

Assessing Sending Institutions Outside the BC Transfer System

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

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BCCAT

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Columbia College

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North Island College

Quest University

Royal Roads University

Simon Fraser University

Trinity Western University

University of BC (Vancouver and Okanagan)

University of Northern BC

Yukon University

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Executive Summary

At many BC Transfer System member institutions, an evaluation of and decision on a transfer credit request includes an assessment of the sending institution. This assessment generally involves an examination of the sending institution's characteristics to determine whether the sending institution is academically comparable to the receiving institution.

The purpose of this study is to review the criteria that BC Transfer System (BCTS) member institutions use to assess sending institutions, in the context of transfer credit requests, and to provide recommendations in relation to this process. Because each BCTS member institution has its own mandate and programming, the study does not provide recommendations for "best practices"; instead, the study provides contextual information and suggestions for institutions developing or revising their policies or practices around this process.

A comparative analysis indicates that of the 39 BCTS member institutions, 21 have specific evaluation criteria for domestic sending institutions, and 16 have specific evaluation criteria for international sending institutions. The evaluation criteria range from short descriptors such as "recognized" and "accredited" to detailed explanations of specific characteristics that the institution and/or course must have in order for transfer credit to be awarded.

Additionally, when the sending institution in a transfer credit request is outside Canada, 17 BCTS member institutions recommend or require a transcript evaluation by an external evaluation agency. All of the recommended or required evaluations include an evaluation of the academic comparability of the sending institution.

The recommendations arising from the analysis are:

- Each BC Transfer System member institution should define the institutional characteristics that it considers indicators of acceptable academic comparability for sending institutions, in the context of transfer credit.
- Each BC Transfer System member should ensure that its policies and procedures for assessing sending institutions align with and reflect the institutional characteristics it has identified.
- Each BC Transfer System member institution should clearly communicate to internal and external audiences, on a regular basis, the specific characteristics that sending institutions are expected to possess to be considered academically comparable, for the purposes of granting transfer credit.



The purpose of this study is to review the criteria that BC Transfer System member institutions use to assess sending institutions, in the context of transfer credit requests, and to provide recommendations in relation to this process.

- BC Transfer System member institutions using external assessments (e.g. association membership, accreditation, transcript evaluation service) to evaluate sending institutions should regularly review the institutional characteristics used by external assessors, and ensure that these align with the institutional characteristics the institution itself has identified as indicators of acceptable academic comparability.
- If acceptable institutional characteristics vary at the program level (e.g. if an occupational regulatory body licenses programs at both public and private post-secondary institutions), BC Transfer System member institutions should consider how to accommodate these program-level variations when assessing the academic comparability of sending institutions.

Introduction

The assessment of transfer credit requests at BC Transfer System member institutions often includes an assessment of the sending institution - the institution where the student completed the course for which they are requesting credit. This assessment usually occurs if the sending institution is not a member of the BC Transfer System (BCTS). The assessment reviews specific characteristics of the sending institution, with the intention of determining whether the institution is academically comparable to the receiving institution, or whether it has an acceptable external validation of its quality. The results of this assessment are combined with other information, such as comparisons of course content, to determine whether the receiving institution should award transfer credit for the sending institution's course.

Assessing the sending institution as part of assessing transfer credit requests has become more important as inter-provincial and international student mobility increases. In the 2016/17 academic year, there were 58,591 international students enrolled in BC public post-secondary institutions, more than double the number enrolled in 2007/08 (Heslop, 2018). Not all of these students request transfer credit, and not all transfer requests involving institutions outside the BCTS come from international students. But it is reasonable to infer that BCTS member institutions will receive more transfer credit requests involving non-BC post-secondary institutions when more students from outside BC or Canada enroll in BC post-secondary programs.

Equality between institutions is one of the foundations of the BCTS. The Principles and Guidelines for Transfer of the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT), which coordinates the BCTS, state that "students should not be required to retake courses successfully completed elsewhere" (BCCAT, 2010, para 1[b]). BCCAT's principles also state that "[v]ariations in institutional programs that reflect differing missions, context, expertise, and modes of delivery should be respected and accommodated" (BCCAT, 2010, para 3[c]). In other words, if a sending institution's program or course is not structured like a similar program or course at the receiving institution, those structural differences should not be interpreted as evidence that one institution is more academically credible than the other. A transfer credit application should not be rejected simply because of such differences. Nevertheless, evaluating equality between different institutional structures, content, curricula, and practices can pose challenges in assessing the academic comparability of sending institutions.

The purpose of this research project is to review and assess the criteria used by BCTS member institutions to evaluate the academic comparability of institutions outside the BCTS as part of evaluating transfer credit requests. These institutions could be BC-based institutions that are not part of the BCTS, institutions in other parts of Canada, or institutions outside Canada. This project is not intended to produce a list of the "best" evaluation criteria, nor to advocate that all BCTS member institutions use the same criteria. The appropriate evaluation criteria for a particular institution will depend on that institution's own mandate and programming. This project is intended to provide a comparative context for institutions examining their own assessment criteria, and to make recommendations for consideration by those developing or revising such criteria.

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Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify the report's terminology. The terms "legitimacy" and "legitimate" are sometimes used in descriptions of the perceived credibility or quality of an organization. "Legitimacy" can be a collective judgement by a group of established or influential organizations as to whether another organization displays enough similarity to them to be included in their group (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). "Legitimacy" can also refer to a perceptual judgement based on implicitly accepted norms and behaviours, or to a status granted after a formal process of evaluation using explicitly stated standards. (For an exploration of legitimacy judgements in the context of post-secondary education, see e.g. Levin, López Damián, Martin, & Vázquez [2018].)

Thus, the process of assessing "legitimacy" is a subjective process that may have negative outcomes. When evaluators determine "legitimacy" in reference to their own perceptions or to established evaluation standards, the outcome may unjustly exclude or denigrate organizations with positive qualities outside those specific frames of reference. This report uses the term "academic comparability" as a generalized descriptor of the characteristics that post-secondary institutions are looking for when evaluating other post-secondary institutions in the context of a transfer credit request. When the term "legitimacy" appears in this report, it is not intended as a value judgement on the overall quality or credibility of a specific post-secondary institution, or of a type of institution.

This report begins with a review of relevant literature. It then provides a contextual overview of formal post-secondary systems in Canada, such as accreditation and quality assurance, that incorporate institutional assessments. It then reviews the criteria used by BCTS member institutions to assess the academic comparability of institutions outside the BCTS, and concludes with recommendations.

Literature Review

Most of the existing literature around institutional assessment addresses the issue of accreditation, mostly in the context of the American post-secondary system. This literature is relevant to the central theme of this project, because the process of awarding accreditation usually includes an assessment of the institution's academic quality. Stakeholders' or assessors' own perceptions of institutional characteristics can also affect whether the institution is considered legitimate or credible for the purposes of accreditation.

The literature on accreditation addresses this topic from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. The theoretical perspective identifies and explores the implicit assumptions underlying accreditation processes. The practical perspective generally compares features of specific accreditations, or the processes that result in specific types of accreditation being awarded.

Skolnick (2006) frames accreditation within the broader theoretical context of degree recognition. He identifies four Canadian contexts within which degrees are recognized, defining "recognition" as the credential being accepted as

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credible and as a reliable indicator that the degree holder has acquired specific knowledge and skills. The four contexts he discusses are (1) granting of the legal authority to award degrees, (2) quality and reputation of degrees, (3) accreditation of degrees, and (4) acceptance of degrees for employment or educational admission (Skolnick, 2006, p. 2). While Skolnick's framework focuses on recognition of degrees rather than of institutions, several of his insights are also relevant to institutional recognition. He identifies a paradox in assessing institutions for the purposes of accreditation, in "how to ensure quality while at the same time allow[ing] for institutional differences....It is easy to imagine the homogenizing influence that a...national system of degree accreditation could have" (p. 9-10). Cottam (2017) suggests that for accreditation to produce meaningful outcomes, accreditation systems need consistent underlying assumptions, such as "a nationwide definition of 'quality'" (p. 200).

The literature identifies two general types of accreditation: mandatory and voluntary. Each type has different implications for institutions and programs. In occupations such as nursing and accounting, where a professional association is responsible for licensing practitioners, graduation from an accredited program may be mandatory for an applicant to be eligible for licensing. Unaccredited programs or institutions can offer courses related to these occupations, but their graduates may not be eligible for licensing and thus may not be able to pursue careers in those occupations. Accreditation may also be mandatory for institutions to be eligible for government funding or for their students to qualify for student loans (Eaton, 2012). Voluntary accreditation is accreditation that an institution or program chooses to acquire because it sees the designation as advantageous for marketing, fundraising, or student recruitment. Both mandatory and voluntary accreditation can facilitate student transfer, because accreditation of the sending institution signals institutional legitimacy to the receiving institution.

When professional associations accredit programs in the occupation they regulate, and require programs to be accredited by the association for program graduates to qualify for professional licensing, it will be difficult for any other type of program or institutional accreditation to gain acceptance in those occupations. Also, if an institution decides to pursue voluntary accreditation, there may be multiple accreditation agencies offering accreditations within the same academic discipline or institutional category. In this situation, the external benefits of accreditation may be reduced, because external stakeholders may not understand the differences between different types of accreditation. A post-secondary institution or program may be perceived simply as being accredited, rather than as having the qualities or characteristics that a specific accreditation is intended to represent.

The problem of accreditation being perceived only as membership in a category may be further exacerbated when competing accreditation agencies use different assessment criteria. "The reality is that national accreditation, quality assurance, and/or regulatory programs are highly inconsistent, and comparisons of quality across schools reviewed within those schemes are difficult to draw" (Bruner & Iannarelli, 2011, p. 235). Acquiring voluntary accreditation also requires the institution or program to adhere to standards that may make it indistinguishable from other institutions or programs holding the same accreditation, thereby reducing any institutional distinctiveness that could be a competitive advantage (Porterfield, Clark, & Keating, 2014).

Acquiring accreditation can be expensive. Institutions must pay application fees to be evaluated by the accrediting organization, and then, if accreditation is awarded, allocate resources to meet ongoing requirements for reporting, internal improvement, attendance at informational seminars, and re-accreditation processes (Hail, Hurst, Chang, & Cooper, 2019). There can also be a potential conflict of interest if the primary revenue source for an accreditation agency is the fees paid by the institutions it accredits. In this situation, an organization may accredit institutions with the intent of maintaining its revenue base, rather than accrediting institutions because of their academic quality (CHEA, 2008). Cottam (2017) suggests that accreditation agencies in this situation also have little incentive to "sanction institutions that behave badly" (p. 200).

Another challenge around accreditation is when a post-secondary institution or program has fundamental operational principles that may conflict with established post-secondary norms and practices, or with the expectations of accrediting agencies. Smith (2013) gives the example of a faith-based institution requiring faculty or staff to adhere to faith-based principles in their work, and accreditors perceiving this requirement as conflicting with the norm of academic freedom. Smith proposes that such conflicts can be manageable if accreditors and institutions agree to co-exist in a “zone of mutual trust” (p. 30) where each party’s expectations and conditions are clearly stated and are accepted by the other party. Similarly, Klassen and Sá (2020) examine how three accredited post-secondary engineering programs addressed the expectations of international accrediting agencies, while simultaneously following their own university’s policies and maintaining their own localized goals and missions. They observe that “[s]ome actors perceive [accreditation’s] regulative influence to be stifling; others struggle with the ambiguity of new criteria; and a few see this as an opportunity to rationalize engineering schools as organizations” (p. 172).

Cottom (2017) suggests that accreditation systems once consisted of “a long-standing gentlemen’s agreement among similarly prestigious institutions” (p. 27), with inflexible standards that unduly excluded many institutions. While she acknowledges that accreditation systems have broadened to include institutions with a varied range of mandates and missions, she contends that institutional accreditation in the US now functions primarily as meeting one of the requirements for an institution’s students to be eligible for federal student loans. Thus, accreditation in some jurisdictions may not provide much useful information on the comparative academic quality or legitimacy of accredited institutions.

Finally, another part of this literature examines perceptions associated with accreditation and with types of institutions. Institutions may attempt to manipulate perceptions of their own legitimacy by making “false or exaggerated claims of external quality review (accreditation or quality assurance)” (CHEA, 2009, p. 5). This type of activity is paralleled by “the growth of ‘accreditation mills’ or bogus providers of quality assurance, often created to provide the appearance of external quality review” (CHEA, 2009, p. 7). However, some types of institutions may be perceived as illegitimate simply because they are different from more established institutions. For example, “[t]he reputation of the degrees awarded by colleges and institutes relative to that of university degrees is likely affected adversely by the newness of college and institute degrees and the association of these institutions in the public mind with other types of educational programs” (Solnick, 2006, p. 3). Perceived differences between the quality of different types of accreditation can also affect the perceptions of institutions in the context of credit transfer. In the US, post-secondary institutions can be accredited by regional or national agencies, but fewer institutions accept transfer credits from nationally accredited institutions because of the perception that programs at those institutions are more technical and are focused on teaching job-related skills, rather than on providing academic courses (GAO, 2009).

Institutional Assessment in Canada

A distinguishing characteristic of the Canadian post-secondary system is that Canada does not have any officially recognized national form of post-secondary accreditation. This is in contrast to jurisdictions such as Europe, which has a cross-national quality assurance system that incorporates accreditation. The results of assessments within the European system are posted in a publicly accessible online quality assurance directory; the directory includes detailed information on each institution and the outcome of its most recent assessment, including its ratings on individual criteria (European Quality Assurance Registry, 2020). The European system incorporates the results of accreditations awarded by other agencies, but goes beyond accreditation to also incorporate quality assurance measures. The difference between accreditation and quality assurance in this context is explained as “simply joining the club does not produce the end points of reform: one needs the evidence of both external review and internal monitoring and improvement” (Adelman, 2009, p. 87). Another example of national accreditation is in India, which has several types of

In the absence of a national accreditation system in Canada, other forms of external recognition for Canadian post-secondary institutions have been used, by other institutions and by stakeholders, as proxies for accreditation or as indicators of institutional legitimacy.

post-secondary accreditation. Each type assesses colleges and universities for a different purpose, such as eligibility for research funding and institutional development funding, but all of these accreditations are coordinated and administered by India's federal government (Dey, 2011).

In the absence of a national accreditation system in Canada, other forms of external recognition for Canadian post-secondary institutions have been used, by other institutions and by stakeholders, as proxies for accreditation or as indicators of institutional legitimacy. The most prevalent of these forms of recognition are program approvals by provincial and regional degree assessment boards, overseen by provincial ministries of advanced education. As the name suggests, these boards are responsible for assessing and making recommendations on institutional applications for funding or for new credential-granting programs. In some provinces, these boards perform additional regulatory functions, such as assessing and making recommendations on institutions' applications to use identifiers such as "university" in their names. At the provincial or federal level, there may also be assessments by other ministries or agencies, for purposes such as determining student loan eligibility or "designated learning institution" status (permitting international students to apply for study visas), or eligibility for designations such as those awarded by BC's Education Quality Assurance program.

Depending on the jurisdiction, programming at private post-secondary institutions may be assessed by degree assessment boards or by a different government body. In most jurisdictions, private training and career colleges are regulated by a branch of the provincial education ministry. These institutions are not always required to have their programs approved by a governmental body, but in some provinces, programs must have such approval for students to be eligible for federal or provincial student loans. Additionally, in some provinces private institutions must apply for program or institutional approval to operate if their programs meet certain criteria; for example, in British Columbia, private institutions offering "at least one career-related program with 40 hours or more of instructional time, with tuition of at least \$4000" (Private Training Institutions Branch, 2020) must be provincially certified in order to operate. Governmental bodies regulating private post-secondary institutions may also possess such powers as rescinding program or institutional approvals if designated operating standards are not met, or reimbursing tuition fees for students enrolled at institutions that close without notice.

Membership in a provincial transfer system is another form of institutional recognition that is used as a proxy for accreditation. In several provinces, institutional or program approval by the provincial degree assessment board or by the appropriate ministry is a pre-requisite for institutional membership in a provincial or regional transfer system. Most provincial transfer systems have other criteria for institutional membership, such as the institution having an internal transfer credit policy and pending or existing transfer arrangements with other institutions. In some provinces, specific programs at an institution, rather than the institution's full range of programs and courses, can be approved for transfer within the transfer system.

Institutions that belong to a provincial transfer system may enter into transfer agreements with institutions outside that system, but not all of these agreements may be recorded in the transfer system's comprehensive transfer guide. BCCAT's policy on listings in the BC Transfer Guide (BCCAT, 2018) includes principles and policies related to institutional assessment for the purposes of listing agreements with institutions outside the BC Transfer System. The principles state:

Institutional quality assurance [for the non-member institution] is addressed through membership in another recognized Canadian provincial transfer system, consent by the BC ministry responsible for advanced education to offer degree-level courses or programs, or accreditation (or equivalent) by a Canadian or an international quality assurance body deemed appropriate by BCCAT. At BCCAT's discretion on a case-by-case basis, agreements with institutions that fall outside the auspices of these quality assurance processes may be considered for inclusion provided they have a well-established articulation relationship with one or more sponsoring member institutions of the BC Transfer System and that they demonstrate ongoing quality assurance practices to the satisfaction of BCCAT.

Program quality is assured through the due diligence undertaken by the BC Transfer System member institution, which includes its assessment of the program, which in turn can include recognized industry or professional accreditation or certification. (p.4)

The procedures state:

1) The non-member institution must be a member of another recognized transfer system, have consent from the BC ministry responsible for advanced education to offer degree-level courses or programs, or have accreditation (or equivalent) by a Canadian or an international quality assurance body deemed appropriate by BCCAT. In the absence of the above, non-member institutions with well-established articulation relationships with one or more BC Transfer System members will be considered on a case by case basis. (p.4)

Membership in a national organization for universities or colleges is another form of institutional recognition for Canadian post-secondary institutions. Universities Canada (formerly the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada) has institutional membership criteria that include governmental approval to operate and to grant degrees, an independent board of governors, faculty research and teaching activity, and institutional commitment to academic freedom and non-discrimination (Universities Canada, 2021). Institutional members are also "invited to reaffirm their adherence to the criteria for membership in the association every five years". While Universities Canada states clearly on its website that "[w]e are not a national accreditation body", its selective membership criteria ensure that its members possess characteristics perceived as indicators of institutional legitimacy. Colleges and Institutes Canada (formerly the Association of Canadian Community Colleges) performs a similar representative function for other types of post-

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secondary institutions in Canada, with its membership consisting of “Canada’s publicly supported colleges, institutes of technology, CÉGEPs, polytechnics and universities with a college mandate” (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2021). It should be noted that membership criteria for these types of organizations have evolved over time, so the criteria used to permit one institution to join may not be the same criteria that permitted another institution to join, even though both institutions are recognized as members.

Finally, another form of institutional assessment in Canada occurs in the context of internal or external evaluations or translations of student transcripts. This form of assessment primarily occurs when a prospective student is applying for admission to or transfer into a Canadian post-secondary institution, and their previous post-secondary experience is at an institution where English is not the primary language of instruction. Most Canadian post-secondary institutions will require non-English transcripts to be translated by a certified translator or translation service. Many also require transcripts from institutions outside Canada to be reviewed by a recognized credential evaluation service, such as a service belonging to the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada, a unit of the Councils of Ministers of Education, Canada (ACESC, 2021). Duklas’s 2019 survey of 81 Canadian post-secondary institutions indicated that 96% of these institutions ask external credential evaluators to “confirm the institutional status” of the international sending institution (p. 26). Credential evaluation services generally offer several different “levels” of evaluation, ranging from an assessment of Canadian equivalencies for completed credentials to assessments of Canadian equivalencies for completed courses and programs, grading systems, and program content. More detailed evaluations usually include an assessment of the sending institution, so a receiving institution’s assessment of a sending institution’s academic comparability may depend on the “level” of transcript evaluation it requires.

Methodology

The researcher visited the websites of all 39 BC Transfer System member institutions to collect data on whether or how sending institutions were evaluated for academic comparability when a transfer credit request is received. Data were collected from policies, practices, information for students, academic calendars, and any other publicly posted information. It is likely that some institutions have policy “by omission” in this area, in that membership in the BC Transfer System means “all member institutions have endorsed the Principles and Guidelines for Transfer....[based on] a foundation of mutual trust and quality assurance” (BCCAT, 2018). Thus, when a BC Transfer System member institution is the sending institution in a transfer credit request, a receiving BC Transfer System member institution would likely only note that the sending institution belonged to the BCTS, and there would be no further evaluation of the sending institution’s academic comparability.

The data collection excluded information on transfer requests involving credits from professional or technical licensing education, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) credits, continuing education credits, or previously acquired PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) credits. These data were not collected because other factors, such as the comparability of course content, program curriculum, or instructor qualifications, might be more influential in the decision to award transfer credit than the academic comparability of the sending institution or organization. The data collection also excluded information from Fraser International College, which does not admit students that have previously enrolled in any credit-bearing post-secondary study (Fraser International College, 2021).

The data were reviewed and organized using these categories:

- Whether there was a statement of specific criteria used to evaluate academic comparability of sending institutions

- The content of those criteria (wording and terminology)
- Whether there were separate criteria for domestic and international sending institutions (and, if so, the content of each)
- Whether the institution uses an external credential evaluation service (and, if so, which type of evaluation it requires)

For several institutions, evaluation criteria for sending institutions were differently worded in different pieces of information. When this occurred, every form of wording was included in the data collection.

The data collected for each BCTS member institution were sent to the registrar's office at the institution for review and verification, and for revision if necessary. The institutions that reviewed and verified their data are listed in the Acknowledgements on page c.

Data Analysis and Results

The sources of data for each institution, and whether the institution has specific evaluation criteria for domestic and international sending institutions, are presented in Table 1. "Specific" in this context means that identifiable evaluation criteria were listed, instead of a generalized statement that sending institutions would be evaluated. If an institution has a single set of evaluation criteria applicable to all sending institutions, regardless of the sending institution's location, that is indicated with a Y in the "domestic or general institutions" column.

TABLE 1: Specific Criteria for Evaluating Sending Domestic/General and International Institutions, and Sources of Information, By Institution

Institution	Relevant Information	Has Specific Criteria for Assessment of Sending Domestic or General Institutions	Has Specific Criteria for Assessment of Sending International Institutions ¹
Acsenda School of Management	Calendar https://acsenda.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Academic-Calendar-2020.pdf Policy https://acsenda.com/admissions/transfer-of-credits/	Y	Y
Alexander College	Policy https://alexandercollege.ca/admissions-and-registration/credit-transfer/	Y	Y
Athabasca University	Policy http://ous.athabascau.ca/policy/registry/ugtransfercredit.pdf	Y	Y
BC Institute of Technology	Policy https://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/5003.pdf Procedures https://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/5003_pr1.pdf	N	Y
Camosun College	Website information https://www.camosun.ca/services/student-records/transfer-credit.html	N	N
Capilano University	Website information https://www.capilanou.ca/admissions/apply-to-capu/transfer-credit/ Calendar https://www.capilanou.ca/media/capilanouca/programs-amp-courses/Calendar-2020-2021.pdf Policy and procedures https://www.capilanou.ca/mycapu/policies--procedures/academic-policies-and-procedures/	Y	Y
Coast Mountain College	Website information https://www.coastmountaincollege.ca/admissions/requirements/transfer-credits Policy https://www.coastmountaincollege.ca/docs/default-source/policies/education-policies-and-procedures/education-policies/transfer-credit-policy.pdf Procedures https://www.coastmountaincollege.ca/docs/default-source/policies/education-policies-and-procedures/education-procedures/transfer-credit-procedures.pdf	Y	Y

College of New Caledonia	Website information https://cnc.bc.ca/admissions/transfer	N	Y
College of the Rockies	Website information https://cotr.bc.ca/admission-and-transfer-information/transfer/ Policy and procedures https://sps.cotr.bc.ca/Forms/Policies%20and%20Procedures/College%20Policies%20and%20Procedures%20Manual/2%20STUDENT%20AFFAIRS/2.5%20Records/2.5.6%20Transfer%20Credit%20(as%20a%20receiving%20institution).pdf	Y	N
Columbia College	Calendar https://www.columbiacollege.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Academic_Calendar_2020-2021-updated-July-2020.pdf Policy https://www.columbiacollege.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2.2-Articulation-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf	N	N
Coquitlam College	Website information https://www.coquitlamcollege.com/programs-courses/associate-arts-degree/transfer-credit/	Y	N
Corpus Christi College	Website information https://corpuschristi.ca/channels/future-students/what-are-the-minimum-requirements/ Policy https://corpuschristi.ca/channels/students/academic-policies/#admintoccc	Y	N
Douglas College	Website information https://www.douglascollege.ca/future-students/admission-information/transfer-credit/transfer-your-credits Policy https://www.douglascollege.ca/sites/default/files/docs/Recognition%20of%20Transfer%20Credit%20Policy.pdf	N	N
Emily Carr University of Art + Design	Website information https://www.connect.ecuad.ca/admissions/undergrad/transfer	Y	Y
Fairleigh Dickinson University	Website information https://www.fdu.edu/campuses/vancouver-campus/admissions/transfer-students/	N	N
Justice Institute of BC	Policy https://www.jibc.ca/policy/transfer-credit Procedure https://www.jibc.ca/procedure/transfer-credit	N	N

Kwantlen Polytechnic University	<p>Calendar https://calendar.kpu.ca/admissions/recognition-prior-learning/</p> <p>Policy https://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/AC6%20Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning%20Policy.pdf</p> <p>Procedure https://www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Policies/AC6%20Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning%20Procedure.pdf</p>	Y	Y
Langara College	<p>Calendar https://langara.ca/admissions/pdf/2021-spring-calendar.pdf</p> <p>Policy https://langara.ca/about-langara/policies/pdf/E2009.pdf</p> <p>Procedure https://langara.ca/about-langara/policies/pdf/E2009-procedures.pdf</p>	Y	N
Lasalle College	<p>Website information https://www.lasallecollegevancouver.com/admission/domestic-students https://www.lasallecollegevancouver.com/future-students/international-students</p>	N	N
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	<p>Calendar https://www.nvit.ca/docs/program_calendar_2020-2021637255859055482978.pdf</p> <p>Policy https://www.nvit.ca/about/policies/secivadmissionfees/c311transfercredit.htm</p>	Y	N
North Island College	<p>Policy https://www.nic.bc.ca/pdf/policy-4-17-admission.pdf</p>	Y	N
Northern Lights College	<p>Policy https://www.nlc.bc.ca/Portals/0/documents/Policies/E-3_05.pdf</p>	N	N
Okanagan College	<p>Website information https://www.okanagan.bc.ca/office-of-the-registrar/transfer-options</p> <p>Calendar https://webapps-5.okanagan.bc.ca/ok/Calendar/AcademicRequirementsforProgramCompletionandGraduation</p>	Y	N
Quest University	<p>Website information https://questu.ca/admissions/how-to-apply/transfer-students/</p> <p>Calendar https://questu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AcademicCalendar2020-2021.pdf</p>	Y	N

Royal Roads University	Policy https://policies.royalroads.ca/academic-regulations/section-1-credit-and-registration	Y	N
Selkirk College	Policy https://policies.selkirk.ca/media/policieselkirkca/college/Policy-8614-Advanced-Standing---Transfer-Credit-PLA-Course-Challenge.pdf https://policies.selkirk.ca/media/policieselkirkca/college/Procedure-8614-Advanced-Standing--Transfer-Credit.pdf	N	Y
Simon Fraser University	Website information https://www.sfu.ca/students/admission/admission-requirements/transfer-credit.html https://www.sfu.ca/students/admission/admission-requirements/transfer/college-university.html Calendar http://www.sfu.ca/students/calendar/2021/summer/fees-and-regulations/admission/undergraduate-admission.html#transfer-credit	Y	N
Thompson Rivers University	Website information https://www.tru.ca/future/admissions/undergrad/transfer-credit.html https://www.tru.ca/future/admissions/international/transferecredit.html	Y	Y
Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning	Policy and procedures https://www.tru.ca/distance/services/policies/transfer.html	Y	Y
Trinity Western University	Website information https://www.twu.ca/academics/office-registrar/transfer-credit Calendar https://www.twu.ca/academics/academic-calendar (p. 10; p. 20-21)	N	N
University of BC – Vancouver and Okanagan	UBC Vancouver website information https://students.ubc.ca/enrolment/registration/transfer-credits/post-secondary-transfer-credit https://you.ubc.ca/applying-ubc/requirements/university-college-transfer/ https://you.ubc.ca/applying-ubc/requirements/university-college-transfer/outside-canada/ UBC Vancouver calendar http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=2,25,72,0 UBC Okanagan calendar http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/okanagan/index.cfm?tree=2,344,0,0	Y	Y

University Canada West	Policy https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1576837446/uwoca/jsriaopfpbd7vupyci8v/9004-transfer-credit-rev-sept-2018_1.pdf	Y	Y
University of the Fraser Valley	Website information https://www.ufv.ca/calendar/current/General/Transfer.htm Policy https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/secretariat/policies/Transfer-Credit-(107).pdf	Y	Y
University of Northern BC	Website information https://www2.unbc.ca/registrar/transfer-credit-definitions	Y	Y
University of Victoria	Website information https://www.uvic.ca/undergraduate/admissions/transfer-credit/index.php	Y	N
Vancouver Community College	Policy https://www.vcc.ca/media/vancouver-community-college/content-assets/documents/policies/d-3-11-transfer-credit-procedures-2017-03-14.pdf	N	N
Yukon University	Website information https://www.yukonu.ca/admissions/transfer-credit Policy https://www.yukonu.ca/sites/default/files/policies/Academic%20Regulations_Effective%20Jan%201%202021%20-%20Jun%2030%202021%20SIGNED.pdf	Y	N
Yorkville University	Website information https://www.yorkvilleu.ca/articulation-partners/ Calendar https://www.yorkvilleu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BC-Academic-Calendar-February-2020-Final.pdf	Y	Y

Y=yes, N=no

¹This category includes criteria specifically for assessment of international post-secondary institutions and/or required evaluations of transcripts from international post-secondary institutions, if those evaluations include an assessment of the sending institution.

Of the 38 BC Transfer System member institutions included in the data, 26 had specific evaluation criteria for domestic sending institutions or for all institutions regardless of location, and 17 had specific evaluation criteria for international sending institutions. Sixteen of the 17 institutions with specific criteria for evaluating international institutions also had specific criteria for evaluating domestic institutions.

The next step in the data analysis was to review, categorize, and count specific evaluation criteria across all institutions. There were very few differences between the occurrences of evaluation criteria for international and for domestic/general evaluation, so criteria from both categories were included in the counting. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Frequency of Criteria Used to Assess Sending Institutions

Criterion	Number of Times Criterion Occurs
Post-secondary institution	17
"Recognized" with additional definition*	13
"Recognized" without additional definition	12
"Accredited" without additional definition	10
"Accredited" with additional definition	8
Public or private status	6
"Approved" with additional definition	2
Course from the institution is already transferable to another institution	2
"Authorized" without additional definition	1

Because some institutions had more than one assessment criterion, the total frequencies are higher than the number of institutions surveyed.

*"Additional definition" means, for example, that the criterion includes a list of accreditations or accrediting agencies that are considered acceptable by the receiving institution.

The criterion that occurred most often was that the sending institution must be a post-secondary institution. This addresses the reality that secondary school systems and other institutions offering secondary school programming may be offering courses or programs with content that parallels the content in some post-secondary courses. Professional associations may also offer in-house post-secondary education related to occupational licensing. The second most common criterion was that the sending institution should be "recognized", although many receiving institutions using this term did not provide any further information on the characteristics a sending institution would need to display in order to be "recognized". Similar terms that occurred with and without additional definition were "accredited", "approved", and "authorized".

Anecdotal evidence indicates that a significant number of transfer credit requests from sending institutions outside the BC Transfer System involve post-secondary institutions outside Canada. Thus, the next step in the analysis was to compare the wording of criteria used for assessing domestic/general and international sending institutions. This comparison is presented in Table 3, with direct quotes of the wording from the relevant source.

It should be noted that Table 3 only includes those institutions that had explicitly stated assessment criteria. Criteria for assessing international sending institutions are listed separately when there is a specific set of criteria for those institutions. For receiving institutions with a single set of criteria, those criteria are assumed to be applicable to all sending institutions regardless of location.

TABLE 3: Criteria for Assessing Domestic/General and International Sending Post-Secondary Institutions

Institution	Domestic/General Criteria	International Criteria
Acsenda School of Management	Recognized and accredited post-secondary institutions [policy] Recognized and accredited and/or provincially authorized post-secondary institutions [calendar]	
Alexander College	An accredited degree-granting institution [policy]	An accredited institution [policy]
Athabasca University	The external institution or organization must satisfy one of the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Canadian institution that is a member of the Colleges and Institutes Canada or the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). • An Alberta-based institution/program approved by the Campus Alberta Quality Council. • Educational providers that have been approved to offer credentials in the Province of Alberta by Advanced Education and are listed in the ACAT Guide. • Courses or programs from unrecognized institutions that have been documented as transferable to another AUCC institution (only the course or program that transfers to the AUCC institution will be considered) [policy] 	An institution from the United States of America (USA) that is a member of one of the following regional accrediting bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Higher Education • Northwest Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities Commission on Colleges and Universities • North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, The Higher Learning Commission • New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education • New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Technical and Career Institutions • Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges • Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges • Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities [policy]
BC Institute of Technology	Post-secondary institutions (website)	
Camosun College	Post-secondary (website)	

Capilano University	<p>Canada does not have a national system of accreditation; therefore, the term “recognition” is used.</p> <p>For the purpose of this policy Capilano “recognizes” the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian public post-secondary institutions • Institutions that hold membership in the Association of Universities and College of Canada (AUCC) • Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria but which the Registrar’s Office, in consultation with the department, approves for recognition <p>[policy]</p>	<p>International institutions considered accredited or recognized in their countries, as determined by accreditation reference materials</p> <p>[policy]</p>
Coast Mountain College	<p>Accredited post-secondary institution</p> <p>[policy]</p>	
College of New Caledonia	<p>Post-secondary institution</p> <p>[policy]</p>	
College of the Rockies	<p>One of the critical steps in evaluating credit from other institutions is in determining whether the institution offering the education is considered recognized or accredited. As Canada does not have an accrediting body, the term “recognition” is used in this document.</p> <p>The College considers the following institutions as “recognized”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian public post-secondary institutions • Institutions that hold membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) • Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria but which the Registrar approves for recognition <p>[policy]</p>	<p>International institutions considered accredited or recognized in their countries, as determined by accreditation reference materials</p> <p>[policy]</p>
Coquitlam College	<p>Coquitlam College will not transfer credits for courses taken outside of the BC Transfer System unless one of the four research universities (SFU, UBC, UVIC or UNBC) previously granted the transfer.</p> <p>[website]</p>	
Corpus Christi College	<p>Courses not listed in the BC Transfer Guide and courses completed at recognized institutions outside of the BC Transfer System will be assessed on a course-by-course basis. [policy]</p>	
Douglas College	<p>Credit transferred from private post-secondary institutions in British Columbia and post-secondary institutions outside the province will be dealt with on an institution-to-institution basis.</p> <p>[policy]</p>	

Emily Carr University of Art + Design	Applicants must have completed Fine Art and Design courses that will transfer to their own province's or country's accredited universities. [website]	Applicants must have completed Fine Art and Design courses that will transfer to their own province's or country's accredited universities. Note: before applying as a transfer student all applicants should research their home institution's transferability to their province's or country's universities. [website]
Fairleigh Dickinson University	In addition to the articulation agreements established by its campuses in New Jersey, FDU–Vancouver is establishing articulation agreements with a number of colleges in Canada and the US. Please contact the Vancouver admissions office for further information about our agreements. If your college does not have an agreement with FDU–Vancouver, your courses may still be considered for transfer credit, providing the college is accredited. [website]	The University is pleased to accept transfer applications from international students. Credit for coursework taken at recognized and accredited universities or colleges may be accepted. [website]
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	The following are considered recognized for the purposes of evaluating and awarding transfer credit and PLAR at KPU: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canadian public post-secondary institutions - Member institutions of Universities Canada Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria may have formal recognition requested through the Senate Standing Committee on Academic Planning and Priorities (SSCAPP). [procedure]	International institutions considered accredited or recognized in their country, as determined by the Office of the Registrar through accreditation reference materials or the Ministries of Education in that country. Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria may have formal recognition requested through the Senate Standing Committee on Academic Planning and Priorities (SSCAPP). [procedure]
Langara College	Upon request, 60% of Langara certificate, diploma, associate degree, and bachelor degree program requirements may be transferred from another recognized post-secondary institution. [policy]	Institutions accredited by the appropriate authority responsible for post-secondary education in their country. In exceptional circumstances, an institution that does not meet the above criteria may be approved for recognition by Registrar and Enrolment Services (RES), in consultation with the relevant department. Registrar and Enrolment Services will assist the departments in assessment of transfer credit by confirming that the institution is recognized in its home province or country. [policy]
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	Applicants who have completed equivalent post-secondary level courses at other accredited institutions may be eligible for transfer credit. [calendar]	[international enrollments suspended until September 2022]
North Island College	Credit (transfer credit) that is awarded for programs or courses completed at another accredited post-secondary institution. [policy]	

Okanagan College	Transfer credit will be granted for a course taken at an accredited post-secondary institution recognized by Okanagan College (OC) [policy]	
Quest University	For a prior course to be considered for transfer credit, it must...have been taught at the college or university level (remedial work is not transferable, and technical or vocational training is not transferable). [calendar]	
Royal Roads University	Students may apply for transfer credit for Royal Roads University courses based on the successful completion of comparable courses at other recognized post-secondary institutions or at Royal Roads University. [policy]	
Simon Fraser University	Transfer credit is granted on the basis of course work completed at another recognized institution. For university transfer, we support the Pan-Canadian Protocol on transferability of first and second year courses from any recognized Canadian university. [website]	
Thompson Rivers University	A recognized institution is an institution that is granted the authority by a Ministry of Advanced Education & Skills Training or similar government body to award credentials. [policy]	
Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning	Transcripts are evaluated for all studies taken through an accredited or similarly recognized educational institution. In BC, accredited institutions includ[e] those that are members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, or publicly funded. [policy]	Outside Canada, institutions that are recognized by accrediting bodies within the country of origin are considered on an individual basis. [policy]

University of BC – Vancouver and Okanagan	<p>In BC, recognized degree programs are those authorized by the Ministry of Advanced Education & Skills Training by recommendation of the Degree Quality Assessment Board.</p> <p>Recognized degree programs offered in other Canadian provinces include, but are not limited to, those offered by institutions with membership in Universities Canada (formerly the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC]). Degree programs from other Canadian provinces not offered by Universities Canada member institutions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>[calendar]</p>	<p>In the United States, recognized degree programs include, but are not limited to, those offered by institutions with regional accreditation from one of the following accrediting bodies: National Association of Independent Schools, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Degree programs from the US not offered by a regionally accredited institution will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Degree programs offered in other countries may be recognized if they are offered by institutions authorized to do so by the national government or a government-approved accrediting body, and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>[calendar]</p>
University Canada West	<p>Other recognized post-secondary institutions</p> <p>Only courses taken at recognized post-secondary institutions (public or private) or institutions/organizations approved by Academic Council will be considered for transfer credit.</p> <p>A post-secondary institution that is approved, accredited, or otherwise deemed to be an institution officially authorized to grant academic credentials by the federal, provincial, or state authority of that jurisdiction.</p> <p>[policy]</p>	

University of the Fraser Valley	<p>Other recognized post-secondary institutions [website]</p> <p>One of the critical steps in evaluating credit from other institutions is in determining whether the institution offering the education is considered recognized or accredited. As Canada does not have an accrediting body, the term “recognition” is used in this document.</p> <p>UFV considers the following institutions as “recognized”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian public post-secondary institutions • Institutions that hold membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) • Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria but which the Undergraduate Education Committee approves for recognition. <p>Credential evaluation staff will determine whether an institution is recognized based on whether one or more of the above criteria have been met. All other institutions are considered unrecognized. This would include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private institutions that do not meet any of the criteria above • any educational institution or other organization that is not a post-secondary institution (e.g., secondary schools, professional organizations). <p>[policy]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International institutions considered accredited or recognized in their countries, as determined by accreditation reference materials. • Any institution or organization that does not meet the above criteria but which the Undergraduate Education Committee approves for recognition. [policy]
University of Northern BC	<p>Definition of recognized institution: An institution, authorized by the recognized government authority for university- or college-level higher education in that jurisdiction to be able to award credentials, including Certificates, Diplomas, and (Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctoral) Degrees, that could be considered equivalent to a Canadian credential.</p> <p>[policy]</p>	
University of Victoria	<p>Recognized institutions</p> <p>Another formally recognized educational institution [website]</p>	
Yukon University [formerly Yukon College]	<p>Recognized colleges, universities and technical institutes [calendar]</p>	
Yorkville University	<p>A recognized post-secondary education institution [policy]</p>	<p>A post-secondary institution recognized in that institution's home jurisdiction [policy]</p>

Note: This table excludes criteria related to: (i) BC Transfer System institutional membership; (b) International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) programs; (c) courses or programs offered by professional licensing agencies, and (d) other education providers outside the post-secondary system.

As can be seen from Table 3, the criteria for assessing sending institutions, both domestic and international, range from brief descriptions to detailed lists.

The final part of the analysis identified the institutions that used external transcript evaluation services for transfer requests, and whether the required evaluations included an evaluation of the sending institution. It should be noted that these data only include evaluations of transcript content, and do not include other transcript-related requirements, such as certified translations of transcripts from institutions where English is not the language of instruction.

The identified institutions and the forms of transcript evaluation they accept are presented in Table 4. None of the BCTS member institutions appear to accept transcript evaluations that do not include an evaluation of the sending institution.

TABLE 4: BCTS Member Institutions Requiring Transcript Evaluations, by Type of Requirement

Institution	Requirements for Evaluation
Acsenda School of Management	International applicants may also be required to have their academic credentials evaluated by a credential evaluation service such as ECE, ICES or WES.
Alexander College	ICES Comprehensive report
Athabasca University	Students presenting non-Canadian/non-United States credentials for possible transfer credit to an AU program must obtain an evaluation of post-secondary course work from an international assessment agency, for example, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS). There are a number of other foreign credential evaluating services whose assessments may be accepted. In Canada, refer to the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada. AU can also accept assessments from the U.S. from members of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) or the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Foreign Education Credential Service (AACRAO).
BC Institute of Technology	ICES Comprehensive report
Coast Mountain College	ICES Comprehensive or WES report
College of New Caledonia	CNC recommends WES or ICES, but any of the agencies listed on the Government of Canada's website can be used.
College of the Rockies	ICES Comprehensive report
Douglas College	ICES Comprehensive report [for admissions only]
Emily Carr University of Art & Design	ICES or WES recommended; full list of recommended evaluation services provided to applicants on request
Fairleigh Dickinson University	WES recommended; evaluation by any member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES)
Justice Institute of BC	ICES Comprehensive report [for admission to certain programs]
Northern Lights College	ICES Comprehensive report

Quest University	ICES Comprehensive report
Royal Roads University	ICES Comprehensive or WES report
Selkirk College	Credit for courses taken outside of Canada may be granted in consultation with ICES.
Trinity Western University	Transfer credit from international schools may need to be assessed by an external international credit evaluation agency. TWU recommends the International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) through BCIT, World Education Services (WES), International Qualifications Assessment Services (IQAS), International Credentials Assessment Services, or any evaluation agency that is a member of the Alliance of Credential Services of Canada. [If ICES is used, ICES Comprehensive Report is required; if WES is used, Course-by-Course evaluation is required.]
University Canada West	ICES Comprehensive report
University of the Fraser Valley	ICES Comprehensive report
Yukon College	ICES Comprehensive report [for admissions only]
Yorkville University	In the case of foreign institutions, an evaluation by a recognized agency providing assessments of foreign credentials may be required.

ECE = Educational Credential Evaluators; ICES = International Credential Evaluation Service; WES = World Evaluation Service

Note: Institutions included in this table may require transcript evaluations for the purpose of admissions, but may or may not require transcript evaluations for making decisions on international transfer credit requests. When an institution has specified that transcript evaluations are required only for admission applications, that has been noted in the table.

Discussion

Each BCTS member institution has its own mandate and serves its own student demographic and geographic region. Not surprisingly, this results in variations among how these institutions assess the academic comparability of international sending institutions. Additionally, as described earlier, multiple accreditation, ranking, and evaluation systems within and across other countries present further challenges in creating institutional assessment criteria. The criteria must be specific enough to guide institutional actions and decisions for a BCTS member institution, but also broad enough to be relevant to the many different types of non-Canadian institutions that could potentially be sending institutions in transfer credit requests.

Within this context, using the findings of this data analysis to identify a single form of “best practices” may be misleading, since each institution’s practices and policies reflect its own environment. It may also be misleading to identify “best practices” among policies and practices that may be based on different beliefs about characteristics that represent institutional legitimacy or academic comparability. However, it is still worthwhile to make general observations based on the data that were collected.

It should be noted, before listing these observations, that policies or procedures at nearly every BCTS member institution allow registrars or committees to exercise their professional judgement as necessary when assessing the academic comparability of a sending institution. In other words, it is possible for a receiving institution to grant credit from a sending institution when that institution does not completely satisfy the receiving institution’s assessment criteria, if institutional staff identify other conditions or characteristics that, in their opinion, make the sending institution sufficiently comparable to justify awarding transfer credit.

First, a number of institutions use terms such as “recognized” or “accredited” in their policies or procedures, without providing a detailed explanation of how those terms are defined or operationalized. This lack of detail is understandable in light of the potentially vast range of attributes of sending institutions. However, generalized definitions may not give adequate internal or external guidance as to which characteristics a sending institution must possess to be considered “recognized” or “accredited”. Presenting these terms without further definition also does not clarify whether the required recognition or accreditation is from the receiving institution itself, from some form of external assessment, or from some other source.

Second, assessing the academic credibility of a sending institution at the institutional level does not take into account potential variations at the course or program level within both sending and receiving institutions. For example, some occupational regulators license programs offered by both public and private institutions. But if a receiving institution’s criteria specify that the sending institution must be a public institution, a request for transfer credit from a private institution may be denied, even if that credit comes from a program licensed by the same regulator that licenses the receiving institution’s own program.

Third, some assessment criteria may not be sufficiently broad or sufficiently detailed to identify the type of academic comparability that the receiving institution is seeking to assess. For example, requiring that the sending institution be accredited is effective in determining academic comparability, if accreditations are credible and if they use criteria that match the receiving institution’s own standards of academic comparability. However, a simple requirement that a sending institution be accredited, without specifying acceptable types of accreditation or the characteristics that accreditation should be based on, opens up the possibility of transfer credit being accepted on the basis of accreditation from untrustworthy or unreliable accrediting agencies, or from institutions that make misleading or false claims of accreditation.

Finally, some institutions determine academic comparability on the basis of courses from the sending institution already having been accepted for transfer by another post-secondary institution, or on the sending institution itself belonging to specific associations. While these types of recognition could reasonably be understood as indicators of academic comparability, it is also possible that such external recognition reflects a specific circumstance or situation that is not relevant to the current receiving institution. For example, a course could be accepted for transfer credit at another receiving institution because it is considered sufficiently equivalent to a course at that particular institution. The assessment of equivalency is made in the context of that institution's courses, programs and/or characteristics, which may not be relevant or comparable to the context of other institutions.

Recommendations

- Each BC Transfer System member institution should define the institutional characteristics that it considers indicators of acceptable academic comparability for sending institutions, in the context of transfer credit.
- Each BC Transfer System member should ensure that its policies and procedures for assessing sending institutions align with and reflect the institutional characteristics it has identified.
- Each BC Transfer System member institution should clearly communicate to internal and external audiences, on a regular basis, the specific characteristics that sending institutions are expected to possess to be considered academically comparable, for the purposes of granting transfer credit.
- BC Transfer System member institutions using external assessments (e.g. association membership, accreditation, transcript evaluation service) to evaluate sending institutions should regularly review the institutional characteristics used by external assessors, and ensure that these align with the institutional characteristics the institution itself has identified as indicators of acceptable academic comparability.
- If acceptable institutional characteristics can vary at the program level (e.g. if an occupational regulatory body licenses programs at both public and private post-secondary institutions), BC Transfer System member institutions should consider how to accommodate these program-level variations when assessing the academic comparability of sending institutions.

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