

The Class of 1996 Five Years After Graduation

Comparing BC University Outcomes for Direct Entry and Transfer Students

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The diversity of British Columbia's post-secondary system is exemplified by the transfer process and has evolved to include five universities, five university colleges, 11 colleges, five institutes and the BC Open University. Individuals who want to complete a bachelors degree, but who are ineligible for or who choose not to enter university directly, can instead complete the first one to two years of their coursework at a college or university college.

Although the college-to-university transfer process has been closely scrutinized from student, curricular, and organizational perspectives, there has been no research until now to compare the post-baccalaureate outcomes of BC students who entered university directly from secondary school with those who began their university-level studies at a college. Throughout this report, the word "college" is used as a generic term to refer to the diverse institutions that students can transfer from and includes colleges, university-colleges, institutes as well as the BC Open University.

In 2001, a partnership was formed among UBC, SFU, UVic, and UNBC, the University Presidents' Council and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, to survey 1996 graduates five years after they had completed their degrees (2001 BC University Baccalaureate Graduate Survey, 2003). The study consisted of a telephone survey, with questions focused primarily on graduates' overall academic experience, further education beyond the bachelors degree, funding and debt load, labour market experience, and social engagement (eg., volunteerism, community involvement, and charitable donations). In order to determine if there are any outcome differences between direct entrants and college transfer students, the results of the 2001 study were further analyzed comparing direct entrants from BC secondary schools with transfer students from BC colleges.

The results of this study clearly show no major differences between direct entrants and college transfer graduates on most key outcomes, including satisfaction with the university experience, continuation of studies, unemployment rates, salaries and social engagement. At the same time, some interesting differences emerge, particularly in the area of student financing and debt. The full report may be found at <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/univoutcomes.pdf>.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

	Direct Entrants	College Transfers
All Respondents	53%	47%
Demographics		
Female	59%	61%
Mean age at time of survey	29.7	32.5
With disabilities	3%	6%
Aboriginal	1%	3%
Visible minorities	30%	17%
Programs		
Humanities and Social Sciences	39%	52%
Sciences and Engineering	29%	12%
In co-op program	11%	7%
Very satisfied with education	32%	38%
Outcomes		
Pursuing further degree	23%	18%
Graduated with debt	36%	45%
Average debt at graduation (for those with debt)	\$14,931	\$20,465
Volunteered in previous year	55%	59%

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The Findings

Overall, 53% of the survey participants had entered university directly from secondary school, compared to 47% who had transferred into university from a BC institute, college or university college. Most of the college transfers had come from a Lower Mainland institution such as Kwantlen University College, Capilano College or Douglas College, and significantly fewer from smaller and more distant colleges such as Northern Lights College or Northwest Community College. Consistent with current gender ratios at BC universities, approximately 60% of the survey participants were female, with the college transfer graduates being, on average, 2.8 years older.

Academic Program

Most of the survey participants had completed bachelors degrees in the Social Sciences, the college transfer group to a greater extent (37%, compared to 28% of direct entrants). On the other hand, approximately three times more direct entrants than college transfers had completed degrees in Computing Science, Life Sciences or Physical Sciences.

According to the survey results, 91% of both direct entrants and college transfer graduates felt that their life, aside from their job, was different as a result of their university experience, and 96% were satisfied with their university education. Despite the strong endorsement, fewer survey participants (72%) indicated that they would select the same program again. The reason most commonly cited was a lack of career opportunities and difficulty finding a job (30% of direct entrants; 33% of college transfers), followed by changed interests (26% of direct entrants; 21% of college transfers). Of those who would not select the same program again, less than 30% gave a primary reason related to course curricula, poor teaching, or a dislike of the university itself.

Further Education

In the five years following completion of their degrees, approximately 90% of respondents from both groups had taken some form of further education, primarily for career-related reasons. Interestingly, more direct entrants (23%) than college transfers (18%) were pursuing another university degree (bachelors or graduate). Of those who were continuing their studies at the time of the survey, significantly more direct entrants were studying full-time (47%, compared to 33% of college transfers). The survey data do not provide a clear explanation for this difference; however, reasons may include the older age of the college transfer group, often connected with increased family responsibilities, and higher student debt which may prevent them from giving up employment to return to school full-time or being able to afford further education.

Education Financing and Debt

The greatest differences between the direct entrant and college transfer grad-

Table 2: Overall Satisfaction with University Education

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Total Students
B.C. Institute of Technology	52.9%	47.1%	0.0%	0.0%	17
B.C. Open University	39.6%	45.8%	12.5%	2.1%	48
Camosun College	35.5%	60.5%	2.9%	1.2%	172
Capilano College	30.4%	65.5%	3.6%	0.0%	194
College of New Caledonia	38.1%	58.7%	3.2%	0.0%	63
College of the Rockies	39.1%	52.2%	8.7%	0.0%	23
Douglas College	42.4%	54.3%	3.3%	0.0%	184
Kwantlen University College	38.6%	58.3%	2.7%	0.4%	223
Langara College	39.3%	58.9%	1.9%	0.0%	107
Malaspina University-College	30.9%	65.4%	3.7%	0.0%	81
Northern Lights College	41.7%	33.3%	8.3%	8.3%	12
Northwest Community College	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12
Okanagan University College	41.5%	52.8%	4.1%	1.6%	123
Selkirk College	32.3%	61.3%	6.5%	0.0%	31
University College of the Cariboo	42.6%	55.9%	1.5%	0.0%	68
University College of the Fraser Valley	42.1%	56.1%	0.0%	0.0%	57
Vancouver Community College	34.9%	62.3%	2.7%	0.0%	146
Other/Unknown	48.5%	55.6%	5.9%	0.0%	68
College Transfers	37.9%	58.0%	3.4%	0.4%	1629
Direct Entrants	31.7%	64.3%	5.5%	0.6%	1834

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uates emerged in the area of student financing and debt. When asked about their primary means of funding their baccalaureate education, the majority from both groups identified employment (36% of direct entrants; 33% of college transfers); however, far more of the college transfer graduates had used student loans as their primary source of funding (32%, compared to 16% of direct entrants).

Furthermore, more of the college transfer graduates had incurred some amount of debt in completing their bachelors degree (55%, compared to 35% of direct entrants). The average debt load for college transfers (excluding those with no debt) was about \$5,500 higher than their direct entrant counterparts. An examination of student loan-specific debt also revealed differences between the two groups: five years after graduation, 66% of the college transfer graduates who had incurred student loan debt still had money owing, compared to 59% of direct entrants, with the average amount being approximately \$2,500 higher.

Table 3: Financial Debt Incurred at Graduation

	Direct Entrants		College Transfer		Total	
\$ 0	1,154	64.5%	711	45.1%	1,865	55.4%
\$ 1- 4,999	96	5.4%	68	4.3%	164	4.9%
\$ 5,000 - 9,999	141	7.9%	118	7.5%	259	7.7%
\$ 10,000 - 14,999	126	7.0%	142	9.0%	268	8.0%
\$ 15,000 - 19,999	75	4.2%	108	6.8%	183	5.4%
\$ 20,000 - 24,999	76	4.3%	124	7.9%	200	5.9%
\$ 25,000 - 29,999	41	2.3%	86	5.4%	127	3.8%
\$ 30,000 - 34,999	35	2.0%	89	5.6%	124	3.7%
\$ 35,000 - 39,999	13	0.7%	41	2.6%	54	1.6%
\$ 40,000 or more	31	1.7%	91	5.8%	122	3.6%

Note: table includes all debt, whether from student loan or other source.

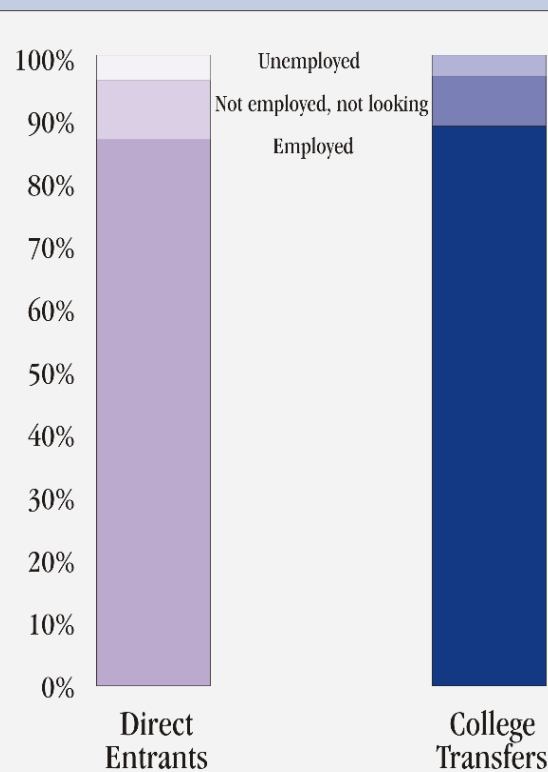
Labour Market Outcomes

Unemployment:

In assessing the success of a university education, an important outcome is the ability of graduates to find employment. Both the college transfer and direct entry graduates had lower rates of unemployment than the Canadian national average of 7.6% (Statistics Canada). This is particularly true for the college transfers (3.2% unemployed and looking for a job, compared to 4.1% of direct entrants), a difference that may be explained by the fact that the direct entrants are more likely to pursue further education and, at the time of the survey, may still be in a state of transition and therefore not employed. Among the small group of unemployed (and actively looking for work) respondents, the direct entrants were far more likely to mention having lost or quit their job as the primary reason for their unemployment (27%, compared to 13% of college transfers), whereas more of the college transfer group claimed a lack of opportunities (24%, compared to 18% of direct entrants).

Of the respondents who had chosen not to work, the overwhelming majority said that they were going to school full-time, the direct entrants to a much greater extent (54%, compared to 32% of college transfers). On the other hand, more college transfer respondents were caring for children full-time (19%, compared to 10% of direct entrants) or on a leave/maternity leave (17%, compared to 9% of direct entrants).

Table 4: Employment/Unemployment



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Salary:

According to the survey results, the direct entrants had slightly higher salaries than the college transfer graduates. The disparity is small, though statistically significant, and may be related more to higher academic achievement in secondary school (with prior studies having shown that college transfer students have lower high school averages than direct entrants) than to their entry route to university.

Employment Characteristics:

Of the employed respondents, a greater percentage of college transfers held more than one job (17%, compared to 12% of direct entrants). The data also showed that more direct entrants than college transfers had moved into professional occupations in the period between graduation and the time of the survey (69% of direct entrants; 63% of college transfers). And while slightly fewer college transfers said that their employer required a bachelors degree to perform the responsibilities of their job (62%, compared to 65% of direct entrants), more felt that their job was “very related” to the university program from which they had graduated (39%, compared to 34% of direct entrants).

Social Engagement

Education has been shown to be the best predictor of civic participation (Ehrlich, 2000), and graduates’ level of social engagement can be considered an important outcomes measure for our higher education system. The survey examined the extent to which graduates were socially engaged through volunteering, community involvement, and making charitable donations, with both groups showing high levels of social commitment. Somewhat more of the college transfers had volunteered in the year prior to the survey (59%, compared to 55% of direct entrants) and credited their university education with motivating them to “some extent” or “a great extent” to volunteer (44%, compared to 38% of direct entrants). Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of both groups had made charitable donations in the year prior to the survey. The average donation for college transfers was \$526, which is \$76 less than the average for direct entrants.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm the positive impact of a baccalaureate education for graduates of BC’s public universities, regardless of whether they enter university directly from secondary school or transfer from a college. Five years after completing their degrees, direct entrants and college transfers were found to have remarkably similar outcomes, and members of both groups were experiencing economic and social benefits from their education. While the data reveal some differences in areas such as education financing and debt, further education, and occupational types, further research is required to provide a more complete explanation. For more detailed recommendations, please see the full report.

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