

Simultaneous Enrolment & Letters of Permission *in the BC Transfer System*

*Prepared by Dr. Fiona A.E. McQuarrie, Special Projects Officer, BCCAT
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BCCAT

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Executive Summary

Simultaneous enrolment – when a student is enrolled in more than one post-secondary institution at the same time – represents between one and two percent of annual enrolment in BC’s public post-secondary system. Most BC post-secondary institutions manage their students’ simultaneous enrolment by issuing Letters of Permission (LOPs), which verify that the institution is aware of the student’s enrolment elsewhere and will grant transfer credit for the course(s) the student takes.

The objectives of this research are:

1. to assess the extent of simultaneous enrolment in the BC Transfer System;
2. to examine institutional processes and procedures around LOPs and simultaneous enrolment; and,
3. to make recommendations to maximize the effectiveness of simultaneous enrolment and LOPs, for students and for institutions.

Data were collected through a review of institutional websites and a survey of registrars at BC Transfer System member institutions. Approximately half of these institutions have policies and/or a standardized procedure around issuing LOPs. Generally, to be eligible to receive an LOP, students must have achieved a minimum GPA and have completed a minimum number of courses or credits. Some institutions also have restrictions on the type or number of courses that students can take elsewhere.

The report makes these recommendations:

1. Institutions may want to consider, based on the institution’s mandate and its student demographics, whether they wish to issue LOPs.
2. Institutions issuing LOPs should establish a clearly explained and standardized process for students to request LOPs. Information on this process should be easy for students to locate on the institution’s website, and easy to obtain from other institutional sources.
3. Institutions issuing LOPs should consider using a standardized LOP request form.
4. Institutions issuing LOPs should, as much as possible, clearly explain to applicants the reasons why LOP requests may be approved or denied.
5. Institutions issuing LOPs should ensure that guidelines for LOP applications are evidence-based and designed to support student success.
6. Institutions issuing LOPs should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to monitor LOP requests, and to monitor student performance in courses taken through LOPs.

Introduction

Over the past decade, simultaneous enrolment – when a student is enrolled in more than one post-secondary institution at the same time – has represented between one and two percent of annual enrolment in BC’s public post-secondary system, which is between 5,000 and 6,000 students per year (Student Transitions Project, 2024). The majority of BC post-secondary institutions manage their students’ simultaneous enrolments through issuing Letters of Permission (LOPs). LOPs verify that the institution is aware of a student’s enrolment elsewhere and will grant transfer credit for the course(s) the student will take.

Within the mature and extensive BC transfer credit system, students can move between post-secondary institutions, and acquire academic credit from multiple institutions. However, relatively little is known about the use of LOPs by students at BC Transfer System institutions, and how these institutions manage the LOP process.

Within the mature and extensive BC transfer credit system, students can move between post-secondary institutions and acquire academic credit from multiple institutions. However, relatively little is known about the use of LOPs by students at BC Transfer System member institutions, and how these institutions manage the LOP process. A previous BCCAT report (BCCAT, 2015) examined the use of the admissions category of “visiting students”, which usually includes students enrolling with LOPs. However, this report mostly focused on institutions admitting and enrolling students with LOPs from other institutions, rather than on institutions issuing LOPs for their own students to take courses elsewhere.

The Transfer and Articulation Committee (TAC) of BCCAT commissioned this research project. The objectives of the project are:

- 1) to assess the extent of simultaneous enrolment in the BC Transfer System;
- 2) to examine institutional processes and procedures around LOPs and simultaneous enrolment; and
- 3) to make recommendations to maximize the effectiveness of simultaneous enrolment and LOPs, for students and for institutions.

Defining Simultaneous Enrolment

Previous research on simultaneous enrolment uses several different terms to describe student enrolment in more than one post-secondary institution at the same time. These terms are listed in **Table 1**. Some of these terms are also used to describe programs jointly offered by two or more institutions where participating students are enrolled in all of the institutions, and to describe programs in which students are enrolled at one institution while guaranteed admission to another institution.

Table 1: Terms Used to Describe Simultaneous Enrolment

Co-enrolment	Overlapping enrolment
Dual enrolment	Concurrent enrolment
Cross-institution study	Transient enrolment
Cross-institution enrolment	Double dipping

It can be challenging to distinguish simultaneous enrolment from other types of non-traditional enrolment. These other types include:

- “Stepping out”, when a student previously enrolled at an institution does not enroll in courses for a semester or more, and later re-enrolls at the same institution or at another institution. A student “stepping out” from one institution may be taking courses at another institution, but this may not always be considered simultaneous enrolment, even if the student has not formally withdrawn from the first institution.
- Dual credit programs, sometimes called “dual enrolment programs” or “simultaneous enrolment programs”. In dual credit programs, secondary school students are simultaneously taking secondary school courses and lower-level post-secondary courses, and are enrolled at both institutions. Students in dual credit programs are generally not categorized as “simultaneous enrolment” students, because the other institution they are enrolled in is not a post-secondary institution.
- “Visiting” students. Simultaneously enrolled students may be included in this admissions category, but the category often includes other types of students, such as international students participating in academic exchanges.

The definition of a “simultaneously enrolled” student used in this study is the definition used by BC’s provincial Student Transitions Project (STP)¹: a post-secondary student enrolled in courses at more than one post-secondary institution in the fall semester of each academic year.

Previous Research on Simultaneous Enrolment

The published literature on simultaneous enrolment suggests many reasons why students might be enrolled in more than one post-secondary institution at once. These reasons are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Students’ Reasons for Simultaneous Enrolment

Temporary geographic relocation making it difficult or impossible for the student to take courses at their current institution
Student wants to finish a program or credential more quickly
Student wants to take a course that is rarely offered or not offered at their current institution
Student wants to retake a course to improve their course grade or GPA
Student wants more flexible course start or end dates
Student wants a more flexible course structure
Student believes there is better academic support (e.g. smaller classes, more assistance outside class times) at the other institution
Student has taken a course the maximum number of times allowed at their current institution [i.e. can no longer repeat the course]
Student intends to combine courses from both institutions to apply for admission at another institution
Tuition is less expensive at the other institution
Student believes that a specific course is easier to pass at the other institution, or that there is less rigorous instruction and/or less rigorous grading at the other institution
Student wants to continue acquiring credit while on academic probation or suspension at their own institution
Student wants to take more credits per semester than the maximum permitted at their current institution
Student wants to “test” the academic experience at the other institution without leaving their current institution (possibly with the intention of transferring if the experience is positive)
Student wants to take a course for personal development or interest [i.e. does not intend to transfer credit for the course, or to change programs or institutions]

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/post-secondary-education/data-research/student-transitions-project>

The literature on simultaneous enrolment can be categorized into three themes: patterns of simultaneous enrolment, characteristics of simultaneous enrolment, and effects of simultaneous enrolment. Each of these themes will be reviewed individually. As indicated earlier, researchers use different terminology to describe simultaneous enrolment; for clarity and consistency, “simultaneous enrolment” will be used throughout this section, even if a specific study uses a different descriptor.

Simultaneous enrolment can be characterized as one type of “swirling” - students moving among and between programs and institutions, depending on their goals and circumstances (Clasemann & Boone, 2020).

Patterns of Simultaneous Enrolment

Simultaneous enrolment can be characterized as one type of “swirling” - students moving among and between programs and institutions, depending on their goals and circumstances (Clasemann & Boone, 2020). In addition to simultaneous enrolment, patterns of swirling can include a mix of full-time and part-time enrolment and continuous and discontinuous enrolment (Crosta, 2014).

McGregor (2018) identifies simultaneous enrolment as a form of “strategic swirl”: a pattern of swirling in which “students...made deliberate enrolment choices to save time and money” (p. 49). She also notes that students engaging in strategic swirling “have a level of sophistication which allow[s] them to navigate the transfer process with ease....The majority of [these students’] transfer decisions were planned” (p. 51-52). Among the reasons her interviewees cited for this pattern of enrolment were lower tuition rates at other institutions, and course scheduling that was more convenient for them.

Students may also undertake simultaneous enrolment because of anecdotal information about a particular course at another institution being easy to pass or to do well in. They may obtain this information from online sites such as Rate My Professors (<https://www.ratemyprofessors.com>), from friends, or from other students (Hayes & Prus, 2014). It is difficult to assess the impact of anecdotal information on students’ course or program choices, because students at different institutions have different amounts of formal and informal information about a course or program before deciding to enroll (Brown & Kosovich, 2014). Students also have individual priorities, constraints, and goals that affect their academic choices (Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). Students may rely more on peers and other informal sources of information if they do not have enough institutional information on instructors and courses (Boswell, 2020).

The reasons for students’ choices of courses or programs may change over time, and thus affect the individual student’s pattern of enrolment, including simultaneous enrolment. For example, if a student believes that part-time or non-permanent (sessional or adjunct) instructors are more lenient in their grading than full-time permanent instructors, they may seek out courses taught by non-permanent instructors. But if a student makes this kind of strategic enrolment choice and their course grade does not accurately reflect their learning – that is, if they are graded too generously – their academic performance may decline in more advanced courses because they did not acquire sufficient knowledge in that course. As a result, their criteria for subsequent course selection may change (Chen, Hansen & Lowe, 2021).

One study of student course choices (Scott & Savage, 2022) points out that students encounter “information asymmetry” in making academic decisions, because, prior to enrolling in a course, students usually do not have access to detailed information such as a complete course outline. Because of that, “direct feedback and comments from peers also play a role in shaping perceptions about courses” (p. 1251). Students may manage course uncertainty by “shopping and dropping”: enrolling in more courses than they need or intend to take, which could include courses at other institutions, and then, prior to the course withdrawal penalty date, dropping the courses that turn out to be least compatible with their expectations and goals.

The timing of when a student takes a course at another institution is another consideration in understanding simultaneous enrolment. Voorhees, Ortagus & Marti (2023) collected data on 2,817 students enrolled in one university's computing science or engineering programs who chose to simultaneously take required lower-level math courses at a nearby college, early in their programs. The authors characterize this type of enrolment as "math swirling". The students with this pattern of enrolment tended to have lower high-school math grades and to have taken more remedial math courses before starting university. The data analysis indicated that "math swirlers" were more likely than other students to complete a bachelor's degree, either in the discipline they first enrolled in, or in another discipline. The authors attribute this outcome to these students avoiding "high-attrition" entry-level math courses at the university, and generating "academic momentum" from experiencing success in the college courses. This outcome also suggests that the timing of simultaneous enrolment in the student's academic journey may affect whether it achieves the student's desired results.

The data analysis indicated that "math swirlers" were more likely than other students to complete a bachelor's degree, either in the discipline they first enrolled in, or in another discipline.

A study using data on 14,230 students who started US post-secondary education between 1996 and 2000 (Herzog, 2005) indicated that between 6% and 10% of the students were simultaneously enrolled in their first semester of study. Generally, these were community college students who simultaneously enrolled at another college. Simultaneously enrolled students were less likely to transfer to another institution, or to drop out during their first semester, and were more likely to enrol for a second year of study at the institution where they started their studies. The three variables that most reduced the likelihood of a student dropping out in their first semester were higher GPAs, passing an introductory math course, and simultaneous enrolment.

Herzog suggests that analyzing patterns of, and reasons for, simultaneous enrolment may help institutions develop effective student retention strategies. "[The impact of simultaneous] enrolment in reducing the transfer-out risk [indicates] that students look for added choices, not to leave the institution for another. Knowing which courses students take [simultaneously], and where they take them, may help substantiate the view that student enrolment decisions are increasingly guided by consumeristic considerations—emphasizing choice, flexibility, low cost, and faster completion" (p. 34).

A later study that used national-level data from the US National Student Clearinghouse (Shapiro, Dunder, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwali, Nathan, & Youngsik, 2018) defined simultaneous enrolment as "two or more enrolment records in which the term start/end dates overlapped by 30 days or more" (p. 25). This study also identified the student's "primary enrolment" - the institution where the student was enrolled the longest or was enrolled first. This distinction was made in order to differentiate simultaneously enrolled students from students whose enrolments overlapped during the process of transferring between institutions. Nearly 25% of transfer activity by students that started post-secondary studies in 2011 involved students at four-year institutions who took classes during the summer at a two-year institution, and then "return[ed] to their starting institution in the fall, either to bolster academic preparedness or to supplement credits" (p. 19). The researchers labeled this pattern as "summer swirling".

Although the report did not correlate simultaneous enrolment with the likelihood of student transfer or with transfer characteristics, the researchers noted that two-thirds of students transferring from a four-year institution to a two-year institution transferred during their first or second year of study. They propose that two-year institutions may "have the capacity to meet the post-secondary needs of both four-year students who discover that a four-year institution is not where they belong [and] four-year students looking to supplement their academic requirements" (p. 20). Simultaneous enrolment may play a role in this process of discovery, as a way for students to try out the academic experience at other institutions.

Soler (2020) cautions that "swirling" is a loosely defined concept, encompassing several different forms of student mobility patterns. "Swirling" may describe the number of inter-institutional moves a student makes; a student's movement between post-secondary

sectors (e.g. to or from a community college to or from a university); and/or the timing of those moves. This makes it difficult to meaningfully compare outcomes of studies around “swirling”, since the term is not consistently defined. Soler also highlights the potential pitfalls of using broadly inclusive demographic data to explain an individual student’s mobility pattern.

The study found that students who initially enrolled in public two-year institutions were more likely to have been simultaneously enrolled than students at other types of institutions.

Characteristics of Simultaneous Enrolment

Several US studies have explored the extent of simultaneous enrolment in different systems and contexts. A major study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (Peter, Cataldi, & Carroll, 2005) used data on approximately 9,000 students who started post-secondary studies in 1995/96 and approximately 10,000 students who completed a bachelor’s degree in 1999/2000. The study defined simultaneous enrolment as a student being enrolled in two or more institutions at the same time for at least one month of one semester. The analysis excluded students that attended more than one institution during their academic career but were not enrolled in more than one institution at once. The study also compared enrolment patterns of students at public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions.

The study found that students who initially enrolled in public two-year institutions were more likely to have been simultaneously enrolled than students at other types of institutions. Students who initially enrolled in private for-profit institutions in programs of less than four years were the least likely to have been simultaneously enrolled. This may be because these institutions generally offer shorter vocational certificate programs, within which students may not need or want to simultaneously take courses elsewhere. Among all students that attended more than one institution, 16% were simultaneously enrolled and then transferred, and 11% were simultaneously enrolled but did not transfer. Older students, full-time students, and students who delayed post-secondary enrolment after completing high school were also more likely to undertake simultaneous enrolment; the researchers note that these students may spend more time in post-secondary education, thus giving them more opportunity for simultaneous enrolment. Simultaneously enrolled students had a higher completion rate for all credentials, except for certificates.

Another large-scale national-level study examined six years of data representing approximately 17,000 US students who began post-secondary studies in 2003/04 (Simone, 2014), and focused on the transferability of the credits acquired by these students. The study did not differentiate between students who transferred to another institution and students who were simultaneously enrolled; it was assumed that in either scenario students intended to transfer the credit they acquired. However, one major methodological difference between this and other studies was that the researcher collected data from student transcripts, rather than relying on students’ self-reporting. This provided a more complete picture of student mobility by, for example, capturing credit that the student acquired but did not transfer, and capturing enrolments that the student may have not reported to other institutions they attended.

The data analysis indicated that students who transferred from a four-year to a two-year institution, or who were at a four-year institution and were simultaneously enrolled at a two-year institution, transferred the lowest average number of credits (18) of all students, and were also more likely to be denied transfer credit. Students who transferred from a two-year to a four-year institution, or who were at a two-year institution and simultaneously enrolled at a four-year institution, transferred the highest average number of credits (32). Students with higher GPAs were more likely to transfer credit between institutions. Most students that transferred credit transferred most of the credits during their first move between institutions, with increasingly smaller amounts of credit moving along with the student if they made more than one move between institutions. However, nearly 39% of students did not receive any transfer credit on their first move between institutions. Private for-profit institutions accepted the least amount

of transferred credit, compared to the amounts accepted by public institutions and by private not-for-profit institutions.

Another study examined enrolments at an Arizona community college and state university offering a common lower-level general education curriculum, and that had a well-defined and well-publicized articulation agreement between the two institutions (de los Santos Jr. & Sutton, 2012). Approximately eight percent of students at the university were also taking courses at the college, with most of these students enrolled in their first year at university. Most simultaneously enrolled students were taking nine or ten credits at the university and three or four credits at the college. While the researchers did not analyze outcomes for simultaneously enrolled students, they noted that university students who transferred college credits had a higher persistence rate than direct-entry university students, and that the persistence rate was even higher for college students transferring to university as upper-division students.

A study of the California community college system analyzed data from 89,057 students enrolled for at least two semesters between 2002 and 2009 (Bahr, 2012). During that time, between two and six percent of students were simultaneously enrolled in two or more colleges, with simultaneous enrolment rates highest in the spring semester and lowest in the summer semester. Sixty-five percent of students who transferred between two or more institutions had been simultaneously enrolled; only five percent of students who had been simultaneously enrolled never transferred between institutions. Students who transferred were also more likely to have been simultaneously enrolled in the semester immediately before they changed institutions. The study's author suggests that these patterns indicate that simultaneous enrolment may be a strategic choice by students, but "we do not know whether this behavior ultimately is beneficial or detrimental to students' progress and attainment" (p. 117).

A study using data from the US Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) survey analyzed six years of data on 4,920 simultaneously enrolled students who first enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the 2003-04 academic year (Crisp, 2013). This study only used data from students ages 23 and younger – 85% of all simultaneously enrolled students in the data set - to assess the extent of simultaneous enrolment in the "traditional" age range for post-secondary students. Students were included in the data set if they had been simultaneously enrolled for at least one month of the six years covered by the data.

Fourteen percent of all community college students that first enrolled in 2003-04 were simultaneously enrolled at least once. Twenty-nine percent of students that had been simultaneously enrolled completed a bachelor's degree within six years; the same outcome was achieved by only 13% of students who did not simultaneously enroll. More female than male students were simultaneously enrolled. Simultaneously enrolled students were also less likely to be the first in their family to attend college, more likely to enroll in college directly after high school, and more likely to be full-time students. Seventy-five percent of the simultaneously enrolled students transferred to at least one other institution, and the majority of those only simultaneously enrolled after completing their first transfer between institutions.

Another study (Wang & McCready, 2013) compared academic and demographic data from simultaneously enrolled students in the US who started their studies at either a community college (1,721 students) or a university (3,516 students). The majority of college students simultaneously enrolled at colleges or universities, but university students were more likely to simultaneously enroll at another university. Simultaneous enrolment occurred most often in the fall semester (August-December) and spring (January-May) semester for both groups.

A study of the California community college system analyzed data from 89,057 students enrolled for at least two semesters between 2002 and 2009 (Bahr, 2012). During that time, between two and six percent of students were simultaneously enrolled in two or more colleges, with simultaneous enrolment rates highest in the spring semester and lowest in the summer semester.

Johnson & Muse (2012) looked at student “swirling” to and from a single institution – a public and primarily undergraduate university - with the goal of understanding students’ departure from and/or return to the institution. Nearly 8,000 students graduated from the institution in 2004 and 2005; of those, 2,862 left the institution at least once during their studies. Students were most likely to not be enrolled during their third and fourth semesters of study, with the likelihood of non-enrolment steadily declining in each semester after that. However, less than one-half of one percent of these students were simultaneously enrolled; it was much more common for students to not be enrolled at all in this institution while being enrolled elsewhere. Simultaneously enrolled students were more likely to depart the institution completely, regardless of whether their simultaneous enrolment was at a two-year or a four-year institution. But because of the small number of simultaneously enrolled students, simultaneous enrolment did not negatively affect the institution’s overall student retention rate.

Effects of Simultaneous Enrolment

A study of California post-secondary students used focus group interviews to explore the experiences of 106 community college students simultaneously enrolled at universities (Morales-Garcia et al., 2022). These students were enrolled in cross-institutional collaborative programs that allowed college students to take university courses “without formal admission and usually at reduced tuition rates” (p. 653). The intent of these programs was to diversify the demographics of students transferring from college to university, and to help college students develop a “sense of belonging” in the university culture prior to transferring. To be eligible to participate in the programs, college students were required to have a minimum GPA of 2.0 and be registered for at least six credits at their college.

The students generally found out about simultaneous enrolment from informal sources such as faculty members or other students; had to seek out specific information on program requirements related to their own academic plans; had negative pre-conceptions about how college students would be treated at university; and saw simultaneous enrolment as a way to achieve their own academic goals while saving money. The researchers point out that while the interviewees were demographically diverse, students at the three colleges where the interviewees were enrolled have “higher than average parental education and income” than students at other community colleges in the state. Thus, the barriers and constraints that these particular students experienced may be even more challenging for students with fewer resources.

The study using data from the US Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) survey (Crisp, 2013) also measured whether the student completed either an associate degree or a bachelor’s degree, or whether they were still a post-secondary student, at the end of the six years covered by the data. Simultaneous enrolment was positively associated with students achieving one of these three outcomes, even after controlling for the effects of gender, ethnicity/race, high school GPA, and the amount of financial aid the student was receiving.

Another study (Wang & McCready, 2013) found that both college and university students who undertook simultaneous enrolment were more likely than students who did not simultaneously enrol to complete an undergraduate degree within six years of their first semester of enrolment. There were no statistically significant differences between these students’ GPAs in terms when they were or were not simultaneously enrolled.

A study of 5,400 US community college students looked at simultaneous enrolment by Latinx students; this demographic group has one of the lowest rates of credential completion of all demographic groups in US higher education (Taggart, 2022). Analysis of a national data set indicated that 30% of Latinx students were simultaneously enrolled for at least one semester between 2012 and 2017, which was a higher rate than all students in the dataset (the overall rate was 25%). Simultaneously enrolled Latinx students had higher secondary school GPAs and took more advanced secondary school courses than Latinx students who did not simultaneously enroll.

More of the simultaneously enrolled Latinx students were enrolled full-time at their home institution, and approximately 28% were simultaneously enrolled at a public institution and at a private for-profit institution. The simultaneously enrolled Latinx students had a higher credential completion rate and a higher persistence rate, and were also more likely to have transferred from the post-secondary institution where they first enrolled. The researcher notes that the majority of students in the data set are first-generation college students, so aggressive marketing by private for-profit institutions may have attracted students whose families do not have experience with post-secondary education systems.

Another study using five years of data from 800 Latinx students who started their education at a US community college (Carales, 2020) analyzed influences on three possible outcomes: retention (continued enrolment), completing an associate degree, and transferring to complete a bachelor's degree. Of the 110 students who transferred to another institution and completed a bachelor's degree, 19% had been simultaneously enrolled at least once; the simultaneous enrolment rate for the entire group was 8%. While simultaneous enrolment was "a positive predictor of both transfer and credential completion" (p. 211), simultaneous enrolment did not relate to retention. Six percent of the 420 students who were no longer enrolled had been simultaneously enrolled, which was the lowest rate among all the groups in the data set.

Another study using nationwide data on 790 US students who started at a community college and then transferred (Wang, 2012) incorporated data on students' secondary school experiences, to better understand these students' post-secondary academic outcomes. Simultaneous enrolment was positively associated with a higher GPA after transfer. The researcher suggests that "simultaneously enrolled students might be a particularly motivated group of students who understand how to navigate the educational system better than other students; therefore, they fare better in their academic performance" (p. 880).

Simultaneous Enrolment in the BC Post-Secondary System

Simultaneous enrolment in BC's post-secondary system may be more extensive than in other jurisdictions, for four reasons.

The first reason is the large number of post-secondary institutions in BC's Lower Mainland. The region defined as "Mainland/Southwest" by the Student Transitions Project (STP) accounts for nearly 70% of all enrolments in BC's public post-secondary system (Heslop, 2021). Of the 40 BC Transfer System member institutions, 24 institutions (12 public and 12 private) are located in this region (BCCAT, 2024). This geographic concentration of post-secondary institutions may facilitate simultaneous enrolment, if students are able to commute between institutions.

The second reason is that Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and Athabasca University are both institutional members of the BC Transfer System. TRU's Open Learning division offers distance education courses and programs in several formats (self-paced online, paced online, and print-based) and admits applicants to courses without requiring them to register in a TRU program, as long as they have English language proficiency equivalent to completion of BC Grade 12 English (Thompson Rivers University, 2024). Athabasca University, a completely online institution, also allows students to enrol in courses without registering for a specific program, with the only standard admission criterion being that applicants must be age 16 or older (Athabasca University, 2024). Many of the courses offered by these institutions are transferable. The admission policies at these institutions, and the opportunity to transfer courses taken there, may facilitate simultaneous enrolment at Athabasca and TRU by students at other BC Transfer System member institutions.

The third reason is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many BC post-secondary institutions put some or all of their courses online, including courses that had previously only been offered in person. The impact of pandemic-related closures varied across institutions (James, 2023), and it remains unclear how many institutions plan to continue offering more online courses than they did before the pandemic (Veletsianos, Irvine, & Johnson, 2023). More online course options at more BC post-secondary institutions, especially for transferable courses, may also increase the frequency of simultaneous enrolment.

The fourth reason is BC’s well-developed post-secondary transfer credit system. The BC Transfer Guide currently includes more than 350,000 provincial, national, and international post-secondary course equivalencies (BCCAT, 2023a). Not every student who is simultaneously enrolled is doing so with the intention of transferring credit. However, the large number of clearly defined and publicly available course articulations in BC may facilitate simultaneous enrolment, by informing students of course options at other institutions and the equivalencies for those courses at their own institution.

The BC post-secondary system also includes some cross-institutional programs that formalize simultaneous enrolment, with students enrolled in both institutions that jointly operate the program. It is important to distinguish these programs from programs in which students completing a credential at one institution are eligible to enter a program at another institution; these are generally called “degree partnership”, “guaranteed admission”, or “guaranteed transfer” programs. In these programs, students will eventually take courses at both institutions, but at any given time students are only enrolled in one of the participating institutions. There are also programs that admit students to two institutions simultaneously; however, in these programs, students are not taking courses at both institutions at the same time. They take courses at one institution and then transfer credits from those courses to the other institution, where they have already been admitted, and complete their credential there.

BC programs with simultaneous enrolment generally take one of two forms. In one form, students can take program courses at either institution at their convenience; in the other, students may have some flexibility in choosing where to take specific courses, but specific parts of the program must be taken at a specific institution. Depending on the program, credentials may be awarded by either institution or by both institutions. Examples of these programs are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Examples of Formal Simultaneous Enrolment Programs in BC

Credential	Participating Institutions	Length	Structure	Institution Awarding Credential(s)	Website
Diploma of Technology in Biotechnology and Honours B.Sc. in Biotechnology	University of BC/ BC Institute of Technology	Three years for diploma, five years for degree	First year can be taken at UBC or elsewhere; second and third years are at BCIT; fourth and fifth years are at UBC. Program includes two four-month work terms. Applicants must be admitted to both institutions, and also meet admission requirements for UBC Sciences honours specializations.	Diploma and degree are both awarded jointly.	https://vancouvercalendar.ubc.ca/faculties-colleges-and-schools/faculty-science/bachelor-science/biotechnology
BA and BSc	Langara College/ Simon Fraser University [students are initially admitted at Langara]	Depends on degree program	Students can take courses at either institution, with both institutions tracking student progress. To be eligible, Langara applicants must meet SFU admission requirements and must not have completed more than 45 transferable credits.	SFU	https://langara.ca/programs-and-courses/degree-partnerships/sfu-degree-program/index.html

While the BC Transfer System focuses primarily on undergraduate-level credit transfer, it should also be mentioned that the Western Deans' Agreement, established in 1974, facilitates simultaneous enrolment for students in BC graduate programs. Graduate students enrolled at participating BC universities, with approval from their home institution, can take graduate or undergraduate courses at other participating universities in Western Canada. The courses must be credit courses that are applicable to the student's program. Under this agreement, students taking courses at other institutions will not be charged tuition by those institutions, although students must continue their enrolment at their home institution and are responsible for any ancillary fees charged by the other institution (Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies, 2024).

It is also important to acknowledge that if a BC post-secondary student undertakes simultaneous enrolment, the applicability of courses taken elsewhere to the student's program may be restricted by institutional or program policies. For example, most BC post-secondary institutions have residency requirements. These define an amount or percentage of credits or courses that must be taken at an institution in order to receive a credential awarded by that institution (James & Cowin, 2020).

If a simultaneously enrolled student takes a course at another institution, they would be guaranteed transfer credit for that course if an articulation agreement exists. But the transferred credit would only be applicable to program completion at the student's own institution if the number of credits or courses the student has already acquired elsewhere does not exceed the amount defined in the institution's residency requirements. This amount would also include transfer credit that the student might have acquired while previously enrolled at another institution (i.e. while not simultaneously enrolled).

Other policies that might restrict the applicability of credit acquired through simultaneous enrolment include policies that require specific courses, groups of courses, or types of courses (e.g. practicum courses) to be completed at the institution awarding the credential. Restrictions such as these would generally be found in the institution's transfer credit policy or in program requirements.

BC Statistics on Simultaneous Enrolment

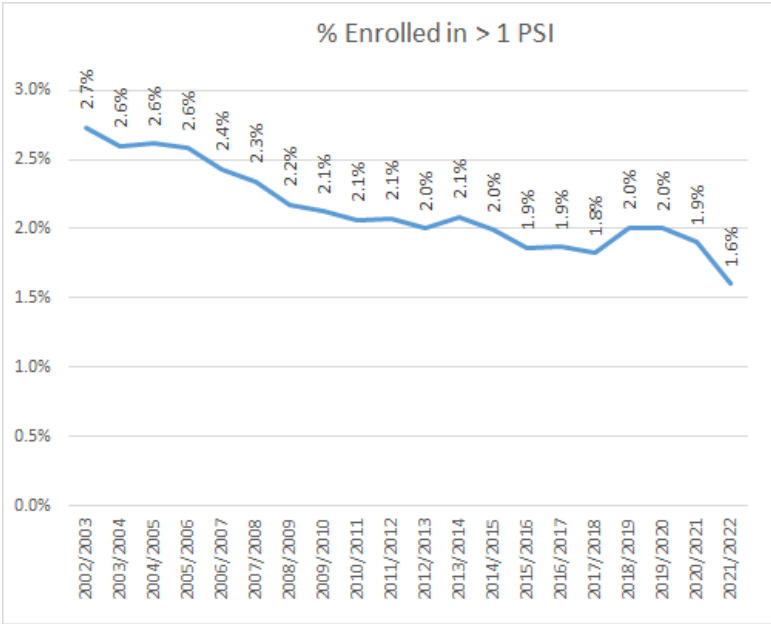
Data from the Student Transitions Project (STP) provide some indication of the extent and frequency of simultaneous enrolment in the BC public post-secondary system. There are two features of these data that should be noted. First, the STP only tracks enrolments in public post-secondary institutions. This is because the Personal Education Numbers (PENs) used by the STP to track student enrolment and mobility are only assigned to students in BC's public and private K-12 systems and public post-secondary systems. If a student at a public post-secondary institution is simultaneously enrolled in a private post-secondary institution, or vice versa, those enrolments will not be captured by the STP data.

Second, BC public post-secondary students may be simultaneously enrolled in more than two institutions. In fall 2021, there were 86 students enrolled in three institutions, and two enrolled in four institutions. However, these numbers are very small compared to the 4,901 students in the same semester enrolled in two institutions (Heslop, 2023). Therefore, discussions of simultaneous enrolment in BC usually focus primarily on students enrolled in two institutions.

The STP data also do not identify a "home" institution for simultaneously enrolled students. It may be reasonable to assume, for example, that a student taking five courses at Institution A and one course at Institution B intends to continue their education and/or complete a credential at Institution A. But given the many possible reasons for simultaneous enrolment, a student may be taking more courses at an institution other than the one where they plan to continue or graduate. As such, the STP analyses identify the institutions at which simultaneously enrolled students are enrolled, but do not assign designations of "home" or "visiting" for these institutions.

The percentage of simultaneously enrolled students in BC, as a percentage of total enrolments, has gradually declined over the past two decades. This decline is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Percentage of BC Public Post-Secondary Students Enrolled in More than One Institution, 2002-2003 to 2021-2022



Source: Student Transitions Project data

Table 4 shows the annual numbers of simultaneous enrolments and total enrolments in BC public post-secondary institutions, covering the same years as Figure 1. The percentage of simultaneous enrolments as part of total enrolments has declined partly because total enrolment numbers have increased. But there has also been a decline in the actual number of students that are simultaneously enrolled. This could be because of expanded programming options at many BC post-secondary institutions, including more institutions being mandated to offer undergraduate degrees. If students have access to more course or program choices at their current institution, that may reduce their desire or need to simultaneously take courses elsewhere.

Table 4: Simultaneous Enrolments and Total Enrolments in BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions, 2002-03 to 2021-22

Year	Number of Students Enrolled in One Institution	Number of Students Enrolled in Two Institutions	Number of Students Enrolled in Three or More Institutions	Total Student Enrolment	Percentage of Enrolled Students Enrolled in More Than One Institution
2002-03	252,479	6,917	179	259,575	2.7
2003-04	253,093	6,530	220	259,843	2.6
2004-05	255,837	6,685	189	262,711	2.6
2005-06	263,031	6,780	195	270,006	2.6
2006-07	269,755	6,563	160	276,478	2.4
2007-08	271,732	6,360	156	278,248	2.3
2008-09	282,553	6,123	164	288,840	2.2

Year	Number of Students Enrolled in One Institution	Number of Students Enrolled in Two Institutions	Number of Students Enrolled in Three or More Institutions	Total Student Enrolment	Percentage of Enrolled Students Enrolled in More Than One Institution
2009-10	295,716	6,263	157	302,136	2.1
2010-11	300,346	6,189	142	306,677	2.1
2011-12	301,644	6,225	172	308,041	2.1
2012-13	297,971	5,962	132	304,065	2.0
2013-14	302,944	6,359	104	309,407	2.1
2014-15	299,840	5,972	131	305,943	2.0
2015-16	301,181	5,622	102	306,905	1.9
2016-17	303,054	5,656	116	308,826	1.9
2017-18	309,390	5,668	98	315,156	1.8
2018-19	318,915	6,417	118	325,450	2.0
2019-20	323,720	6,510	108	330,338	2.0
2020-21	306,458	5,855	80	312,393	1.9
2021-22	305,907	4,901	88	310,896	1.6

Source: Student Transitions Project data

The number of simultaneously enrolled students has declined more rapidly between 2020-21 and 2021-22, in comparison to previous years, but this may be because of the impact of COVID-19 related closures at BC public post-secondary institutions. If students were able to take more courses online at their own institution during this time, that may have reduced their interest in taking online courses elsewhere. It is worth noting that the total number of BC public post-secondary students also noticeably declined between 2019-20 and 2021-22.

The STP data also categorize simultaneously enrolled students by the types of post-secondary institutions (research-intensive university, teaching-intensive university, institute, or college) where they are enrolled. For example, a simultaneously enrolled student categorized as "RIU-TIU" would be enrolled at a research-intensive university and at a teaching-intensive university.

Table 5a presents the total enrolments in each type of BC post-secondary institution in 2021-22. **Table 5b** presents the numbers of simultaneous enrolments during the same time, categorized by types of institutions. Comparing the data in **Tables 5a** and **5b** shows that while teaching-intensive universities represent only 22% of total enrolment in the BC public post-secondary system, they are part of the three most common pairings of institutions where students are simultaneously enrolled.

Table 5a: Enrolments in BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions Categorized by Institution Type, 2021-22

Type of Institution	Number of Students Enrolled in This Type of Institution	Percentage of Total Enrolment
Research-intensive university	123,928	41%
College	74,517	24%
Teaching-intensive university	68,063	22%
Institute	39,399	13%
TOTAL	305,907	100%

Source: Student Transitions Project data

Table 5b: Simultaneous Enrolments in BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions Categorized by Institution Types, 2021-22

Types of Institution	Number of Students Simultaneously Enrolled in These Types of Institution
Institute/Teaching-Intensive University	942
Research-Intensive University/Teaching-Intensive University	764
College/Teaching-Intensive University	754
College/Institute	691
Institute/Research-Intensive University	389
College/Research-Intensive University	293
College/Institute/Teaching-Intensive University	15
College/Research-Intensive University/Teaching-Intensive University	10
Institute/ Research-Intensive University/Teaching-Intensive University	6
College/Institute/Research-Intensive University	5

Source: Student Transitions Project data

Some BCTS member institutions also conduct internal research on the extent of simultaneous enrolment at their institution, either as stand-alone research or as a component of a larger research project. For example, BCIT’s 2023 engagement survey of its “flexible learning” (part-time) students indicated that seven percent of the 1,900 respondents were simultaneously enrolled at other public post-secondary institutions, with UBC, VCC, and Douglas College identified most often as the other institutions where students were taking courses. Fifty-four percent of the simultaneously enrolled BCIT students were taking one course elsewhere, 24% were taking two courses, and 22% were taking three or more courses (BCIT, 2023).

The Process of Simultaneous Enrolment in BC

At most BCTS member institutions, a currently enrolled student wishing to simultaneously enroll at another institution must request a Letter of Permission (LOP) from their institution. By issuing an LOP, the institution verifies that it is permitting the student to simultaneously enroll elsewhere. The LOP also serves as a record of the course(s) the student is planning to take at the other institution. If those courses are transferable, approval of the LOP usually also guarantees that the institution will grant transfer credit for the course – although, as previously mentioned, the applicability of that credit to the student’s program or credential may be restricted.

Depending on the institution’s procedures, LOPs are approved by the Registrar’s Office, Dean, program head, and/or an academic advisor.

A student wanting to take a course at another institution usually must also be admitted to that institution. They would usually be expected to meet the institution’s general admission criteria, and to meet pre-requisites or other enrolment criteria for the course(s) they plan to take. They usually must already have an LOP from their own institution before they apply for admission. LOPs are generally sent directly by the “sending” institution (where the student is currently enrolled) to the “receiving” institution (where the student will be taking the course), with a copy provided to the student.

Simultaneously enrolled students are usually admitted to other institutions in a category for students that are taking courses for credit, but who do not intend to complete a credential at the institution, or to transfer from their current institution. These admission categories have different names at different institutions: for example, “undeclared/no program” (UNBC), “visiting” (UVic, TRU, Okanagan College), and “non-degree studies” (UBC). Some BCTS member institutions set a maximum number of courses that students can take if they are admitted in these categories.

After the simultaneously enrolled student has completed the course at the other institution, they are generally required to provide their own institution with an official transcript from that institution. The transcript verifies that the student has completed the course and achieved the minimum grade required for transfer, and ensures that the transfer credit is added to the student’s record.

Since the credit that students acquire with an LOP is transfer credit, the transcription and applicability of the credit is governed by their institution’s transfer credit policy. Generally, a grade in a course taken elsewhere with an LOP will be added to the student’s transcript, but if the student has already taken the equivalent course at the institution, the grade for the transferred course will not replace the grade for the equivalent course (i.e. the grades for both courses will appear on the student’s transcript). The grade for the transferred course will usually not be included in the calculation of the student’s GPA.

Simultaneous Enrolment Policies and Procedures in BC

To further understand how simultaneous enrolment is managed in BC post-secondary institutions, two sets of data were collected. The first set was data from a review of institutional websites, to identify publicly available information on institutional practices around LOPs. The second was data from a survey of institutional representatives, to collect additional information on each institution’s LOP practices, and their experiences with simultaneous enrolment by their students. Both types of data were collected from the 40 institutional members of BC Transfer System.

Both data sets focus on LOPs issued by an institution for its own students to take courses elsewhere. Most institutions have policies and procedures around accepting LOPs for simultaneous enrolment by students at other institutions. However, the focus of this study is on institutions “sending” their own students to other institutions, rather than on institutions “receiving” other institutions’ students. At most institutions the process of “receiving” simultaneously enrolled students is not significantly different from other admissions processes, other than that in addition to meeting admissions requirements, these students must have an LOP confirming that they plan to take specific courses at the institution and then transfer those credits back to their own institution.

Each data set will be discussed separately.

Website Information

In summer 2024, the researcher visited the websites of each institutional member of the BC Transfer System to identify policies, practices or information around issuing letters of permission for their students to simultaneously enroll elsewhere. The relevant content was initially identified by site searches using the terms “simultaneous enrolment” and “letters of permission”. Since some institutions use the term “simultaneous enrolment” or a similar term such as “dual enrolment” to describe secondary school students that are also enrolled in post-secondary courses, the data collection did not rely solely on searches using terminology. It also included reviews of website resources where such information was likely to be found, such as policy manuals and academic calendars.

Only one BCTS member institution (Fairleigh Dickinson University) explicitly prohibits its students from simultaneously enrolling elsewhere.² Among the other 39 member institutions, 19 have either website information or policies outlining requirements for LOPs and/or simultaneous enrolment, and 13 have standardized forms that students must use to request an LOP. Links to the information available at each BCTS member institution website are presented in [Appendix A](#).

All of these institutions recommend that students request LOPs well in advance of when they plan to take a course elsewhere. The recommended times to request LOPs range from three months to six weeks in advance of enrolment.

All 19 institutions with publicly available information on simultaneous enrolment have these requirements for issuing LOPs.

- The LOP must be requested in advance of taking the course. Retroactive requests will not be accepted – i.e. the student cannot simultaneously enroll elsewhere, complete courses, and then request an LOP to transfer those course credits.
- The permission granted by the LOP only applied to the courses listed on the LOP – i.e. the student cannot request transfer credit for courses not named in the LOP if these are taken at the other institution while the student is simultaneously enrolled.
- The student is responsible for ensuring that the other institution's course is transferable.
- The student is responsible for ensuring that the other institution's course fulfills a requirement of their program, or fulfills some other academic requirement.
- The student must be in "good academic standing", generally defined as not being on academic probation, academic warning, or academic suspension.
- The other institution must be recognized by the student's institution, or have accreditation that is accepted by the student's institution.
- The student must not owe any fees at their institution.

All of these institutions recommend that students request LOPs well in advance of when they plan to take a course elsewhere. The recommended times to request LOPs range from three months to six weeks in advance of enrolment. Many institutions also state that they cannot guarantee a specific processing time for LOP requests, and/or that they will not process "rush" LOP requests. Four institutions charge fees to process LOP requests (\$5 at three, \$25 at one [only charged if the request involves a course not listed in the BC Transfer Guide]).

Most institutions also recommend that students planning to take a course elsewhere to complete a credential should take the course at least one semester in advance of their institution's deadline for graduation applications. If the course is taken in the same semester as the deadline, transcripts from the other institution may not be available in time for the student to apply for graduation.

² Another BCTS member institution (Royal Roads University) permits simultaneous enrolment, but states that "(f)ailure to disclose attendance at another post-secondary institution may lead to cancellation of the student's application or registration without reimbursement."

Other requirements vary by institution. The frequency of these different requirements is presented in [Appendix B](#). This appendix lists all the requirements that were identified, including those that only appeared at a single institution. The complete list is presented because this information may be useful to institutions developing or revising their own LOP-related policies or procedures. At UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan, LOPs are approved at the faculty level, rather than at the institutional level; the LOP requirements for these faculties (six at UBC Vancouver, seven at UBC Okanagan) are counted individually.³ Thompson Rivers University and Thompson Rivers University Open Learning have their own LOP policies, so these are also counted individually.

The requirements that were found at three or more institutions were:

- The student must have completed a minimum number of credits to request an LOP [number ranges from nine credits to 30 credits]
- The student must have achieved a minimum GPA in the semester preceding their LOP request [minimum ranges from 60% to 3.0]
- The LOP is only valid for a specified period of time [period ranges from one semester to one year]
- The student must be enrolled in a credential program
- The course taken with an LOP cannot be a core course in the student's program
- Specific subjects or course topics are not eligible to be taken elsewhere with an LOP
- There is a maximum number of credits that can be acquired through courses taken with LOPs
- Additional LOPs will not be issued to students after they have acquired a specified number of credits

The data presented in [Appendix B](#) indicate that most institutions have at least some eligibility requirements for students seeking LOPs. These requirements appear to be intended to ensure, as much as possible, that students are academically prepared to benefit from simultaneous enrolment, and/or to discourage students from using simultaneous enrolment to bypass the institution's own course or program regulations. Some institutions also have requirements to ensure that the courses students take through simultaneous enrolment are courses that supplement, rather than replace, the institution's own courses.

Another part of the website data collection focused on the reasons that institutions consider acceptable for granting a student's LOP request. Collecting these data was somewhat challenging, since, as mentioned, not every institution has a standardized LOP request form or template. Other institutions have posted information on acceptable and unacceptable reasons, but present this information as recommendations, not as rules or requirements. This may be because each student requesting an LOP will have different circumstances, and an unacceptable reason in some contexts might be an acceptable reason in others.

Table 6 presents the frequency of reasons that institutions identify as being acceptable or unacceptable reasons for LOP requests. These data are drawn from the same sources as the data in [Appendix B](#). In reviewing these reasons, it should be remembered that an institution's decision to grant an LOP may depend on the student's individual circumstances or on a combination of reasons, rather than on a single reason.

³ UBC Vancouver's nursing program and UBC Okanagan's Bachelor of Sustainability program do not issue LOPs. Some UBC faculties also specify that students cannot take courses at UBC during a semester when they are taking courses elsewhere.

Table 6b: Frequency of Acceptable and Unacceptable Reasons for LOP Requests

	Number of Respondents Reporting This Reason
<i>Acceptable</i>	2
Valid academic reason	2
Residing elsewhere ^a	2
Equivalent course at the institution is full or is not offered that semester	1
Course is not offered at the institution	1
Course is in a discipline not offered at the institution	1
Personal scheduling conflict	1
Course scheduling conflict	1
Course at other institution is equivalent to pre-requisite course at institution, and pre-requisite is not offered that semester	1
<i>Unacceptable</i>	
Less expensive tuition at the other institution	3
Other institution is closer to the student's home	3
<i>Other</i>	
[blank space on form for student to complete]	4

^a One institution defines this as residence in "another province or a remote location".
One institution defines this as residence outside the boundaries of a specified region in the institution's geographic location.

Institutions that do not have a standardized LOP request form or template generally require the student to submit a written LOP request. The request should include their student information, the name of the other institution, the name and the course code of the course(s) they want to take, and an explanation for their request. Most institutions require an official course outline for the course(s) at the other institution, especially if the course is not already listed as transferable in the BC Transfer Guide. One institution also requires students to submit an explanatory letter and a letter of support from an academic advisor along with its standardized form.

The final part of this data set was information on positions within institutions that have the authority to approve LOP requests. The frequency of the positions that are explicitly identified are shown in **Table 7**. Two institutions require an LOP request to be approved by multiple positions. Institutions with formal LOP policies and/or application forms or templates generally recommend that students meet with an academic advisor before applying for an LOP.

Table 7: Frequency of Positions Authorized to Approve LOP Requests

Position	Number of Respondents Identifying This Position
Registrar	5
Program/Department Head or Coordinator	4
Academic Advisor	3
Dean or Associate Dean	2

Survey of Institutional Representatives

In July 2024, an online survey was created and the survey link circulated to all 40 BC Transfer System member institutions, with a request for participation in the survey. If the institution's website indicated that letters of permission were managed by the registrar's office, the request was sent to the registrar. If there was no clear indication of where or how letters of permission were managed, the request for survey participation was sent to the Transfer Credit Contact (TCC) that acts as the institution's liaison with BCCAT. All requests asked the recipient to forward the survey link to a colleague, if they felt that another person would have better knowledge of LOPs at the institution. The survey questions are presented in [Appendix C](#).

Thirty responses were received, for a response rate of 75%. Twenty-two surveys were completed in full; the responses from the eight incomplete surveys were included in the analysis of each question for which a response was provided. Thus, the number of responses to some questions is less than the total number of respondents.

In reviewing the survey results, it was apparent that some questions received a relatively high number of "don't know" responses. This may be due to LOP requests potentially involving multiple departments at an institution. A single respondent in a single department may not have complete information about such issues as institution-wide trends in numbers or types of LOP requests. Thus, the survey results should be viewed with the caveat that respondents have provided the best information they have access to, but that information may not provide a complete picture of the LOP process or its characteristics at their institution.

Respondent Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the institutions responding to the survey are presented in **Tables 8a** and **8b**.

Table 8a: Institutions Participating in Survey, By Type

Institution Type	Number of Respondents
College	7
Research-intensive university	4
Private college	4
Teaching-intensive university	3
Private university	3
Institute	2
TOTAL	24

Table 8b: Institutions Participating in Survey, By Location

Institution Location	Number of Respondents
Southwestern/Lower Mainland	11
Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenay	5
Vancouver Island/Coast	2
Cariboo-North	2
Outside BC	2
TOTAL	23

The distribution of these demographic characteristics reflects the general geographic and institutional demographics of the BC Transfer System membership.

The LOP Process

The processes of granting LOPs described by the survey respondents were generally similar to the processes identified from the review of institutional websites, with some exceptions. First, while the majority of respondents (14) indicated that the registrar's office was responsible for approving LOPs, seven identified academic advisors as being able to approve LOPs. Six respondents stated that approvals from more than one area were required.

Characteristics of LOP Requests

Nine respondents did not know how many LOP requests were usually submitted each semester. Of those who were able to provide an estimate, eight respondents reported less than 10; one reported between 11 and 20; and three reported between 21 and 49.

Respondents were asked to indicate the geographic areas of the institutions for which students were requesting LOPs, and whether there were specific institutions for which students regularly requested LOPs. For both questions, respondents were asked to identify all responses that were applicable. These responses are summarized in **Tables 9a** and **9b**.

Table 9a: Regions for Which LOPs Were Requested

Region	Number of Respondents Identifying This Region
Other parts of BC	16
The same part of BC	15
Other Canadian provinces and territories	9
Alberta	8
United States	5
Europe	3
Asia	2
Africa	1

Table 9b: Post-Secondary Institutions for Which LOPs Are Regularly Requested

Institution	Number of Respondents Identifying This Institution
Thompson Rivers University	10
Athabasca University	6
BCIT	2
UBC Vancouver	2
UBC Okanagan	1
University of Alberta	1
University of Toronto	1
Seneca College	1
Fanshawe College	1
Algonquin College	1
University of Lethbridge	1
University of Northern BC	1
Langara College	1
Douglas College	1
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	1

These results indicate that students tend to request LOPs either for institutions that are geographically accessible to them, or for institutions that specialize in online courses. Since the majority of BC post-secondary institutions are located in the Lower Mainland, and it is feasible to travel between many of them by driving or public transit, it is surprising that the institutions in that region do not tend to be subjects of LOP requests. It appears that students seeking simultaneous enrolment may be more interested in online rather than in-person options.

Respondents were also asked whether there were any particular subjects or disciplines for which students regularly requested LOPs. Twelve respondents either did not know or did not see any identifiable patterns in their institution's LOP requests. Of those that did, the subjects or disciplines that were regularly identified in requests were commerce/business (six respondents), math/stats (four), English (three), computing/IT (two), criminology (two), and social sciences (two). Most respondents did not notice larger or smaller numbers of LOP requests in specific semesters. Eight respondents said that students occasionally request LOPs and then do not take the course(s) at the other institution; three respondents indicated that this happens regularly, and two indicated that it rarely happens.

Nine respondents reported that between 95% and 100% of LOP requests were approved in an average semester. The other four respondents to this question indicated that between 60% and 80% of requests were approved. Respondents were also asked to provide the most common reasons why LOP requests were denied; these responses are shown in [Appendix D](#). The most common reasons for denial were that the requested course was not transferable, or that it was not applicable to the student's program.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments or information on simultaneous enrolment by their institution's students. Three respondents stated that although their institution's policies required students to obtain an LOP before enrolling elsewhere, if a student requested transfer credit for a course they had taken elsewhere without an LOP, the credit would usually be granted. All three of these respondents added that some students are genuinely unaware that an LOP is required for simultaneous enrolment.

Three respondents commented that students seemed to use simultaneous enrolment as a way to avoid taking a course at their own institution that was perceived as exceptionally difficult or that had rigorous grading standards. One of these respondents mentioned that when students used LOPs to take courses elsewhere that they had already taken at the institution, they often seemed to get higher grades at the other institution. Finally, two respondents questioned whether LOPs are necessary in a post-secondary system that values student mobility, and that encourages students to utilize the opportunities available to them through BC's well-developed and extensive transfer credit system.

Discussion

Collectively, the analyses of these data sets indicate that institutions balance competing considerations when managing simultaneous enrolment by their students.

BC's transfer credit system gives students access to a wide range of post-secondary opportunities, including opportunities at institutions other than the one where they are currently enrolled. Students may want to take courses that are applicable to their program but that are not offered at their own institution. Students may need to temporarily enroll elsewhere because of unexpected events such as a geographic relocation for work. Students may also face situations such as needing credit for a particular course and not having access to the course at their own institution, because of limited numbers of timetabled sections, or limited availability of seats in those sections. Simultaneous enrolment through LOPs allows students to continue their post-secondary education in a timely fashion despite these circumstances.

However, a student taking a course elsewhere means the institution loses the tuition revenue it would have received from the student taking the course there. Ongoing or substantial revenue losses of this kind may be particularly concerning for institutions facing financial challenges. Simultaneous enrolment at other institutions also has implications for departments and programs around instructional workloads, timetabling, and resource allocation. For example, if students at an institution are regularly using LOPs to take a specific course elsewhere, that may reduce student demand for the institution's own equivalent course. That in turn may reduce the number of sections that are timetabled, and reduce the amount of work available for instructional faculty. These reductions can be especially problematic if students enrol elsewhere after a department or program has finalized timetables and instructional assignments for an upcoming semester.

A student taking a course elsewhere means the institution loses the tuition revenue it would have received from the student taking the course there. Ongoing or substantial revenue losses of this kind may be particularly concerning for institutions facing financial challenges.

It must also be acknowledged that students may request LOPs for reasons other than unexpected personal situations or institutional constraints. Students may have heard informally from other students, or from external sources, that a particular instructor or course at their institution is exceptionally challenging. That may motivate them to request an LOP to take the course elsewhere and avoid the perceived excessive workload, or improve their chances of passing the course.

Although these motivations are based on informal perceptions, it is also a reality that courses are not always as equivalent as they are assumed to be. Articulation agreements are based on informed assessments that courses are substantively equivalent, but courses may evolve over time without their articulations being revised, leading to one course possibly being less rigorous than a supposedly equivalent course. Individual course sections may also not be delivered at the comparable level of academic rigour that is implied by an articulation agreement.

Students may also attempt to use LOPs and simultaneous enrolment to bypass their own institution's policies, such as limits on the number of times a course can be retaken, or limits on the number of courses in which students can enroll during a semester or academic year.

As noted by some survey respondents, students may be unaware that an LOP is required for them to simultaneously enroll elsewhere. This finding is particularly worth highlighting in relation to the public visibility of the BC Transfer Guide, the wide range of transfer credit opportunities available to BC post-secondary students, and institutional recruitment and marketing strategies that emphasize the ease of student mobility. Students may be aware that they can easily transfer courses between BC Transfer System member institutions, but may not be aware that their current institution may require them to receive an LOP before they can take courses elsewhere at the same time.

Requiring LOPs for simultaneous enrolment allows the institution to monitor the numbers and types of LOP requests and to identify patterns, such as requests from multiple students to take the same course elsewhere at the same institution. These patterns may indicate issues with the institution's own course, or with perceptions of how the equivalent course is delivered at other institutions. The institution can then address these issues if necessary. Monitoring student performance in courses taken with LOPs may indicate whether the institution's policies or requirements around LOPs are supporting the success of students undertaking simultaneous enrolment. Monitoring student performance may also indicate whether there are noticeable differences between institutions in grading or student evaluation practices, which may need to be addressed collaboratively with other institutions.

Recommendations

1. Institutions may want to consider, based on their mandate and student demographics, whether they should require students to request LOPs for simultaneous enrolment.

The survey data collected for this report indicate that there are different philosophies within the BC Transfer System on the necessity for, and the usefulness of, LOPs as part of the simultaneous enrolment process. A decision for or against requiring LOPs for simultaneous enrolment may provide clarity to guide institutional policies and procedures, as well as providing the opportunity to revise policies or procedures accordingly.

2. Institutions requiring LOPs for students to take courses elsewhere should ensure that there is a clearly explained and standardized process for students to request LOPs, ideally related to a formal institutional policy on issuing and using LOPs. Information on this process should be easy for students to locate on the institution's website, and/or easy to obtain from other institutional sources (e.g. registrars' offices, academic advisors).

A clearly explained and standardized process ensures equity across the institution in how and why LOPs are granted. It also ensures that institutional resources supporting LOPs are used efficiently and appropriately. Making information on the LOP process easily available to students assists them in understanding LOPs and the process of obtaining one, and may reduce the number of problematic LOP applications.

3. While recognizing that students' reasons for and circumstances around requesting LOPs can vary quite widely, institutions issuing LOPs should consider implementing a standardized LOP request form.

A standardized form will facilitate staff and/or faculty assessment of LOP requests, and ensure that students provide the information necessary for an informed assessment of a request.

4. While recognizing that students' reasons for requesting LOPs can vary, institutions issuing LOPs should, as much as possible, clearly explain to applicants in advance the reasons why LOP requests may be approved or denied.

This may be particularly important if the institution has identified reasons that will always result in an LOP request being denied, regardless of the circumstances (e.g. the requested course not being transferable).

5. Institutions issuing LOPs should ensure that guidelines for LOP application, such as requiring students to have a minimum GPA to be eligible for an LOP, are evidence-based, and are designed to support students being successful when enrolling elsewhere.

Anecdotal information may suggest that another institution's course or program is not being delivered with comparable content or rigour to the institution's equivalent course or program. However, in keeping with the BC Transfer System guideline that "courses from other institutions should be treated as each institution would like its own courses to be treated" (BCCAT, 2023, p. 14), an institution's decision to restrict students' simultaneous enrolment elsewhere should be based on reliable and factual documentation. Similarly, guidelines or requirements limiting students' eligibility for LOPs should be based on indicators demonstrably related to student success.

6. Institutions issuing LOPs should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to ongoing and regular monitoring of LOP requests, and ongoing and regular monitoring of student performance in courses taken through LOPs, to identify and act upon trends that may require institutional action.

Monitoring LOP requests, and student performance in courses taken with LOPs, ensures that LOPs and simultaneous enrolment are being used appropriately, and that policies and guidelines around LOPs are achieving their desired outcomes. These benefits can only be realized if sufficient resources are allocated to support ongoing and regular monitoring.

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Appendix A:

BC Transfer System Member Institutions' Website Information on Simultaneous Enrolment and Letters of Permission

Institution	Policy on Letters of Permission and/or Simultaneous Enrolment	Form for Requesting Letter of Permission
Acsenda School of Management	None identified	None identified
Alexander College	None identified	None identified
Athabasca University	https://www.athabascau.ca/calendar/undergraduate/admission-registration-evaluation/letter-of-permission.html	Linked on password-protected page requiring student login for access
BC Institute of Technology	None identified	None identified
Camosun College	None identified	None identified
Capilano University	https://www.capilanou.ca/admissions/course-registration/registrarx-office/transcripts--forms/	https://www.capilanou.ca/media/capilanouca/admissions/course-registration/registrarx27s-office/Letter-of-Permission-Request.pdf
Coast Mountain College	None identified	None identified
College of New Caledonia	https://cnc.bc.ca/admissions/transfer/letter-of-permission	https://cnc.bc.ca/docs/default-source/admissions/transfer/letter-of-permission.pdf?sfvrsn=19cd8185_0
College of the Rockies	None identified	https://cotr.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Letter-of-Permission-FILLABLE-READER-2023.pdf
Columbia College	None identified	None identified
Coquitlam College	None identified	None identified
Corpus Christi College	https://corpuschristi.ca/current-students/#Policies ("Permission to study elsewhere" section)	None identified
Douglas College	None identified	None identified
Emily Carr University of Art + Design	https://www.ecuad.ca/student-life/student-services/student-services-forms#letter-of-permission	Not publicly posted
Fairleigh Dickinson University	https://www.fdu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/May-2019-Application-to-Take-Credits-at-Other-Accredited-Academic-Institutions.pdf	
Fraser International College	None identified	None identified
Justice Institute of BC	None identified	None identified
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	https://www.kpu.ca/transfercredit/LOP	https://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Registrar/LOP_form-Fillable.pdf
Langara College	None identified	None identified
LaSalle College Vancouver	None identified	None identified
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	None identified	None identified
North Island College	https://www.nic.bc.ca/admissions/advising/transfer-ability/	https://www.nic.bc.ca/pdf/letter-of-permission-request.pdf
Northern Lights College	https://www.nlc.bc.ca/schedule/Regulations/#transfer-credit	None identified
Okanagan College	https://www.okanagan.bc.ca/sites/default/files/2020-03/transfer_credit_policy.pdf	None identified

Institution	Policy on Letters of Permission and/or Simultaneous Enrolment	Form for Requesting Letter of Permission
Royal Roads University	https://www.royalroads.ca/letters-permission https://www.royalroads.ca/approval-external-transfer-credit	None identified
Selkirk College	None identified	None identified
Simon Fraser University	https://www.sfu.ca/students/calendar/2024/spring/fees-and-regulations/enrolment/policies-and-procedures.html#LOP	https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/students/enrolment-services/records/letter-of-permission/_jcr_content/main_content/download/file.res/Letter%20of%20Permission%20Application
Trinity Western University	https://www.twu.ca/academics/office-registrar/transfer-credit	https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/letter_of_permission.pdf
Thompson Rivers University (Distance)	https://www.tru.ca/distance/services/forms.html	https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/permission99.pdf
Thompson Rivers University	https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Visiting_Student_Status5676.pdf	https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Letter_of_Permission_Form29998.pdf
University of BC - Vancouver	https://students.ubc.ca/enrolment/registration/transfer-credits/letter-permission	None identified
University of BC - Okanagan	https://students.ok.ubc.ca/academic-success/degree-planning/study-options/	None identified
University Canada West	https://www.ucanwest.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/UCW-9004-Transfer-Credit-Policy.pdf	None identified
University of the Fraser Valley	https://www.ufv.ca/calendar/current/General/Transfer.htm	https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/admissions/forms/Request-for-Letter-of-Permission-final-Feb-3-2023.pdf
University of Northern BC	https://www.unbc.ca/registrar/letter-permission	https://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/registrar/letteofpermissionrequestform-april2023.pdf
University of Victoria	None identified	https://www.uvic.ca/services/advising/assets/docs/forms/letter-of-permission.pdf
Vancouver Community College	None identified	None identified
Vancouver Island University	https://isapp.viu.ca/PolicyProcedure/docshow.asp?doc_id=21122 https://isapp.viu.ca/PolicyProcedure/docshow.asp?doc_id=21124	None identified
Western Community College	None identified	None identified
Yukon University	https://www.yukonu.ca/sites/default/files/policies/AR%200.0%20Academic%20Regulations%20Jul%201%202024-Jun%2030%202025_FINAL.pdf sec 3.03	None identified
Yorkville University	https://yorkvilleu.ca/app/uploads/2024/03/BC-Academic-Calendar-Mar-202496.pdf p. 29	None identified

Appendix B:

Frequencies of Letter of Permission Requirements at BC Transfer System Member Institutions

Requirement	Number of Institutions with This Requirement	Additional Details
Student must have completed a minimum number of credits to request an LOP	10	Nine credits (5), 12 credits (2), 24 credits (2), 30 credits (1)
Student must have a minimum GPA in the semester immediately preceding their request for an LOP	6	70% (1), 68% (2), 65% (1), 60% (2), 3.0 (in most recent 12 credits of study) (1)
LOP is only valid for specified period of time	6	One year (2); one semester (2); the semester when it was issued plus the two following semesters (1); date range stated on the LOP application (1)
Student must be enrolled in a credential-granting program to be eligible for LOP	4	Degree program (2); degree, certificate, or diploma program (2)
Course taken with LOP cannot be a core course in student's program	3	
Specific subjects/courses at other institutions are not eligible to be taken elsewhere with LOPs	3	English (2), Kinesiology (1)
There is a maximum number of program credits that can be acquired through courses taken with LOPs	3	9 (1), 6 (2)
LOPs will not be issued to students after they have acquired a specific number of credits	3	90 (1), 60 (2)
A course taken with a LOP cannot be a course also offered at student's own institution	2	
Course at other institution must have a supervised final examination to be eligible for LOP	2	
To be eligible for LOP, student must not have failed any courses in their most recent semester of study	2	
After completing a course with a LOP, in addition to submitting transcript from other institution, student must submit formal request for LOP credit to be added to their record	2	
LOPs will not be issued in current semester after the course withdrawal date	2	
Number of course(s) taken with LOPs, in combination with any other courses taken that semester, must not exceed maximum permitted course load	2	No additional specifications (1); student can apply for permission to exceed maximum course load (1)
Student must have completed minimum number of semesters of study to be eligible for an LOP	1	One semester
Student must have a minimum overall GPA to be eligible for LOP	1	2.0 (1)
Course taken with an LOP must be at same academic level as student's current enrolment	1	
Student must have declared a major or a minor to be eligible for LOP	1	
LOPs will only be issued for first- or second-year elective courses	1	
There is a maximum number of courses per semester that a student can take with LOP	1	one course
The student must not have failed a course due to academic misconduct in any of their most recent four semesters of study	1	

Appendix C:

Survey on Letters of Permission

The BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) is currently conducting a study of simultaneous enrolment in BC, focusing on the role of Letters of Permission (LOPs) in that process. Simultaneous enrolment is when a student is enrolled in two or more post-secondary institutions at the same time. LOPs permit students to take courses elsewhere, while remaining enrolled at their own institution.

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how BC post-secondary institutions issue LOPs. The study will also assess the impact of simultaneous enrolment across the BC post-secondary system.

Your participation in this survey about LOPs is very much appreciated, as your responses will provide valuable data for the study.

Please note that "simultaneous enrolment" as defined in this study does not include dual credit or other programs in which secondary school students take post-secondary courses.

This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Please be sure to click the "submit" button on the last page, for your responses to be recorded.

All data will be anonymized in the report on the study, so that no individual institution will be identifiable.

If another person at your institution is responsible for the areas that the survey addresses, please feel free to forward the survey link to them.

If you have questions about this survey or about the study, please contact Dr. Fiona McQuarrie, Special Projects Officer, BCCAT (fmcquarrie@bccat.ca) or Mike Winsemann, Director, Transfer and Technology, BCCAT (mwinsemann@bccat.ca).

Thank you for your participation!

1) Does your institution permit students to be simultaneously enrolled at the institution and at another post-secondary institution?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Not sure

If not, why not?

2) Does your institution have a formal policy or procedure around issuing Letters of Permission (LOPs) to students?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

3) Who approves LOPs at your institution? Please check all that apply.

- Registrar's office
- Dean, Associate Dean, or Dean's office
- Program or department head
- Academic advisor
- Other (please describe)
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

4) Does your institution have a standard template or form for LOP requests?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

5) In an average semester, approximately how many student requests for LOPs are submitted?

- Less than 10
- 11-20
- 21-49
- 50-75
- 76-100
- More than 100 (please provide a number)
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

6) When students request LOPs to simultaneously attend other institutions, where are those institutions located? Please select all that apply.

- In the same part of BC as my institution
- Other parts of BC
- Alberta
- Other Canadian provinces or territories
- United States

- Europe
- Asia
- Other regions (please describe)
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

**7) Are there specific post-secondary institutions that students regularly request LOPs to attend?
If so, please identify those institutions.**

8) Are there particular course subjects or topics that students regularly request LOPs for?

- Yes (please specify)
- No
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

9) Are LOPs requested more often for certain semesters?

- Yes, to take courses between September and December
- Yes, to take courses between January and April
- Yes, to take courses between May and August
- No, the number of requests for each semester is approximately the same
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

**10) Most institutions have criteria that students must meet to be eligible for an LOP.
Please indicate the criteria that are used at your institution.**

- The student must be in good academic standing (e.g. not on academic probation or academic suspension)
- The student must not have any unpaid fees
- The student must have a minimum GPA or grade percentage (please specify)
- The student must have completed a minimum number of credits or semesters (please specify)
- The student must specify the course(s) they plan to take at the other institution

- The course(s) at the other institution must be transferable
- The student must consult with an academic advisor before submitting the request
- The other institution must be accredited or recognized, by the institution and/or by an external organization
- The student cannot have already taken the course(s) at the other institution(s) (i.e. LOPs are not issued retroactively)
- There is a maximum number of courses per semester that a student can take elsewhere using an LOP (please specify)
- The student's courseload for the semester, including the LOP course(s), cannot exceed a maximum number of hours or credits (please specify)
- Additional criteria [please describe]
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

11) Are students required to provide a reason for requesting an LOP?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

Please list the most common reasons given by students.

12) Does your institution grant an LOP for individual courses, or for multiple courses?

- Students must apply for a separate LOP for every course they want to take elsewhere
- Students can apply for a single LOP that covers multiple courses at another institution (if there is a maximum number of courses allowed, please indicate that number)
- Don't know/Not sure
- Not applicable

13) Are there any noticeable demographic differences in LOP requests? (e.g. male students requesting LOPs more often than female students). If so, please describe these differences.

**14) In an average semester, what percentage of LOP requests are granted?
Please indicate the percentage using the slider below.**

15) What are the most common reasons for rejecting LOP requests?

16) Has the annual number of LOP requests changed over the past decade?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

17) Do students ever request LOPs and then not take the course(s) at the other institution?

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- Yes, rarely
- Never
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

18) Is there a maximum number of LOPs that a student can receive? Please choose all relevant answers.

- Yes, a maximum number of LOPs per semester (please provide the number)
- Yes, a maximum number of LOPs per academic year (please provide the number)
- Yes, a maximum number of LOPs during their enrolment at the institution (please provide the number)
- No
- Don't know/not sure
- Not applicable

19) If you have any other comments or observations about LOPs at your institution, or about simultaneous enrolment elsewhere by your institution's students, please include them here.

The information from the next two questions will only be used to categorize survey responses. No individual institution or respondent will be identifiable in the report.

20) What type of post-secondary institution do you work at?

- Publicly funded research-intensive university
- Publicly funded teaching-intensive university
- Publicly funded college
- Publicly funded institute
- Private university
- Private college

21) Where is your institution located?

- Southwestern/Lower Mainland
- Vancouver Island/Coast
- Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenay
- Cariboo-North
- Outside BC

Thank you for your participation!

Please be sure to click the "Submit" button below, to ensure that your responses are recorded.

Appendix D:

Frequency of Reasons for Denying LOP Requests

Reason	Number of Respondents Giving This Reason
Course identified in LOP request is not transferable	5
Course identified in LOP request is not applicable to program	4
Course identified in LOP request is available at this institution	2
Student has already taken the maximum allowable number of courses elsewhere, as outlined in residency requirement	2
Course identified in LOP request will be offered next semester at this institution	1
Student is not in good standing	1
Other institution is not recognized by this institution	1
Course identified in LOP request is not an undergraduate academic course	1
Course identified in LOP request is a required course and student has failed it twice at this institution	1
Student's reason for requesting LOP is not an academic reason	1
LOP request is retroactive	1
Student is requesting more than the maximum allowable number of LOP courses	1
Student has not provided sufficient information on the other institution's course(s)	1

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