key courses that are lower level requirements for their chosen major.

Options for solving the problem

Some jurisdictions in North America have chosen, via legislation or government directive, to mandate approaches that allow students to transfer among post-secondary institutions without facing this problem (e.g. requiring standard course numbering across institutions). Historically in BC the emphasis has been on facilitating solutions that recognize the importance of diversity and institutional autonomy in the post-secondary system rather than on standardization.

What is a Flexible Pre-Major?

"Pre-Major" refers to 1st and 2nd year courses that students are required to complete in order to be admitted to a major. A Flexible Pre-Major (FPM):

- is a set of flexible requirements
    - deliverable by sending institutions & acceptable to receiving institutions, and
    - deemed to fulfill the lower level requirements for the major.

When FPM agreements are in place across all sending and receiving institutions, students can plan their first and second year courses so as to leave open many options for transferring into various BC institutions and for entering the major at the third year level. Several FPMs have been developed or are currently being developed within the BC Transfer System.

Two Types of FPM Projects

1. **Analysis**: readiness of a discipline for establishing a Flexible Pre-major
2. **Implementation**: includes detailed description of the courses that make up the pre-major and negotiation of its acceptability at sending and receiving institutions

Appendix B

The Project Advisory Committee

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Appendix C

A Possible Model for a Flexible Pre-Major (B.A.)

At the articulation committee meeting of May2009 a straw vote was taken on preferences for possible models. The following model was preferred by most members:

Option C

1st Year

Introduction 1 (3)

Introduction 2 (3)

2nd Year

Research Methods / Thinking Clearly (3)

Statistics / Data Analysis (3)

2 (6 credits) of:

- Biopsychology
- Cognitive
- Developmental
- Abnormal
- Social

Appendix D

Pre-Major Course Availability at a Sample of 'Sending' Institutions.
(The following courses are currently approved for credit transfer to SFU)

	Intro Psyc 1	Intro Psyc 2	Intro Research Methods	Intro Data Analysis	2nd Year Course from list	2nd Year Course from list
College of New Caledonia	x	x	x	x	Bio Cognitive	Abnormal Develop Social
Northern Lights College	x	x	x		Bio Social	Abnormal Develop
Okanagan College	x	x	x		Bio Cognitive	Abnormal Develop Social
Camosun College	x	x	x		Bio Social	Abnormal Develop
North Island College	x	x		x	Abnormal	Develop
College of the Rockies	x	x	x		Abnormal	Social
Selkirk College	x	x	x		Bio Abnormal	Develop

Douglas College	x	x	x	x	Bio Cognitive	Abnormal Develop Social
Langara College	x	x	x	x	Bio Cognitive	Abnormal Develop Social