Enhancing College to University Transfer in Ontario, Canada

Community College Baccalaureate Association Conference
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Overview

- Postsecondary system design in Ontario – some context
- Postsecondary credit transfer in Ontario – some history
- A new direction for credit transfer – process and outcomes
- Toward a new transfer framework
- Lessons learned
- Questions and answers
PSE System Design

- 20 universities, 24 colleges, Francophone and Anglophone institutions
- Binary system – two distinct mandates for colleges and universities
- No lower division transfer mandate for colleges
- Little history of formal coordination between PSE sectors
- Degree granting authority restricted
- High levels of university autonomy
PSE in Ontario – Some Context

- Traditional academic mandate for universities
- 1967 – Colleges established with mandate for advanced, applied, occupationally-oriented education
- 1990s – Vision 2000 – new vision for colleges
  - Increased emphasis on general education and generic skills
  - Shift to learning outcomes for courses and programs
  - Development of provincial program standards
    - Identify graduate knowledge, skills and abilities
    - Define common outcomes for all program graduates
    - Colleges commit to meeting program learning outcomes for all graduates
PSE in Ontario – Some Context

- Growth of the knowledge economy
  - More students want blend of theory and application
  - More jobs require degree
  - More college graduates look for degree completion opportunities
  - New university–college collaborative programming developed to meet need

- Students increasingly mobile – access a greater issue

- 2001 – some colleges authorized to offer degrees in applied areas of study
  - Provincial program standards for diploma programs form basis for system–wide pathways to college degrees
Credit Transfer in Ontario – Some History

- Some joint activity, ad hoc arrangements, “understandings” evolved
- 1996 – College University Consortium Council (CUCC) established
- 1999 – sector agreement on minimum transfer reached
- By October 2010:
  - 516 transfer pathways
  - Majority are bilateral agreements
  - Majority lack specificity regarding number/use of credits
  - 70 degree completion block transfer pathways – 33 are bilateral, 37 are multilateral
  - 406 college to university degree completion agreements with some specified or unspecified credit transfer; 25% specify at least one of the credits that will be granted
  - 40 college–university Collaborative programs – majority are bilateral and lack transfer pathway from diploma program
Government establishes student mobility as a provincial priority

Ministry creates Credit Transfer Steering Committee and Working Group
- Council of Ontario Universities
- Colleges Ontario
- Three student organizations

Goal is to enhance credit transfer
- Access and choice
- Clarity and certainty
- Build on unique characteristics of the Ontario system
Design Questions

- **Credit transfer**
  - Inter- or intra-sectoral or both?
  - Lower-division transfer mandate?

- **Pathways**
  - Bilateral or multilateral?
  - System-wide, regional, institutional or a combination?

- **Participation**
  - Mandated or voluntary?
  - Incentives, accountability indicators or both?

- **Transfer credits and processes**
  - Transparent and student friendly?
  - Clear and certain?
  - Provincial or institutional standards?
  - Course-based or block credits?

- What **resources** and **supports** for transfer students are provided?
- Is there a **research** capability to track institutional performance and student success?
Consultation and Research

- Implications of system design
- Stakeholders’ views
- Best practices – literature, other jurisdictions
- Agreement on principles
- Credit transfer vision endorsed by Steering Committee, August 2009
By 2015, Ontario will have a comprehensive and consistently applied credit transfer mechanism that facilitates and promotes student mobility, by assisting qualified students to move between publicly funded postsecondary institutions without repeating prior, relevant learning successes.
Transfer Models: Inspirations

- CUCC Change Fund projects
- Ontario program standards – college diploma to degree pathways
- Experience with pathways to college degrees
- Canadian transfer conference, 2009 – Michael Skolnik keynote address
  - University programs for transfers from college applied programs:
    - "Career ladder program" – upper level courses in the area of the major (College degrees in applied studies)
    - "Management ladder degree" – often a BAS (Business Administration)
    - "Upside down degree" – often a Bachelor of General studies
Transfer pathways
- Institutional – college to college, university to university
- Sectoral – college to university, university to college
- Credential – certificate to diploma to degree
- Student status – in progress or graduate

Elements of transfer pathways:
- Partners in the student pathway
- Curriculum analysis – process through which learning equivalency is determined
- Credit transfer mechanism – how credit is applied to the student’s program
Element One – Partners

Partnerships

Bilateral

Multilateral

System

Multi-institutional

Regional

Language
Element Two
Curriculum Analysis

Course-by-course comparison

Analysis of Program Learning Outcomes

Recognition of credential for entry to specially designed degree completion program; based on level of learning competency
Element Three
Transfer Credit Mechanism

Direct entry with course credit toward degree requirements
- Assigned
- Not Assigned

Direct entry to a specific point in a program with block credit
- With Bridge
- Without Bridge

Direct entry with course credits toward program requirements
- Assigned
- Not Assigned

Direct entry with undifferentiated block credit equal to a specific entry point of a degree (usually 3rd year)
- With Bridge
- Without Bridge

Major
Elective
Ontario Credit Transfer Models

Course-by-course comparison

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Recognition of credential for entry to specially designed degree completion program; based on level of learning competency

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Direct entry with course credit toward degree requirements

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Assigned Not Assigned

With Bridge Without Bridge

Assigned Not assigned

With Bridge Without Bridge

Major Elective
Answers to Framing

- First phase – **inter-sectoral** transfer; college diploma to university degree
- **Multilateral/system** degree completion pathways
- Graduates of college programs
- **High affinity** programs with **provincial standards**
- **Specially designed programs** for general or low affinity programs
- **System-wide course transfer** for General Arts and Science
- **Institutional determination** of nature of participation
- **Accountability measures**
Next steps

- **Innovation fund** to facilitate development of preferred pathways
- Development of **accountability indicators**
- Development of **transfer portal**
- Expansion of **coordinating function**
- Development of **research capacity**
Lessons Learned

- Political commitment
- Ministry leadership
- Engagement of stakeholders
- Research and consultation
- Design must reflect PSE system – play to strengths
- Openness to issues, concerns, design possibilities
- Iterative, organic – build on unique strengths
- Patience
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