

SPECIAL REPORT

February 2007

CAMPUS 2020: Thinking Ahead: *Submission by the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer*

BCCAT was established as an independent arms-length agency by government in 1989, with members being appointed by the Ministry of Advanced Education and with a mandate to facilitate admission, articulation, and transfer arrangements among BC post-secondary institutions. This paper has been written to provide advice from the Council to the Campus 2020 consultation in areas that relate to BCCAT's mandate.

BC'S POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM TODAY

Over the last several decades, BC has developed a highly differentiated public post-secondary system of autonomous institutions with varying mandates. These institutions compete with each other for resources and students but also cooperate in system-wide initiatives that benefit students. A good example of system-wide cooperation is the maintenance of transfer agreements that ensure that students who take equivalent courses at one institution will be granted credit at another to continue their education. BC's transfer system, coordinated by BCCAT and including public and private institutions, is often cited as a model of a high-functioning transfer environment in North America. In recent years the post-secondary system, and hence the BC transfer system, has become more complex, with a blurring of institutional mandates and more diverse opportunities for students. Public colleges, university colleges, and institutes have been given authority to offer degrees, and

legislation has allowed private institutions to play a greater degree-granting role. There are now well over 100 degree programs being offered at these institutions and many more are currently under development. A major challenge is to ensure continuing and efficient student mobility and transferability of credits across this broad array of institutions with changing mandates.

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THE IDEAL POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM IN 2020

This paper will address five factors critical to the evolution of our post-secondary system. But first, we would like to paint a brief picture of an ideal, flexible post-secondary system, from the perspective of students.

By 2020, the secondary and post-secondary systems have built sustainable relationships and bridging programs to maximize both the number of students moving into post-secondary and the success of students making the transition. High school students and adult learners have access to accurate, current information about post-secondary options and diverse learning/career paths. Adequate spaces in an appropriate mix of programs are available in the post-secondary system for qualified students.

Universally accepted quality assurance mechanisms are in place to ensure the quality of programs and the portability of credentials within BC and across Canada, both at public and private institutions. Students know at the outset whether or not credit achieved at one institution is transferable to another and are assured that, with appropriate planning, a degree can be completed in the same amount of time regardless of whether they attend one or more institutions in pursuit of their goal. Numerous laddering opportunities exist so that students can complete a certificate or diploma at one institution and continue to the next level at the same or another institution, possibly after taking time off for work or other endeavours. Learning opportunities are available in a number of modes, including face-to-face and through the use of technology. Employers support their employees engaging in life-long learning opportunities and provide them with the flexibility they need to pursue further studies.

REALIZING THE VISION: FIVE CRITICAL FACTORS

In order to build on the success of the post-secondary system of today to achieve the ideal system described above, we will discuss critical factors as they relate to the core components of BCCAT's mandate. Despite, or possibly because of, the absence of legislative or regulatory authority, BCCAT has experienced remarkable success in achieving the objectives of this mandate. Part of that success rests on the research we have conducted and the extensive experience we have amassed working at the system level. Based on both empirical evidence and depth and breadth of experience in the post-secondary arena, we identify five areas in which substantive improvement by 2020 will a) facilitate student mobility and degree completion opportunities, b) ensure program quality, and c) improve the capacity of the system to plan more efficiently. Our recommendations specify actions that can be taken by government, by institutions, and by the Council itself.

Student Mobility and Transition

BC Grade 12 graduates can take alternate routes to degree completion: they can attend a degree-granting institution directly from high school, they

can first attend a college or university college and then transfer to another institution to complete their degree, or they can enrol in programs that are delivered through collaborative arrangements among two or more institutions. Ongoing communication at the curricular level between high school instructors and post-secondary faculty is vital to maximizing student success once the transition is made.

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Recommendations:

1. For students to feel confident that either route will earn them a degree, it is essential that receiving institutions provide reasonable and predictable access to degree completion spaces for both direct entry and transfer students and clearly commit to policies that promote both routes as viable options to degree completion.
2. BCCAT urges government to establish effective, ongoing structures to facilitate communication between the secondary and post-secondary systems on matters related to student transitions.
3. BCCAT recommends that as soon as possible, government restore funding to enable secondary school representatives to join post-secondary Articulation Committees, which are BCCAT-supported committees that meet regularly to discuss inter-institutional curricular issues.

Transferability of Credit

A major reason for the success of the BC transfer system is the large volume of course-to-course and block transfer agreements that have been negotiated by faculty at institutions. These agreements guarantee transfer credit for equivalent learning. Besides continuing to expand transfer agreements, it is necessary to move beyond our existing model to one in which we recognize that students move in a huge variety of directions, traditional and non-traditional; that students move among universities and other degree-granting institutions; that students in career/technical and trades programs (and not

just those in academic disciplines) need transfer information and opportunities; and that students in high quality private institutions should be able to transport credit between private and public institutions and among private institutions.

Recommendations:

1. Expansion of the BC transfer system must proceed in a careful manner to extend the benefits of transfer to students in programs and institutions currently outside of that system, while ensuring quality and safeguarding the collaborative relationships among institutions that are the foundation of the transfer system.
2. Such expansion must ensure that we are taking advantage of the latest technologies to streamline transfer credit negotiation and administration, maximize information available to students, and minimize institutional resource burdens.

Given that students are often uncertain as to what institution they will be admitted to for further study, it is imperative that institutions are flexible in enabling students to meet lower division requirements so that they have multiple options for enrolling in advanced courses.

Applicability of Credit

Just as important as awarding transfer credit is the applicability of that credit to credential completion. In 2020, many more institutions will be offering equivalent degrees in similar areas of study. Given that students are often uncertain as to what institution they will be admitted to for further study, it is imperative that institutions are flexible in enabling students to meet lower division requirements so that they have multiple options for enrolling in advanced courses.

Recommendations:

1. Institutions should consider, wherever possible, modifying degree requirements for equivalent programs to include more electives or adopting more flexible policies about what courses will satisfy program requirements.

2. Provided that care is taken to ensure success for transferring students, flexibility in the applicability of credit should be based on the objective that a student can complete a credential in the same amount of time whether or not he or she is a transfer student.

Program Quality and Institutional Accreditation

The expanding post-secondary system has meant new degrees being offered in different ways and for different purposes by institutions that have not traditionally offered degrees (for instance, colleges and institutes, public and private). This expansion has occurred across Canada in the absence of any standard degree nomenclature or universally accepted means of providing institutional and program accreditation. The result has been that some Canadian universities are not considering graduates of applied and other baccalaureate degrees in BC for admission to graduate or professional programs, severely disadvantaging students who then are unable to proceed with their education.

Recommendations:

1. Over the next several years, work must proceed across Canada to ensure the recognition and portability of appropriate degrees for entrance to graduate and professional programs.
2. There should be an examination of the implications and feasibility of developing national and/or regional accrediting agencies to assess and validate, against rigorous criteria, the quality of institutions and programs at public and private institutions.
3. It is in BC's fundamental interest to play a key role in that examination.

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Availability of Consistent and Reliable Data

The Student Transitions Project (STP) is a recent collaborative effort of the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and BC's public post-

secondary institutions to share student data to answer important questions on student mobility. The information that the STP has been able to glean and disseminate about the flow of students into and among post-secondary institutions has been groundbreaking in its depth and breadth, but still falls short of what the system needs for sound, evidence-based enrolment decision making. As technology advances, the transfer of data from institutions to a central databank and among institutions should become much simpler and could be accomplished on a continuous or on-demand basis. However, under-resourced ministries and institutions that can only provide sporadic system-level data will not result in the culture of data-based planning that is desirable.

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Recommendations:

1. Over the next several years, we must build an integrated data set that includes secondary and post-secondary student data that can be carefully analyzed to provide reliable reports on student mobility at predictable times to assist government and institutions with their planning. Data should be collected and analyzed for both post-secondary applicants and registrants.
2. Including data on students from private institutions will build a better understanding of the role that these institutions play in meeting the post-secondary needs of British Columbians. This will require enabling the Ministry of Education to assign the Personal Education Number (PEN) to private institution students to allow tracking across institutions and systems.
3. Government should commit adequate resources to build a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting.

THE NEED FOR AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH

In order to accomplish the work in the five critical areas and move towards the kind of ideal education system described above, an intentional rather than “laissez-faire” approach must be taken by both government and post-secondary institutions. Clear goals relating to (a) student mobility and (b) the flexibility and accessibility of the post-secondary system to accommodate that mobility should be set as part of the broader discussion on the future framework under which post-secondary education will operate. Accomplishing these goals will require a high level of cooperation among autonomous institutions that have a history of collaboration on system initiatives, like transfer. Government would play the key roles of funding adequate numbers of spaces for students and leading discussions to establish system-wide, measurable goals for which both government and institutions would be held accountable. Government should not become involved in micro-managing the system but should rather provide latitude to autonomous institutions, working in collaboration, to determine how system-level goals in the areas of admission and transfer are to be met.

In order to accomplish the work in the five critical areas and move towards the kind of ideal education system described above, an intentional rather than “laissez-faire” approach must be taken by both government and post-secondary institutions.

Such an intentional approach, with measurable goals and clear timelines for achieving them, will build on our existing successes; provide evidence of quality assurance to facilitate degree recognition nationally and internationally; improve the capacity of institutions and the system to plan more effectively; and result in a more flexible, responsive, and effective system of student mobility and transfer in 2020.

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