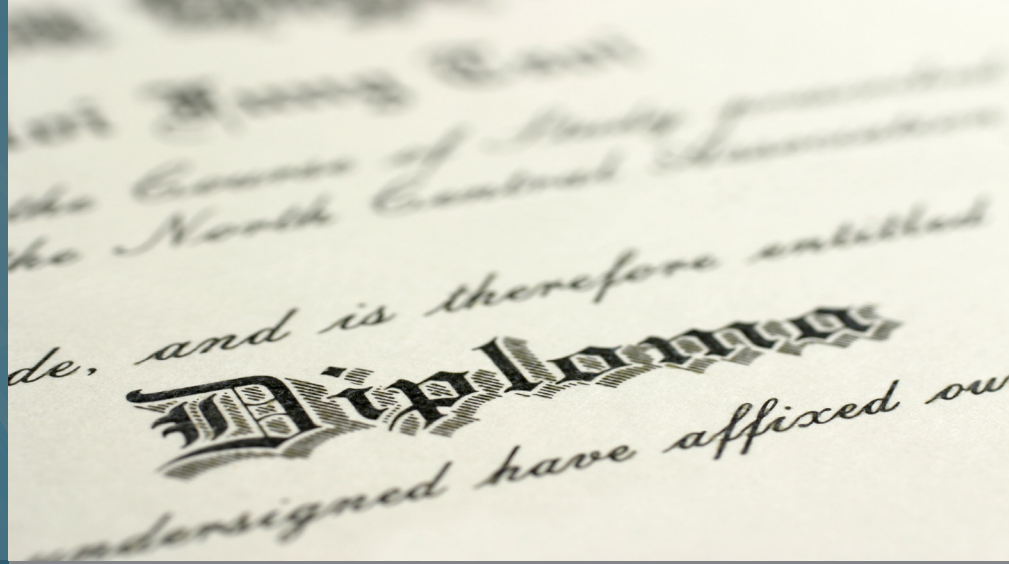


The Growth of Post-Degree Programs in BC

Prepared for BCCAT by
Bob Cowin and Ted James



This newsletter presents the executive summary for this project report. The full report is available at bccat.ca/pubs/post_degree_programs.pdf

The number of post-degree certificate and diploma programs offered by BC post-secondary institutions, in addition to enrolment in graduate and first professional degrees, is perceived to have grown considerably over the past decade. This growth, however, has not been previously studied in a systematic manner.

Post-degree certificate and diploma programs require an undergraduate degree (or sometimes a diploma) for admission and are relatively short (0.5 – 2 years’ duration). They extend or broaden the student’s baccalaureate education by adding specialized knowledge or skills for practical and career purposes, sometimes incorporating periods of work experience. Some programs allow for transfer credit, enabling students to complete the program in reduced time.

Post-degree programs consist of courses at the third year, fourth year, or master’s level. Although not the focus of this study, a set of upper division programs that offer curricula similar to post-baccalaureate certificates and diplomas, but which require less than a bachelor’s degree for admission, are sometimes referenced by way of context. These other programs are known as advanced certificates and advanced diplomas. Certificates at the advanced and post-degree levels are generally one to two semesters in duration, whereas the corresponding diplomas are typically two to four semesters in duration.

This study involved conducting a literature review, creating a taxonomy of current programming, analyzing available provincial data on program enrolments and offerings, and surveying all public provincial institutions about the reasons for the growth of these credentials.

Types of Certificates and Diplomas in this Study

Type of Credential	Curriculum Level	Admission Requirement
Advanced	3rd & 4th year	Diploma or Associate Degree
Post-Baccalaureate	3rd & 4th year	Bachelor’s degree
Graduate	5th year (Master’s)	Bachelor’s degree

Institutional Incentives for Offering Post-Degree Programs

Post-degree programs are intended to provide career-related skills development with the potential for enhanced employment and income. Often they are attractive to recent graduates with a general bachelor’s degree who want applied or specialized skills to secure employment. Some post-degree programs facilitate immigration to Canada and these programs are attracting many international students; indeed, some programs are targeted at this population exclusively. Some post-degree programs provide a smooth transition or laddering into master’s degrees for students who are not ready, willing, or able to enter a master’s program directly.

There are a number of institutional incentives to offer these programs. These offerings can fill empty seats in existing course sections at minor additional cost to the institution, sometimes with higher tuition rates. They can prove stimulating for faculty to teach, especially in institutions where faculty often teach primarily lower level courses. Institutions can also use these programs to pilot new curricula or to test demand for potential programs of longer duration. The variety of post-degree

programs in BC appears to mirror worldwide patterns, including the integration of post-secondary programs and professional employment-based certifications.

Some jurisdictions make extensive use of graduate certificates and diplomas to ladder or transfer into master's degrees, rather than simply using them as parallel, but shorter, tracks of study. The literature about post-baccalaureate certificates and diplomas (consisting of undergraduate courses) is more limited than for master's level credentials. In Canada, much of the writing about non-degree, post-baccalaureate programs either concerns or originates in Ontario, where post-baccalaureate certificates and diplomas (as well as some other undergraduate credentials) fall under its umbrella term of graduate certificates.

Growth Differs by Program Type and Discipline

Provincial data reveal that 13 percent of all BC baccalaureate graduates subsequently enter a certificate or diploma program. Almost half of these enrolments are in the types of programs examined in this study.

Different types of institutions offer quite different mixes of credential types, with varying enrolment trends within the same credential. For example, full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment in post-baccalaureate programs has grown in BC's colleges, teaching-intensive universities and institutes. At research-intensive universities, in contrast, FTE enrolment in undergraduate certificate and diploma programs has been relatively flat, while that in their post-baccalaureate programs has declined slightly.

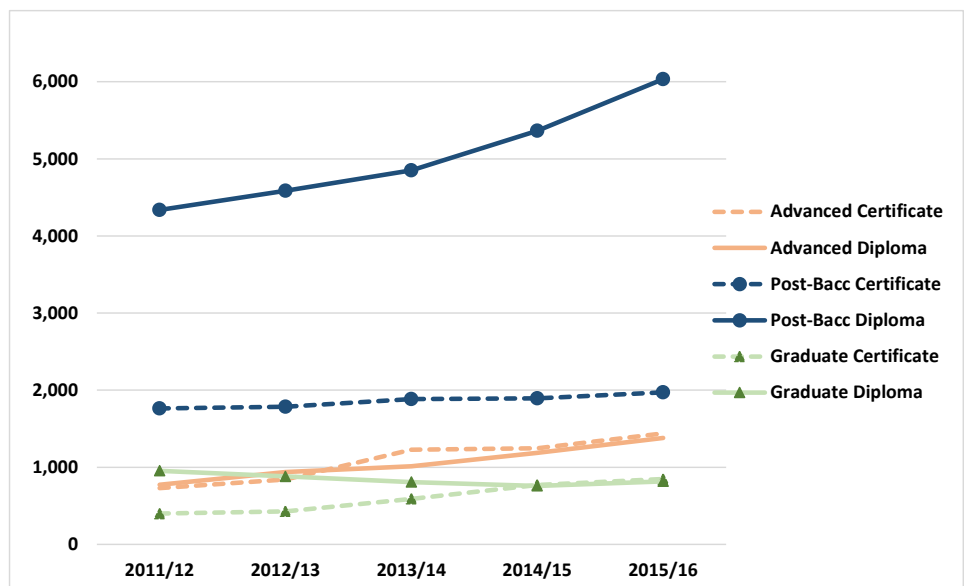
At the post-baccalaureate level, colleges and teaching-intensive universities together enrol much the same number of students in diplomas as do research-intensive universities but fewer in certificate programs.

Most striking is the growth of international enrolment in a single type of credential, the post-baccalaureate diploma. In 2011/12, international students were a small component of certificate and diploma programming at the level of third year and higher. Four years later, domestic enrolment in post-baccalaureate diplomas had shrunk while international enrolment had grown considerably.

Three fields – business, followed distantly by education and then health – account for most enrolment in post-degree programs. Health is concentrated in advanced certificate programs, business in post-baccalaureate diplomas, education in three credentials, and the smaller number of students in other fields are fairly well distributed across all credential types.

The findings of this study uncovered or underscored some implications for the BC public post-secondary system, including areas for further attention. Of particular policy importance are the need for consistent terminology, as well as greater awareness of how federal immigration policy affects enrolment demand from international students in certain types of credentials.

Trend in Headcount Enrolment by Credential Type in BC (2011/12 - 2015/16)



Source: Student Transitions Project, 2017.

Your guide through **BCCAT**
post-secondary education