

**Psychology Flexible Pre-Major  
Implementation Report  
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on Behalf of the  
Provincial Psychology Articulation Committee**

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## **Introduction - The Flexible Pre-Major**

Flexible Pre-Major (FPM) initiatives have emerged as one of the major developments in the BC articulation system over the last five years. With support from BCCAT, a series of articulation committees have developed proposals, examined their feasibility and, in many cases, moved to implementation of FPMs. These include English, Computer Education, Sociology/Anthropology and Economics. The Psychology FPM is one of a group of projects in the second wave of development.

All FPM projects share a similar aim: to reduce barriers for students who transfer between institutions within a particular discipline. The type of barrier that may be involved here stems from differences in requirements between institutions, and can result in a situation where some transfer students are unable to be accepted directly as Major students in their chosen discipline, even though they have met the necessary GPA level. Transfer students who have all the lower level courses required to become a Major student at one institution may be missing one or more courses required for acceptance at another. As a consequence, they may have to spend one or more semesters catching up on lower level requirements before being able to declare their Major.

The extent to which delayed acceptance as a Major student constitutes a barrier varies greatly depending on discipline and institution. In some instances, being a Major student is important for admission into core courses and priority registration. In other cases, there are well developed pathways for students facing delay in program completion. In most cases, however, the increase in student anxiety and uncertainty associated with these 'workarounds' constitutes a potential barrier in itself. The strength of the transfer system in BC rests on a high level of clarity and certainty, and FPM initiatives further elucidate and support this system.

Recognition of the need for Flexible Pre-Majors has increased with the growth of choices available to transfer students, and with increased complexity in the BC Transfer System. Students who follow 'traditional' transfer routes from a college to a nearby research university are likely to have followed the course requirements for that university. FPMs are intended to supplement this traditional route (which is likely to remain a significant component of the BC Transfer System into the foreseeable future). Many students, however, take increasingly 'non-traditional' routes through the transfer system, transferring into teaching or special purpose universities, or transferring within a particular institutional sector rather than between different types of institutions. For these students, substantially different requirements for acceptance as a Major student can add significantly to the difficulty of course and program planning. The courses required for one university, can seem very different from those of another. Flexible Pre-Majors address this problem by providing a common route which can provide students with a range of transfer options.

## **The Development of the Flexible Pre-Major in Psychology**

Initial discussions on the creation of a Flexible Pre-Major in Psychology took place in BC in 2008, when the articulation committee decided to apply for funds from BCCAT to examine feasibility issues. Following the successful allocation of funds, the committee took part in an initial discussion of possible models for the FPM in 2009, and in 2010 took a vote on the formal model and made a decision to apply for implementation. The aim of this report, in 2011, is to describe the progress made toward implementation, to identify and describe some of the issues that have emerged, and to make recommendations for future action.

There are several different models for Flexible Pre-Majors, and the model developed for Psychology was different in some respects from models developed or proposed in other disciplines. In some disciplines, the FPM has included 'categories' of courses. FPM students must complete one or more course(s) in a category before they can be admitted as Major students. For example, the English FPM requires students to have completed a second year literature course. In other disciplines, the articulation committee has been considering a 'learning outcomes' model. In Psychology, however, it was felt that the content of particular courses was important and that the FPM should be built around existing patterns of course articulation. Consequently, the Psychology FPM was built around four required courses and an additional two courses drawn from a list of courses that are required, in many institutions, as prerequisites for more advanced study (Appendix 3).

From the perspective of implementation, there are both advantages and disadvantages of the 'list' model adopted in Psychology. By building on existing course articulation, the Psychology FPM can be implemented with little change in many institutions. On the other hand, students who complete a Psychology FPM may still have lower level requirements to complete after having been accepted as a Major student if there are unmet graduation requirements, or if they need to meet a particular course prerequisite.

The Psychology FPM as developed via this approach has focused on the BA Psychology programs offered in BC. The BSc Psychology programs were judged to be too variable and to have too many specific requirements to be amenable to an FPM.

## **The Implementation Process**

Following advice from BCCAT and drawing on the experience of the FPM in English, the initial implementation of the Psychology FPM was designed as a two-step process. In the first step, Psychology departments were asked to discuss and 'sign off' on their support for the implementation of the FPM at their institution. Information was sent to articulation representatives to help with this discussion. At the same time, attempts were made to inform Registrars' departments and relevant academic administrators about the proposal. If appropriate within the institution, the proposal was then sent by departmental representatives to additional committees and institutional representatives for approval

and implementation.

Due to significant variation in decision-making procedures across institutions, it was not possible to establish a common process of institutional sign-off. In some cases, participation in the FPM requires no substantial change to existing policies or practices. The decision whether to accept someone as a major student, for example, is made within the program area. In other cases, the proposal raised matters of course articulation and program requirements. In these situations, the FPM proposal appeared to raise issues for academic administration and governance.

The information and request for participation for the Psychology Flexible Pre-Major was distributed with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that had been prepared in consultation with BCCAT (Appendix 4). The FAQ document suggested that 'sign-off' be taken as a willingness to work to implement the FPM in a collaborative way that helps students who are transferring at the end of the second year and becoming a Psychology Major student. While signing off involves a clear commitment, the nature of that commitment depends upon the circumstances in that institution.

In the final period of this implementation process, as the initial range of participants became clearer, a draft matrix of course transfers was developed, based on existing course transfers in the BC Transfer Guide (Appendix 2). This first draft consists of transfers between the first three participating universities with BA Psychology programs, and the first nine colleges and Capilano University. It was envisaged that additional universities and colleges would be added to these tables over the following year as they complete the 'sign-off' process. This matrix was sent to the articulation committee for initial review.

Since the implementation process for the Psychology FPM has been started, BCCAT has created a working group to examine implementation issues for FPMs generally. Undoubtedly the recommendations of this group and the resulting practices will create more clarity around the implementation process across institutions.

### **Participation and Sign-Off**

Up to the date of this progress report, 14 post-secondary institutions have signed off on participation in the BA Psychology FPM; two institutions have declined to participate; and, at six additional institutions, participation was still to be considered or was being considered by 9 May 2011, the date of the most recent Psychology Articulation Committee meeting (Appendix 1). Of the research universities, UBC-Vancouver, SFU and UVic are participants while UBC-Okanagan has not yet completed discussions. UNBC only offers a BSc and has currently declined to participate. In the other public Universities that offer a BA Psychology, Capilano and TRU have agreed to participate; Kwantlen and UFV are in the process of taking the proposal through administration and governance after departmental discussions; and VIU has currently declined to participate. Among the colleges, Douglas, Langara, CNC, Okanagan, Selkirk, College of the Rockies, North Island College, and Yukon College have agreed to participate; Northern Lights is not sure that it is appropriate; and Northwest Community College and Camosun are at different stages

in internal discussion and decision making. In general, the extent of participation in the Psychology FPM appears to be about the same level as previous FPMs in other disciplines, although the pattern of institutions differs slightly, reflecting discipline specific issues as well as regional concerns.

As expected, the nature of the institutional sign-off has varied considerably between institutions. In some cases, formal sign-offs have been provided by Psychology Departments, while in others, the sign-off has been done by a representative of the institutional administration or the senate.

## **Issues**

During the discussions around the implementation of the Psychology Flexible Pre-Major, a number of issues have emerged. Clarification of these issues in the future may help with the continuing implementation of the Psychology FPM and with FPM initiatives within other disciplines. Broadly speaking, these issues can be divided into four categories: continuing issues concerning the need for a Flexible Pre-Major, issues concerning the nature of the institutional commitment, issues concerning the form of implementation, and course transfer issues.

Concerns about the need for a Flexible Pre-Major continue to be expressed in some institutions. As indicated above, universities have developed ways of admitting students who have 60 credits but do not yet have the required courses to be admitted as Major students. In addition, students who plan to transfer to a local university, and who do not change their mind, are able to ensure that they have the required courses. As has been pointed out, there is a general lack of statistical evidence of the need for a Flexible Pre-Major. On the other hand, those universities who see themselves as attracting transfer students more widely, and those colleges who see themselves as providing more transfer options for their students, have been more easily convinced as to the value of this innovation. For them, the increased clarity of the FPM route has clear benefits for students and for themselves.

Issues have also been raised concerning the nature of the commitment to a Flexible Pre-Major by participating institutions. Faculty members and administrators at some colleges have asked questions about whether they are committed to offering all the courses included in an FPM, or whether they can participate if they only offer some of the courses. It has been suggested that students may be able to complete a Psychology FPM by supplementing the courses available on campus with courses available online. Potentially, at least, a similar issue can occur for those universities who offer some of the FPM courses at the third-year level, which may make it difficult for their students to complete FPM requirements and transfer elsewhere if their circumstances changes. Recent research from the Student Transitions Project shows that the amount of transfer from and between universities, including research universities, is highly significant.

Additional questions concern the form of implementation. The Flexible Pre-Major is not a program in the usual sense of the word, in that it is not tied to a credential. In some cases it has been called a 'program of study' and in other cases the word 'program' has been omitted altogether. Many sending

institutions may choose to emphasize the value of completing an FPM and an Associate of Arts degree at the same time, but this dual completion is not required. In some cases, colleges may choose to establish a program 'label' for the FPM in their student information system, and in other cases they may not do so. One important consequence of this is that it will prove very difficult to identify FPM students as a separate group, and to monitor the FPM implementation as a whole. Some students may meet the FPM requirements without intending to do so or even being fully aware of the FPM route. The FPM implementation group at BCCAT is currently considering these issues.

Finally, the FPM implementation process has also raised issues about Psychology course transfer between post-secondary institutions. The course transfer system in BC is widely judged to be highly effective in supporting transfer and maintaining quality. However, occasional anomalies can develop and persist. For example, a course may transfer without difficulty to one institution as a second year research methods course in Psychology, but may not be accepted so readily at another institution. The continual implementation of the Psychology FPM requires a matrix of course to course transfers so that students and advisers can see what is needed to meet FPM requirements. An initial draft of this matrix for the 14 institutions who have signed off to date (Appendix 2) provides a basis for examining the existing variability. It is notable that, in constructing this matrix, 14 possible anomalies have been identified involving all of these institutions. Some of these may just be simple errors of omission, but without a case by case examination it is difficult to make any definite evaluation. Nonetheless, it is clear that an effective FPM would need to address many of these existing anomalies in course transfer.

## **Next Steps**

Although this first stage implementation project has resulted in a good level of sign-off and participation, much of the work of implementation remains to be done. The degree and form of implementation is likely to vary significantly within each institution, and some system-wide coordination and support will be required.

As a first step, a process for steering and maintaining the FPM will need to be established. The pace of development and implementation to this date reflects not just the rhythm of academic decision making, but also the fact that the Articulation Committee meets just once a year for discussion and decisions. In a draft version of this report, taken to the Psychology Articulation Committee for discussion, it was recommended that a subcommittee of the articulation committee be established for ongoing coordination and development of the FPM. Four volunteers were found and approved by the overall Committee (Appendix 5). The subcommittee will meet online at the end of the summer to see what still needs to be done to support implementation and to review existing course transfers.

The group formed to coordinate and develop the Psychology FPM will need to work closely with the BCCAT staff, with Institutional Contact Persons (ICPs) and with Registrars' departments. The results of the FPM Working Group may help to clarify how this can best be done.

Part of the activity of the subcommittee would be to develop and examine the matrix of course transfers for FPM courses (Appendix 2) to identify potential anomalies and see if they can be clarified. This is not envisaged as a process which would in any way replace the usual mechanism for establishing course articulation, in which each institution retains control over transfer credit into its own programs. But, given the apparent widespread nature of omissions and anomalies across the system, this might operate as a form of quality control to help correct unintended errors.

The possibility of including online courses in the options available to FPM students has the potential to improve the value of the FPM to students, particularly those in smaller communities. A process for coordinating and providing information about these courses may need to be developed. The subcommittee may make some recommendations on this after consulting with BCCAT staff, and with agencies such as BCcampus and with TRU-OL.

Finally, much information about the Psychology FPM will be developed and made available by institutions themselves as part of the local provision of information on transfer options and transfer requirements. Nonetheless, there may be additional value in providing and maintaining system-wide information about the Flexible Pre-Major. It has been suggested that this could be done within a special section of the BC Transfer Guide. In addition, alternative ways of providing system-wide information, such as information about the availability of online courses that meet FPM requirements, may need to be developed.

## Appendix 1 - Institutional Participation as of 5/8/2011

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Camosun College</b>	In Progress
<b>Capilano University</b>	YES
<b>College of New Caledonia</b>	YES
<b>College of the Rockies</b>	YES
<b>Douglas College</b>	YES
<b>Kwantlen Polytechnic University</b>	In Progress
<b>Langara College</b>	YES
<b>Northern Lights College</b>	NO
<b>North Island College</b>	YES
<b>Northwest Community College</b>	In Progress
<b>Okanagan College</b>	YES
<b>Selkirk College</b>	YES
<b>Simon Fraser University</b>	YES
<b>Thompson Rivers University</b>	YES
<b>Thompson Rivers University – Open learning</b>	In Progress
<b>University of British Columbia - Vancouver</b>	YES
<b>University of British Columbia - Okanagan</b>	In Progress
<b>University of the Fraser Valley</b>	In Progress
<b>University of Northern British Columbia</b>	NO – BSc.
<b>University of Victoria</b>	YES
<b>Vancouver Island University</b>	NO
<b>Vancouver Community College</b>	YES
<b>Yukon College</b>	YES



**Appendix 2 – Initial Draft Table of Transfers for FPM (based on Institutions that had signed off by 1 May 2011)**

<b>Table 1</b>	Intro 1	Intro2	Research	Statistics	Bio- psychology	Cognition	Develop- mental	Social	Abnor- mal	History
Langara	Psyc1115 (UBC – both)	Psyc1215 (UBC – both)	Psyc2320	Psyc2321	Psyc 2331	Psyc 2341	Psyc 2328	Psyc 2322	Psyc 2326	
Capilano	Psyc100 (UBC – both)	Psyc101 (UBC – both)	Psyc212	Psyc213	Psyc 225	Psyc 230	Psyc 204	Psyc 200	Psyc 222	Psyc 203
Douglas	Psyc1100 (UBC – both)	Psyc1200 (UBC – both)	Psyc 2301	Psyc 2300	Psyc 2315	Psyc 2360	Psyc 3320	Psyc 3330	Psyc 2341	Psyc 3308
Yukon	Psyc100 (SFU - both)	Psyc101 (SFU- both)	Psyc201			Psyc 202	Psyc 205	Psyc 203	Psyc 204	
Selkirk	Psyc100 (SFU/UBC -both)	Psyc101 (SFU/UBC -both)	Psyc202		Psyc 200		Psyc 240			
CNC	Psyc101 (UBC – both)	Psyc102 (UBC – both)	Psyc202	Psyc201	Psyc 209	Psyc 210	Psyc 205	Psyc 204	Psyc 207	
COTR	Psyc101 (UBC – both)	Psyc102 (UBC – both)	Psyc280				Psyc 203	Psyc 207	Psyc 240	
Okanagan OC	Psyc111 (UBC – both)	Psyc121 (UBC – both)			Psyc 230	Psyc 219	Psyc 214	Psyc 252	Psyc 242	
VCC	Psyc1100 (UBC – both)	Psyc1200 (UBC – both)								

**BA Psychology Programs**

<b>Table 2</b>	Intro 1	Intro2	Research	Statistics	Bio- psychology	Cognition	Develop- mental	Social	Abnor- mal	History
SFU	Psyc100	Psyc102	Psyc201	Psyc210	Psyc280	Psyc221	Psyc 250	Psyc 260	Psyc241	
UBC (Van)	Psyc101	Psyc102	Psyc217	Psyc218						
TRU	Psyc 1110	Psyc 1210	Psyc 2110	Psyc 2100	Psyc 2040	Psyc 2210	Psyc 2130	Psyc 2220	Psyc 2160	

**Note 1:** All of the courses in Table 1 transfer to some of the corresponding courses in Table 2 but some of the courses in Table 1 do not transfer to all of the courses in Table 2. Altogether in this preliminary matrix, 14 'anomalies' have been identified involving almost all institutions.

## Appendix 3

### Psychology Flexible Pre-Major

Students who complete the following courses at the first and second year level (and who meet other requirements for completion of first and second years - e.g. total credits), will be considered for admission to a BA Psychology Major at the third year level. Students so admitted at the third year level will normally be eligible to complete their degree in the equivalent of two further academic years, if all other degree requirements are met.

The BA Psychology Flexible Pre-Major consists of the following courses (usually 18 credits):

- Introduction to Psychology I
- Introduction to Psychology II
- Research Methods / Thinking Clearly about Psychology
- Statistics / Data Analysis
- And any 2 of the following:
  - Biopsychology
  - Cognition
  - Developmental Psychology
  - Abnormal Psychology
  - Social Psychology
  - History of Psychology / Conceptual Foundations

## Appendix 4

### **F.A.Q. for the Flexible Pre-Major in Psychology**

Here are some answers to common questions about this program of study:

#### ***Is the Flexible Pre-Major a new program?***

No. The Flexible Pre-Major is a list of courses for students who wish to keep their transfer options open. It has been described as a 'Program of Study' rather than a 'Program'. It provides a clear and explicit route for students who wish to transfer into a BA with a Major in Psychology at the end of their second year, but have not yet decided on the institution where they intend to complete their program.

#### ***How was this proposal developed?***

Some time ago, BCCAT identified the development of Flexible Pre-Major Programs as a priority innovation given the wide variability in student transfer, and the expansion of receiving institutions. The Psychology Articulation committee, consisting of faculty representatives from most BC universities and colleges, applied to BCCAT in 2008 for funds to initiate a Flexible Pre-Major Feasibility Project. With the completion of this project in 2009, they applied again for funds to initiate an implementation project.

#### ***Does the Flexible Pre-Major replace the Associate Arts Degree?***

No. The Flexible Pre-Major can be followed by students at the same time as they are taking an Associate of Arts program. Colleges and universities may wish to recommend this option as it has many advantages. On the other hand, students may also complete the Flexible Pre-Major without completing an Associate of Arts degree.

#### ***Does the Flexible Pre-Major program of study replace other transfer routes?***

No. Students can still transfer to a BA degree program in Psychology without following the FPM. Most sending institutions provide advice to University Transfer students about the courses they need to take in order to transfer to a specific institution such as UBC, SFU, UVic, UNBC and other institutions that have BA degrees in Psychology. If students know where they intend to transfer, and don't need to keep their options open, then they might follow the more specific program of study applicable to their chosen destination.

***Does the Flexible Pre-Major program of study require Universities to change their program or admission requirements?***

Not in most cases. The proposed flexible pre-major program of study has been designed and approved by the Psychology Articulation Committee in order to fit with as many existing BA Psychology programs in BC as possible without requiring any additional changes. We would expect each University to check the program of study against their requirements for transfer and admission into the BA Major and let us know if there are any additional issues.

***Does the Flexible Pre-Major program of study require sending institutions to change their programs or course offerings?***

Not necessarily. Colleges and other sending institutions currently decide whether they will offer all, or only some, of the lower level courses required for the BA Psychology Majors at other universities. This would not change. Of course if student demand increases, some sending institutions might decide to offer more of the recommended courses. Administrators, as well as faculty, are being informed of this program of study to ensure all relevant parties can be part of the decision making process.

Participation in the Flexible Pre-Major Program of Study is possible even for colleges who do not offer all the courses. If courses are not available at their home institution or campus, information would be provided to students about alternative course options available through other BC colleges and universities.

***What does it mean to 'Sign Off' on the Flexible Pre-Major program of study proposal?***

'Signing Off' indicates an agreement with the list of courses, as decided by the Psychology Articulation Committee, and a willingness to participate in implementation. The nature of this participation will vary between institutions and will be decided by each institution. As a minimum, sending institutions would be expected to provide information to students, and receiving institutions would be expected to continue to make transfer as straightforward as possible, provided that students have met any additional admission requirements such as minimum GPA levels. Receiving institutions would also be expected to inform the articulation committee, in the usual way, of any changes that might affect the transfer of students who are following this program of study.

For a sending institution, 'signing off' indicates that the institution offers courses that cover the Flexible Pre-Major requirements. In some cases, an institution can sign off and agree to participate if they offer courses that meet most of the FPM requirements and the students are able to take any FPM requirements not covered at their home institution through other post-secondary institutions.

For a receiving institution, 'signing off' means that if a transfer student has the credits and GPA to be admitted at the third year level to that institution, and has completed the courses covering the FPM requirements, then the student would normally be able to transfer into the third year of the Psychology major.

***Does the Flexible Pre-Major program of study require any change to program registration or admission procedures?***

Although we believe that it will be possible to implement this proposal without any changes, this is a question which individual institutions will need to consider. We will be informing Institutional Contact Persons and Registrars about this proposed program of study so that they can provide feedback and make decisions that are appropriate to their institutions.

It will be very helpful if, in future, information can be collected on the number of students who are following this program of study, as well as the transfer patterns of these students. Ideally, we would also like to be able to survey these students to guide future changes. It may be easier to collect this information if students have identified themselves as following this program of study, and this information is recorded in some way by receiving universities. However, if this is too difficult at the outset, the program of study can be implemented without any changes.

***Is the program of study set in stone?***

A recommendation will be taken to the next Psychology Articulation Committee to establish a steering committee which reports back annually. Any proposed changes would be voted on by the Articulation Committee. If created, the steering committee would look at any issues or barriers to transfer that remain for students who follow this program of study, and make recommendations to the Articulation Committee as well as participating institutions.

***Don't we do this already?***

Most universities have developed ways of helping transfer students who have 60 credits but who do not have all the requirements for admission into their BA Major program in Psychology. Information about these alternatives is not, however, well known throughout the BA post-secondary system and is not clear to many transfer students. The Flexible Pre-Major program of study is intended to create more clarity and certainty for these students.

***How can we find out more?***

Graham Rodwell, the current Chair of Psychology and Social Science at Douglas College, is working with Ariel Kirk-Gushowaty to help the proposal through this initial stage of implementation. If you have any questions, please contact them at the email below. They would be happy to join a meeting in person or by teleconference to answer any questions.

Contact email: [Psychology@douglas.bc.ca](mailto:Psychology@douglas.bc.ca)

## Appendix 5

### Members of the FPM Subcommittee of the Psychology Articulation Committee

Graham Rodwell	Douglas College
Chris Newitt	Okanagan College
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