

Credit Accumulation in Pathway Programs

Prepared for BCCAT by Plaid Consulting

Introduction

Pathway-transfer programs and the students who enrol in them are a little-studied part of the BC Transfer System (BCTS). The BCTS is fundamentally built on course-to-course articulation, rather than the transfer pathways that are more common in other jurisdictions. This study assessed the number of credits completed by pathway-transfer and direct-entry students in Business, Engineering, Nursing, and Social Work, and explored the reasons why students complete the number of credits they do. The study's results highlight a number of important issues around a system-wide understanding of pathway programs and students, and may assist in developing further program services and supports for students following these pathways.

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In this study, **pathway-transfer students** are defined as students transferring from one or more sending institutions¹ to one of the four receiving institutions (Athabasca University, Royal Roads University, Simon Fraser University, and the University of British Columbia) with Year 2 standing or equivalent. This definition was chosen on the assumption that students transferring into Year 2 or its equivalent were the most likely to have completed a pathway program preparing them to transfer. The study included data on 9,187 students who completed their baccalaureate degree between September 2015 and August 2019, of which 23% met the study definition of pathway-transfer students. There were wide variations in the percentages of pathway-transfer students across institutions and programs, from 17% of SFU and UBC Business students to 100% of AU and RRU students in Business, Nursing and Social Work.

>>No significant difference in efficiency for course-to-course assessment vs. block transfer/advanced standing

Different post-secondary institutions use different practices for transcribing transfer credits. Seventy-two percent of the pathway transfer students did not have transfer credits transcribed, despite completing credits at a sending institution. When transfer credits are not transcribed, transferring students may be granted advanced standing in a program at the receiving institution, or block transfer credit. In this study, both transfer students with and without recorded transfer credit had on average similar numbers of credits from sending institutions – 60 credits for students with recorded transfer credit (based on institutional data from receiving institutions), and 57 credits for students without recorded transfer credit (based on data in the Central Data Warehouse database at the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training).

¹ The sending institutions were institutions that submit data to the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training Central Data Warehouse: British Columbia Institute of Technology, Camosun College, Capilano University, Coast Mountain College, College of New Caledonia, College of the Rockies, Douglas College, Emily Carr University, Justice Institute of British Columbia, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Langara College, North Island College, Northern Lights College, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Okanagan College, Okanagan University College, Selkirk College, Thompson Rivers University, University of the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Community College, and Vancouver Island University.

Table 1: Number of direct-entry and pathway-transfer students by receiver and basis of admission (within the study scope) (9,187)

Study Discipline	Receiving Institution	Number of Students			Transfer Students as % of all Students
		Direct-Entry	Pathway-transfer	Total	Pathway-transfer %
Business	AU		18	18	100%
	RRU		68	68	100%
	SFU	931	194	1,125	17%
	UBC	2,863	592	3,455	17%
Engineering	SFU	285	98	383	26%
	UBC	2,752	706	3,458	20%
Nursing	AU		61	61	100%
	UBC	253	210*	465*	45%
Social Work	AU		N<10	N<10	100%
	UBC	22	125	147	85%
Total		7,106	2,081	9,187	23%

Note: *Indicates a rounded number. For rows/columns containing cells with N<10, the value of one other cell is rounded up or down to the nearest 5.

>>Continued student satisfaction with transfer via the survey

Pathway-transfer students reported that all (30%) or nearly all (44%) of their credits were counted toward their credential. This suggests that these students felt they received appropriate recognition for courses completed.

More than two-thirds of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the transfer process. The highest rate of satisfaction was reported by respondents in Business programs (81%, or 22 of 27 respondents), and lowest for respondents in Engineering (63%, 31 of 49).

>>Differences between direct-entry and transfer students

About a quarter (26%, or 533) of pathway-transfer students completed at least one credential at a sending institution in addition to their baccalaureate degree at the receiving institution. Over 25% of pathway transfer students whose credits were transcribed at a receiving institution attended more than one sending institution. These students typically had a lower proportion of their credits accepted for transfer than transfer students who attended only one sending institution.

>>Pathway transfer students accumulated more credits in completing their degree

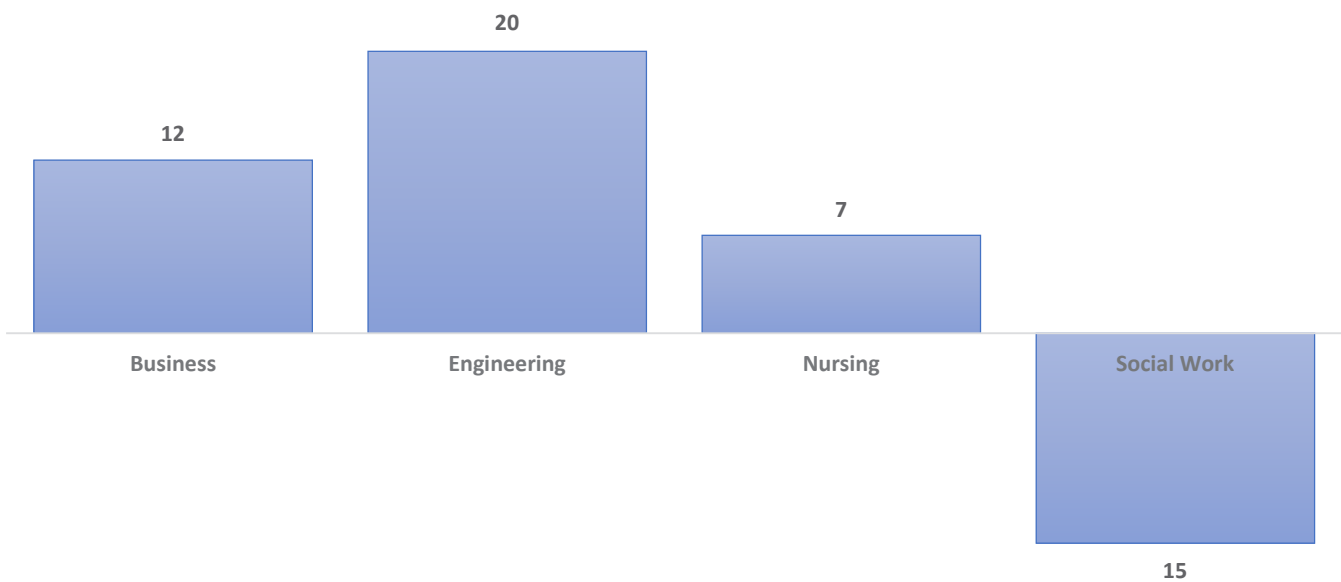
Two groups of students that are traditionally compared in their performance on the way to a baccalaureate are transfer students with recorded transfer credits, and direct entry students who enrol at a post-secondary institution right after high school. These pathway transfer students generally completed more credits than did direct-entry students in Business, Engineering and Nursing programs. Students in social work programs were a notable exception, but the number of students in this category was small.

For transfer students whose credits were recorded, on average 83% credits completed at senders were accepted as transfer credit post-transfer. These results indicate that pathways are relatively efficient for this group of students, based on the proportion of transfer credits recognized by the receivers.

On the other hand, at SFU and UBC, a small number of direct-entry students collected credits at sending institutions prior to enrolling at the receiving institution. These students completed a higher number of credits than transfer students (with or without recorded credit) and direct students without credits from the CDW institutions.

There does not seem to be a consistent difference between the number of credits completed by pathway transfer students whose credits were transcribed and the number of credits completed by those students who were granted advanced standing.

Difference in the number of accumulated credits between pathway transfer students with recorded transfer credits, and direct entry students with no sender credit, by discipline of baccalaureate degree



Conclusions

These findings indicate that student pathways to a baccalaureate degree tend to be non-linear. There are both personal and institutional factors that influence the number of credits students accumulate on the way to a baccalaureate in pathways programs. Pathways appeared to take slightly more credits to complete overall, but were relatively efficient for students. Helping students understand why some of their previous academic credit is not recognized at their new institution may improve student satisfaction, and confidence, in pathway programs.

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Further information
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