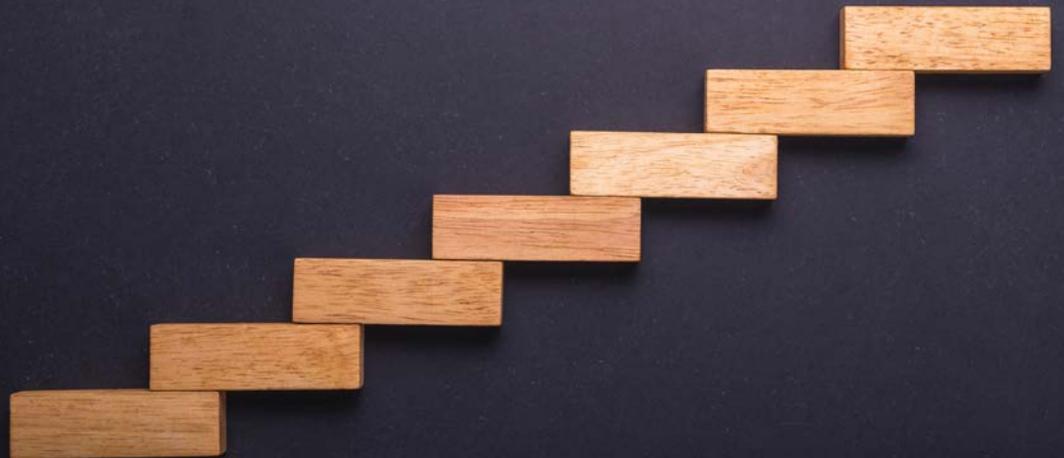# Block Transfer Agreements:

Implementing and Communicating BTAs at BC Transfer System Institutions

Prepared for BCCAT by Paul Merner

November 2019

BCCAT

Block Transfer Agreements:

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this research is to assess institutional practices of defining, implementing and communicating block transfer agreements (BTAs) at BC Transfer System (BCTS) member institutions.

This paper begins with a review of the recent literature, with an emphasis on recent studies of block transfer within the BC Transfer System. The paper then discusses perspectives on nomenclature, and provides a glossary of block transfer-related nomenclature in **Appendix III.**

The paper then analyzes data obtained from a survey of staff at BC Transfer System member institutions, beginning with identifying roles and functions within institutions when either initiating or signing on to block transfer agreements. Usually an educational area initiates an agreement, but authority for input and approvals is broadly dispersed within and across institutions. The Registrar's office generally bears the larger responsibility for implementation.

Agreements are recorded and maintained through several mechanisms. These include internal filing systems, institutional or departmental web pages, and the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG). An educational area usually creates new BTAs or makes changes to existing ones, and in most institutions that area is also at least nominally responsible for communicating information to the Registrar's office and others within the institution. This communication can be an area of concern.

The BCTG is an important mechanism and resource for information on block transfer agreements. Almost invariably the service side of the organization, such as the Registrar's office, is charged with updating the BCTG information on the institution's BTAs. Most institutions also have agreements with other BC institutions that are not included in the BCTG, and the paper explores some of the reasons why.

Most institutions rely on students to self-identify if they plan to follow a block transfer pathway. Institutions provide varying levels of support to these students, predominantly through the educational department or Advising. The information recorded on student transcripts, and in institutional records systems, usually includes sending institution and total credits awarded, but the amount and type of this information can vary quite considerably.

The study concludes with four recommendations based on the survey findings and the literature review. These are:

- identifying and supporting students internally;
- creating a centralized repository for BTA information;
- establishing consultation and communication procedures for BTA development or change; and,
- using the Central Data Warehouse (CDW) or STP (Student Transitions Project) to track and analyze block transfer pathways and volumes.

Introduction

Recent research and discussion among BC transfer system professionals has identified issues in communicating Block Transfer Agreements (BTAs) within and between member institutions of the BC Transfer System (BCTS). There is confusion regarding the definition of BTAs and how these agreements may differ from other types of transfer agreements, such as degree partnerships. An additional and important consideration is how student mobility through BTAs could or should be tracked at institution and system levels.

Block Transfer Agreements (BTAs) are important mechanisms in the BC Transfer System. They enable both learners and institutions to promote and achieve transfer and mobility.

BTAs are important mechanisms in the BC Transfer System. They enable both learners and institutions to promote and achieve transfer and mobility. Adding definitional clarity to these mechanisms, identifying leading practices in how they are communicated, and proposing effective means of tracking and quantifying their use will provide important benefits to the system as a whole.

The purpose of this research is to assess institutional practices of defining, implementing and communicating block transfer agreements in BC Transfer System institutions. This assessment includes an online survey of BCTS member institutions, a scan of institutional websites, and an analysis of BTA information in the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG). The report provides a glossary of relevant nomenclature; identifies common roles and practices in development, maintenance, communication and tracking of BTAs; and examines student support and transcript practices among institutions. It concludes by suggesting some beneficial practices identified at institutions that contributed to the research. It is hoped that these practices, and the study itself, may assist those responsible for managing block transfer agreements in BCTS institutions, and, ultimately, help foster student mobility and success.

[Appendix I](#) includes a full description of the study objectives.

Methodology

The data collection methods for this study included a literature review, an online survey, a review of relevant website content, and a review of BTA information on the BC Transfer Guide website.

Literature Review

Relevant research was reviewed with an emphasis on recent studies of block transfer within the BC Transfer System, and on studies of other transfer mechanisms similar to block transfer. Selected publications from other jurisdictions were also reviewed to identify definitions or practices that might be informative for the BC context.

Online Survey

In April and May of 2019 a link to an online survey was sent to all 39 BCTS member institutions, using the BC Registrars Association's email list of institutional representatives. The survey collected data pertinent to the study's core objectives, including:

I. Which departments develop and sign block transfer agreements;
II. Which types of information are typically included in block transfer agreements and which are required and optional;
III. How agreements are recorded in institutional information systems;
IV. How students progressing along a block transfer agreement pathway are tracked and supported;
V. How the institutional list of block transfer agreements is maintained;
VI. How block transfer agreements are communicated to prospective and current students and the system; and,
VII. How block transfer agreements are documented on transcripts

Eighteen complete responses were obtained for a response rate of 46%, and an additional three responses were partially usable. The 18 full responses represent 55% of the 33 BCTS institutions for which at least one block transfer agreement is listed in the BCTG. **Appendix II** lists the institutions that provided full responses to the survey.

Institution and Organization Website Review

To supplement the findings of the literature review and the survey, the websites of BCTS member institutions were reviewed to identify information pertinent to block transfer agreements and how this information is communicated to students, the public, and the system. In addition, the websites of many of the major transfer-related organizations across Canada were reviewed. These included the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT), Ontario Council on Admissions and Transfer (ONCAT), Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), Council on Articulations and Transfer of New Brunswick (CATNB), and others. The information collected from these websites included approaches, tools, publications, definitions, and related materials.

Analysis of Block Transfer Information on the BC Transfer Guide

Agreements listed in the Block Transfer portion of the BC Transfer Guide were categorized using the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) coding. The resulting categorization was analyzed to identify agreements in specific educational subject areas or departments that develop and sign these agreements.

Literature Review

BC and Canada

The BC and Canadian literature on block transfer and block transfer agreements can be divided into four categories.

First, there are overviews that place BTAs within the general milieu of transfer. This includes historical contexts as well as theoretical, jurisdictional and support contexts.

Finlay (2009) reviews credit transfer in BC, including articulation-based transfer, case-by-case transfer, and transfer through program and laddering arrangements. Block transfer, which is program-based, is contrasted with discipline-based flexible pre-majors, as well as with bridging and dual credit transfer. She discusses a number of models found in other jurisdictions, including general education, associate degree transfer, common course numbering, outcomes-based transfer, and degree partnerships. She notes that while other models have been considered for BC "any new model must be suitable for a BC/Canadian context, must weigh cost/benefit considerations, and must balance student needs with institutional resources" (p. 4).

Here we might also place McQuarrie's report (2012) which concentrates on "the potential for Red Seal-qualified tradespersons to transfer credit from their trades education directly into undergraduate post-secondary degree pro-grams" (p. 1). Many existing programs of this type in BC are based on block transfer. McQuarrie discusses international examples of trades-to-academic (TTA) transfer, including Australia, Germany, England and the US, and gives examples from BC involving trades transfer into degree, diploma and certificate programs. The discussion includes how this type of transfer is structured, including block transfer; the predominant types of programs that accept TTA; and the timing of TTA transfer, in parallel with or subsequent to trades credentialing.

An early history of transfer in BC is part of the overview by Andres and Dawson (1998). This overview includes a review of the "Charting a New Course" impetus for block transfer in 1996. Important landmarks of block transfer in BC are also found in Gaber's (2010) reviewing this history of the BC transfer system between 1958 and 2010. An extension of this document to 2018 can be found on BCCAT's website. Both of these studies note key points in the development of block transfer in BC, particularly those described by Finlay (1997a) and Finlay (1998).

Finlay (1997a) reviews the then-current state of transfer and block transfer in the BCTS. She discusses bilateral and multilateral transfer, as well as the background of block transfer agreements, which were initially found mainly in busi-ness and professional programs. She sets out six options in relation to block transfer, intended to improve or ease existing student transfer mechanisms, while at the same time "introducing both more coordination and more flexibility into the academic transfer environment" (p. 6). These options are system-wide transfer, general education core curric-ulum, standardized pre-majors, flexible pre-majors, a learning outcomes-based approach, and descriptive pathways.

The subsequent update to the review (Finlay, 1998) summarizes the previous year's system-wide discussions, and presents six principles of transfer. These are that agreements should: optimize opportunities; be voluntary; supple-ment – not replace – course-to-course transfer; increase curricular flexibility; strive for multilateralism; and be clear and accessible to students and advisors. The recommendations for the first options to be pursued include "the Flexible Pre-Major, the Descriptive Pathways model, and the investigation of block transfer for the associate degree and for a First Year Transfer program" (p. 4). All of these, with the exception of a common First Year Transfer, are now part of the BC Transfer System.

> *An early history of transfer is part of the overview by Andres and Dawson (1998).*
> *This overview includes a "Charting a New Course" impetus for block transfer in 1996.*

A second type of study focuses primarily on nomenclature, typology, and definition, delineating block transfer and its sub-genres from other forms of transfer agreements.

Duklas (2013) examines the protocols at BC post-secondary institutions for credentialing joint programs and degree partnerships, on both transcripts and parchments. Block transfer is a common form of transfer in both types of arrangements. The project also examines partnership and agreement nomenclature used in the province, and notes both convergence and divergence in terminology for both agreements and programs.

Duklas, Maki, Pesaro, and Brady (2014) examine nomenclature relating to transfer and transcription practices across multiple jurisdictions, including individual Canadian provinces, the US, Australia, the UK and Europe. Although the study is not limited to nomenclature around block transfer, it describes regional standards with respect to nomenclature; differences, challenges and inconsistencies across institutional types and program groups; and learner perspectives on nomenclature and transfer terminology.

Finlay (2007, 2009) also defines various models of transfer and related concepts, while Orum (2010) discusses flexible pre-majors and delineates these agreements from other types of transfer, such as course-to-course articulation, block transfer, and associate degrees.

The "How to Articulate" handbook by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) (Stainsby & Erskine, 2018) provides resources for those involved in articulating courses and programs for transfer credit within the BCTS. These resources include suggested practices, checklists, definitions and models. The handbook includes information about bilateral course-to-course transfer, as well as multilateral and block transfer, and alternative or innovative approaches to articulation. Similar resources, which include some material related to block transfer and transfer pathways, are on the websites of the Alberta Council on Admission and Transfer (ACAT) and the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT).

A third type of work focuses mainly on technical aspects of block transfer, including resources, development, mechanisms, data, and metrics.

The ONCAT site provides a large number of reports that describe the need for and development of various descriptive pathways or block transfer agreements in the province, or that present evaluative research into their effectiveness. There are more than 40 of the first type, including:

- Different types of transfer between institutions, such as college to college, college to university, or university to college, e.g. Decock & Smith (2016); Decock, Murkar, Michasiw & Parna (2016)

- Different types of transfer between certifications, such as diploma to degree, or associate degree to baccalaureate, e.g. Centennial College (2014); Heppner & Koster (2016)

- Transfer between various occupational areas, such as Policing to Criminal Justice, or Social Service Worker to Public Administration, e.g. Conestoga College (2016b); Munro (2015)

- Transfer and specific populations, such as Indigenous or remedial learners, e.g. Helmer & Small (2015); Harvel, Percival, Stokes. Shah & Zakoor (2017)

- Bilateral, multilateral and reciprocal agreements, e.g. College Boreal (2015)

- Various types of agreements, including degree partnerships and bridge agreements, e.g. Conestoga College (2016a); Rickets (2015)

There are also a number of research or evaluative reports covering various dimensions of pathways or block transfer, including:

- Transfer process barriers and strategies, and a transfer office profile and evaluation, e.g. Mallette, Page-Cutrara, Choiniere, Rogers & Umana (2015); McLoy, Baker, Williams and Decock (2017)

- Practical challenges and success, e.g. Gorman, Phelps & Carley (2012)

- Student expectations, experiences and satisfaction, e.g. Lakehead University (2012); Coffey, Lindsay & Sproul (2012)

A larger ONCAT study (Usher & Jarvey, 2012) addresses credit transfer in general. Nonetheless, it provides perspectives on student experience, barriers, success and satisfaction that would be valuable to those implementing and supporting more specific mechanisms such as block transfer.

The ACAT site focuses more on providing resources to member institutions to aid in the negotiation and creation of agreements. This site, like the ONCAT site, has a searchable agreement database similar to that on the BC Transfer Guide. ACAT also provides several research reports that are focused on general transfer student success; however, pathways or block transfer components are not separately identified in these studies.

In BC, Agility Consulting (2011) examined two approaches to quantifying two types of block transfer – from certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees, and from flexible pre-majors - in the BC Student Transitions Project (STP) and Central Data Warehouse (CDW) databases. The first approach uses logical structures built upon existing data, while the second includes new data elements to tag and facilitate flows. The study recommended coding block transfer based on new data elements (basis of admission and transfer credit type), as well as better alignment and coding of existing data, especially program names, within data submissions.

Agility's recommendations were implemented, enabling Jacinto's 2018 study. The results of that study indicate that more BTAs exist on institutional websites than within the BCTG, and more credits are transferred between BC institutions outside of published agreements than within them. "Key challenges were found in access to block transfer information; consistency of block transfer information among sending/receiving institution sites, and with BC Transfer

In BC, Agility Consulting (2011) examined two approaches to quantifying two types of block transfer--from certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees, and from flexible pre-majors--in the BC Student Transitions Project (STP) and Central Data Warehouse (CDW) databases. The study recommended coding block transfer based on new data elements.

> *BC's Associate Degree Review Steering Committee (BCCAT, 2013) examined an initial rise and then a drop in the number of associate degree credentials issued, along with an increase in subject area concentrations and transfer pathways.*

Guide; difficulty acquiring robust system-wide quantitative data; and continued inability to qualitatively measure the use of block transfer" (p. 2). The report recommends working towards common record-keeping practices; qualitatively examining how block transfers are used and operate in BC and elsewhere; and streamlining block transfer agreement data management and advertising practices.

FitzGibbon (2014) focuses on learning outcomes and their utility in supporting various types of credit recognition, including core curriculum, flexible pre-majors and block transfer. "Learning outcomes are more amenable to describing students' learning as they progress through a program, because they can encapsulate both the broad outcomes of a program of study and the specific competencies expected of a module or unit of study. They can be a reference point for describing the sequence of learning, allowing institutions to judge whether a course satisfies prerequisites and/or is at the level of difficulty normally associated with a particular level in a program" (pp. 3-4). FitzGibbon provides examples of the use of learning outcomes in various jurisdictions, including BC, Ontario, the US, Europe and Australia, and concludes with a discussion of issues and possible directions.

The last group of studies are largely evaluative, seeking to understand the successes and shortcomings of block transfer.

Bastedo (2010) evaluates BTAs in the BCTS, looking at awareness of BTAs among institutions; their review and promotion; student use and satisfaction; student success subsequent to admission; and the contribution of BTAs to improving articulation and transfer. Her recommendations include improving block transfer and its management across various aspects of the system, including clarification of agreements and nomenclature; greater support of automation; ensuring currency of the BCTG and synchronizing it with institutional sites; improving institutional and BCCAT-managed sites; reviewing resource materials and processes within institutions; and developing mechanisms in institutional and provincial systems to identify students pursuing BT pathways.

McIvor (2010) examines the results of BCCAT's 2008 decision to amend the BCTG to publish BTAs between BCTS member institutions and private post-secondary institutions accredited by the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA). More than a year after this decision, few private/public block transfer agreements had been published in the BCTG. The paper considers possible reasons for this, including the low volume of student transfer between private and public institutions; the existence of fewer foundational agreements than expected; and the possible lack of utility of BTAs compared to course-to-course transfer and other forms of articulation.

BC's Associate Degree Review Steering Committee (BCCAT, 2013) examined an initial rise and then a drop in the number of associate degree credentials issued, along with an increase in subject area concentrations and transfer pathways. Several factors were identified as contributing to the drop in the number of associate degrees, including expansion in baccalaureate programs; development of academic certificate and diploma programs; increasing competition for transfer spaces at universities; and fewer admissions priority opportunities for associate degree graduates. The

report provided several recommendations intended to enhance student accessibility, institutional collaboration, alignment of requirements with baccalaureate programs, major field credit applicability, and credential completion. Most of these could be usefully applied to block transfer agreements in general.

McQuarrie (2014) "assess[ed] the current overall state of block transfer agreements in the BC Transfer System, and identif[ied] areas for potential action" (p. 1). This study defines block transfer as "a predetermined number of credits... granted to students who have successfully completed a certificate, diploma, or cluster of courses that is recognized as having an academic wholeness or integrity, and that can be meaningfully related to a degree program or other credential" (p.1) . It identifies a number of concerns around the operation of block transfer, including difficulty in quantifying student/credit flows; the usefulness of BTAs in the current system structure; currency and maintenance of agreements; difficulties involving prerequisites; curriculum flexibility constraints; and the administrative burden. The resulting recommendations include establishing a sunset date for current BTAs; examining associated workloads; encouraging more accurate tracking; mounting surveys etc. to foster understanding of mechanisms; and considering program-to-program agreements such as flexible pre-majors. "It may be time for BCCAT and BC Transfer System member institutions to undertake a formal evaluation process to consider whether block transfer still serves the purpose it was originally intended to serve" (p. 15).

Examples from the US

Although this literature review has focused primarily on BC and other Canadian jurisdictions, there is a large volume of American literature related to various aspects of block transfer. This literature is often concerned with credit transfer in general, or with specific subtypes of block transfer or similar mechanisms, such as a common core curriculum, system-wide transfer, or learning outcomes-based approaches to transfer. It is also often evaluative, focusing on assessing the efficacy of policies, approaches, agreements, or sets of agreements between institutions, or on a statewide or multi-state basis. Many articles focus on the student-institution interaction, which is of interest to those who are charged with implementing block transfer agreements. Although a thorough review of this literature is beyond the scope of this paper, the following examples give an indication of its breadth.

Kisker, Wagoner & Cohen (2012) discuss the policy impetuses behind statewide pathways in four US states that simultaneously lead to an associate degree and transfer with junior status to a four-year college or university. They explore seven curricular and policy-related elements of effective transfer associate degrees: 1) a common general education package; 2) common lower-division pre-major and early-major pathways; 3) a focus on credit applicability; 4) junior status upon transfer; 5) guaranteed and/or priority university admission; 6) associate and/or bachelor's degree credit limits; and 7) an acceptance policy for upper-division courses.

Packard, Gagnon, & Senas (2012) analyzed the delays experienced by students navigating community college transfer pathways in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields in Massachusetts. Three central elements of the delays were: 1) informational setbacks from dissatisfactory advising; 2) imperfect program alignment with four-year institutions; and 3) college resource limitations. Students took unnecessary courses or could not get into courses in a timely manner, resulting in lost time, money, and credit. An accumulation of delays is particularly detrimental to those in STEM disciplines, given the sequential nature of such programming, and implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Kadlec & Gupta (2014) used materials from focus groups to gain a better understanding of the student experience of both barriers to, and facilitators of, smooth and seamless transfer between two Indiana institutions. Their findings highlight the importance of 1) facilitating completion; 2) clarity of pathways; 3) supportive and accurate advising; and 4) useful, correct, and consistent information. The study's context is general transfer rather than block transfer, but the findings are readily applicable to the latter.

Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink (2016) suggest three key strategies and related essential practices for institutions implementing transfer agreements. These are: 1) making transfer student success a priority, including communicating commitment, sharing data, and dedicating resources; 2) creating clear programmatic pathways aligned with high-quality instruction; and 3) providing tailored transfer student advising, including clearly articulated pathway options, monitoring student progress and providing interventions, and providing dedicated advising and related resources. They identify several emerging practices such as defining transfer requirements in terms of competencies and monitoring student progress across the entire transfer pathway.

Eller (2017), in a general transfer context, provides a useful set of practices focused on receiving institutions and incoming students. These include 1) getting students on track academically at an early point; 2) promoting sustainable academic performance in the new environment; 3) providing clear and consistent information; 4) providing helpful and flexible support; 5) connecting transferees to the institution; and 6) building on transferees' sense of commitment to completion goals.

Anderson (2016) provides a comprehensive comparison of four different transfer policies (transfer types) across all 50 US states. These transfer types are 1) a transferable core of lower-division courses; 2) statewide common course numbering; 3) guaranteed associate degree transfer; and 4) statewide reverse transfer.

Hodara, Martinez-Wenzl, Stevens, & Mazzeo (2017), in a study spanning ten US states, examine problems with credit mobility. They investigate different policy approaches, and how college staff and students experience transfer at the campus level. The study utilizes data from policy documents and legislation, and from interviews with system officials, college staff, and students. The authors categorize credit mobility policies on a continuum from system-wide transfer initiatives to local-level institution-to-institution approaches. They note that policies may not be working across the systems as intended, because many transfer students do not select a major and destination institution early enough in their studies to avoid credit loss. Institutions may also lack the capacity to provide personalized support to students interested in transfer early in their career. The researchers conclude by providing a framework to understand different policy approaches to ensuring transfer students' credits transfer and apply to their major. They offer policy and practice considerations to improve credit mobility across different policy systems.

Data Analysis

Nomenclature

As stated in the Introduction, some issues have been identified around communicating BTAs among BCTS member institutions, and there is confusion regarding the definition of BTAs and how they may differ from other types of agreements. Thus, clarifying nomenclature and establishing a common terminology for block transfer, as well as other transfer mechanisms, is important.

The Duklas (2013) and Duklas, Maki, Pesaro & Brady (2014) studies identify a considerable degree of convergence in nomenclature relating to BTAs across Canadian jurisdictions and within BC. Indeed, seven of the top ten descriptors of block transfer and similar agreements are common to BC and to other Canadian jurisdictions. These common descriptors are italicized in **Table 1**.

TABLE 1:
Ten Most Common Descriptors of Block Transfer Agreements in BC and Canada

1)	Memoranda of understanding
2)	*Block transfer agreements*
3)	*Articulated agreements*
4)	*Pathway agreements*
5)	*Numeric titling agreements*
6)	Bridge/bridging programs or agreements
7)	Degree/diploma completion programs
8)	*Joint programs*
9)	*Collaborative programs*
10)	*Dual/double credential programs*

Source: Duklas, Maki, Pesaro & Brady (2014) pp. 102-103

However, these studies also identify a considerable divergence in nomenclature, and a relative lack of definitional clarity, even for commonly used terms. For instance, while 75% of Canadian institutions use the term "Memoranda of Understanding" and 73% use "Articulated Agreement", only 43% and 51% respectively have an actual definition of those terms. Only 25% have a definition of the commonly used term "Pathway Agreement". "Despite these terms being commonly used, many respondents noted that formal definitions do not exist." (2014, p.103)

The findings also suggest that "varied terminology is in use across Canada to describe transfer agreements and programs. There is also evidence from other research to suggest that these types of terms might potentially have different meanings even within the same sector, which can cause challenges" (2014, p. 104).

For these reasons, an objective of the current research is to create a glossary of nomenclature around block transfer agreements used at BCTS institutions. The glossary is presented in **Appendix III**.

Survey

The complete set of survey questions is presented in **Appendix IV.**

The first survey question investigated whether various transfer paths into the responding institution would be considered "block transfer". **Table 2** summarizes the responses.

TABLE 2:

Percentage of Institutions Identifying a Type of Transfer Agreement as "Block Transfer"

Transfer Agreement Type	Is Block Transfer %	Is NOT Block Transfer %
Associate degree completion	65	35
Diploma completion	58	42
Advanced standing	32	68
Bridging program completion	40	60
External career-related program or credential	5	95
Collaborative agreement	89	11
Descriptive pathways	63	37
Dual admission agreement	50	50
2x2 agreement	65	35
Reciprocal agreement	53	47

n=20

Clearly there is both substantial agreement and substantial disagreement in these responses. 89% of respondents agree that collaborative agreements constitute block transfer, and 95% agree that transfers based on external career-related programs or credentials do not. Opinion is evenly split over whether dual admission agreements are considered BTAs. Responses are also almost evenly divided (53% vs 47%) on whether reciprocal agreements are considered BTAs. 65% see Associate Degree completion and 2x2 agreements as block transfer, while 68% do not see such agreements as block transfer. Interestingly, 60% do not see bridging program completion as block transfer, despite numerous examples of these programs being listed in the block transfer section of the BCTG. In a similar vein, only 5% of respondents see career program completion as block transfer, despite numerous examples of career program agreements in the BCTG.

Some of the terms used in the survey question refer to the type of agreement itself, while others describe the type of programming on which the agreement is based. "Advanced standing", "collaborative agreement" and "descriptive pathways" are examples of the former, while "associate degree completion", "bridging program completion" and "external career-related program or credential" are examples of the latter.

The above terms are descriptors of what might be considered types of block transfer. **Table 3** presents an abbreviated list of terms of a similar nature, taken from institutional and organizational websites across BC and Canada.

TABLE 3:

Other Descriptors of Agreements Related to Block Transfer

advanced diploma agreement	bilateral agreement	career laddering agreement
collaborative program agreement	degree completion program agreement	degree partnership
dual admission agreement		flexible pre-major agreement
guaranteed admission agreement	dual credit agreement	memorandum of understanding
	joint/integrated program agreement	subject-specific transfer grid
pathways agreement	program transfer agreement	

A glossary of block transfer-related terms is presented in **Appendix III**.

Forming, Maintaining and Communicating Block Transfer Agreements

Roles Within the Institution – Initiating and Signing On to Block Transfer Agreements

An important objective of this study is to help determine which departments develop and sign BTAs. However, given the multilateral and collegial nature of most institutional processes, different areas within an institution may be involved with different aspects of BTA development. This involvement may include originating the idea; negotiating or reviewing the agreement; obtaining approval for the agreement; and implementing the completed agreement. Some areas or positions may play more than one of these roles. In addition, these functions may vary depending on whether the institution is initiating a BTA or is signing on to one that was initiated externally.

Initiating an Agreement

Table 4 indicates that responsibilities vary both across and within institutions when a block transfer agreement is being initiated.

TABLE 4:

Percentage of Institutions Indicating Areas of Responsibility in Initiating a Block Transfer Agreement

Area	Originate	Negotiate	Review/Input	Recommend	Approve	Implement
Individual Faculty	55	30	65	70	10	15
Department Chair	70	50	70	75	30	35
Dean	70	65	80	70	55	20
VP Education/Provost	40	35	50	30	70	15
Registrar	15	20	80	40	35	100
Education Council/Senate	5	0	40	25	55	0
Board of Governors	5	0	20	10	25	0
Pathways Office	5	5	5	5	5	5
International Education	5	5	5	0	0	0

n=20

Responsibilities for different functions may change at different points in a particular development process, or in different processes over time. Many of these responsibilities will also vary depending on the BTA under development, although others may be determined by institutional policy. For example, in most institutions the subject area Dean is the most frequent originator of a BTA. However, Department Chairs and others may also play this role.

Additionally, all of the administrative and instructional positions (Faculty, Chair, Dean, VP Education/Provost, Registrar) can fulfill all of the developmental roles. For example, a Dean might help negotiate an agreement, review and provide input, provide approval, and recommend an agreement for further approval.

At most responding institutions, the subject area Dean has the greatest involvement in the various roles within the BTA development process, with the Department Chair having the next highest involvement. The VP Education/Provost and Faculty have roughly equal levels of involvement, although in different areas of the process. The Registrar has important roles to play in the review and implementation functions, and Education Council/Senate and the Board participate in approvals at many institutions. One institution indicated that the Pathways Office was occasionally involved in developing BTAs, and another indicated a similar role for the International Education Office.

Responses also indicate that the Dean or Department Chair *originates* BTAs in most institutions (70% each), followed by individual Faculty (55%) and the VP Education/Provost (40%). At research universities, individual faculty are the most likely to originate an agreement (67%).

With respect to *negotiating* the agreements, there is a somewhat more even distribution of responsibility, although the Dean is involved this way in the majority of responding institutions, followed by the Chair.

Responsibilities for *review and input* to agreement development are quite broadly distributed. The Registrar and the Dean are most frequently identified as being involved (80% each), while the Education Council or Senate are also involved in 40% of institutions.

Recommending the agreement forward to other responsibilities is a fairly broad-based function, reflecting the collegial and multi-faceted nature of such processes within institutions. The departmental Chair (75%) and individual Faculty or the Dean (70% each) are most frequently involved in this role.

In most institutions (70%), the VP Education/Provost provides *approval;* and where they are not the ultimate approver, they make recommendations to Education Council/Senate, or the Board. These are the ultimate approvers in 55% and 25% of institutions respectively. 45% of institutions indicated Education Council or Senate approval is required for new BTAs.

Lastly, when initiating agreements, *implementation* falls heavily on the shoulders of the Registrar's Office, which has some part in implementation in all the institutions that responded. In about 35% of responding institutions, the Department Chair is also involved.

Signing On to an Agreement

Table 5 outlines the responsibilities and roles when an institution signs on to a BTA. In this context we see the same general patterns as when an institution initiates an agreement, particularly in relation to the area/responsibility combinations.

TABLE 5:
Percentage of Institutions Indicating Areas of Responsibilities When Signing On to a Block Transfer Agreement

Area	Originate	Negotiate	Review/Input	Recommend	Approve	Implement
Individual Faculty	45	35	65	50	5	15
Department Chair	50	60	75	70	35	30
Dean	50	60	75	70	35	30
VP Education/Provost	30	45	45	35	70	10
Registrar	0	25	75	40	35	100
Education Council/ Senate	0	0	35	20	55	0
Board of Governors	0	0	20	10	25	0

n=20

This similarity in patterns is observed both across institutions and within institutions, either concurrently or over time. This is not surprising given the multilateral nature of the educational environment, and the collegial and interlocking nature of internal processes. When comparing signing on to a BTA versus initiating one, it can be seen that the area/role combinations differ only in degree or emphasis.

At the majority of responding institutions, the subject area Dean or Chair has the greatest involvement in the development process, followed by the individual Faculty member and the VP Education/Provost. But responsibilities are more evenly shared in the signing-on process, likely because of the different ways BTAs may reach the institution. This is very evident in the patterns of BTA *origination* within the sending institution, which can indicate the point of contact for receiving institutions. The Dean (50%), Chair (50%) and individual Faculty (45%) are equally likely to be involved, followed in most institutions by the VP Education/Provost (30%). Clearly there are varied points of interaction at multiple levels between institutions in the BC system.

Other patterns related to initiating agreements are present in signing-on as well. The Dean (60%), Chair (60%), faculty member (35%) and VP Education/Provost (45%) may be involved in *negotiating* incoming agreements. All the staff positions including the Registrar have important roles in *reviewing* and recommending forward these agreements, and the Registrar plays a role in *implementation* at all responding institutions. *Approval* at some level is shared at many

responding institutions by many positions or bodies, but it is the VP Education/Provost who has this responsibility at 70% of institutions, followed by the Education Council or Senate (55%), and the Board (25%). These last three percentages were the same for both initiating and signing on to agreements.

Subject Areas

Another approach to determining which departments develop and sign BTAs is to examine the distribution of agreements by subject area. Using the BTAs listed in the BC Transfer Guide, we examined the educational departments or subject areas that most frequently sign agreements. **Table 6** presents the frequency of block transfer agreements in the BCTG, organized by the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code of the sending program.

TABLE 6:
Number and Percentage of Block Transfer Agreements by Sending Subject Area, Classified by CIP Category

Subject Area of Sending Program	Number of BTAs	% of Total BTAs
Business, management, accounting, and marketing	309	26.5
Tourism and hospitality management	119	10
Public administration and social services	118	10
Health and related programs	105	9
Environmental studies, forestry, and natural resources	103	9
Family studies, education, and early childhood education	72	6
Sport management, recreation, and leisure	54	4.5
Engineering and biochemical technologies	47	4
Visual and performing arts	44	3.5
Liberal arts and humanities	43	3.5
Computer and information sciences	35	3
Biological and physical sciences	30	2.5
Social sciences, culture, and gender studies	30	2.5
Criminal justice, legal, peace and conflict studies	25	2
Communication and journalism	24	2
Other	17	2
TOTAL	**1,175**	**100**

n=1,175 sending agreements

The area with the largest amount of agreements is business, management, accounting and marketing (26.5%), followed by tourism and hospitality, and public administration and social services (10% each). Liberal arts, biological and physical sciences, and social sciences areas have many fewer BTAs. "Other" program areas include developmental, library science, sign language, culinary, and agriculture and food technology.

Considerations in the Creation of Block Transfer Agreements

Studies of the BC post-secondary system have noted that BTAs are more prevalent in certain program areas than in others, and have identified possible considerations in the formation of BTAs. These include workload, particularly in Arts and Sciences and Business; lesser reliance on transfer enrolments, such as transfer from Trades programs; or the prevalence of other transfer mechanisms, such as course-to-course agreements (Bastedo, 2010; McQuarrie, 2014; Jacinto, 2018). Accordingly, the survey asked respondents about considerations that affect the creation of block transfer agreements in specific academic areas. The responses are summarized in **Table 7.**

TABLE 7:
Percentage of Institutions Indicating a Consideration Affecting the Creation of Block Transfer Agreements, Classified by Program Area

Program Area	Infrequent Transfer	Character-istics of Program	Course to Course Preferred	Workload Issues	Resource Issues	Reluctance	Other	MEAN
Developmental	28	11	17	6	6	0	6	10
Arts	11	6	28	22	17	0	11	13
Sciences	6	11	28	22	11	0	6	12
Fine arts & design	22	22	11	17	6	0	0	11
Trades	11	22	6	6	6	6	17	10
Technologies / engineering	11	11	22	6	6	0	17	10
Health	6	11	22	6	6	6	11	10
Business	6	6	33	22	17	6	6	13
Other professional	0	17	17	6	11	0	0	7
MEAN	**11**	**13**	**20**	**12**	**9**	**2**	**8**	**11**

n=18

The generally low numbers in **Table 7** indicate that responding institutions do not see these conditions as particularly strong impediments to the formation of BTAs. The grand mean across all response categories is 11%, indicating that on average, institutions feel that a given condition is relevant to BTA development in the program area about one-ninth of the time. The condition most often affecting the creation of BTAs is a *preference for course-to-course transfer agreements*, reported by 20% of responding institutions. Similar to the findings of previous studies, the next most prevalent conditions are *characteristics of the program* (13%), and *workload constraints* (12%).

Despite these rather benign overall patterns, there are certainly some issues to be aware of.

The first is *infrequent transfer*. While only 11% of responding institutions see this as a condition, 28% see it as such for Developmental Studies, and 22% for Fine Arts and Design. Perhaps surprisingly, given the low frequency of Trades to academic transfer, only 11% note infrequent transfer as a condition for Trades.

However, 22% see the *characteristics* of Trades programs as a condition, compared to 13% for all program areas.

We have already noted that a *preference for course-to-course transfer agreements* is the most commonly identified factor affecting BTA formation. This condition is strongest in Business (33%), less so in Arts and in the Sciences (28% each), and weakest in the Trades (6%).

Workload and other *resource issues* are indicated as considerations by 12% and 9% of institutions, with workload being most commonly mentioned as a condition in Business, Arts, and Sciences. One institution reports workload and resource issues as considerations for all program types, but these are not seen as significant constraints by most respondents.

Reluctance was rarely identified as a consideration, while *other difficulties* are mainly noted as a consideration in the Trades and Technology/Engineering areas (17% each). The other difficulties identified by respondents include low enrolments in some areas, programs that are poor matches, and programs that are irregular or fluid in receiving institutions.

There is relatively small variation across subject areas in all types of considerations that might affect BTAs, from 7% in Other Professional to 13% each in Business and Arts.

Recording and Maintaining Block Transfer Agreements

Another objective of this research is to examine how BTAs are recorded, maintained and communicated to relevant internal and external audiences. **Table 8** summarizes responses to survey questions in these areas.

TABLE 8:
Percentage of Institutions Reporting Where BTAs are Recorded, Primary Responsibility for Updates, and Primary Responsibility for Communicating Changes

Area	Respondents Identifying Area Where BTAs are Recorded (all that apply)	Respondents Identifying Area as Primarily Responsible for BTA Updates	Respondents Identifying Area as Primarily Responsible for Communicating Changes to BTA
Individual Faculty	11	6	6
Department Chair	50	22	22
Dean's Office	56	17	17
VP Education/Provost	67	22	0
Education Council or Senate Secretariat	39	6	0
President's Office or Board Secretariat	17	0	6
Registrar's Office	83	11	22
Advising Office	56	0	0
Pathways / Transfer Office	33	17	11
Other / Varies	22	0	17

n=18

In 83% of reporting institutions, agreements are recorded in the Registrar's office. This is in line with the role this area usually plays in the implementation process. The three institutions that do not indicate the Registrar's office as primary recorder of BTAs are all universities; two of these three cited Advising as the recording area, and one cited the Pathways or Transfer office.

> *All institutions report recording BTAs in internal filing systems or archives, and two-thirds also record BTAs on their public websites. A third of institutions record agreements on their student systems and 28% on their internal administrative systems.*

In the educational areas, it is most commonly the VP Education/Provost office that records agreements (67%), followed by the Dean's office (56%) and Department Chair (50%). The percentages substantially mirror those of the offices' roles in developing and approving BTAs. This can also be said of the recording roles of Education Council/Senate (39%), and the President's office or Board Secretariat (17%). Other areas reported as repositories for agreements included the Office of Global Engagement and the Strategic Partnerships Office.

All institutions report recording BTAs in internal filing systems or archives, and two-thirds also record BTAs on their public websites. A third of institutions record agreements on their student systems and 28% on their internal administrative system. Only two institutions use their Intranet or portal for this purpose, while one institution records block transfer agreements on a contract registry.

At the majority of responding institutions, educational areas are primarily responsible for *updating* agreements. These areas include VP Education/Provost (22%), Department Chair (22%) and Dean (17%). In 17% of institutions the Pathways/Transfer Office updates BTAs, and in 11% of institutions, updates are the responsibility of the Registrar's office. At 39% of institutions, changes in BTAs must be approved by the Education Council or Senate.

Communicating Block Transfer Agreements

In terms of *communicating changes* to BTAs the pattern is different in small but noteworthy ways. The VP Education/Provost is not involved in communicating BTAs in reporting institutions, and while the Dean, Department Chair and individual Faculty continue to be involved, the communication task shifts towards the Registrar's office in some cases. There might be some communication gaps with service areas and students, if the area responsible for making changes is not also responsible for communicating them. One institution states that the onus for communication varies with who is making the change, and one reports communication to be "an unclear process".

In the survey, institutions were asked how information about BTAs is communicated to relevant audiences. The responses are summarized in **Figure 1**. Institutions were also asked where, specifically, the Registrar's office found information about block transfer agreements. The distribution of responses is presented in **Figure 1**.

One institution notes that BTAs are posted to faculty websites, and another one states that BTAs are posted to the institutional administrative system. Other sources utilized by the Registrar's office include internal files, intranet or shared folders, the institution's administrative system, and in one case an institutional Contract Registry.

In approximately three-quarters of institutions, an educational area has primary responsibility for updating an agreement. However, less than half (45%) of respondents indicate that the educational area is primarily responsible for communicating these changes. As we see in **Figure 1,** the Registrar's office receives such information via memos and other direct communication only slightly more than half of the time (56%).

FIGURE 1:

How Block Transfer Agreements are Communicated to Relevant Audiences, and Where the Registrar's Office Finds Information on BTAs (reported in percentages)
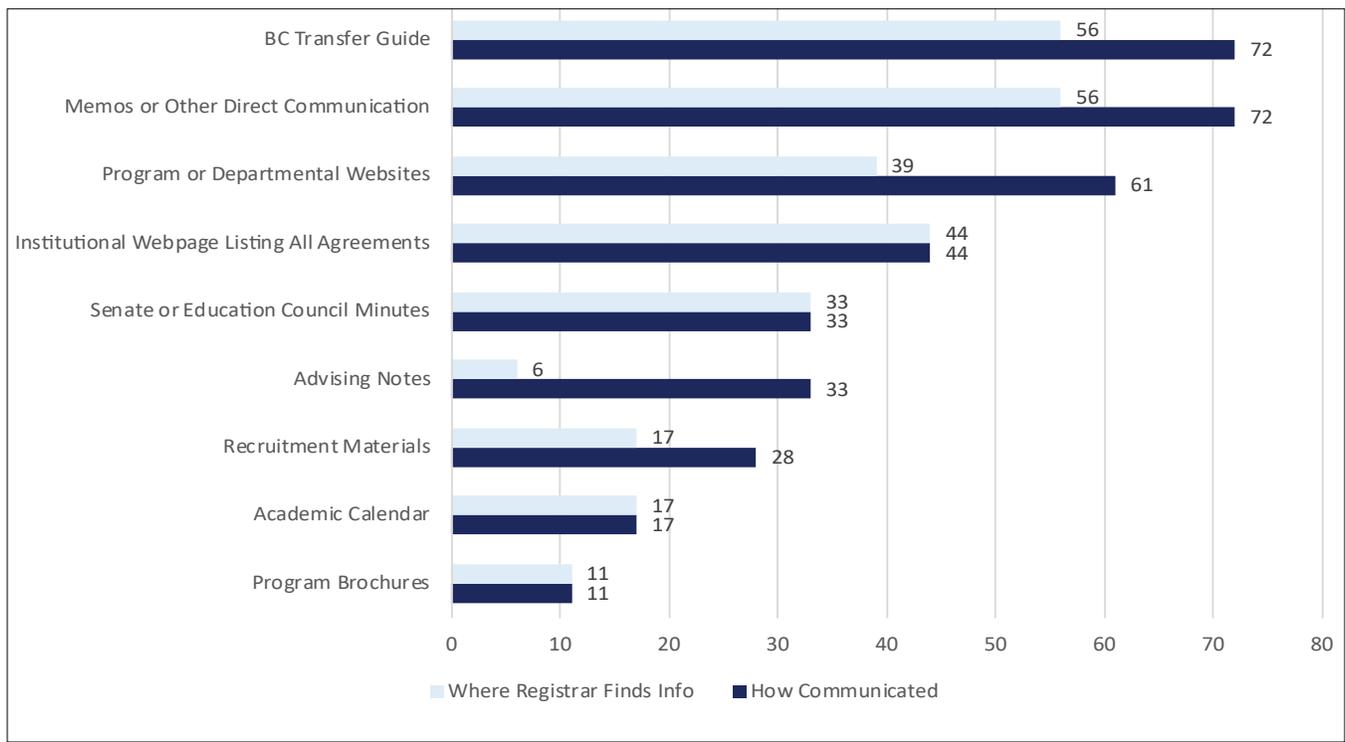
n=18

The survey also explored how new BTAs and changes to existing ones are communicated. There were very few differences reported around communication involving new or modified agreements, but there was a variety of responses across institutions as to how agreements were communicated.

Most often the participating educational area is responsible for notifying the Registrar's office of new agreements or of changes to existing agreements. In 29% of institutions the department Chair is responsible. In 21% of institutions the Dean or individual Faculty is responsible, and in one institution the VP Education's office is responsible for notifying the Registrar. Other respondents identified the Pathways office, the Institutional Contact Person (ICP), the Articulation Officer, the Strategic Partnerships office, and the office of Global Engagement as responsible for informing the Registrar's office of new or changed agreements.

When it comes to notifying Advisors of new or changed BTAs, the educational areas are responsible for this in about half (49%) of responding institutions. Two institutions cite the Registrar's office as being responsible for this, and other institutions indicate responsibility lies with the Pathways office, the ICP, the Articulation Officer, the Strategic Partnerships office, or the office of Admissions and Transfer Credit.

Although few institutions have a Transfer or Pathways office, the responsibility for informing this office of new or amended BTAs is most often the educational area (at 50% of responding institutions). At other institutions this responsibility is split between the Registrar's office (two institutions), and the ICP and Strategic Partnerships office (one institution each). These designations of responsibility are broadly the same for informing the Marketing or Communications office and the Student Recruitment office.

Institutions were also asked about broader communications responsibilities, such as updating institutional and departmental web pages, and print materials. Marketing or Communications departments play a greater role in these functions in some institutions. Marketing and/or Communications are responsible for updating institutional BTA web pages in about a third of responding institutions, and for updating departmental BTA webpages and print materials in about a quarter of those responding.

In other institutions these responsibilities are spread across various departments or positions, including the participating educational department, Dean's office, Registrar's office, Pathways office, the Articulation office, and the Strategic Partnerships office. In most responding institutions the educational area or Marketing department updates educational departments' web pages. The Registrar's office is responsible for this in one institution, and in another the web pages "auto-populate".

Finally, institutions were asked if there are issues regarding internal communication of block transfer information, and, if so, the causes of the issues. Two-thirds of respondents indicate issues such as:

- Lack of consultation and coordination at the development and negotiation stage (reported by 3 respondents);
- Communication breakdown between the educational area and the Registrar's office, particularly around informing the Registrar of new or modified agreements (reported by 3 respondents);
- Unclear roles, and/or lack of internal structures, policies and processes across the institution (reported by 2 respondents);
- Difficulty of, or lack of understanding of, processes or appropriateness when creating agreements (reported by 2 respondents);
- Difficulty in accessing expertise and support (reported by 1 respondent); and,
- Lack of a centralized (institutional) repository for agreements (reported by 1 respondent).

The BC Transfer Guide

The responsibility for communicating new or updated block transfer information to the BCTG lies with the Registrar's office or with the Transfer or Pathways office at 72% of responding institutions (36% for each). Other positions or areas responsible for this process include the designated BCCAT Institutional Contact Person (two institutions) and the Admissions office or the Program and Articulation office (one institution each).

Jacinto (2018) found there are more BTAs on institutional websites than are posted to the BCTG. He also determined that more block transfer credit recorded in the Central Data Warehouse is not associated with posted block transfer agreements. Accordingly, institutions were asked about their BTAs recorded inside and outside the BCTG.

> *The responsibility for communicating new or updated block transfer information to the BCTG lies with the Registrar's office or with the Transfer or Pathways office at 72% of responding institutions (36% for each).*

Institutions were asked if they had negotiated BTAs with other BC institutions that are not listed in the BCTG. About a quarter of institutional respondents were unsure, but 70% of institutions reported they had negotiated agreements that were not posted to the BCTG. Only one institution declared that all its BTAs with BC institutions were listed in the Guide.

The reasons given by respondents for not listing BTAs in the BCTG include:

- Some institutional partners are not BCTS members (4 respondents);
- Some agreements are not fully articulated or are under review (2 respondents);
- Internal communication, workload or priorities affect the institution's ability to submit information to the BCTG (2 respondents);
- Some agreements are rarely or never used (1 respondent); and,
- Some programs are ineligible for listing, or program transfer is handled in an alternate way (1 respondent).

Most institutions communicate agreements not listed in the BCTG through their websites or marketing and recruitment materials. One institution lists these agreements in its academic calendar.

The survey also asked respondents whether their institution accepts block transfer credit without a formal BTA in place, and, if so, how the decision to accept such credit is made. Half of the responding institutions accept block transfer credit without a formal BTA, usually on the basis of comparing the completed courses or credential to program entry requirements. In some instances, past practice with the sending institution is also a consideration, but generally such assessments are on a case-by-case basis. The assessment is usually conducted by the Registrar or Registrar's office (including the Transfer office or Transfer & Articulation team), the department Chair, individual Faculty, the Dean, or the VP Education.

Student Support

Identifying and Supporting Block Transfer Students

In the BCTS, member institutions are no longer classified as "sending" or "receiving". A student who is planning to use block transfer into another institution, or is actively involved in a block transfer, may need support in both the sending and receiving environments.

Accordingly, the survey asked institutions about support for students when sending and receiving block transfer. The first question asked how students planning to use a block transfer agreement are identified. One-half of responding institutions rely upon the student to self-identify to the Advising or Transfer office, and, in about 40% of institutions, the student may self-identify to the program or department as well. One responding institution uses degree audit software to proactively identify such students, and two do not identify transfer path students.
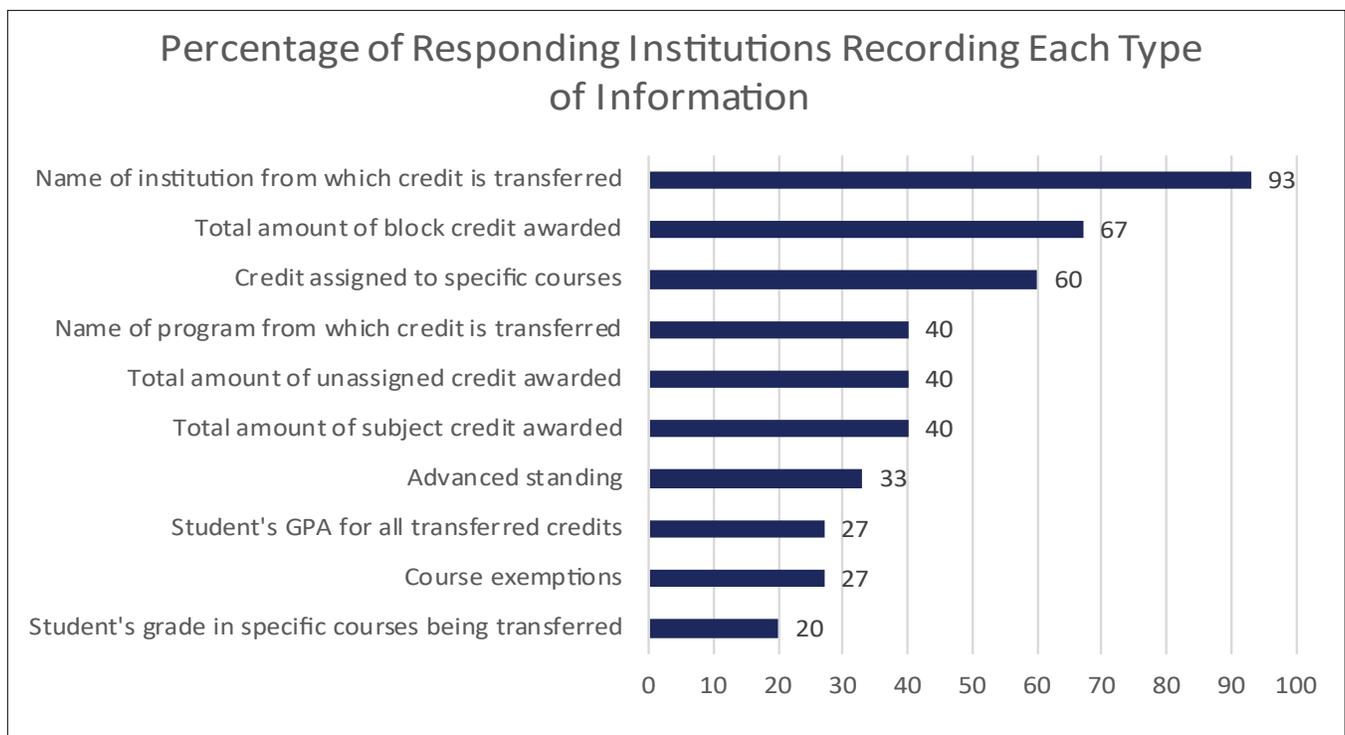
The survey then asked what supports are available to identified block transfer students. Three-quarters of responding institutions provide advising support to identified students, while two-thirds provide faculty advisors or mentors as well or as an alternative. Other supports that were named were the Registrar's office, Student Services, and/or the Transfer or Pathways office; however, only a few responding institutions have a dedicated Transfer or Pathways office. Two institutions indicate that the supports for block transfer students are those available for all students.

Incoming Students and Transcripts

The Registrar's office plays a significant role in implementing BTAs, but the educational area may assess incoming transfer students' course eligibility. Respondents were asked which area holds the primary responsibility to assess and award block transfer: 70% of respondents identified the Registrar's office as having this responsibility, with the department chair responsible in the other 30%. It is always the department chair who does this assessment in institutes, and almost always the Registrar's office in colleges, universities, and private institutions.

Institutions were also asked to indicate the information that is recorded on an incoming student's transcript if the student is using a BTA to transfer. These results are shown in **Figure 2**.

FIGURE 2:
Information Recorded on an Incoming Student's Transcript

Percentage of Responding Institutions Recording Each Type of Information

Category	Percentage
Name of institution from which credit is transferred	93
Total amount of block credit awarded	67
Credit assigned to specific courses	60
Name of program from which credit is transferred	40
Total amount of unassigned credit awarded	40
Total amount of subject credit awarded	40
Advanced standing	33
Student's GPA for all transferred credits	27
Course exemptions	27
Student's grade in specific courses being transferred	20

n=18

One institution reported that other information, such as international and joint credentials, is recorded for specific programs.

Respondents were also asked which courses from the institution are recorded on the student's transcript. 53% of responding institutions indicate that they only record the courses from the previous institution that are being transferred. Other reported practices include:

- Total amount of "block" credit awarded is recorded as "bulk" transfer credit (1 respondent);

- Sometimes 'standing only' credit is assigned to assist with pre-requisite checking (1 respondent);

- We currently do not record the courses that were transferred, just that we've accepted the transfer credit from X institution (1 respondent);

- Original courses do not appear on the transcript, only the transfer credits (1 respondent); and,

- We only track the specific diploma name that they are using to transfer in. The breakdown of the courses is recorded at the point of evaluating the transfer agreement (1 respondent).

Tracking Block Transfer Use

The survey also explored whether institutions could track block transfer use. Perhaps surprisingly, given recent improvements to the CDW coding (e.g. within the Student_Course_Transfer | Credit_Assignment_Type table) that provide for identification of incoming block transfer activity, 72% of respondents indicate that they cannot track block transfer usage. Among the remaining 28%, two institutions could track a full range of activity, including students and credits transferring out and in, as well as identifying both sending and receiving programs. Other institutions could track incoming but not outgoing students and credits transferring through BTAs, and all institutions could identify both outgoing and incoming programs.

Perhaps, surprisingly, given recent improvements to the CDW coding that provide for identification of incoming block transfer activity, 72% of respondents indicate that they cannot track block transfer usage.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the results of the survey and the literature review.

1. Each institution should create a centralized institutional repository for all its BTAs, including agreements in which it is a sender and agreements in which it is a receiver. A centralized repository would allow all users to access this information reliably and efficiently. Such a repository would preferably be located on outward-facing webpages so that students, the public, and system professionals can access the information. A central repository would also be helpful to those who are assisting students internally, and to faculty or educational areas. Although the BCTG is an important resource, it is not, and is not meant to be, a location for a comprehensive listing of all BTAs.

2. Institutions should create development, consultation, approval, and communication procedures relating to BTAs, and post these where they can be accessed by staff (e.g. SharePoint, portal, intranet, institutional website). The posted procedures should include:

    • Relevant materials from *How to Articulate* (see bibliography) and other sources such as the ACAT website

    • Clearly identified internal supports (e.g. resource materials, personnel)

    • Internal consultation protocols that include affected support service areas

    • Clearly defined responsibilities for each step in the BTA development and implementation process

    • Approval requirements

    • Post-approval communication procedures, especially with areas responsible for implementation, including the Registrar's Office, Transfer/Pathways office, Marketing, Recruitment, Web Support, and other areas

    • Procedures and responsibilities for updates and for ongoing maintenance

3. Institutions should create clearly defined, accessible, and well-advertised methods to identify students planning to use block transfer. Identifying these students will facilitate their receiving information and support from knowledgeable staff, as well as tracking and assisting them in their progress. Most institutions rely on informal student self-identification to obtain BTA support: for example, self-identification to the Advising or Program office. Mechanisms for identifying block transfer students should be formalized and well-advertised, and information about the content and process of BTAs should be posted or otherwise made available to students. This will encourage students wishing to use block transfer to identify themselves and to obtain support. The student records of identified block transfer students should be flagged for service continuity and for tracking BTA usage.

4. Institutions should use the Central Data Warehouse (CDW) (and eventually the Student Transitions Project [STP]) to regularly monitor flows between institutions and program through BTAs. Jacinto (2018) identifies issues in the scope and application of coding practices across CDW institutions, and we also know that BC's research universities are included in the CDW data only to the extent they send transfer student credit to a CDW institution. The Central Data Warehouse Coordinator should be asked to clarify standardized coding practices, particularly within the Student_Course_Transfer | Credit_Assignment_Type table, and to create a Standard Report for institutional and system use. The STP Steering Committee should also consider whether STP data submissions could be expanded to include detailed transfer data, including block transfer. These changes would allow tracking of BTA usage into research universities, greatly improving the comprehensiveness of reporting beyond the subset of CDW institutions.

Future Research

From this and other recent research, we can more clearly see the state and the shortcomings of block transfer. It is not a heartening picture. Most institutions are blind to the student use of BTAs in any summative way. Most do not track numbers of students who are following a block transfer pathway, nor are they aware of the number of students who have used BTAs to transfer to other institutions. Changes to the CDW have allowed some tracking of block transfer activity, but there appear to be issues or inconsistencies in the way that data are recorded by institutions. Additionally, the largest receiving institutions (research universities) do not provide CDW data. Institutions are more likely to pursue and promote mechanisms that they can identify, quantify and understand. Data availability and quality issues should be addressed at both the institutional and system levels, and additional quantitative research will allow us to better understand, improve and promote this important mechanism for student transfer and mobility.

Data availability and quality issues should be addressed at both the institutional and system levels, and additional quantitative research will allow us to better understand, improve and promote this important mechanism for student transfer and mobility.

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Appendix I: Objectives

The objectives of this project are:

a) To review available literature on block transfer agreements and comparable agreements;

b) To create an inventory of nomenclature used at BC Transfer System institutions for these agreements;

c) To analyze institutional practices of block transfer agreement implementation, including:

     I.   Which departments develop and sign block transfer agreements,
     II.   Which types of information are typically included in block transfer agreements and which are required vs optional,
     III.   How agreements are recorded in institutional information systems,
     IV.   How students progressing along a block transfer agreement pathway are tracked and supported,
     V.   How the institutional list of block transfer agreements is maintained,
     VI.   How block transfer agreements are communicated to prospective and current students and the system, and
     VII.   How block transfer agreements are documented on transcripts

d) To identify areas for future research and, if appropriate, the development of best practices.

Appendix II: Survey Respondents

Representatives of the following institutions provided full responses to the survey.

British Columbia Institute of Technology
Camosun College
Capilano University
Coast Mountain College
College of the Rockies
Justice Institute of British Columbia
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
LaSalle College Vancouver
North Island College
Okanagan College
Royal Roads University
Selkirk College
Thompson Rivers University
University Canada West
University of British Columbia
University of Northern British Columbia
University of Victoria
Vancouver Community College

Appendix III: Glossary

[numbers after each entry indicate the source of information as identified in the bibliography below]

Advanced Diploma Agreement

A type of block transfer agreement based upon completion of a Diploma program of study, usually two years in length. Post-degree diplomas are often one year in length. (1)

Advanced Standing

Refers to the recognition of prior studies or experiences where the granting of credit is not possible. Both advanced credit and transfer credit may result in achieving higher standing at the subsequent institution; however, for advanced standing, the previous learning could have been completed through different forms of credit work (formal learning) and/or through informal and non-formal learning such that an array of courses, prerequisites, or overall requirements for a degree or diploma are awarded. The term "advanced standing" has particular utility in the context of the world of *prior learning assessment/recognition of prior learning* and in situations that do not always lend themselves to the awarding of specific credit. (1)

Associate Degree

A two-year undergraduate academic credential awarded by a college, an institute, or a university upon completion of a 60-credit course of study with an Arts or Science focus. It is equivalent to the first two years of a four-year degree (undergraduate or bachelor's) and has prescribed general outcomes, curriculum, and program requirements. Transfer based on Associate Degree completion is usually considered a type of block transfer. (1)

Bilateral Agreement

A transfer agreement between two institutions. Within a bilateral course-to-course agreement, each transferred course is articulated individually with the receiving institution. Therefore, a course receiving transfer credit at multiple institutions has multiple bilateral articulation agreements. Contrasted with a *Multilateral agreement.* (1)

Block Transfer

A transfer agreement in which a predetermined number of transfer credits is granted to transferring students who have successfully completed a certificate, diploma, or cluster of courses at another institution. Generally, block transfer is used to award credit for courses that, as a group, are recognized as having an academic wholeness or integrity and that collectively satisfy part of the requirements for another credential. (1)

Bridging Program

Programs that allow students who have completed a credential to transition into another credential program. These programs provide content that is typically not covered in the previously completed program. (1)

Career-related Program Completion

Transfer into a program based upon completion of a career or technical program, which may be one to four years in duration. Most commonly found in Business, Health, and Criminal Justice programs. May be considered a type of block transfer. (3)

Career Laddering Agreement

Refers to specified academic pathways students can follow to extend their learning hierarchically in a particular subject area. An example would be where students would transfer their completed postsecondary credential into another program credential at a higher level (e.g., from a certificate to a diploma, or from a diploma to a degree). (3)

Collaborative Program/Agreement

These include:

(i) *Joint Degree Program* - awards one joint qualification and is completed in the same time period as it would have taken to complete an individual program;

(ii) *Multiple Degree Program* - awards more than two individual qualifications at equivalent levels and takes longer to complete than an individual program;

(iii) *Double Degree Program* - awards two individual qualifications at equivalent levels and takes longer to complete than an individual program. Also called Dual Degree Program.

(iv) *Combined Degree Program* - awards two individual qualifications at consecutive levels (e.g. Bachelor/Master, Master/Doctoral); takes longer than one degree but less time than if the two degrees were taken separately. (3)

Credit Transfer

The granting of credit by one institution for equivalent courses completed at another institution. Once transfer credit is granted, completion of the other institution's course is accepted in lieu of completion of the institution's own course, to fulfill general or specific credential requirements. Block transfer is a form of credit transfer. Course and program equivalencies that have been awarded credit through a formal inter-institutional request process are recorded in the BCTG. (1)

Degree Partnership

An agreement between two institutions that allows students to earn credit toward a credential at one institution while enrolled at the other institution. May also be called *Dual Enrollment*. (1)

Descriptive Pathways or Pathways Agreement

Defined route from one program or institution to another program or institution that specifies eligibility requirements and how transfer credits will be accepted and applied at the receiving institution. Usually applies to multiple sending institutions and one or more receiving institutions. May not require formal signed agreement between institutions. (4)

Dual Admission

Credit that may be applied to a credential at more than one institution, sometimes between secondary school and college programs or between college and university programs. (4)   It may involve a dual   environment in which the student is concurrently enrolled in a high school and post-secondary institution, or consecutive enrolment in which the student completes high school and subsequently is provided credit for learning when they are admitted to the specified post-secondary institution. (3)

Dual Degree Program

See *Collaborative Program/Agreement.*

Dual Enrollment

See *Degree Partnership.*

Exemption

The waiving of a program or course requirement. A student granted an exemption because they have transferred a course may be required to take another course to replace the credits or content associated with the exempted course. (1)

Faculty Credit or Program Credit

Transfer credit applicable to a faculty or program, such as 'Arts (3)' or 'Science (3)' or 'Humanities (3)', may be used if the receiving institution does not have a corresponding discipline, but the course or program is considered appropriate to fulfill elective credit requirements within a faculty or program. (1)

Flexible Pre-Major Agreement

A formal inter-institutional block transfer agreement facilitating student transfer into programs offering a major in a discipline or subject. The agreement identifies the set of courses at each participating sending institution that fulfill each component of the first two years of the major at the receiving institution. (1)

Guaranteed Admission Agreement

Similar to a dual credit agreement but usually formed between a college and a university. Specifies a number of eligible transfer courses, usually with a minimum GPA, which will guarantee entrance to select university programs with full credit for college coursework. (5)

Joint Program Agreement or Integrated Program Agreement

A program offered co-operatively by university and college partners. May integrate two or more distinct programs also offered independently by partner institutions. Students study at both institutions either sequentially or concurrently. Graduates receive one or more credentials from partner institutions, for example, a student might receive both diploma in media arts and a degree in communications. (4)

Learning Outcomes

Course or program objectives that focus on the results or outputs of the educational process as expressed in the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes may form a basis for determining the content of block transfer agreements. (3)

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A formal agreement of intent between two or more institutions to accept courses, or clusters of courses, from one institution for credit at the other institution. Generally, MOUs also incorporate other factors, such as recognition of co-op placements, or reduced course load for completion, that are not normally found in a transfer agreement. (3)

Multilateral Agreement

A transfer agreement between more than two institutions. It usually organizes information by subject area, and is used by several disciplines, most notably within the BC Transfer Guide by Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL). In multilateral articulation, programs or subject areas articulate their courses collaboratively, comparing each institution's individual courses to a set of outcomes or content statements that have been jointly developed as representing an acceptable standard for the course. (1)

Program Transfer Agreement

An agreement that enables students who have completed a credential at a college or university to gain credit for that credential at another institution. (4)

Program-Specific Transfer Guide or Subject-Specific Transfer Guide

A set of transfer agreements among institutions or programs relating to courses in a specific discipline or subject. A program-specific transfer guide includes transfer agreements that are not eligible to be recorded in the BCTG. However, the institutions and programs participating in a program-specific transfer guide have agreed to honor the transfer agreements outlined in it. (1)

Reciprocal Agreement

A transfer agreement allowing students to move between two participating institutions in either direction. (1)

Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG)

A program that offers community college students guaranteed admissions to several colleges and universities. A TAG agreement guarantees qualified students admission at the receiving institution(s) one year prior to transfer. Students must meet certain requirements to be eligible. (5)

2+ 2 Agreement

A block transfer agreement in which the receiving institution grants two full years of credit towards completion of a four-year degree program, with no additional requirements. Students should be able to graduate in a total of four years. Some agreements may require completion of particular courses, or meeting specified standards or additional prerequisites (e.g. grade 12 Math), or specify that completion of a two-year diploma is required for admission into the final two years of the degree program. (1)

Unassigned Credit or Level Credit

A form of transfer credit that can be awarded when a course is assessed as not being equivalent to a specific course at a receiving institution. Unassigned credit is usually specified as applying toward the requirements of a particular discipline or program at a particular level (e.g., BUS 1xx (3)). (1)

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Appendix IV: Survey Questions

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire on block transfer agreements. Block transfer is important to both students and institutions, and it plays a key role in the BC Transfer System.

We would appreciate receiving your response by May 21, 2019.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and all responses are confidential. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you have questions about the questionnaire or this project, please contact the project contractor, Paul Merner, at mernerpaul@gmail.com, or Dr. Fiona McQuarrie, Special Projects Coordinator, BC Council on Admissions & Transfer, at fmcquarrie@bccat.ca

Thank you for your assistance in helping us understand this form of transfer.

1) *Please indicate whether your institution considers the following types of transfer agreements as block transfer agreements.*

	Is considered a block transfer agreement	Is not considered a block transfer agreement
Transfer into a program after completion of an associate degree	O	O
Transfer into a program after completion of a diploma	O	O
Transfer that results in advanced standing in a program	O	O
Transfer into a program after completion of a bridging program	O	O
Transfer into a program after completion of an external career-related program or credential	O	O
Transfer based on collaborative agreement between two programs	O	O
Transfer into a program based on a descriptive pathways agreement	O	O
Transfer into a program based on a dual admission agreement	O	O
Transfer into a program based on a 2X2 agreement	O	O
Transfer into a program based on a reciprocal agreement	O	O

2) *Are there other types of agreements that your institution considers to be block transfer agreements? If so, please name them.*

3) Forming and Maintaining Block Transfer Agreements:

Different areas within an institution may be involved with developing block transfer agreements. This involvement may include originating the idea; negotiating or reviewing the agreement; obtaining approval for the agreement; and implementing the completed agreement. Some departments or areas may play multiple roles in this process. If your institution was initiating a block transfer agreement, what roles would each of the following areas play? Please indicate the roles of each area, and please check all that apply.

	Originate	Negotiate	Review/Input	Recommend	Approve	Implement
Faculty members or instructional staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Program/subject department chair	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VP Education or Provost	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Registrar's office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education Council or Senate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Board of Governors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4) If you chose "other", please specify which area(s).

5) If your institution was signing onto a block transfer agreement, what roles would each of the following areas play? Please indicate the roles of each area, and please check all that apply.

	Originate	Negotiate	Review/Input	Recommend	Approve	Implement
Faculty members or instructional staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Program/subject department chair	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VP Education or Provost	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Registrar's office	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education Council or Senate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Board of Governors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6) *If you chose "other", please specify which area(s).*

7) *Does your institution require that new block transfer agreements be approved by Senate or Education Council?*

      □ Yes

      □ No

8) *In your institution, are there considerations that affect the creation of block transfer agreements in specific academic areas? Please mark all that are applicable to each area.*

	Infrequent student transfer	Characteristics of sending or receiving programs that make block transfer difficult	Preference for course-to-course transfer agreements	Workload constraints	Resource constraints	Reluctance to develop transfer agreements	Other difficulties
Developmental	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Arts	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Sciences	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fine Arts & Design	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Trades	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Technologies/ Engineering	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Health	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Business	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Other profes-sional programs (e.g. Education)	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

If you selected "other difficulties" for any of these academic areas, please briefly describe the difficulties.

9) *Information on block transfer agreements may be recorded in more than one area of an institution. Please indicate the areas where block transfer agreements would be recorded at your institution.*

- ☐ Faculty members or instructional staff
- ☐ Program/subject department chair
- ☐ Dean's office
- ☐ VP Education or Provost's Office
- ☐ Education Council or Senate Secretariat
- ☐ President's Office or Board Secretariat
- ☐ Registrar's Office
- ☐ Advising offices
- ☐ Pathways/Transfer Office
- ☐ Other (please specify)

10) *Information on block transfer agreements may be maintained through a variety of mechanisms at an institution. Please indicate all that are used at your institution.*

- ☐ Internal filing systems or archives
- ☐ Institution's student information system
- ☐ Institution's administrative information system
- ☐ Institution's intranet or portal
- ☐ Institution's website for external use
- ☐ Other (please specify)

11) *Which area of your institution has primary responsibility for updating block transfer agreements? Please choose one from the list below.*

- ☐ Faculty members/instructional staff
- ☐ Program/subject department chair
- ☐ Dean's office
- ☐ VP Education or Provost's office
- ☐ Education Council or Senate secretariat
- ☐ President's Office or Board Secretariat
- ☐ Registrar's Office
- ☐ Advising
- ☐ Pathways/Transfer Office
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ It may vary (please explain)

12) *Does your institution require that changes or updates to block transfer agreements be approved by Senate or Education Council?*

 □   Yes

 □   No

13) *Which area of your institution has primary responsibility for communicating changes to block transfer agreements? Please choose one from the list below.*

 □   Faculty members/instructional staff

 □   Program/subject department chair

 □   Dean's office

 □   VP Education or Provost's office

 □   Education Council or Senate secretariat

 □   President's Office or Board Secretariat

 □   Registrar's Office

 □   Advising

 □   Pathways/Transfer Office

 □   Other (please explain)

 □   It may vary (please explain)

If you checked "other", please name the relevant area.

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14) *Communicating Block Transfer Agreements:*

How is information about block transfer agreements communicated to relevant audiences? Please indicate all methods that your institution uses.

 □   Program or department web page

 □   Institutional web page listing all block transfer agreements

 □   Academic calendar

 □   Advising notes

 □   Senate or Education Council minutes

 □   Internal memos to affected areas, e.g. registrar's office, transfer office, advising

 □   Program brochures

 □   Recruitment materials

 □   BC Transfer Guide

 □   Other (please specify)

15) When a new block transfer agreement is implemented, or an existing block transfer agreement is changed, who at your institution is responsible for these tasks?

	Implementing new block transfer agreements	Updating existing block transfer agreements
notifying the registrar's office		
notifying advisors		
notifying the transfer/pathways office		
notifying the marketing/communications department		
notifying the student recruitment office		
updating institutional web pages		
updating program/department web pages		
updating print materials		
communicating information to the BC Transfer Guide		

16) Where does the registrar's office at your institution find information about the institution's block transfer agreements? Please check all that apply.

◻   Program or department webpage

◻   Faculty or staff in programs participating in block transfer agreements

◻   Institutional web page listing all block transfer agreements

◻   Academic calendar

◻   Advising notes

◻   Program brochures

◻   Recruitment materials

◻   BC Transfer Guide

◻   Other (please specify)

17) If there are issues at your institution with internal communication of information about block transfer agreements, please describe these issues and what you think causes them.

18) *Has your institution negotiated block transfer agreements with other BC institutions that are not listed in the BC Transfer Guide?*

    ☐   Yes, block transfer agreements in which our institution is a sender

    ☐   Yes, block transfer agreements in which our institution is a receiver

    ☐   Some but not all of our block transfer agreements are listed in the BC Transfer Guide

    ☐   All of our block transfer agreements are listed in the BC Transfer Guide

    ☐   I don't know

If you answered "Yes" or "Some", why are these agreements not listed in the BC Transfer Guide, and how do you communicate information about them to relevant audiences?

19) *Does your institution accept block transfer credit without a formal block transfer agreement being in place?*

    ☐   Yes

    ☐   No

If you answered "yes", on what basis would this decision be made (e.g. past practice), and what position in the institution has the authority to approve these credits as being accepted?

20) *Student Support*

If your institution plays a sending role in transfer agreements, how do you identify students planning to use a block transfer agreement to continue their studies elsewhere? Please indicate all the methods that your institution uses.

    ☐   Student identifies themselves to the program or department

    ☐   Student identifies themselves to Advising

    ☐   Student identifies themselves to Pathways/Transfer Office

    ☐   Student is identified through degree audit or other system that allows proactive identification

    ☐   Other (please specify)

21) *Once a student at your institution has been identified as planning to use a block transfer agreement to continue their studies elsewhere, are there specific supports available for them? Please indicate all that are available at your institution.*

- ☐ Faculty advisors or mentors in the program or department
- ☐ Registrar's office
- ☐ Advising office
- ☐ Student Services office
- ☐ Transfer office
- ☐ Pathways office
- ☐ Degree audit or other automated/online support
- ☐ Other (please specify)

22) *When your institution is the receiving institution in a block transfer agreement, what area of the institution has the primary responsibility for assessing and awarding block transfer credit for incoming students?*

- ○ Registrar's office
- ○ Program or department chair
- ○ Faculty members or instructional staff
- ○ It depends on the agreement (please explain)
- ○ It depends on the student's circumstances (please explain)
- ○ Other (please specify)

23) *Transcripting*

When your institution is the receiving institution in a block transfer agreement, what information is recorded on the incoming student's transcript? Recognizing that the information that is recorded might be different for different agreements, please check all that apply.

- ☐ Name of institution from which credit is being transferred
- ☐ Name of program from which credit is being transferred
- ☐ Total amount of "block" credit awarded
- ☐ Total amount of "unassigned" credit awarded
- ☐ Total amount of subject credit awarded, e.g. "ENGL 15 credits"
- ☐ Credit assigned to specific courses, e.g. "MATH 100 6 credits"
- ☐ Student's grade in specific courses being transferred
- ☐ Student's GPA for all transferred credits
- ☐ Advanced standing (e.g. student is admitted to third year of a four-year program)
- ☐ Course exemptions (e.g. student is exempted from taking specified course(s) at the receiving institution)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

24) When a student transfers to your institution using a block transfer agreement, which courses from the previous institution are recorded on the student's transcript at your institution?

☐ All courses taken at the previous institution

☐ Only the courses from the previous institution which are being transferred

☐ Only the courses from the previous institution which transfer as part of the block transfer agreement

☐ It depends on the program (please explain)

☐ It depends on the block transfer agreement (please explain)

☐ Other (please explain)

25) Can your institution track usage of its block transfer agreements, either as a sender or a receiver?

☐ Yes

☐ No

26) Which types of block transfer agreement activity can be tracked? Please choose all that apply.

☐ Number of students using block transfer agreements to transfer out

☐ Number of students using block transfer agreements to transfer in

☐ Total number of credits transferred out through block transfer agreements

☐ Total number of credits transferred in using block transfer agreements

☐ Number of programs participating in block transfer agreements as senders

☐ Number of programs participating in block transfer agreements as receivers
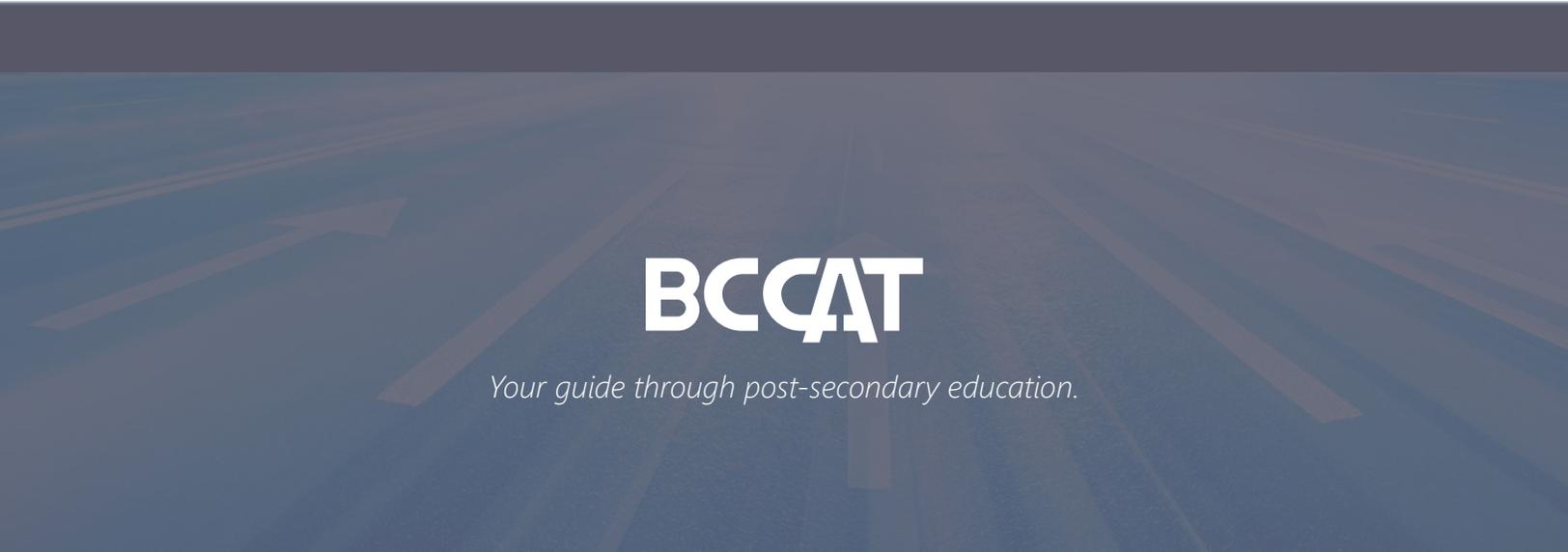
☐ Other (please specify)

27) Name of Institution

☐ Acsenda School of Management

☐ Alexander College

☐ British Columbia Institute of Technology

☐ Camosun College

☐ Capilano University

☐ Coast Mountain College

☐ College of New Caledonia

☐ College of the Rockies

☐ Columbia College

☐ Coquitlam College

☐ Corpus Christi College

☐ Douglas College

☐ Emily Carr University of Art and Design

☐ Fairleigh Dickinson University

☐ Fraser International College

- ☐ Justice Institute of British Columbia
- ☐ Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- ☐ Langara College
- ☐ LaSalle College Vancouver
- ☐ Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
- ☐ North Island College
- ☐ Northern Lights College
- ☐ Okanagan College
- ☐ Quest University
- ☐ Royal Roads University
- ☐ Selkirk College
- ☐ Simon Fraser University
- ☐ Thompson Rivers University
- ☐ Trinity Western University
- ☐ University of British Columbia
- ☐ University Canada West
- ☐ University of Northern British Columbia
- ☐ University of the Fraser Valley
- ☐ University of Victoria
- ☐ Vancouver Community College
- ☐ Vancouver Island University
- ☐ Yorkville University

28) Your department or area

29) Your position title

Thank you for your participation!