

TRANSCRIPT ASSESSMENT STUDIES: What Transfers? What Doesn't?

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Introduction

The B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer has the mandate to ensure that students are able to transfer credit as they move among B.C. post-secondary institutions, and therefore has sponsored a number of research studies in order to assess students' transfer experience. These have included

in-depth interviews with students contemplating future and reflecting on past experiences,¹ as well as analyses of former college and institute students' responses to transfer related survey questions.² Transcript assessment studies were undertaken by Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria

on behalf of the Council in order to assess whether students receive appropriate credit. These were based on the need to test students' reports of transfer credit problems. This document will outline the findings of these studies and recommend follow-up to the B.C. post-secondary system.

The Studies

The primary objective of the transcript assessment studies undertaken by B.C.'s three largest universities was to assess what proportion of credits earned by students at a college was granted by the university upon transfer, and where transfer credit was not granted, to identify the reasons why. These studies involved analysis of the transcripts of a random sample of B.C. college transfer students entering each university in 1998. The UBC sample was based on a proportion of the applicants admitted to the five largest undergraduate degree programs. Information was organized by sending institution and region, and faculty of admission. Type of credit granted was also included (assigned versus unassigned). Those interested in the full reports can locate them on the Council Web site: www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/pubsfs.htm

The Findings

General

All three studies found that students transferring to university had a high level of success with the courses they attempted at college. Prior to entering university, those transferring to SFU and UBC successfully completed about 95% of the college course credits they attempted, while the figure for students entering UVic was 99%. The average number of college credits earned was highest for those students transferring to SFU (56) while students transferring

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1 Andres, Lesley, UBC, *Investigating Transfer: The Students' Perspective*, Phases I & II, 1997 and 1998.

2 GDA Research and Information Systems Inc., *An Assessment of British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education Transfer Issues: the Student Perspective*, March 1998.

to UVic and UBC averaged 51 and 50 credits respectively.

General information about the sample of students whose transcripts were analyzed is highlighted in Table 1.

Key Findings

Figure 1 compares the average number of credits that students earned at college with the average number of credits successfully transferred to university. Stated as a percentage, B.C. college transfer students received transfer credit from the universities for 85% of the credits they earned at college. The percentage was lower for Science students (79% at SFU and UBC; 83% at UVic), while the highest percentages at each institution were for students in Arts (SFU - 87%), Human Kinetics (UBC - 91%), and Fine Arts (UVic - 93%).

Those reading the full UVic report will note that 89% of “potentially transferable” college credits were granted by UVic, a figure which excludes those courses not transferable by definition (ESL, ABE, vocational and career/technical). Taking these courses into account, as was done by SFU and UBC, allows a direct comparison of the three universities’ findings. The result is that students entering UVic received transfer credit for 85% of the credits they earned at college, the same finding as that of SFU and UBC.

**THE
KEY FINDING**
**is that B.C. college
transfer students entering
the universities receive
credit for the vast
majority of college
credits earned.**

As shown in Table 2, all three studies identify the reasons why transfer credit was not granted for 15% of the college credits presented by applicants. These average out to 8.3 credits per student entering SFU, 7.5 for those entering UBC, and 7.2 for UVic students (after correcting for the difference in the UVic study design).

The most significant reason credits were not granted by all three universities was that the courses were not articulated; that is, transfer credit

had not been negotiated by the college offering the course. This reason applied to almost 50% of those courses which were not granted credit. For the most part, courses are not articulated because they are not university level (e.g., a high school level or college preparatory course) or are from programs not intended for transfer, such as vocational or applied fields. As noted in the UBC report, some courses are not articulated because students complete subjects not offered at that university.

A list of all courses not granted transfer credit is found in the appendices of the three reports. A brief analysis of these reveals that among them are several that appear to be university level, or that receive credit at one but not another university.

With the exception of SFU, the way in which the data were analyzed does not indicate how many of the non-articulated courses were considered by the

Table 1: The Sample

University	Definition of Transfer Student	Top Faculties in Sample (in order)	Top Sending Institutions in Sample	B.C. Colleges Not Represented in Sample
SFU	Min. 30 semester credits	Arts, Business Admin., Science, Applied Sciences, Education	Kwantlen (28%) Douglas (25%) Capilano (16%)	COTR, VCC
UBC	Min. 24 semester credits	Arts, Science, Commerce, Applied Science, Human Kinetics	Langara (26%) Kwantlen (19%) Capilano (17%)	Columbia, Northern Lights, VCC
UVic	Min. 24 semester credits (12 units)	Social Science, Humanities, Science, Education, Fine Arts	Camosun (30%) Malaspina (15%) Okanagan (13%)	VCC

Table 2: Reasons Credit Not Granted

Reason	Percentage of Credits Not Granted			
	SFU	UBC	UVic	Average
1. Course not articulated	53%	42%	52%	49%
2. University course weighted less	18%	27%	37%	27%
3. Duplicate course already granted credit	2%	8%	9%	6%
4. Maximum transfer credit exceeded in program	21%	6%	n/a	n/a
5. Maximum transfer credit exceeded in subject/yr. level	2%	7%	n/a	n/a
6. Course not sufficient on own to receive credit	5%	4%	3%	4%
7. Not for credit in specific university program	n/a	7%	n/a	n/a
8. Low pass grade	n/a	n/a	0.5%	n/a
	*101%	*101%	*101.5%	n/a

* Totals for each institution do not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

researchers to be “university level”. Although the data in Table 2 appear to indicate that UVic and SFU have a higher percentage of non-articulated courses than UBC, we know from an analysis of the *B.C. Transfer Guide* that UVic has the largest number of courses transferable from B.C. sending institutions (colleges, university colleges and one institute), with UBC listing the least.

Another important reason credit was not granted was due to the differences in credit weighting of courses among institutions. For example, several colleges (Kwantlen University College in particular) assign 4 or more credits to Science courses while the equivalent university course is assigned only 3 credits. Most affected by this discrepancy were students enrolled in Science and Applied Science at UBC and SFU, and those enrolled in Business, Engineering and Science at UVic.

The variety of other reasons credit was not granted account for a small percentage of the total, as outlined in Table 2. The one

Figure 1: Average Number of Credits Per Student

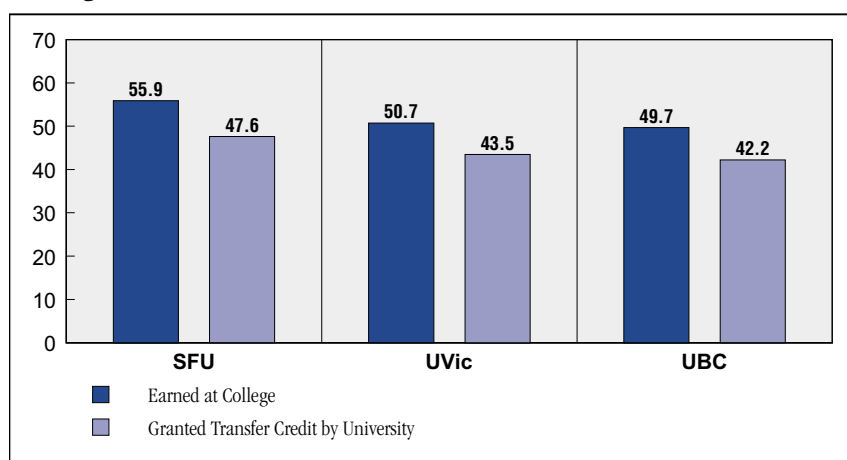
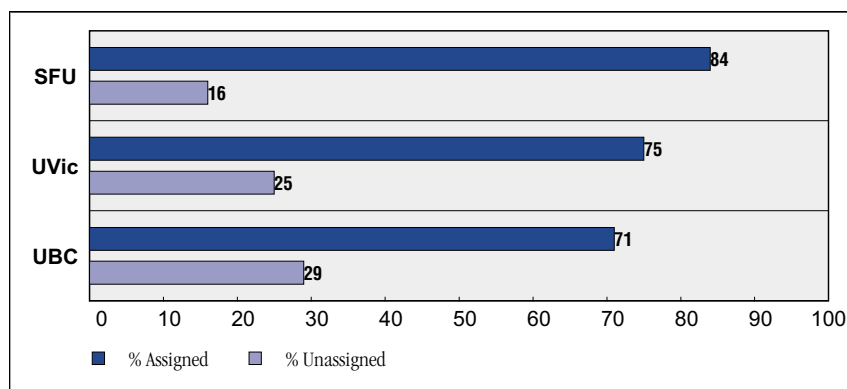


Figure 2: Type of Credit (as a % of total transfer credit granted)



exception is the 21% of credits not granted by SFU as a result of students bringing with them more credit than they are allowed to transfer into their SFU program.

The three studies analyzed the type of credit that was granted by each university, as either “assigned” (equivalent to a specific university course) or “unassigned” (considered a university level course but not matching a specific university course). The proportion of unassigned course credit (SFU – 16%; UVic – 25%; and UBC – 29%) is shown in **Figure 2**. The UBC figure probably includes instances where a one-semester course cannot earn assigned credit as it must be combined with another course to equate to a full-year course at UBC. The highest percentages of unassigned credit are in Fine Arts at UVic (39%) and Arts at UBC (38%). The lowest percentages are in Engineering at UVic (7%) and Science at SFU (9%).

**THE MAIN REASON
courses didn't transfer ?
They were not articulated.**

- examine their own courses, both those listed in the appendix of each report as well as additional non-articulated university level courses, to see which ones it may be appropriate to articulate with receiving institutions.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The key findings of these studies are that B.C. college transfer students entering the universities receive credit for the vast majority of college credits earned. Credits that do not transfer are primarily from programs not designed for transfer or from pre-university programs such as English as a Second Language or Adult Basic Education. However, two reasons for non-transfer, non-articulation of courses and different credit weighting, warrant further consideration as noted in the following recommendations.

Sending institutions are encouraged to:

- inform students about those courses and programs which are not intended for transfer. In this way, students will have realistic expectations about the transfer credit they will or will not receive;
- advise students in the event that they routinely assign higher credit values to Science courses. Thus informed, students will know that they will receive the same number of credits that the receiving institutions give their own students taking the equivalent university course; and

Receiving institutions are encouraged to:

- upon initiation by sending institutions, grant unassigned credit for a university level course for which there is no equivalent subject at the university, in accordance with the Council's Principles and Guidelines for Transfer.³ Increasing the number and range of university level courses that are transferable will be helpful to students who wish to complete their programs in a timely and cost-effective manner.

The results of the transcript assessment studies quantify the experiences of students who transfer from a college to a university. They confirm that some transfer problems can be addressed through improved articulation of courses and that the overall transfer experience can be enhanced by making accurate and timely information available to students.

BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON
ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

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³ The Principles and Guidelines for Transfer can be found at: www.bccat.bc.ca/artic/articfs.htm