

**Creative Writing Credit Transfer Between BC
Post-Secondary Institutions:**

**A Report on the Feasibility of Pursuing a Flexible
Pre-Major in the Discipline**

For

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer

By

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Executive Summary

The current system of credit transfer in the academic discipline of creative writing does pose some problems for students who wish to transfer with advanced standing into programs at the three provincial institutions which grant degrees at the baccalaureate level.

This report examines this system, with the intention of determining whether or not it would be useful and/or desirable to proceed with a full flexible pre-major project. This examination focussed on the structure of the three degree-granting programs in the province, and the ways that students progress through these programs, whether internal or transfer.

The report concludes that there are some problems with transfer in the system, and offers some recommendations for how these problems might be addressed.

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Before Beginning (Apologia)

The authors of this report originally had in mind as their model Jean Francois Lyotard's "Report on Knowledge," originally commissioned by the Conseil des Universites of the government of Quebec, which evolved into his seminal work, *The Postmodern Condition*.¹ However, it soon became apparent why such works do not get written by college instructors; there is neither world enough nor time. So then our deluded duo thought they might at least include a brief historical survey of the relatively new academic discipline of creative writing; but, alas, even this proved too much for our exhausted authors, as they tried to juggle a college workload, three-year old children, emotional commitments to life-partners, and their own creative and scholarly work. It will have to suffice, then, to quote the obvious: "Writers' workshops now exist in large and increasing numbers, forming something of a [trans-] national system for the training of creative writers. . . . [All] manner of questions have been raised about such an extensive and industrious system, from its social function to its effect upon contemporary literature."²

I. Purpose (pragmatics)

This report examines the state of credit transfer between various creative writing programs at post-secondary institutions in BC, with the intention of determining whether or not it would be useful and/or desirable to proceed with a full flexible pre-major project for the discipline.

II. Limitations

The report examines the state of credit transfer from post-secondary sending institutions to the three institutions that offer a baccalaureate degree major in creative writing: the University of BC, the University of Victoria, and Malaspina University College.

¹ Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

² D.G. Meyers, "The Rise of Creative Writing," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1993): 277-97. Meyers' essay argues that: "Creative writing was devised as an explicit solution to explicit problems," and was an institutional "effort to reform the study of literature" (278); specifically, to devise "an integrated approach to the study of reading and the practice of writing" (291).

III. Analysis

A. Institutional Context

There is a general initiative within the BC post-secondary environment to establish a more flexible, efficient system of credit transfer between sending and receiving institutions. The BC system currently works well; there is a good level of cooperation between the colleges and the universities. Student outcome surveys reveal a high level of satisfaction with the process of transferring credit; students are able to move from one institution to another without losing credit, and are able to enter the upper level courses that they want to enter. Within this context, the Creative Writing articulation committee passed a motion at their May 13, 2000, meeting: That the Creative Writing Articulation Committee pursue a transfer initiatives project.

B. Key Points: the Situation at Present

1. University of British Columbia

To transfer into any program at UBC, the potential student must meet the general admission requirement: successful completion of 24 transfer credits with a “C” average. If the potential student has less than 24 transfer credits, the potential student is evaluated on both their post-secondary and secondary grades. Academic standing is based on the average grade of all college and university courses attempted; if a student fails a course, and then retakes the same course, the failing and passing grades are both factored into the average. Potential students may transfer a maximum of 60 credits. (*UBC Calendar*)

After a student is accepted into the University of British Columbia, the student must then meet the BA/BFA graduation requirements: six credits of first-year English, a Grade 12 foreign-language, or 6 credits of an approved language course if the student has taken a Language 11 course, or 12 credits of an approved language course if the student has not taken a Language 11 course. (*UBC Calendar*)

As well, students must meet a science requirement: 6 credits in the Faculty of Science or other prescribed courses. (*UBC Calendar*)

There is also a Literature requirement: 6 credits of work in Literature beyond the English requirement. (*UBC Calendar*)

Once the student has met the Faculty of Arts requirements, the student must meet the Creative Writing program requirements: submission of a written request for admission accompanied by a creative writing manuscript (30-35 pages of original writing in two or more genres).

If a potential student has less than 60 transfer credits, the student must first complete 60 credits in the Faculty of Arts, and then submit their written request and manuscript to the Creative Writing Program.

Typically, a student from another BC post-secondary institution transfers into UBC with the intention of pursuing a major in Creative Writing after:

- a) completing less than 60 credits; then the student must complete the Faculty of Arts requirements, probably take CRWR 202 (Creative Forms), and prepare an appropriate portfolio.
- b) completing 60 credits (including course(s) equivalent to UBC's 202), making sure to have fulfilled the Faculty of Arts requirements; submit portfolio and a written request of application to the Creative Writing program.

2. University of Victoria

To transfer to any program at UVic, the potential student must meet the general admission requirement: successful completion of 12 transfer units (equivalent to UBC's 24 transfer credits) with a "C" average. If the potential student has fewer than 12 transfer units, the potential student must seek admission as a first-year UVic student. Academic standing is based on the average grade of all college and university courses attempted; if a student fails a course, and then retakes the same course, the failing and passing grades are both factored into the average. Potential students may transfer a maximum of 30 units. (*UVic Calendar*)

After a student is accepted into the University of Victoria, the student must then meet the BFA requirements: three units of first-year English. (*UVic Calendar*)

Once the student has met the Faculty of Fine Arts requirements, the student must meet the Department of Writing major program requirement: submission of a portfolio received by the department between January 15 and March 31. This can be done at any time during the program. For the major, students must pass Writing 100, and six units of 200-level writing courses.

Typically, a student from another BC post-secondary institution transfers into UVic with the intention of pursuing a major in Creative Writing after:

- a) completing less than 12 units; the student must then seek admission as a first-year student. The student may or may not need to take WRIT 100 (Introduction to Writing), depending on the transferability of their creative writing courses.
- b) completing more than 12 but no more than 30 units; the student must determine if they have credit for WRIT 100 plus a further six units of 200-level creative writing courses, so as to enter directly into the third year of the UVic writing program.

3. Malaspina University College

To transfer to any program at Malaspina, the potential student must meet the general admission requirement: completion of grade 12 or equivalent. (*Malaspina Calendar*) Students can transfer a maximum of 60 credits from the sending institution to Malaspina.

After a student is accepted into Malaspina University College, the student must then meet the BA requirements: six credits of first-year English, a minimum of 36 credits at the 100 or 200 level, with at least six credits from three or more disciplines, and a minimum of six credits in math/science; students whom have completed two Grade 12-level science or math courses are deemed to have met this requirement (*Malaspina Calendar*).

Once the student has met the Faculty of Arts requirements, the student must meet the Creative Writing major program requirements: at least 21 credits of first and second-year Creative Writing, including at least three of the following five genres: journalism/non-fiction, poetry, fiction, script writing/drama, publishing.

Students wanting to transfer into Malaspina University College's creative writing major should note that all Malaspina courses are single semester and single genre. Any one semester single-genre course completed successfully ("C") allows the student to progress to the 200-level course in the same genre. Two semesters of study of a single genre with a minimum B- in the intermediate course qualifies the student for the advanced (300/400) course. For students coming from institutions that offer multi-genre courses, two semesters of a multi-genre course equals two single genre, one semester courses in any of the genres covered by the multi-genre course. A student whom has two levels of courses completed in three genres can enter the majors program.

**Table 1: Requirements for transfer entry
into degree-granting creative writing programs**

	English	Math/Science	Second Language	Manuscript
UBC	x	x	x	x
UVic	x			x
Malaspina	x	x		

C. Discussion of Findings

1. Problems for Students

If a student wishes to transfer credit to the creative writing program at either UVic or Malaspina, the student may not have been able to take enough single genre courses to satisfy the entry requirements of his or her first-choice program. For example, a student transferring from NWCC to UVic will have taken NWCC's ENGL 209/210. This is a multi-genre creative writing course, covering poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction and drama. The student would receive credit for 3 units of 100-level UVic WRIT, which may or may not be equivalent to UVic WRIT 100, a required course in the program.

Along similar lines, a student going to Malaspina receiving credit for NWCC's ENGL 209/210 would be able to enter into two intermediate level writing classes; they would have to return to an entry-level class that covered genres for which they did not receive credit. For example, if the student was given credit for entry-level courses in poetry and creative non-fiction, they would then have to take an entry-level fiction course at Malaspina.

Another potential problem involves UBC's general requirements for the Faculty of Arts, specifically, the second language requirement. If a student has not taken a Language 12 in high school, and then attends a college without credit courses in Modern Languages (such as Northern Lights College), that student will not be able to meet this requirement. The remedy here would be to take the required college language courses through some form of distance delivery from another institution.

2. Problems for Sending Institutions

Due to budgetary limitations, institutional priorities and the lack of sufficient enrollments, smaller colleges are not always able to offer the number of creative writing courses (or other courses that students need to meet general degree requirements, as noted in III.C.1. above) that their students need to transfer directly into the second or third year of baccalaureate-level creative writing programs.

3. Problems for Receiving Institutions

The entry requirements of the universities/university colleges pose something of a barrier to students coming from the smaller colleges. For example, a student may elect to try to enter the creative writing program at UBC rather than Malaspina or UVic simply because the number of specifically-designated creative writing courses the student is required to have before entering UBC's program is lower than it is for UVic and Malaspina. However, UVic and Malaspina may not see this as a problem; both programs report full enrollments, and do not have as part of their program's mandate a requirement for geographical representation from all corners of BC.

4. Statistical Analysis: University of British Columbia

Figure 1. Relation between number of transfer and internal applicants to UBC's Creative Writing Program as Majors, 1994-2000

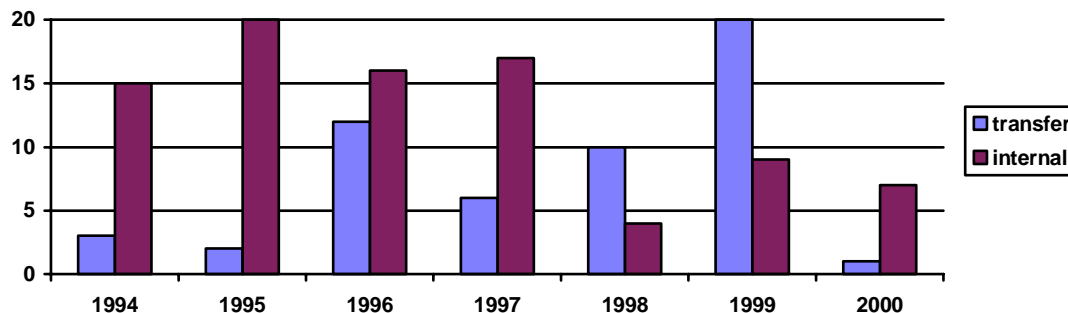


Figure 1 indicates that there is no strong relationship between the proportional representation of internal and external transfer students registering as creative writing students in any given year.

Figure 2. Status of External Transfer Applicants to UBC Creative Writing Program, 1994-2000.

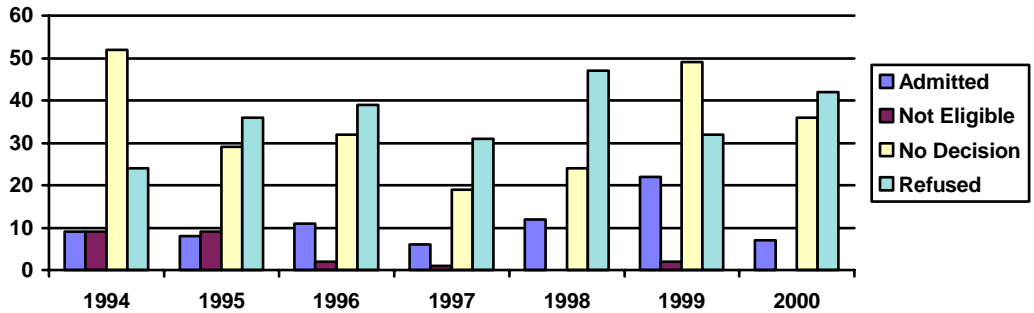
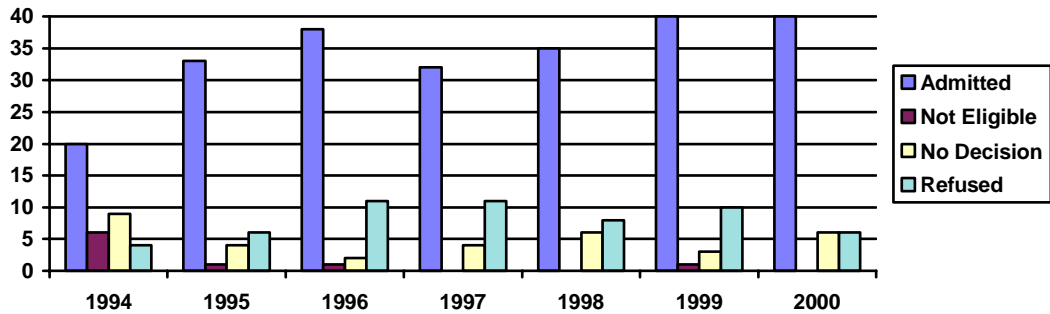


Figure 3. Status of Internal Applicants to UBC Creative Writing Program, 1994-2000.



Figures 2 and 3 indicate that, in practise, students coming from within UBC’s Arts program are much more likely, in general, to be admitted to UBC’s Creative Writing program. This contradicts the anecdotal accounts of UBC program administrators, concerning the likelihood of a student’s admission into the Creative Writing program having any relationship with his or her college of origin. (interview with George McWhirter, February 14, 2001)

Discrepancies in totals can be accounted for by the departmental practice of considering students who have enrolled in/completed a number of courses in the program as members of the program, even if they have not officially applied for admission to the program.

5. No Statistical Analysis: University of Victoria

UVic's Office of Institutional Analysis could not provide us with statistics corresponding to those received from UBC. They did send us the large document entitled "Profile of B.C. College Transfer Students Admitted to The University of Victoria: 1994/95 – 1998/99," but we found the statistical analysis within this document much too broad for our purposes here.

After presenting a draft of this report at the Creative Writing Articulation Meeting held on May 11, 2001, Bill Valgardson, Chair of the Department of Writing at UVic, contacted us with some numbers he had concerning the program. He reports that in this last academic year, 39 students requested advanced standing for entry into second- and third-year writing courses. Of the 37 who received advanced standing, 23 were transfer students. The high ratio of request/receive is accounted for by the fact that the obvious cases were discouraged from pursuing the formal process before any paperwork was committed.

Furthermore, Mr. Valgardson reports that there is no set number of spots set aside for transfer students, that though they "did try at one time to set aside a particular percentage of seats for transfer students," this policy became unworkable once the department moved over to enrollment by telephone. Mr. Valgardson insists that in reading portfolios submitted to them they "make no difference between those students coming up through WRIT 100 and WRIT 202 and those who submit portfolios from outside."

6. No Statistical Analysis: Malaspina University College

As Malaspina's Creative Writing major was only approved in the spring of 2000, there has been insufficient time to collect significant or reliable data. The only data that exists for Malaspina's Creative Writing major is anecdotal.

Steve Guppy, chair of the Creative Writing program at Malaspina, reports that they "haven't been receiving a vast number of transfer students from other BC institutions in recent years - probably no more than three or four annually - though with the major in place, that may change." It is worth noting here that one of the authors of this report had a promising student choose to pursue a joint English/Creative Writing Major at Malaspina rather than UBC because of the latter's second language requirement.

IV. Rationale for the Flexible Pre-Major in Creative Writing

Clearly, a set of flexible requirements constituting a pre-major for baccalaureate level study in creative writing that was both attainable by sending institutions and acceptable to the three receiving institutions would make the system of transfer more efficient. It would benefit sending institutions in that it would provide them with a clear indication of the courses they should make available to their students. It would benefit receiving institutions in that there would be no artificial barriers to keep students from being accepted at the institution of their choosing.

However, it is not clear whether the barriers that exist at this time are of sufficient severity to warrant undergoing the process of creating such a mechanism. Furthermore, it must be recognized that there is little real motivation for the receiving institutions, particularly UVic and UBC, to see such a model as in any way necessary, or even desirable. They want the best candidates to apply to their programs, they will want to defend their rights to institutional autonomy, and they will want to ensure that the best of their own students will be able to finish their programs there.

V. Recommendations

At our annual meeting in May 2002, we will recommend to the Creative Writing Articulation committee that:

- 1) A flexible pre-major curriculum in Creative Writing should be established;
- 2) A subcommittee of the Creative Writing Articulation committee should be established to develop and implement the flexible pre-major;
- 3) The flexible pre-major should contain 60 credits of general university Arts and Science courses, of which 12 credits should be full-year multi-genre Creative Writing (poetry, fiction, drama, non-fiction/journalism) courses;
- 4) The existing transfer mechanism of the Associate of Arts degree might be easily exploited to fulfill recommendation #3.

These four recommendations are made in context of recognizing that each receiving institution has the right to retain their own degree requirements, and that the portfolio should remain the ultimate instrument for determining acceptance into a baccalaureate-level program in Creative Writing.

The Creative Writing Articulation Committee reviewed our findings at its meeting in May 2001. The draft report generated a great deal of discussion which centred around two main themes: first, that capacity issues, or lack of spaces for creative writing students, have created a greater need to look for solutions to transfer issues; and second, that there was no appetite for solutions that featured standardized curricular requirements. The final report will be presented to the Articulation Committee next May. The committee will decide whether they wish to act upon the recommendations above.