
Improving the BC Transfer Experience: Feedback from Students

Prepared by: BC Stats



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Prepared by: BC Stats



709 – 555 Seymour Street
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 3H6
bccat.ca | admin@bccat.ca
t 604 412 7700 | f 604 683 0576

Improving the BC Transfer Experience: Feedback from Students

The BC Council on Admissions and Transfer is always seeking ways to improve the transfer system for the benefit of students. Doing so is informed by research in one form or another. Questions added to the 2011 Diploma, Associate Degree and Certificate Student Outcomes (DACSO) survey sought to gain a better understanding of why some students are dissatisfied with their overall transfer experience. The good news is that only 193 students reported being dissatisfied, which is consistent with the small number of respondents reporting dissatisfaction in former years. The 2011 research shows that the BC credit transfer system continues to work well for the large majority of students who use it. For the small number of students reporting dissatisfaction, the findings shed light on the nature of their experiences and what would have improved them.

Introduction

Recent figures show that each year over 22,000 students move between institutions in BC's network of public colleges, institutes, teaching-intensive universities, and research-intensive universities.¹ A well-developed credit transfer system provides students with the flexibility they need to devise a post-secondary plan that works for their individual circumstances. The BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) facilitates the movement of students among BC post-secondary institutions by co-ordinating an efficient system for transferring course credits.

Highlights

- A high proportion of former students who continued their studies at a different institution expected to transfer credits regardless of whether they continued in the BC public system (79%), BC private (47%), or elsewhere in the Canadian public post-secondary system (64%).
- 92% of students who moved from BC public colleges, institutes, or teaching-intensive universities to BC research-intensive universities expected to transfer credits and 87% of these students reported receiving all of their expected credits.

The proportion of students who expected to transfer credits and were dissatisfied with their experience has remained constant across multiple survey years at about 8%. In the 2011 survey, only 193 such respondents reported being dissatisfied with their transfer experience. About half of these reported receiving *all* of the transfer credits they expected. What would have improved their transfer experience?

Top three responses:

1. Improved service from academic advisors and admissions staff.
2. Better access to clear, accurate, accessible and timely information about what is transferable.
3. More opportunities to transfer courses.

¹ Student Transitions Project, "Movers and Transfers in the B.C. Public Post-Secondary System," Government of British Columbia, February 2011.

BCCAT makes extensive use of administrative data to study student flows among institutions. This newsletter looks into the results of a special series of questions from a provincial survey of former students,² the *BC Diploma, Associate Degree, and Certificate Student Outcomes (DACSO) Survey*.³ The survey, which focuses on the experiences of former students of certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs, provides a unique opportunity to see the transfer system through the eyes of its users—the students.

About the study

The data used for this study are mainly from the 2011 Diploma, Associate Degree, and Certificate Student Outcomes (DACSO) Survey (formerly the College and Institute Student Outcomes (CISO) Survey), which received 14,697 responses. This survey includes students who completed or almost completed a certificate, diploma, or associate degree program at one of BC's public teaching-intensive universities, colleges, or institutes. As research-intensive universities are not included in the study population for the DACSO survey, students moving *from* these institutions were not surveyed. However, research intensive universities are a popular destination for students who continued their studies and these institutions are included as *receivers* of students who moved to a new institution. For trend information, data are also drawn from surveys conducted in 2002, 2005, and 2008.

Transfer Trends and Patterns

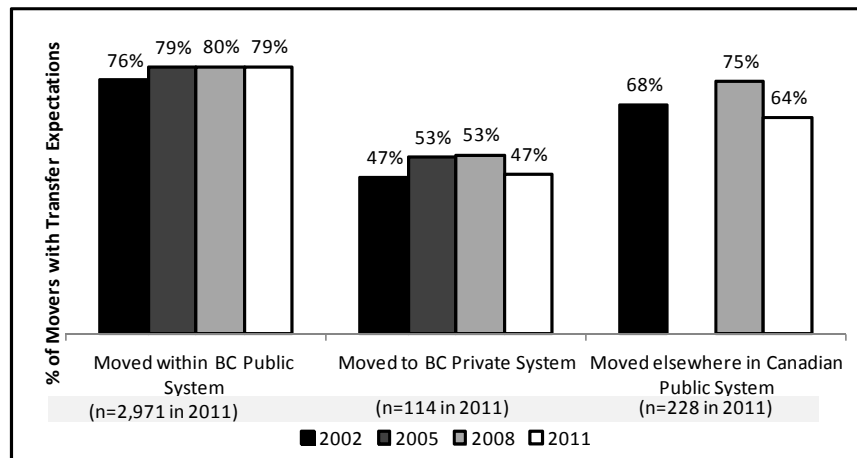
How many students expect to transfer credits?

In each of the last four DACSO surveys when transfer questions were asked (2002, 2005, 2008, and 2011), between 44 and 47% of former students surveyed said they had continued their studies after completing or almost completing their program at a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute. Consistently across survey years, more than three-quarters of those who continued at a different institution in the BC public post-secondary system expected to transfer credits to their new institution. Figure 1 shows that transfer expectations were not limited to students who moved to another institution in the BC public post-secondary system. In 2011, almost two-thirds of the 228 respondents who transferred to a public post-secondary institution elsewhere in Canada expected to transfer credits, as did 47% of the 114 respondents who moved to a private institution in BC.

²The annual DACSO Survey is overseen by the BC Student Outcomes Research Forum and is jointly funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and participating institutions. It was previously known as the BC College & Institute Student Outcomes (CISO) Survey.

³For more detail, please see the full 2011 DACSO transfer study, "2011 Admissions and Transfer Experiences of Students Continuing their Post-Secondary Studies in British Columbia." Similar reports for 2002, 2005, and 2008 are also found at BCCAT's website, <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/publications/index.cfm>

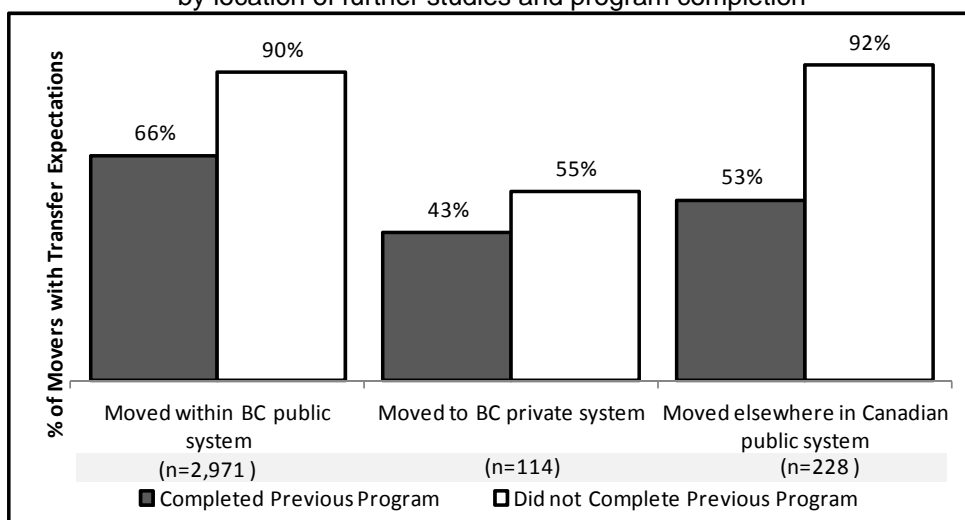
Figure 1: Percentage of respondents with expectations to transfer credits to their new institution, by location of further studies and survey year



Note: Data are not available from the 2005 survey for students who continued elsewhere in Canada. The “n” values reflect the total number of 2011 respondents from teaching-intensive universities, colleges, and institutes who continued their studies at a different institution.

The DACSO survey includes a range of former students, some of whom completed their previous program and others who were close to completing. Those who did not complete their previous program were much more likely to expect to transfer credits to their new institution than those who had completed. In fact, nine out of ten non-completers who continued their studies in the BC public post-secondary system or at a public institution elsewhere in Canada expected to transfer credits. A much lower proportion of those who had completed their previous program expected to transfer credits (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents with expectations to transfer credits to their new institution, by location of further studies and program completion

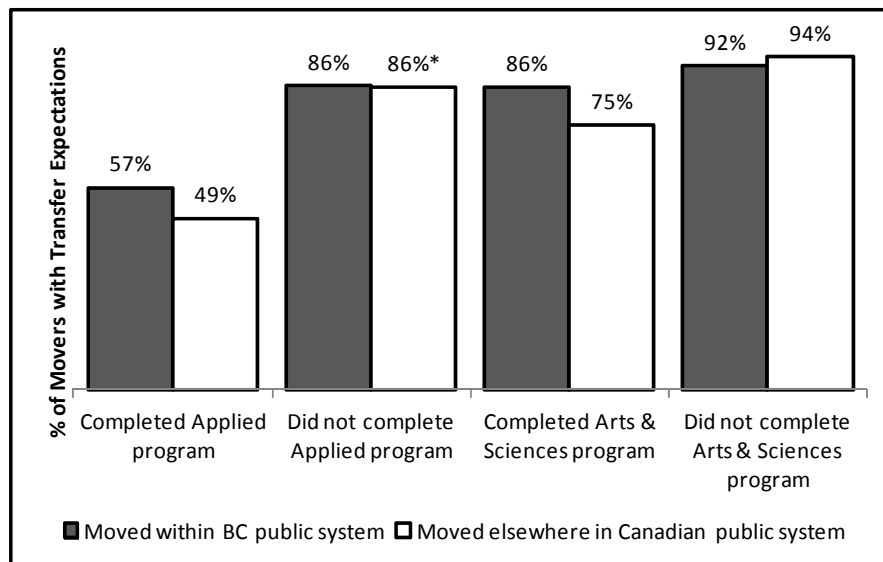


The “n” values reflect the total number of 2011 respondents from BC teaching-intensive universities, colleges, and institutes who continued their studies at a different institution.

Among those who expected to transfer credits within the public post-secondary system in BC or elsewhere in Canada, Figure 3 shows that former students who completed an Applied program before going onto further studies were relatively unlikely to expect to

transfer credits. However, those who had *not* completed their Applied program were very likely to expect to transfer credits (86%), whether they transferred within BC or elsewhere in Canada. The percentage of non-completers expecting to transfer credits from their previous Applied program to another institution in the BC public system varied across the five Applied program areas as follows: Health (96%), Engineering and Applied Sciences (88%), Business and Management (85%), Visual and Performing Arts (79%), and Human and Social Services (76%). These high rates of transfer expectations are somewhat surprising considering that many Applied programs are less likely to be designed for transfer than Arts and Sciences programs, which account for the vast majority of courses in the BC Transfer Guide. However, Applied programs have a mix of applied and academic courses and this may influence the high expectations of Applied program students. As expected, a relatively high proportion of Arts and Sciences students expected to transfer credits regardless of their completion status or where they continued their studies.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who moved within the public post-secondary system who had transfer expectations, by program type, completion status, and location of further studies



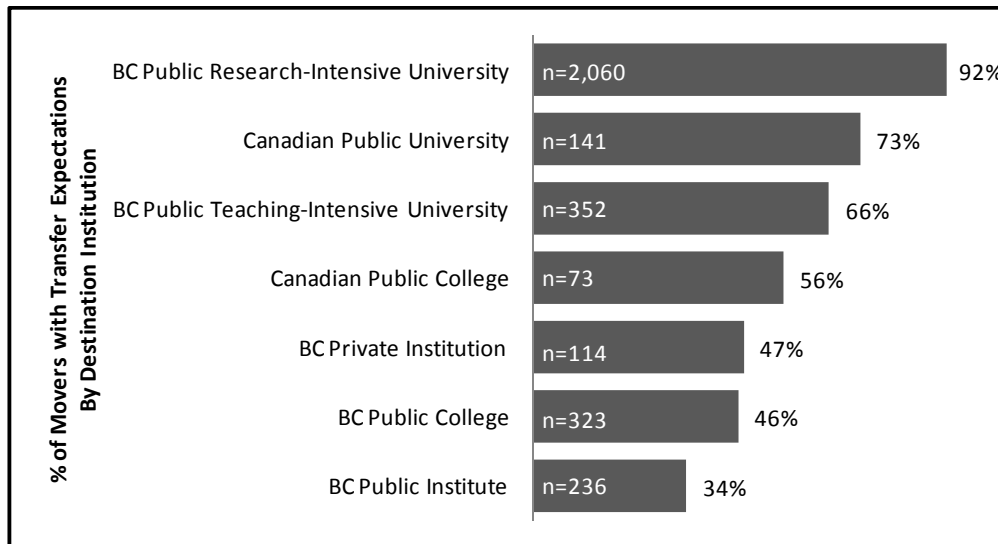
*Interpret with caution – this percentage is based on responses from 14 respondents.

The largest flow of students with transfer expectations was to BC’s five research-intensive universities,⁴ which accounted for 71% of the respondents with transfer expectations. Almost all (92%) of the 2,060 respondents who reported moving to a research-intensive university in BC expected to transfer credits to their new institution. Those who left BC to attend a public university elsewhere in Canada were also very likely to expect to transfer credits (73%), although this flow was much smaller, at 4% of total students with transfer expectations. It is also interesting to note that close to half

⁴ For the purposes of this study, the following five institutions are included in the research-intensive university category: Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia (including Okanagan campus), University of Northern British Columbia, University of Victoria, and Royal Roads University.

(47%) of the 114 respondents who entered private institutions in BC expected to transfer credits.

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents moving from a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute who expected to transfer credits, by receiving institution type and location

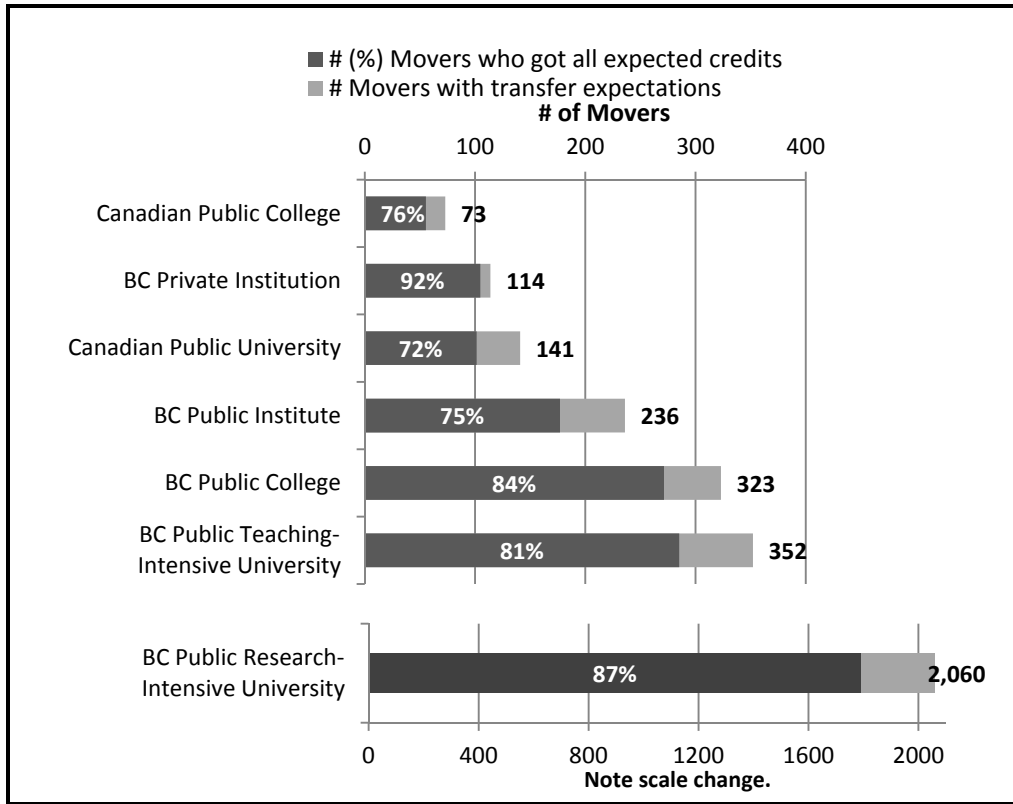


Note: the “n” values represent the total number of respondents who moved to this type of institution from a BC teaching-intensive university, college or institute.

Do students receive the transfer credits they expect?

Overall, 86% of those respondents who expected to transfer credit from their teaching-intensive university, college, or institute received all of the credit they expected. Figure 4 shows that the proportion of respondents reporting that they received all of their expected credits varied substantially in 2011 by the type and location of the institution to which they moved. Those who left the province to attend a public college or university elsewhere in Canada tended to be less likely to receive all of their expected credits than those who stayed in BC. Although students who moved to a BC private institution were relatively less likely to expect to transfer credits, 92% reported receiving all of their credits. Respondents moving to BC’s research-intensive universities with transfer expectations also reported a relatively high rate of receiving expected transfer credits (87%).

Figure 4: Number of movers with transfer expectations and percentage who received all expected transfer credits, by destination institution



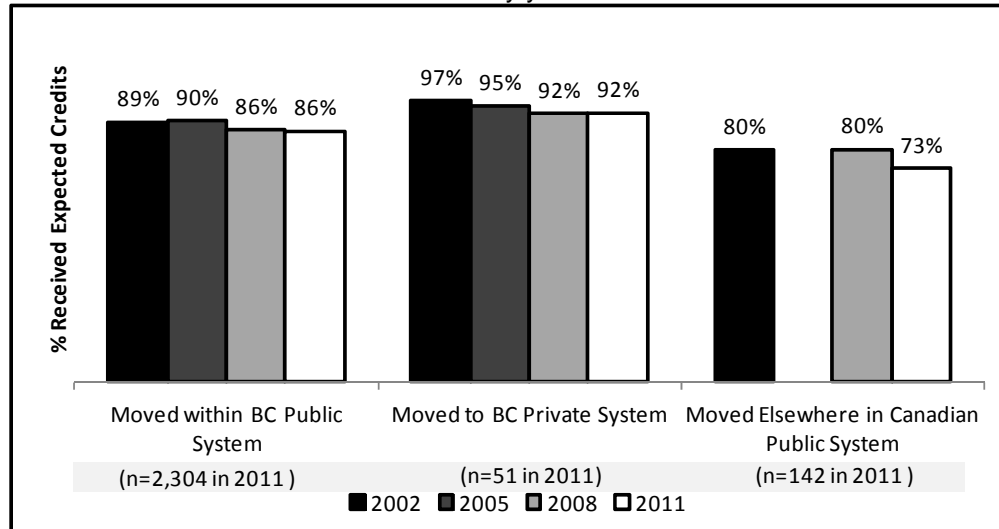
Note: the “n” values represent the total number of respondents who moved to this type of institution from a BC teaching-intensive university, college or institute.

Over the survey years, rates of receiving all expected credits have been highest for those transferring to BC private institutions and lowest for those who left the province (Figure 5). The proportion of respondents reporting that their transfer expectations were met declined between 2002 and 2011 regardless of where students continued their studies or their previous program. It is not possible to tell from the survey whether this finding reflects increasing student expectations regarding what courses or programs should be transferable or broader issues with the effectiveness of the transfer system. At least some of the decline after 2005 can be attributed to changes in data collection, from telephone interviewing only to a combination of telephone and web in 2008. The mode of data collection had a significant impact on respondents’ answers to this question in 2008 and 2011; in 2011, for instance, 88% of telephone respondents who

Research shows that respondents surveyed by phone are more likely than web respondents to give positive ratings on satisfaction and level-of-agreement questions. Please see the full admissions and transfer report³ for a detailed discussion of the impact of changes to the data collection methodology on year-over-year comparisons. The combined telephone and web approach to data collection will be used in future DACSO surveys because it has become increasingly difficult to maintain response rates to telephone surveys within existing budgets.

continued in the BC public post-secondary system reported receiving all of their expected credits compared with 83% of respondents who answered the same question online.

Figure 5: Rates of receiving all expected transfer credits, by location of further studies and survey year



Note: the “n” values represent the total number of 2011 respondents who expected to transfer credits from a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute. Data are not available from the 2005 survey for students who moved elsewhere in the Canadian public system.

What are the main reasons for not receiving transfer credit?

The reasons provided by students for not receiving their expected transfer credits vary by the type of program they left and by the location of their continued studies. Focusing first on the BC public system, former Applied program students were more likely to report that their credits did not transfer because their original course or program was not designed for transfer (58%). Arts and Sciences students were more likely to say that either their courses transferred, but could not be used toward their degree (44%), or that they received unassigned credit when they expected to receive specific credit (43%).⁵

Relatively few students who moved to a public institution elsewhere in Canada said they did not know or understand transfer requirements (8% vs. 27% for those who stayed in BC). This is a somewhat surprising finding given that there is no transfer guide for institutions outside BC but an extensive transfer guide that provides predictability in transfer among public institutions inside BC.

The two top reasons for not receiving expected transfer credit reported by students who left the province were that they received unassigned credit instead of specific credit (58%) and/or their original course or program was not designed for transfer (53%).

⁵ Unassigned credit is given when a course or program is considered worthy of credit but does not have a specific equivalent at the receiving institution. Assigned credit is credit granted for a specific course when a course from another institution is considered equivalent to one at the receiving institution.

Table 1: Reasons for not receiving transfer credit, by original program of study and location of further study

Reason For Not Receiving Transfer Credit	Further studies in BC Public System			Further studies in Public System Elsewhere in Canada
	From Arts & Sciences Programs (n=191)	From Applied Programs (n=131)	Overall (n=322)	Overall (n=38)
Original courses or program were not designed for transfer	36%	58%	45%	53%
Courses transferred but could not use all of the credits toward degree	44%	36%	41%	32%
Received unassigned credit when expected to receive specific credit	43%	33%	39%	58%
Did not know or understand transfer requirements	30%	21%	27%	8%
Received fewer transfer credits for a particular course than initially granted (e.g., a 4-credit course only received 3 credits)	24%	25%	24%	21%
Completed more credits than allowed to transfer	23%	22%	23%	16%

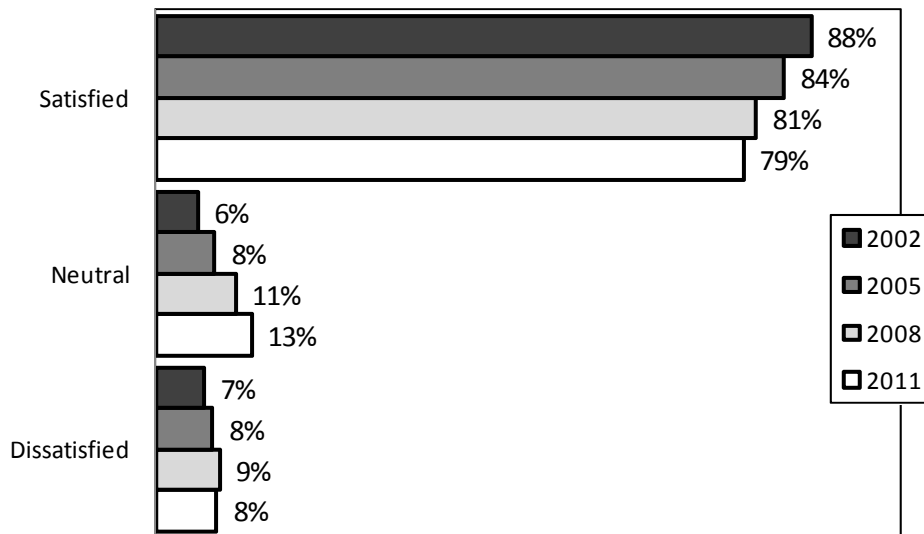
Note: Respondents were permitted to select more than one reason. Results are not provided for the BC private system because very few respondents indicated they did not receive expected transfer credit (n=4).

Satisfaction with the Transfer Experience

Are respondents satisfied with their overall transfer experience?

For many years, students' satisfaction with their overall transfer experience has been a key accountability indicator of the success of the BC Transfer System. BCCAT has supported the collection of such information through a series of questions in the DACSO survey for more than a decade, and results have consistently shown that while most respondents are either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their transfer experience, between 7 and 9% consistently report that they are dissatisfied (Figure 6).

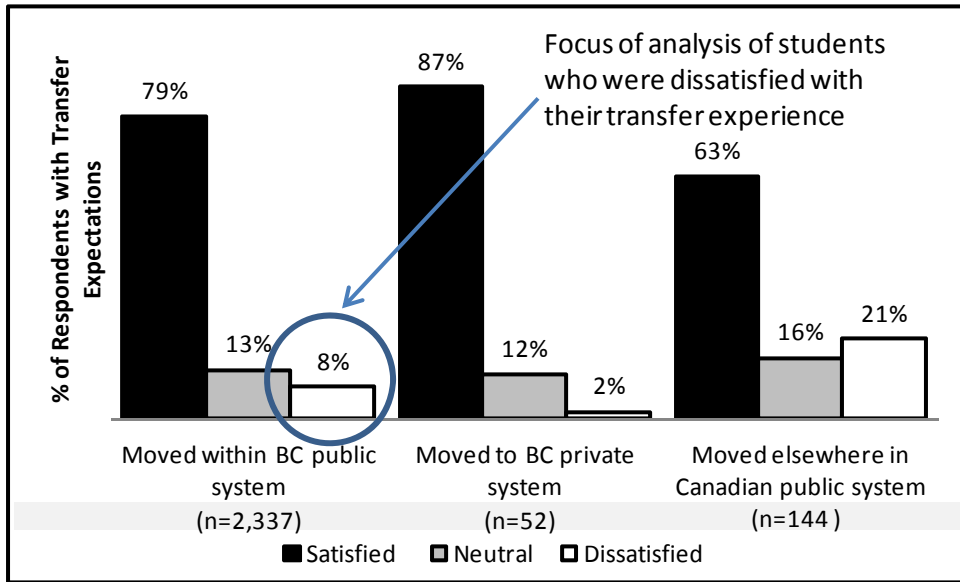
Figure 6: Satisfaction with transfer experience for those who moved from a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute to any BC public post-secondary institution, by survey year⁶



The 2011 satisfaction results, illustrated in Figure 7, show that the majority of students who expected to transfer were movers to another BC public institution (n=2,337), of which 8% were dissatisfied with their transfer experience (n=193). Significantly fewer students expected to transfer to BC privates or outside of BC. Rates of dissatisfaction for these respondents were 2% for the 52 respondents transferring to BC privates and 21% for the 144 respondents transferring outside of BC.

⁶ Satisfaction ratings subsequent to 2005 have been affected by changes to the DACSO survey data collection methodology. Please see this report for details: “2011 Admissions and Transfer Experiences of Students Continuing their Post-Secondary Studies in British Columbia.” Similar reports for 2002, 2005, and 2008 are also found at BCCAT’s website, www.bccat.bc.ca/publications/index.cfm

Figure 7: Satisfaction with overall transfer experience, by location of further study



Note: the “n” values represent the total number of 2011 respondents who expected to transfer credits from a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute.

Why are some students dissatisfied with their transfer experience?

A new set of questions was asked in 2011 so that BCCAT could hear directly from students regarding the specific source of their dissatisfaction and to gather their input regarding how the transfer system might be improved.

This section focuses on the responses of the 193 respondents (8%) who transferred within the BC public post-secondary system and reported that they were either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their transfer experience (Figure 7). This respondent subgroup is composed of students who experienced a variety of transfer outcomes: over half (51%) of the 193 respondents, for example, reported receiving all of their expected transfer credits. Dissatisfied students

account for only 8% of all respondents who moved within the BC public system with transfer expectations, and the level of analysis in this section is limited by the small number of respondents eligible for the additional questions.

The reasons provided by respondents for dissatisfaction with their overall transfer experience are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for Dissatisfaction with Overall Transfer Experience

Reason For Dissatisfaction	# who reported issue	% of total 193 dissatisfied respondents
1. You sought transfer information but didn't get the information you needed	99	51%
2. The transfer process was difficult to understand or follow.	97	50
3. You didn't get the transfer credit you expected	89	46
4. The courses you took at [sending institution] were not in the BC Transfer Guide	47	24
5. The way the grades for your transfer courses were calculated at the institution you transferred to.	37	19
6. You didn't get into the program you wanted	35	18
7. Frustration resulting from poor management of your transfer file (e.g., missed registration deadlines, transcript errors, lost documents, etc.)	18	9

Note: Respondents were permitted to report more than issue.

The two top reasons, agreed to by about half of the respondents who were dissatisfied, were that they did not get the information they needed after seeking it (51%) and that the transfer process was difficult to understand or follow (50%). Just over 60% of those who agreed to one of these statements also agreed with the other, suggesting that a respondent's ability to access the transfer information they need is a key factor in their perception of the complexity of the process. Some representative comments for these two themes are provided in the call-out box.

Did not get information needed and process difficult to understand

...counsellors were giving contradictory information...

It seemed like no one knew the answers or could help you.

...could not get help from anyone ... was shuffled from person to person.

Process was not clear, many unanswered questions.

Just under half (46%) of dissatisfied students said they did not get the transfer credit they were expecting. It is not possible to tell from the survey whether these respondents' expectations were reasonable given the constraints of the transfer system. Their comments show that they were frustrated by the sense of being set back in their studies and/or that they had to repeat material that they felt they had already covered.

Calculation of grades

...the marks were reduced ... and this is why I did not get into my program of choice.

...my GPA ...was set to 0 ...which resulted in having to take general studies courses to boost my GPA.

One in five respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with the way the grades for their transfer courses were calculated by their receiving institution for the purpose of admission. Further comments by these students suggest that they were confused by inconsistencies across institutions in how grades are calculated and particularly dissatisfied when the recalculation affected their transfer outcome.⁷

Did not get transfer credit expected

... I retook and repaid for the same classes.

...they put me back in second [year] which resulted in me doing a five year bachelor.

...despite there being overlapping material, nothing transferred over.

Nine percent of respondents were concerned with the way their transfer files were handled by admissions staff and advisors. Some respondents indicated that delays and errors in the handling of their transfer file caused them to miss or almost miss registration deadlines at their new institution.

Improve service from advisors and admissions staff

...when phoning, I could be on hold for long periods of time...You need to talk to someone who ...can provide the answers and advice you need.

...improvement in knowledge level of counsellors would help students making important life, education and career decisions.

What suggestions do dissatisfied students offer for improvement?

Dissatisfied students were asked to provide feedback on how their experience might have been improved. A total of 149 out of 193 dissatisfied respondents (77%) provided suggestions. The most popular suggestion, mentioned by 35% of respondents, was that improved service on the part of academic advisors and admissions staff was needed. Some

⁷ Institutions have a practice of recalculating grades achieved elsewhere for the purposes of admission which may result in a lower GPA than expected and could affect admissions decisions. The formulae used for GPA conversions vary by institution.

respondents felt they had received inaccurate or incomplete information from advisors.

The second most-mentioned area for improvement (29%) was the availability of clear, accurate, and timely information. Several mentioned the importance of sending institutions being proactive about providing information to students at the course selection stage, so that they can plan accordingly. This sub-population of transfer students focused on the need for improvement in the information and service provided by advisors at sending and receiving institutions, as opposed to self-service resources such as the BC Transfer Guide or institution websites.

Improve availability of clear, accurate, and timely information

...orientation for transfer should take place earlier and give more clear details.

...have the knowledge provided at the beginning ... I never would have chosen the course ... if I knew this would happen.

...instead of the advisor telling students to just look on the transfer guide, they should provide more information and resources.

Table 3: How Overall Transfer Experience Could be Improved

Suggestions for Improvement	% who made suggestion	% of total 149 respondents who suggested improvements
1. Improved service from academic advisors and admissions staff	52	35%
2. Clear, accurate, accessible and timely information about what is transferable	43	29
3. More opportunities to transfer courses	30	20
4. More collaboration among sending and receiving institutions	22	15

Note: Respondents were permitted to provide more than one suggestion for improvement.

The third most-mentioned area for improvement was to expand opportunities for courses to transfer. Many of the responses coded to this theme touched on frustration with institutions that teach a curriculum that is not broadly recognized by other institutions. Finally, 15% of respondents felt that greater communication and collaboration between sending and receiving institutions is needed to improve their transfer experience. Many of these respondents believed that a transfer agreement should have been in place for the credits they were unable to transfer. Some were surprised that in spite of the existence of a block transfer arrangement or a joint degree offered by two institutions, they still encountered difficulties transferring their credits.

Conclusion

Across the survey years, transfer expectations have been consistently high among students who move from a BC teaching-intensive university, college, or institute to another institution in the province's public post-secondary system. In 2011, 79% of these students expected to transfer credits to their new institution; for those who moved to one of BC's research-intensive universities, the corresponding figure was 92%. However, the DACSO survey shows that expectations to transfer credits are not limited to students who stay within the BC public post-secondary system. Close to three-quarters of students who transferred to a Canadian public university (73%) and 47% of those who transferred to a private institution in BC also expected to transfer credits.

While former Arts and Sciences (90%) students were generally the most likely to expect to transfer credits, those who had not completed their previous Applied program were also very likely to expect transfer credit (86%). Among those who had not completed their previous Applied program, transfer expectations were especially high for those who transferred from a Health (96%), Engineering and Applied Sciences (88%), or Business and Management (85%) program.

In 2011, 86% of those who expected to transfer credits to another BC public post-secondary institution received all of their expected credits. Between 2005 and 2011, the rate at which students reported receiving all of their expected credits has been declining and a small but consistent percentage of respondents (between 7 and 9%) has reported being "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with their transfer experience.⁸ A new series of questions asked in 2011 sheds light on why these students were dissatisfied and how they feel their overall transfer experience might have been improved. The three top reasons for dissatisfaction were difficulty getting the information needed (51%), challenges understanding the transfer process (50%), and not receiving the transfer credit expected (46%). When asked how their experience could be improved, dissatisfied respondents offered the following suggestions:

- improve service from academic advisors and admissions staff at sending and receiving institutions;
- increase availability of clear, accurate, accessible, and timely course transfer information;
- provide more opportunities to transfer credits among institutions; and
- increase collaboration among sending and receiving institutions.

⁸ Some of the decrease over time in the rate of receiving all expected credits and in satisfaction with the overall transfer process is attributable to the introduction of a mixed-mode approach to data collection in 2005, as detailed in the full report. See footnote 3.



709 – 555 Seymour Street
Vancouver BC Canada V6B 3H6
bccat.ca | admin@bccat.ca
t 604 412 7700 | f 604 683 0576