

Research Results

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Following Their Footsteps: What Happens to Students Who Move from Research Universities to Other BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions?

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Historically, student mobility in the BC public post-secondary system consisted mainly of students transferring from colleges and institutes into baccalaureate degree programs at a research university. This dichotomous system has evolved significantly over the past few decades to a system where every institution in the BC public post-secondary system now has degree-granting authority. As a result, British Columbia has a differentiated post-secondary system in which different kinds of institutions provide students with a wide range of educational program options and numerous opportunities for credential completion.

Given the numerous education choices and pathways available in BC, students tend to navigate their way through the education system in a variety of ways in order to achieve their goal. The Student Transitions Project (STP) conducted a study for BCCAT to help education planners and policy makers gain a better understanding of one of those pathways – the route from research-intensive universities (RIUs) to other BC public post-secondary institutions. This newsletter briefly highlights some of the findings from the study, from a short-range and long-range perspective. The full report is available at bccat.ca/pubs/footsteps.pdf.

The short-range perspective in Part I looks at the 6,143 students who moved from an RIU in 2007/08 to any other BC public post-secondary institution in 2008/09, including another RIU. Where did they go? What program areas did they move from and to? How many completed a credential at a research university before enrolling elsewhere? What were their educational goals?

In Part II, the longer-range perspective follows the footsteps taken by 20,422 new students admitted to RIUs in academic year 2002/03. How many subsequently left the research university to attend another institution? How many returned over the next seven years? Of those who stayed, how long did they stay? Of those who left to enroll elsewhere, when did they leave? How many returned to each RIU? How many completed a credential by 2009/10? Did the different education pathways result in any differences in credential completion and bachelor's degree completion rates?

Part I: What can we learn about the 6,143 students who moved from research-intensive universities to other BC public post-secondary institutions from 2007/08 to 2008/09?

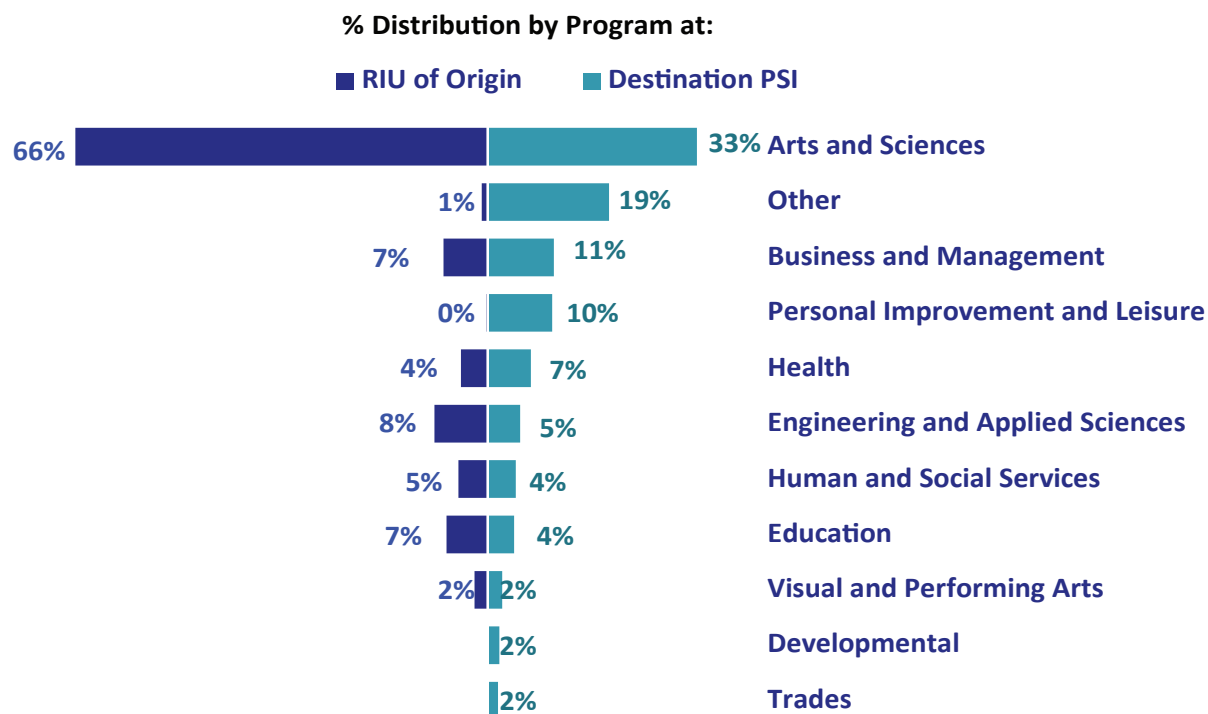
a) Where did they go?

BC Institute of Technology, University of British Columbia and Langara College were the top three institution destinations of student movers from RIUs. Roughly one-third of all movers from RIUs enrolled at these three institutions.

b) What program areas did they move from and to?

Regardless of the program of origin, nearly one-third of all students remained in the same program at both the originating RIU and destination institution. Arts and Sciences programs were popular among movers, but only 26% remained in Arts and Sciences in both years. More students left Arts and Sciences programs (66%) than those who moved into Arts and Sciences programs after leaving an RIU (33%). See [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1: Program Source and Program Destinations of Students Who Moved from Research-Intensive Universities to Other BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions, 2007/08 to 2008/09



c) How many completed a credential at a research university before enrolling elsewhere?

Among those who moved from an RIU, 24% completed a credential before moving. The majority (76%) did not complete a credential before moving, but many of these non-completers continued in another credential program at the destination institution.

d) What were the educational goals¹ of students who moved from RIUs to another institution?

Credential completers who moved from RIUs sought proportionately fewer diplomas (10% vs. 21%) and fewer bachelor's degrees (9% vs. 23%) at the destination institution than non-completers.

Part II: What can be learned about movers from research-intensive universities by following the footsteps taken by 20,422² new students admitted to research-intensive universities in 2002/03 and those who subsequently left the research university to attend another institution?

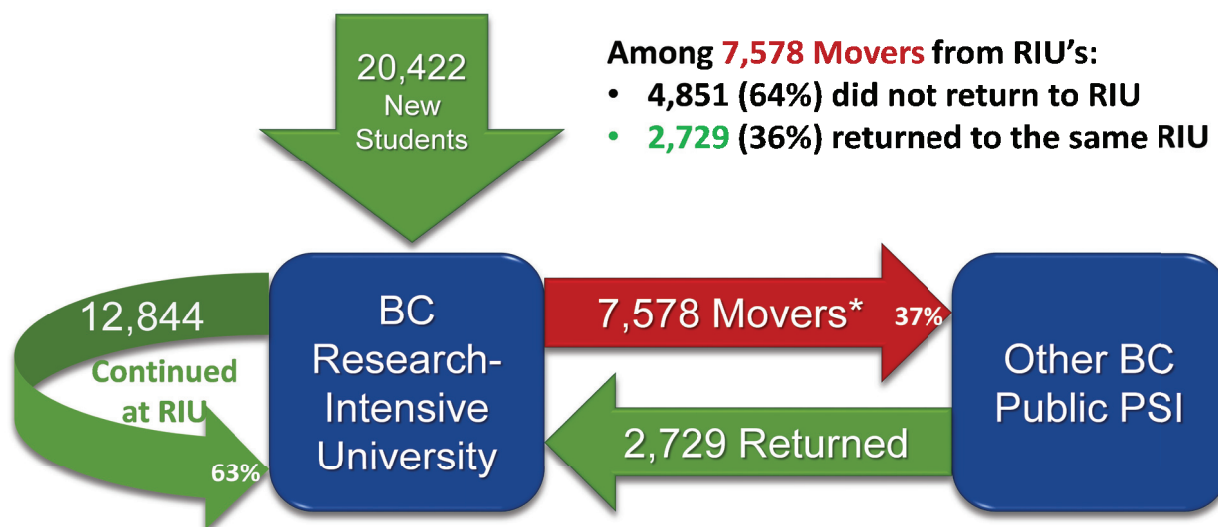
a) How many subsequently left the research university to attend another institution?

A total of 20,422 new undergraduate students were admitted to RIUs in 2002/03. Among this group of new university students, 7,578 (37%) subsequently left the RIU between 2002/03 and 2009/10, including 2,217 who completed a credential at the RIU before moving. See [Figure 2](#).

¹ The STP used credential category on the student records at the originating and destination institutions as a proxy for educational goals. Educational goals might be more accurately defined if we were able to directly ask the students about their goals, but this study did not involve a survey of students.

² A total of 20,422 new students were admitted to research-intensive universities (SFU, UBC, UNBC and UVic) in 2002/03, including students from all admission categories (BC grade 12, BC college transfer and other categories).

Figure 2: Destinations of New 2002/03 Students to Research-Intensive Universities by 2009/10



Note: Students may stop out for one or more terms and/or complete a credential before 2009/10. A total of 490 exchange students were included in this study: 484 continued at RIUs, 6 moved to another post-secondary institution, of which 3 returned to the RIU where they began.

b) Of those who left the RIU, how many returned over the next seven years?

From the group of 7,578 students who left RIUs, a total of 2,729 students (or 36% of those who left), eventually returned to the original RIU between 2003/04 and 2009/10.

c) Of those who stayed at the RIU, how long did they stay?

Among the 12,844 students who were new to an RIU in 2002/03 and did not leave to attend another institution³, two-thirds stayed long enough to complete a credential at the RIU. From academic year of entry (2002/03) to academic year of exit, this group of 12,844 students stayed at the RIU for an average of 3.9 years. Included in this group of “stayers” are 2,666 students (13%) who remained at the university only for the duration of the 2002/03 academic year.

d) Of those who left RIUs to attend another institution, when did they leave?

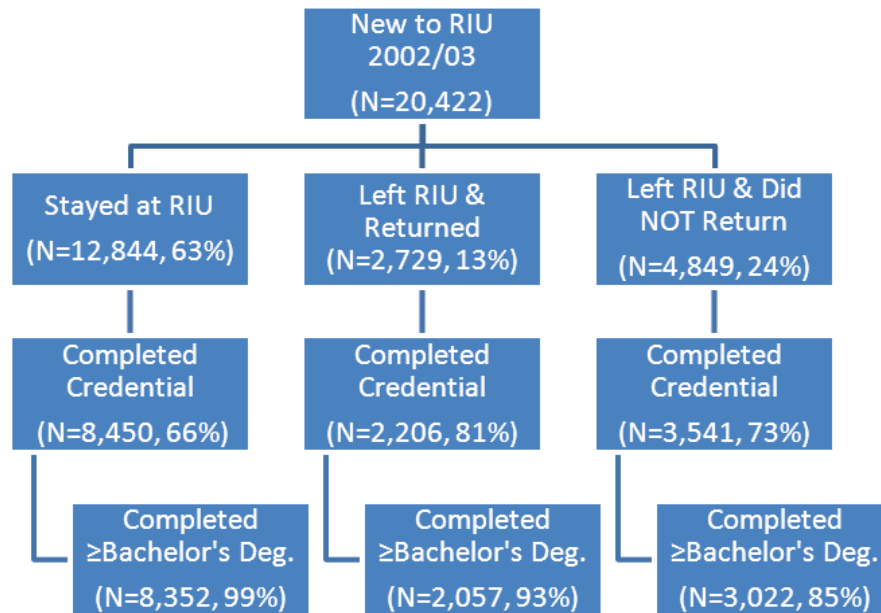
The students who subsequently moved to another institution were enrolled at the RIU for an average of 2.7 academic years (from time of entry in 2002/03 to academic year of departure to another institution). Excluded from this average length of stay is the additional time subsequently spent at another institution and any additional time spent at the RIU among those who came back.

e) How many returned to each RIU?

Among the 7,578 students who left RIUs to attend another institution, on average 36% eventually returned to the same RIU by 2009/10. UNBC had the highest proportion of students who returned (42%) while SFU had the lowest rate of returning students (32%).

³ Included in the population of 12,844 “stayers” are 484 exchange students, of which 448 of these exchange students stayed at the RIU only for academic year 2002/03. Excluding exchange students reduces the share of students staying at the RIU for only one year from 13% to 11%.

Figure 3: Registration and Highest Credential Completion Status of 2002/03 New to RIU Students (N=20,422) by 2009/10



f) How many completed a credential by 2009/10?

Among the 20,422 students who were new to RIUs in 2002/03, a total of 14,197 students (or 70%) completed a credential. Two-thirds of the total entry cohort (or 95% of credential completers) attained a bachelor’s degree or higher by 2009/10. A total of 766 students attained a credential below a bachelor’s degree, including certificates, diplomas, etc.

g) Did the different education pathways result in any differences in credential completion and bachelor’s degree completion rates?

The credential completion and bachelor’s degree completion status of each of three groups of students is summarized in **Figure 3**. Differences in credential completion rates between these three groups may be partially explained by: (a) the presence of exchange students⁴ in the group of “stayers”;

⁴ With exchange students excluded, the credential completion rate of the “stayers” group increases from 66% to 68%.

(b) differences in the length of credentials sought – students who left RIUs completed proportionately more short credentials than those who stayed; and (c) differences in academic intentions – not all students enrolled for the purpose of obtaining a credential.

Conclusion

The traditional unidirectional movement of students from colleges to research universities for degree completion has developed into a complex multi-directional system of student mobility, aided by the changing post-secondary landscape in BC and the numerous degree completion options. The precise reasons why students move from research-intensive universities to other institutions is not known, but a BCCAT survey of movers in its planning phase may provide a better understanding of student intentions and motivations.



Your guide through post-secondary education.

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