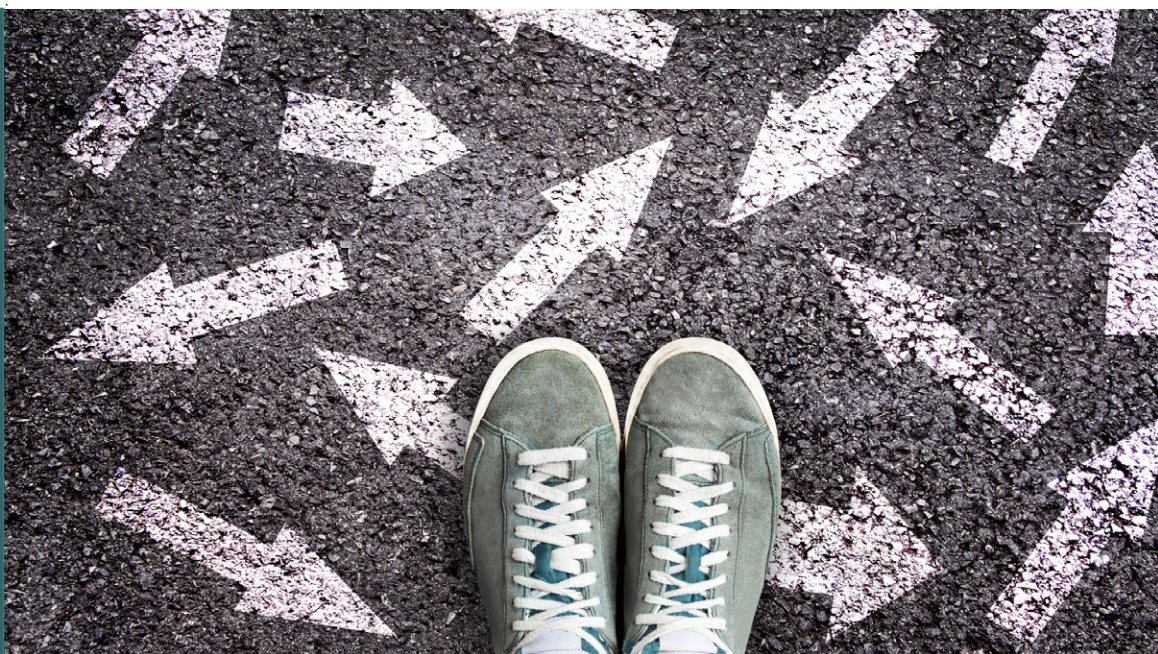


Applying Credit to Multiple Credentials

Prepared for BCCAT by Ted James and Bob Cowin

February 2020



BCCAT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Permitting students to transfer credits earned in one program towards another program lies at the heart of the BC post-secondary transfer system, maximizing student mobility through credit portability. Generally, this type of transfer occurs either when students have not been awarded a credential for the credits being transferred, or where students progress from one program to a higher-level program, such as transferring credits earned in a diploma to a degree. But opportunities also exist to transfer credits from a previously awarded credential to a credential at the same or lower academic level.

This study focused on situations where students seek to apply credits to multiple credentials that are *lateral* (for example, where a student with a marketing diploma seeks to earn another business diploma) or *reverse* (for example, where a student with a social work degree seeks to earn a certificate in addictions). The common practice of using credit in the ordinary progression of junior to senior credentials (such as, where a student uses credits in a diploma to block transfer into a degree) was outside the scope of this project. The study examined only undergraduate credentials and posed the following questions:

- To what extent, and in what ways, do public post-secondary institutions in BC allow students to use credit that they have already applied towards earning one credential as credit towards another credential at the same or lower level?
- What policies and practices currently govern the awarding of credit for multiple credentials, and how readily available are these?
- To what extent are institutional policies consistent across the province, and where do they vary?
- What issues are raised by the practice of allowing the same credit to be used in multiple credentials, and how might the BC public post-secondary system best address these issues?

To answer these questions, we conducted a literature review, gathered data on current policies and practices published on a sample of institutional websites, conducted interviews with institutional personnel, and collected background policy documentation.



Opportunities exist for students to transfer in a variety of directions; not just upwards, from one program to a different, higher-level program.

This study focused on situations where students seek to apply credits to multiple credentials that are "lateral" or "reverse".

The literature review identified two issues central to policy about multiple credentials: (1) academic integrity, i.e., how to avoid devaluing the validity of a credential due to reduced credit requirements for multiple credentials, and (2) communication, i.e., how to ensure stakeholders understand the learning and effort that multiple credentials represent. The literature review also found this topic lives within the broader context of a desire to reform the credentialing system itself to make it more consistent across jurisdictions and more transparent to employers. Here the growth of “stackable” credentials is notable, but again can introduce further confusion in terminology.

The data collected from institutional websites and personnel provided some information about lateral multiple credentials but much less about reverse pathways. Typically, BC institutions limit the number of credits that can be double-counted, requiring at least 50% new coursework in the second credential, although some require only 25%. These requirements are often embedded in policies about transfer and residency. Policies regarding dual and joint degrees were more prevalent, again with various regulations and restrictions such as a time limit on the currency of previous credit.

The varying institutional criteria for awarding multiple credentials are not currently an identified issue in the BC post-secondary system, but attention to the challenges of academic integrity and communication with stakeholders is advised, particularly in a world where learning and credentialing may be becoming more modularized. In this environment, it would be desirable for the BC post-secondary system to formulate practices and regulations that strike a defensible balance allowing flexibility and portability, while still maintaining the integrity of each credential, and communicating to stakeholders the amount of new learning in the second credential.

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

Permitting students to transfer credits earned in one program towards another program lies at the heart of the BC post-secondary transfer system. Generally, this type of transfer occurs either when students have not been awarded a credential for the credits being transferred, or when students progress from one program to a higher-level program, such as transferring credits earned in a diploma to a degree. But opportunities also exist to transfer credits from a previously awarded credential to a credential at the same academic level or lower.

The ability for students to apply credit earned in post-secondary courses to multiple credentials is an extension of the broader phenomenon of promoting more flexible portability of credit. Traditionally, credit earned in one program area could not be applied outside the program it was earned in. Over time, as overlap in curriculum common to several programs was formally recognized, permission to transfer that credit from one area into another grew, and spurred the creation of a myriad of new credit transfer possibilities, including dual credit and concurrent credit. The flexibility was also extended from the course to the program level, allowing students to count credit used to earn one credential to be counted towards a further credential, such as credit for a diploma or associate degree laddering into a bachelor's degree. In addition, some credit transfer occurred prior to the awarding of a credential and some could occur afterwards, such as with post-baccalaureate diplomas where some undergraduate credit could be applied towards a graduate level program. An example of further transfer flexibility is courses that count as general or breadth electives in multiple programs, such as where a student could take Introduction to Psychology as an elective within a BA program, but if the student switched to another degree program could use that course credit to fulfill a breadth requirement within the program as well.

This increased flexibility, however, did not come without concerns. Some felt it was less than transparent to allow credit to be applied to more than one program of the same level or type. This was seen as tantamount to “double dipping” with negative connotations. Even those who supported this increased flexibility felt there needed to be limits on how much credit could be applied, what time limits should be set for credit applicability, whether minimum grades for applicability should be identified, and how credentials embedded within other credentials should be treated. These concerns have given rise to more critical analysis of the nature and value of such credential innovation (Williamson & Pittinsky, 2016). In a wider context, this also forms part of the debate about what exactly such credentials mean and what their value is. (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

The various potential conditions required to regulate the use of credit for multiple credentials can be seen, for example, in the following policy statement from Thompson Rivers University:

The ability for students to apply credit earned in post-secondary courses to multiple credentials is an extension of the broader phenomenon of promoting more flexible portability of credit.

MULTIPLE PROGRAMS occur when students undertake more than one certificate, diploma or degree with the University. When students undertake multiple specializations within a single degree, they are considered double majors, minors, or concentrations.

- a. Multiple programs require the satisfactory completion of all requirements of each of the individual programs.*
- b. Multiple programs may be completed either concurrently or sequentially.*
- c. Graduating multiple program students will receive one credential for each of the programs. The credentials awarded to multiple program graduates will not differ from those awarded to graduates of the corresponding single credential programs.*
- d. A minimum of 6 additional credits will be required for a dual certificate program.*
- e. A minimum of 15 additional credits will be required for a dual diploma program.*
- f. A minimum of 30 additional credits will be required for a dual degree program.¹*

In the past, when there was a small number of students seeking to apply credit to multiple credentials, these issues were not central in the minds of institutional policy makers. However, with the increased popularity of joint, embedded and stackable credentials, this topic has grown in importance. Institutions in many jurisdictions are navigating the criteria and conditions involved in regulating the application of credit to multiple credentials.

Purpose/Goal

This project focused on the collection and analysis of the various policies and practices used by BC post-secondary institutions when applying credits earned by students to more than one undergraduate credential, where the second credential is at the same level or lower than the first. The purpose was to map what commonality exists across the BC public post-secondary system.

Scope

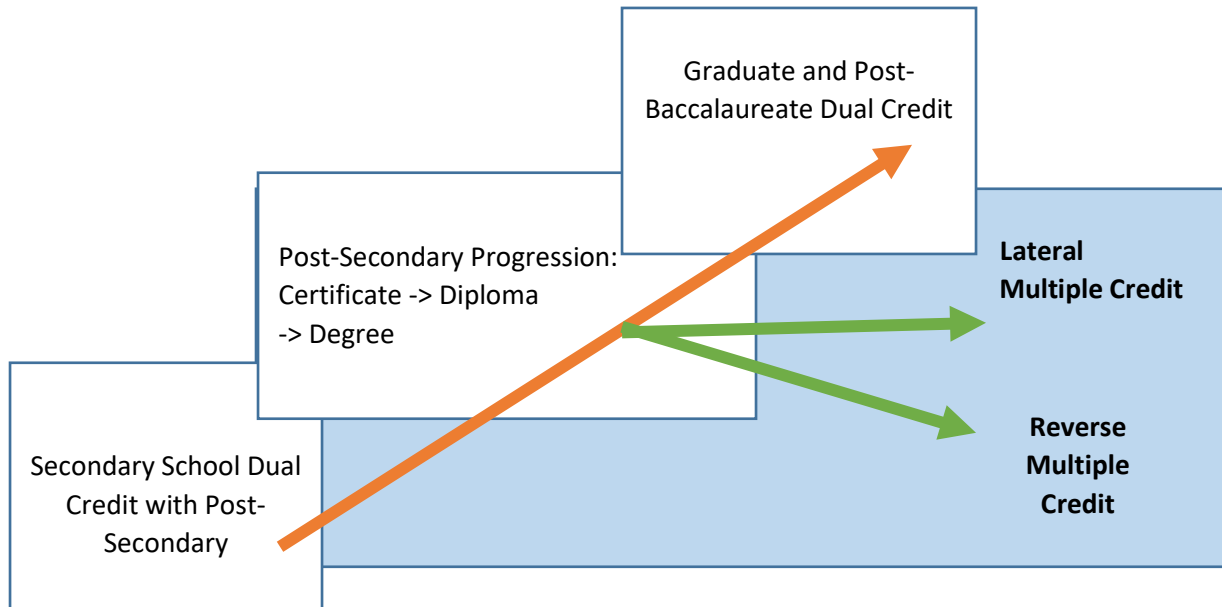
The institutions studied are a selection of British Columbian and other North American public post-secondary institutions. The range of credentials included in the project's scope included certificates, diplomas, associate degrees and three- and four- year baccalaureate degrees.

Our focus excluded the concurrent credit pathway used by some students to earn dual credit for secondary school courses in post-secondary programs, where the credits used toward two credentials are considered functional at two different academic levels. The project also only dealt with programming at the undergraduate level (including some professional programs such as education) and did not include the various ways that multiple credit can be earned by students within graduate programs.

Most importantly, the study was limited to lateral or reverse application of credit for multiple credentials, rather than ordinary laddering (progression) from a lower to a higher credential.

¹ Source: https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Types_of_Undergraduate_Degrees5670.pdf (page 4)

FIGURE 1: Programming within Scope (blue shading)



The scope of the study is depicted in the blue-shaded portion of the diagram in **Figure 1**. The green arrows reflect applications of credit to multiple lateral or reverse credentials as opposed to the credit applied in the ordinary progression depicted by the orange line.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the research project were as follows:

- To review existing literature and other relevant sources of information on the application of credit to multiple credentials;
- To collect and analyze published policies regarding application of credit from previous undergraduate credentials to subsequent credentials;
- To document examples of:
 - Limitations on the amount of credit that may be applied to credentials at the same or lower level;
 - Differences in how credits from other institutions may be applied, where joint credential agreements are in place, and where they are not;
 - How credit from embedded credentials (for example, a certificate in a specialization) may be applied toward a higher-level credential;
- To create a typology of policies to classify common practices;
- To explore whether and how exceptions are managed within these policy areas;
- To identify areas for future research and, if appropriate, the development of best practices.

Methodology

The research design had four components:

- Identifying practices and issues in other jurisdictions through a literature review.
- Gathering data from institutional contacts on the use of credit for multiple credentials in BC:
 - Review of the current policies and practices regarding use of credit towards multiple credentials displayed on 20 websites of BC public post-secondary institutions
 - Interviews with Registrars and Vice-Presidents (Academic) at colleges, institutes, teaching-intensive universities, and research-intensive universities. Requests were accepted by 11 Registrars and four Vice-Presidents.
 - Collection of background policy documents pertaining to issues regarding the use of credit for multiple credentials
- Analyzing what is common or different, and why, among examples of policies and practices.
- Synthesizing results into a framework of new knowledge.

In summary, this research project sought to investigate how and in what ways BC public post-secondary institutions offer students opportunities to apply multiple credit to different credentials on lateral or reverse pathways. The goal was to support the development of policy and practices that strike a defensible balance allowing flexibility and portability, while still maintaining the integrity of each credential, and communicating to stakeholders the amount of new learning in the second credential.

The goal of this research project was to support the development of policy and practices that strike a defensible balance allowing flexibility and portability, while still maintaining the integrity of each credential, and communicating to stakeholders the amount of new learning in the second credential.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

While the practice of permitting credit earned in one context to be applied toward the requirements of another program has received extensive exposure in the research literature, notably much less attention has been devoted to situations where this phenomenon produces multiple credentials at the same or lower level.

The literature about multiple credentials is most extensive with respect to joint degrees (one credential offered by two institutions) and dual or double degrees (a single program of studies leading to a credential from each of two institutions). The impetus for such degrees came from Europe (Knight, 2008), spread to Australia (O'Brien & Proctor, 2011) and Asia (Hou, 2017) and "has left Americans in the unfamiliar position of playing catch-up" (Guttenplan, 2011).

As a result of the mutual transfer of credit between the two providers, and possibly other streamlining of requirements, dual awards may provide students with an opportunity to achieve two qualifications in a shorter time than if they were completed separately. However, the awarding of qualifications, while done separately by each provider, may be delayed until the requirements of both programs have been fulfilled (Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2017). And the use of two providers, especially when in different countries, can set up a variety of challenges created by different cultures, expectations and requirements (Yamutuale, 2017).

Despite dual degrees typically requiring more credits and a longer time to complete than a single degree, the time to acquire the second degree may be considerably shorter than the first. The University of Arizona's dual bachelor's degree in civil engineering requires only two years of study in China followed by two years in the USA.

This is the same structure as for the two BA degrees in four years awarded through the collaboration of the University of British Columbia and Sciences Po (l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris) in France. The UBC website² explains how this program works:

As a Dual Degree student, you'll spend the first two years of your studies at one of Sciences Po's three regional campuses: Menton, or Le Havre, or Reims. Each Sciences Po campus specializes in a particular region of the world, and offers a core curriculum with a heavy linguistic and cultural focus. Courses are taught in English, with additional instruction in French and the languages spoken in the campus' region of focus.

During the second half of your second year, UBC will guide you through the process of choosing a major and creating a study path at UBC. The curriculum at Sciences Po prepares you to major in five areas at UBC: History, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, or Economics.

Other programs that are not intentionally integrated often have minimum thresholds of new coursework for a second baccalaureate. At the University of West Virginia³, for example, the second degree requires a minimum of 30 additional credits and each degree major must have a minimum of 50% unique credit hours. The University of Oregon's rules for concurrent degrees⁴ stipulate that the student must complete a minimum of 36 credits (45 credits if the first degree is from another institution) at the University of Oregon, beyond the amount of credit required for the degree that has the highest credit requirement. In the case of dual degrees, the University of Oregon requires at least 75% of the coursework for the major in the second degree to be completed after the first bachelor's degree.

² Abridged source: <https://sciencespo.ubc.ca/program-overview/>

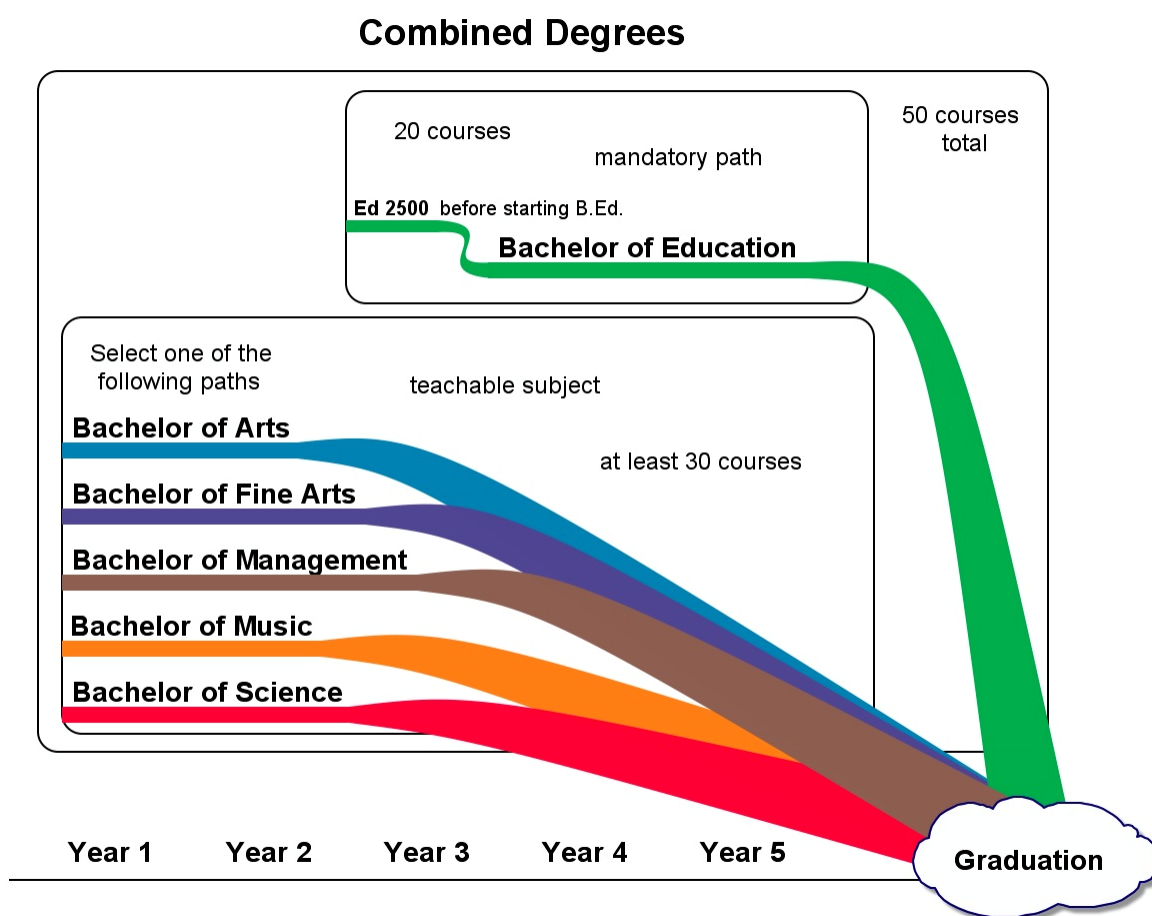
³ See: http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/degree_regulations/#awardingdegreestext

⁴ See: <https://registrar.uoregon.edu/current-students-/concurrent-degrees>

Another example of a dual bachelor's degree is the 3-2 engineering program, such as at CalTech in California⁵, where students complete three years of foundational study at their first institution, usually a college, followed by two years with a university partnering institution to complete the engineering portion. Although this arrangement takes one year longer to complete than the traditional four-year degree, the student actually earns a bachelor's degree from both institutions.

Dual or combined degrees may also be pursued within the same institution. Canadian post-secondary institutions often provide this option in teacher training programs where students study concurrently for a Bachelor of Education while taking courses in another degree field, such as a Bachelor of Arts or Management. The website of the University of Lethbridge, for instance, offers the following diagram of the dual degree options available:

FIGURE 2: Combined Degree Options at the University of Lethbridge⁶



⁵ See <http://www.admissions.caltech.edu/apply/32-program>

⁶ Source: http://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/Combined%20Degrees_0.jpg

An innovative approach to joint credentialing is the *Reverse Transfer*⁷, a statewide program of delayed credentialing in Colorado. Students who do not complete an associate degree from a college before entering a four-year university are able to earn an “associate’s in passing” when they earn sufficient university credits to be eligible for the two-year junior degree. They are awarded both the associate degree and, on completion of the required credits, a baccalaureate. This flexibility assists students who leave before completing their four-year program and who otherwise would have no credential.

One key aspect of any discussion of multiple credentials is the notion of double-counting credit, often pejoratively referred to as “double dipping”. Double dipping is when the completion of one course fulfills more than one degree requirement (Columbia College, 2018). Rules about double dipping are easy to find on the websites of American universities and colleges – for example, the Philosophy department at the University of Arizona⁸ allows 6 units of double dipping with any other major that also allows double dipping.

In general, it seems that although institutions may be explicit about the minimum number of credits that must be completed at the institution conferring the credential, the rationales for these policies are rarely made public. It is not at all clear why some institutions have a residency requirement of 50% of all credits for a bachelor’s degree while others require only 25%. In the same vein, it is not clear on what grounds institutions determine the minimum number of additional credits that must be completed for a second credential at an equivalent or lower level than the first.

The literature identifies two issues that are central to policy about multiple credentials, namely academic integrity and communication.

The question of academic integrity is not easily resolved, with its presence in dual degree policy and rationale not having settled into coherent practice even in countries with more than two decades of dual degree offerings (University of Cape Town, 2015). The two competing perspectives on integrity may be summarized as follows:

Many would argue that attributing the same courses or workload towards two or more degrees from two or more institutions in different countries devalues the validity of a qualification. Others believe that if students meet the stated learning outcomes/competencies required to obtain a qualification regardless of where or how the competencies were acquired, the credential is legitimate.... Both arguments have validity but the variety of models used prevents a clear resolution to the question of ‘legitimacy’.
(Knight, 2008, p.308)

Knight (2013) subsequently framed the question about the ethics and values behind giving two degrees for ostensibly the work of one as the thin edge of academic fraud:

But, with all new ideas, come questionable adaptations and unintended consequences. For instance, in some cases, double degrees can be nothing more than double-counting one set of course credits... While it may be very attractive for students (and potential employees) to have two degrees from institutions in two different countries, the situation can be described as the thin edge of academic fraud if course requirements for two full degrees are not completed or differentiated learning outcomes not achieved. (p.87)

⁷ See: <https://degreewithinreach.wordpress.com/>

⁸ See: <https://philosophy.arizona.edu/double-major>

Regardless of the position taken about the appropriateness of using the same credits towards more than one credential, the challenge remains of how to communicate what exactly the multiple credentials mean.

Regardless of the position taken about the appropriateness of using the same credits towards more than one credential, the challenge remains of how to communicate what exactly the multiple credentials mean. This is important so that employers and other stakeholders are not led to believe that graduates have undertaken more study than was in fact the case (Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2017).

Several authors have commented on the lack of general agreement about definitions (e.g. McMahan, 2015). Indeed, Knight (2008) calls the issue of defining terms and identifying key concepts and challenges “vexing.” She uses international collaborative programs such as double and joint degrees to illustrate the plethora of terms used to describe the programs:

These terms include: double; multiple; tri-national; joint; integrated; collaborative; international; combined; concurrent; consecutive; overlapping; conjoint; parallel; simultaneous; and common degrees. They mean different things to different people within and across countries – thereby complicating the situation. One of the key questions to be clarified is whether the terms listed above are used to describe the programme offered or the qualification awarded. (Knight, 2008, p.299)

Although Knight (2011) is referring to the global level, the observations are applicable to our provincial environment: “The challenge facing the higher education sector is to work out a common understanding of what joint, double and consecutive programs actually mean and involve...and [so] do not lead to undesirable unintended consequences” (p.309).

The literature review also found that this topic lives within a broader context of the desire to reform the credentialing system as a whole, to make it more consistent across jurisdictions and more transparent to employers.

In calling for reform of the American credentialing system, the Lumina Foundation (2015) noted that half the head-count enrolment in the USA is in non-credit occupational training, and that many individuals enrolled in this training encounter difficulties obtaining credit when moving to credit-bearing programs. Similarly, skills and knowledge gained on the job do not generate academic credits. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is an attempt to address this problem, but its application is largely idiosyncratic:

Since PLA is largely faculty- and institution-based, there are no common descriptors of the credentials being evaluated and no common standards on which to base decisions about the amount of credit to be awarded. As result, decisions about the awarding of credit are often inconsistent from one institution and program to another. (CLASP & CSW, 2014)

A second strategy for addressing the challenges presented by informal and non-linear learning is through the concept of stackable credentials, a term which does not yet have a precise definition (Ganzglass, 2014) but which connotes modularization, portability, flexibility, and multiple entry and exit points (Audant, 2016):

The most common description of stackable credentials goes something like this: over a lifetime of learning, individuals can assemble, or stack, a series of traditional degree-based and/or nontraditional credentials – certificates, certifications, licenses, badges, apprenticeships and more – that recognize achievements and provide an accurate assessment of knowledge, skills and abilities... While that narrative captures a number of key ideas, it glosses over important differences in what credentials are being stacked and why. (Williamson & Pittinsky, 2016, paragraph 3)

A shared rationale across the varying versions of what constitute stackable credentials is that skill requirements change over time (Pittinsky, 2015). In other words, even if individuals complete a degree, throughout their lives they may need to acquire additional skills with certification to attest to their newly acquired skills (Bailey & Belfield, 2017).

Williamson and Pittinsky (2016) propose that the best framework for thinking about stackable credentials is one often attributed to Salt Lake City Community College:

Vertical Stacking: The original and more traditional version of credential stacking, vertical stacking, thinks about credentials in a hierarchy -- with one level building on another, enabling the learner to progress toward a higher degree.

Horizontal Stacking: With horizontal stacking, the level of the credential is less important than the subject matter. Learners expand their subject matter expertise by earning credentials in related fields that, collectively, prepare each person for a specific type of job. Unlike vertical stacking, there is no explicit ordinal ranking or prerequisites, although some credentials may build on others.

Value-Added Stacking: Combining the concepts of vertical and horizontal credential stacking, value-added stacking is when a learner adds an area of expertise to an existing two- or four-year degree with shorter-term credentials to prepare for a specific type of job. (paragraph 6)

Bailey and Belfield (2017) present a different taxonomy of stackable credentials:

Progression: Starts with a short-term certificate and leads to a higher-level degree or credential.
This is a way that a student can acquire a credential on the way to an associate or bachelor's degree.

Supplemental: Short-term credentials that supplement prior degrees

Independent: a broadening of skills of knowledge that might lack coherence (p.8).

Bailey and Belfield conclude that although the notion of the stackable credential is logical and attractive, and has many advocates, it is often not clear how stacking takes place to create a coherent and more comprehensive education. An additional challenge in identifying stacks is that many non-credit programs may complement credit-bearing certificates and degrees.

As post-secondary institutions explore how best to integrate industry and professional certifications into degree and certificate programs, and as some are moving towards competency-based models, the result is myriad credentials in the marketplace and little clarity about what these credentials mean – their value, their quality and how they connect (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

The phenomenon of students using credit earned in one credential to meet the requirements of a second or third credential can be seen as a form of stacking, when additional credentials are assembled through double-counting of credits. Furthermore, the issues observed by external stakeholders and employers relating to the validity and viability of stacking also apply to multiple credentials in general.

SECTION 3: REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

If it's okay to use some or all of the credit earned as part of a certificate program toward a diploma or degree program, is it also appropriate for this to work backwards -- for some of the credit earned in a higher level program to be used towards the credit requirements of a lower credential?⁹

Introduction

This section reports the findings from a review of twenty BC public post-secondary institutional websites, interviews from 15 Registrars or Vice-Presidents (Academic), and two background policy documents we were able to collect. We examined websites of eight colleges, two institutes, five teaching universities, and five research universities from the Lower Mainland (6), Vancouver Island (4), Interior BC (7), and Northern BC (3). The website reviews were intended to determine:

- The extent to which information about multiple credentials is readily accessible;
- What topics are addressed; and,
- The consistency of policies and practices across institutions.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather:

- Estimates of the extent to which students were applying the same credit towards multiple credentials;
- Information on which program areas more frequently saw credit being applied to multiple credentials, or saw more requests for this use of credit;
- Observations on how well the policies and practices were working; and,
- Copies of any additional background documentation.

This was an exploratory exercise to provide an orientation to the application of credit to multiple credentials. It was not intended as a systematic study to determine the full range of approaches or how frequently each approach is used.

Laddering

Before considering the types of multiple credentialing that are the subject of this study, it is helpful to review our findings about the more frequent and traditional form of multiple credentialing – specifically the findings about “laddering” to higher credentials, e.g., from a certificate to a diploma or associate degree and finally to a bachelor’s degree. When students proceed to progressively higher credentials, they are generally permitted to count all relevant credits from a lower credential towards a higher one and to keep both credentials, even if both credentials are from the same institution.

⁹ Comment made in a questionnaire on multiple credentials at Royal Roads University.

Nevertheless, there are sometimes restrictions. For example, one website specified that students can use block transfer to obtain 60 credits, but none of those credits can be used as upper-level credits towards a bachelor's degree. One university said that the internal transfer of credits across its programs is at the discretion of the receiving program.

Institutional representatives overwhelmingly confirmed that the majority of credit transfers occurred in the progressive laddering of programs, and not in lateral laddering. An example is the following comment from an informant at a teaching-intensive university:

There hasn't been a lot of discussion about specifically increasing opportunities for lateral double-counting. It is mostly the ordinary progression where we try to increase flexibility. That's because we tend to view the accumulation of education longitudinally rather than laterally. That's our mindset, but it isn't always the students' view.

Indeed, some institutions mentioned how differently some students may be pursuing their education compared to the institution's framework. This can mean that the laddering is in fact concurrent rather than sequential when students are pursuing courses in a somewhat desultory manner. The Registrar at one teaching-intensive university said:

Students are supposed to be in a program but a lot of times they are not. They complete a whole bunch of credits and they come to us and say "Can I have a degree, a diploma and a certificate all at once." We issue them all even though it doesn't make a lot of sense. But we only recognize the highest degree at convocation. They only get to go across the stage once.

Lateral or Reverse Pathways

The websites and interviews provided some information about achieving a second credential at the same level as the first, but much less information about obtaining a second credential at a lower level. At least one institution will not award its students a subsequent certificate or diploma in the same field as a previously earned degree; that is, it prohibits reverse pathways in the same subject area. At the other end of the spectrum, another institution explicitly encouraged its students to acquire multiple credentials and to do so on as expedient a path as possible.

Where an institution sits on this spectrum can depend on its mission and orientation. For example, the Registrar at a research-intensive university told us:

Students can transition from one program to another and their credits are portable internally, but once the credential is completed we tend to do a closed door on that and don't let them count the credit in another credential.

An institution's interest in providing opportunities for credit for multiple credentials can also depend upon aspects of its current strategic plan as well. The representative of one research-intensive university reported:

Different institutions do view things differently, and the more they are looking for international partnerships, the more likely they are to pursue dual degrees or to permit double-counting.

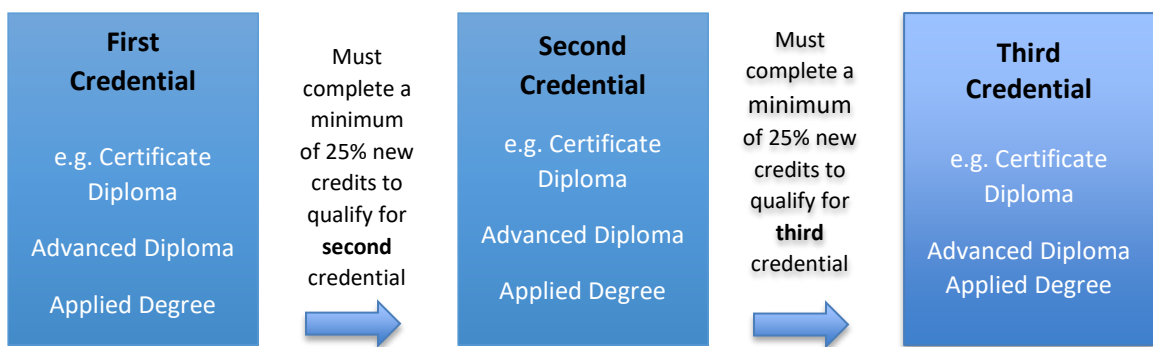
The spectrum of views and opportunities can also vary within institutions. The Registrar from a teaching-intensive university told us:

People have different opinions on double-counting, depending on the faculty they are coming from. Arts and Business are the most open to it. And then the availability of double-counting varies by program, because students who are in cohort groups have set curricula and little opportunity to count credit twice.

Representatives of several institutions said that up to 50% of the credits from the first credential can be used towards a second credential of the same level. One institution's representative added the caveat that the second credential must always include at least 18 new credits, regardless of the 50% rule. In one example, only 25% of the credits in the second credential need to be new. Residency requirements can be involved too. For example, if a student uses credit from one credential towards a second credential at the same institution, the "reused" credits can count towards residency as well.

Figure 3 shows how one college in BC permits second or third credentials provided that at least 25% of the credits in the subsequent credential are new credits.

FIGURE 3: Qualifying for Multiple Credentials at Camosun College



Policies regarding two bachelor's degrees were the easiest to find. Some websites distinguish dual degrees (two degrees taken concurrently) from sequential degrees (a second degree completed after a first degree), and from joint degrees (one program offered by two institutions leading to one degree). It seems common in BC that the credit threshold for a second degree is at least 50% new credits (60 credits). Various institutions' websites provide additional details, e.g., at least 42 of the new credits must be upper division; the second degree must be in a different field of study; and if the first degree was from the same institution, then at least 50% of the additional credits must also come from that institution and not be transferred from another institution.

A special instance of multiple credentials at the same level is when students earn a bachelor's level credential that is used to satisfy the admission requirements for entry into a professional degree program in education (BEd). These credentials are both at the undergraduate level, but are not really an instance of double-counting credit, because there is a fundamental difference between meeting the admission requirements for a program and the double-counting of transfer credit that this study is focused on.

Also worth noting is that some students, most commonly international ones with graduate degrees such as MBAs from non-Canadian institutions, have applied to have some or all of their graduate-level credits accepted as applicable to completion of a bachelor's degree, because students are seeking a Canadian credential. Some post-secondary institutions have implemented policies that specify that graduate-level credit cannot be used towards completion of an undergraduate degree.

Embedded Credentials

Many institutions offer a range of credentials – usually certificates – that are shorter programs based on parts of the curriculum of a longer program. The same credits are used to satisfy the requirements of both credentials, where all the credits earned in the shorter program count towards the credits needed to earn the longer one. These embedded credentials, generally composed of between 12 and 24 credits, are intended to be completed prior to graduation from the longer program, usually at the degree level. Both credentials may be noted on students’ transcripts, but a single parchment is issued to denote the completion of both credentials. These embedded credentials may be specialized, or may be generally thematic across various faculties without dependency on any particular field of study.

Many institutions offer a range of credentials - usually certificates - that are shorter programs based on parts of the curriculum of a longer program.

For example, Vancouver Island University offers an Addictions Studies Certificate program, which is described as follows:

This certificate gives students the opportunity to take a collection of courses (by their own design) that specialize in the area of addictions. Students must satisfy the Degree English Requirement, and complete 6 credits of required courses in psychology and one required second year methods course. A senior course in theories of addiction is also required but offered across a number of departments. These courses were selected/created to give students an appreciation for research, a strong background in pharmacology and addiction. The remaining courses can be chosen from a variety of disciplines that deal either directly or indirectly with addictions.

This credential is considered embedded as it has been designed to be taken as part of a degree or diploma in an area of the student’s primary interest. For example, students interested in criminology could benefit from a working understanding of addictions if they were going into policing, probation or juvenile services.¹⁰

Another example is the Computer Aided Drafting and Design diploma program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, which has specifically been designed to allow students to obtain multiple credentials at the same level. The website states:

The program offers students three options for their studies:

- Diploma in Computer Aided Design and Drafting
- Certificate in Computer Aided Design and Drafting
- Citation in Computer Aided Design and Drafting

The Certificate and Citation are embedded within the Diploma. They allow students who do not wish to pursue a diploma in CADD to have an optional exit point after two or one semester of coursework.¹¹

This arrangement provides students with a credential if they do not complete the entire diploma. This may make the program more attractive to students who do not have the time or resources to finish the entire program.

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.viu.ca/programs/arts-humanities-social-sciences/addiction-studies-certificate>

¹¹ Source: <https://www.kpu.ca/calendar/2018-19/science-hort/cadd/cadd-dip.html>

Freestanding Linked Credentials

Some forms of multiple credentials that can share credit are really free-standing in nature, rather than being embedded within a longer program. These can function as a series of separate but connected credentials. For example, a representative for an institute stated:

In some areas, it is quite common for students to take one certificate and then another that is related but different, and also have students taking multiple options of a program. So they will eventually complete the requirements of one option, graduate, and then come back and want to do another option.

Students who come back to do the second credential often are allowed to count previously earned credit towards this second credential, therefore being required to complete fewer credits after earning the first credential than if they were doing the second one on its own.

Table 1 summarizes the types of multiple credentials previously discussed, along with providing definitions, a description of the scope of the credential type, and some examples.

TABLE 1: Types of Multiple Credentials

Terminology	Definition	Scope	Examples
Double bachelor's degree	<p><i>Dual degree:</i> two degrees earned concurrently</p> <p><i>Consecutive degree:</i> two different degrees earned one after the other</p> <p><i>Joint degree:</i> one program offered by two institutions leading to one degree</p>	Can be offered internally within one institution or in partnership with another institution, often a foreign one	<p>BA dual degree with Sciences Po and UBC</p> <p>Bachelor's degree used as entrance to BEd at TRU</p> <p>BASc in Environmental Engineering at UBC and UNBC</p>
Embedded credential	A shorter credential offered concurrently and within a longer one; the same credits are used towards both credentials	Typically 12-24 credits in length; may have opportunity to earn multiple embedded credentials	Computer Aided Drafting and Design (CADD) citation and certificate embedded in diploma at KPU
Free-standing credential	A stand-alone program taken independently of a degree program	Typically at the certificate level; may or may not involve double-counting of credit	Associate Certificate in Applied Software Development at BCIT

In addition to the various types of multiple credentials, there are considerations that were found in the review of policies and procedures at institutional websites. These are discussed and then organized into a possible typology of the components of those policies and practices.

Residency

BC institutions commonly require between 25% and 50% of the credits applicable to a program to be earned at the credentialing institution; one of the teaching-intensive universities in the sample specified 25%, while another teaching-intensive university required 50%. Sometimes the threshold varies even within an institution: for example, 25% for programs of 30 or more credits but 50% for shorter programs. One institution said the requirements vary by program but generally are 25% at the baccalaureate level and 50% for sub-baccalaureate credentials.

BC institutions commonly require between 25% and 50% of the credits applicable to a program to be earned at the credentialing institution.

While uncommon, some institutions do not set residency requirements in some fields of study, and do not restrict courses being used from one credential to another. For example, one teaching-intensive university allows a student who earns an Associate Degree in Arts to be granted a General Diploma in Arts and Science without needing to take any additional courses.

In contrast, one college has a 50% residency requirement for a second diploma or associate degree, but treats credentials in general studies differently, even requiring the surrender of the first credential in some cases:

In the event that the first diploma or associate degree conferred by the College is in general studies, the student will be required to complete only the outstanding requirements of the second or subsequent diploma or degree. If the outstanding requirements total less than 30 hours of credit the student will be required to surrender the Diploma in General Studies.

Apprenticeship programs present a complication in that student learning in these programs is not measured with credits. One institution specified that the final term of the apprentice's classroom learning has to be taken at that institution in order to receive a credential.

Several institutions indicated they felt their policies were not particularly well-articulated, or used confusing language. For example, a representative at one college said:

Policy wording should be clearer. It is important to align residency requirements with the amount of credit that can be used towards a second credential.

In addition, a representative from a teaching-intensive university stated:

For lateral ones, what I think would be helpful is for us to be more explicit about the percentage of credits that can be shared between multiple credentials at the same level. We don't have any specified pathways for them which could help those who have been exploring and wondering what to do.

Institutions seem to be applying different standards to determine awarding of PLAR credit, and this has a ripple effect on multiple credentialing through transfer and residency policies.

Core Curriculum

Requirements related to residency requirements are for a subsequent credential to include a set of core courses or sequence of courses, regardless of whether the same or similar courses were completed in the first credential. Generally, this requirement is designed to ensure not only that all students have covered essential curriculum, but also that they have absorbed an institutional ethos. As a respondent from a research-intensive university commented:

I think a student should have to complete, at least, an integrative capstone course/project/thesis as well as an identified core suite of courses that reflect the journey through the program – as this isn't simply about nuts and bolts curriculum content, but also about exposure to the [university's] culture.

Some institutions have discussed approaches to ensuring certain core curriculum is required prior to completing any shared credentials, to ensure the integrity of each one. For example, the respondent from a teaching-intensive university stated:

Our Senate Standing Committee on Curriculum has debated having more specific requirements that upper-level credit is required for each shared credential. The thinking is that if it is to have our name on it, then we need to ensure the work completed with us is at the terminal end.

Currency

Institutions and programs vary in how recently they require credits to have been earned. This applies more frequently to credits transferred from another institution rather than ones earned at the same institution.

Some institutions will not accept transfer credits that are more than 10 years old. Another institution said the threshold varies from four to 10 years, according to the length of the credential. Another institution took a similar approach but provided a simple benchmark: twice the length of the program. One institution allowed exceptions to the 10-year rule, provided the student had sustained work experience in a relevant field. Yet another institution stated that there is normally no time limit for transferring courses, but then placed some caveats on this rule of thumb: “except in rapidly changing fields” and noted that program requirements normally have to be completed within 10 years.

One of the objectives of the study was to explore how exceptions are managed within institutional policies and procedures. Generally, students are able to contest situations where transfer credit is denied by submitting petitions to appeal committees.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Institutions seem to be applying different standards to determine awarding of PLAR credit, and this has a ripple effect on multiple credentialing through transfer and residency policies. One institution's website cautioned that PLAR credits recognized by one program might not be recognized by another program, even within the same institution. Some institutions identify PLAR credits on the student's transcript while others do not. One institutional representative said that the highest grade it will award for PLAR is a B grade. Several representatives mentioned that PLAR credits count as resident credit, although one cautioned that the same residency limit applies for PLAR credits as for transfer credits. One interviewee stated that PLAR credits are viewed as resident credits, but that there is a limit (50%) on the number of resident credits towards a credential that can come from PLAR.

Sometimes the previous learning of students is assessed not to grant credit, but for the purposes of advanced standing. One institutional representative said that although credit is not granted if a student is exempted from a course, the student is not required to take a substitute course if they can meet program requirements, possibly for another credential, using other courses. However, practices vary from institution to institution and from program to program. Some institutions grant advanced standing and then require the students to take extra credit (sometimes outside of the program area) in order to achieve the amount of new credits required for the credential.

Appealing Institutional Decisions

One of the objectives of the study was to explore how exceptions are managed within institutional policies and procedures. Generally, students are able to contest situations where transfer credit is denied by submitting petitions to appeal committees. We found no public post-secondary institution in BC with an appeal process or appeal committee specifically for petitions regarding multiple credentials or denial of credit for courses taken at the same institution. However, institutional representatives indicated that appeals on these grounds would be handled under the mandate of regular appeals committees, whether at the faculty or institutional level. Institutional representatives indicated that the number of such petitions was unknown but likely to be minimal.

Towards a Typology

Our investigation of the policies and practices surrounding the application of credit to multiple credentials was used to develop a possible typology of the components of those policies and practices.

TABLE 2: Typology of Policy Components

Component	Function	Scope	Examples from Policy Documents
Admission	Determining the minimum entrance requirements of previous education needed by applicants to gain entry. This ensures that incoming students have the pre-requisite skills, knowledge and experience.	Applicants usually must meet the entrance requirements of both programs when seeking multiple credentials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must satisfy entrance requirements of second or subsequent program (Okanagan) • Must apply for admission and meet all admission requirements for both credentials (UFV) • Arrangements for admission to dual degree program as differentiated from stand-alone degrees must be stipulated in dual degree program (UBC)
Residency	Requiring that a certain number or proportion of credits must be completed at the institution awarding the credential. This places a cap on the number of credits that can be transferred in from other institutions and even from within the same institution.	Even though only 50% new credits may be required to obtain the subsequent credential, in reality the student may face additional core courses or pre-requisite courses which will increase the number of new credits required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 25% - 50% of credits applicable to completion of the subsequent credential must be from the institution that awarded the first credential (Selkirk, NIC, Camosun 25%;Kwantlen, BCIT, VIU, NVIT 50%) • Sometimes variable within an institution (e.g. Douglas: 25% for programs of 30 or more credits and 50% for shorter programs) • For apprentices, final term of coursework (BCIT)
Double-counting	Permitting credits that have already been counted as satisfying the requirements of one credential to be counted again as part of another credential. The previous credential may have been awarded by the same or a different institution.	Triple-counting may also occur if a student has or seeks more than two credentials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May use up to 50% of credits that have been used to satisfy the requirements of the first credential towards the second one (Douglas, BCIT, Kwantlen) • At least 18 new credits AND a minimum of 50% of required additional credits must be new (Selkirk) • BA Adult Education automatically awards an associate certificate in workplace training to every BA ADED graduate, because the certificate courses are all part of the BA ADED curriculum. The certificate can also be taken independently of the degree program (UFV)

Component	Function	Scope	Examples from Policy Documents
Currency	Setting a time limit on how old previous credits can be before they are deemed no longer to be current. Usually refers to transfer credit but can apply to credit earned at the same institution.	This can be an institutional requirement or can vary by program area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 years for transfer credit (Capilano, Kwantlen, Okanagan) • Varies by credential length from 4-10 years (Douglas) • Twice the length of the program (Selkirk)
Core Curriculum	Requiring that certain courses or course sequences must be taken by the student in a subsequent credential, regardless of whether the same or similar course has already been completed in the first credential.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Block transfer can be used to acquire up to 60 credits, but those credits can't be used for upper-level credit towards a bachelor's degree (VIU) • Internal transfer: discretionary whether credits earned in one program will be accepted by another program (RRU)
Minimum Grade	Requiring that any credit counted within multiple credentials meets a minimum acceptable grade. This may also apply to the minimum grade point average (GPA) required to graduate with the credential.	Generally, members of the BC Transfer System are required to honour a previous institution's passing grade for transfer purposes, unless that institution itself requires students to meet a higher grade in certain cases, such as a literacy or numeracy requirement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically a minimum CGPA of 2.0 (VCC) • Can vary by program, with some programs requiring higher than 2.0 CGPA for graduation (UFV)
Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)	The assessment and recognition of prior learning that occurred outside formal credit courses, for the purpose of awarding credit for that learning towards a credential.	Few students use PLAR for multiple credentials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counts as resident credit (VIU, RRU). • Same residency limit for PLAR credits as for transfer credits (Selkirk) • PLAR credits recognized by one program may not be recognized by another program (Kwantlen)
Appeal	Providing a mechanism for students who have been denied transfer credit to be able to petition to an appeal committee to have the decision overturned.	This is not limited to multiple credentials.	Not mentioned separately in policies on multiple credentials.

Summary

It seems that BC institutions commonly accept that a second credential at a similar or lower level may not require as many new credits as the first credential. However, the rationale for this stance is not generally made public. The overarching rationale would appear to be recognizing prior learning and respecting the multiple pathways that learners take, but beyond this, there is little, if any, specific explanation of the rationale for not requiring students to take as many credits for a subsequent credential. This is not a large problem, but it does mean that reasons for inter- or intra-institutional variability are unavailable.

There is variation in exactly how many new credits are required for multiple or subsequent credentials, and sometimes the detailed rules seem idiosyncratic. This suggests that post-secondary institutions in the province do not share consistent practices in this area.

Institutions frequently specify rules for transferring credits towards a second credential, including the maximum amount and how current they must be – but here again, the details vary across institutions. PLAR, in particular, seems to be an area where a consensus is lacking within the province on how the results of credits awarded can be applied to multiple credentials.

It is helpful to think about three dimensions along which institutional practices vary:

- *Credits*: Minimum number or percentage of new credits required for a second credential. (This could range from close to zero in some types of dual degrees to 100 percent in other situations.)
- *Double-counting*: Extent to which previous credits can be counted towards fulfilling the requirements of the second credential.
- *Transfer constraints*: Regarding residency, currency, PLAR policies, and so on, within or across institutions.

All three of these dimensions will be relevant to the recommendations at the end of this report.

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SECTION 4: DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

The research conducted in this study uncovered, or shone more light on, several issues that merit discussion at the system level. Recommendations in response to these issues are presented in Section 5.

Potential to Become Problematic

BC's conventions about the forward or sequential laddering of credentials from lower to higher are well-developed and generally consistent across institutions and programs. In addition to conventions, there are regulatory standards, such as Associate Degrees being accepted province-wide for 60 lower-level credits and the Degree Quality Assurance Board (DQAB) degree-level standards that distinguish degree program characteristics from characteristics of programs leading to other credentials. In contrast, credentialing requirements for lateral and reverse pathways are less well-articulated and quite variable. Our interviews identified uncertainty and some anxiety within institutions about credentialing these less traditional pathways.

Despite robust practices to ensure consistent standards for individual courses for transfer and credentialing purposes, there are different ways in which institutions bundle courses into credentials when students do not follow the usual upward progression. This variability has the potential to devalue the meaning of credentials – a significant concern in that the specification of a syllabus, the assessment of student learning, and the awarding of a credential to attest to that learning are at the heart of post-secondary education.

Varying institutional criteria for awarding multiple credentials (as defined in this study) is not currently a pressing issue in BC, nor did we encounter evidence suggesting that BC students or employers are currently concerned about institutional uncertainty or inconsistencies with respect to reverse and lateral laddering. However, the topic is increasingly important in a world where learning and credentialing may be becoming more modularized. For example, here are two comments from respondents of a research-intensive university:

Students are demanding more flexibility in where and when they get credit – we need to be able to honour credits earned in other PSIs.

We are trying to maintain [being] competitive within a landscape in which stacked credentials, laddering, transferring, etc. are increasingly common and supported.

Independent actions are likely to exacerbate the challenges. It would be desirable for BC institutions at a system-wide level to prevent, or at least minimize, future problems by formulating best practice guidelines for the awarding of credentials at a lower or equivalent level as the first credential.

Fundamental Dilemma of Double-counting

It is redundant to require students to take courses when these students already possess the relevant learning from previous courses. On the other hand, a credential also signals that a certain amount of time, effort and “non-testable” or implicit learning has occurred since the student began the program. Stakeholders may reasonably expect that two students who hold the same two credentials will have spent similar amounts of time in their post-secondary programs, but this is not necessarily the case. The practical manifestation of this tension is a simple question: “How much double-counting of courses should be permitted across credentials?”

The Registrar at one teaching-intensive university highlighted the concern expressed by several institutions:

My challenge is that it can appear that students have done more work than they actually have. And employers can be confused. They say this student has two degrees and you say, well no, actually it is just one really. It isn't really transparent to all stakeholders.

This dilemma does not seem to be resolvable at a technical level, in that more and better data are not likely to lead to consensus. Rather, the issue seems to pivot on the dual messaging embodied by a credential. A credential is simultaneously a symbol of work successfully completed, and a symbol of skills and knowledge acquired. Institutions attempt to balance both considerations when they make decisions (often on a programmatic or individual basis) around double-counting. Unfortunately, this balance is often not apparent to employers, or even to other educators. The best the BC system may be able to do is to make a decision about the double-counting of credits, communicate it widely, and encourage institutional compliance. A greater level of consistency across institutions should be achievable; a formal standard that resolves the dual messaging that a credential embodies is probably not.

Confusingly Variable Terminology for Credentials

In addition to inconsistencies across the names and definitions of a number of certificates and diplomas within BC, variations in the names of multiple credentials are occurring at the baccalaureate level -- especially when these involve joint and dual degrees with institutions in other jurisdictions. More consistent or standardized nomenclature would be valuable.

Depending on the outcome of discussions about double-counting, it may also be desirable sometimes to identify on transcripts, and perhaps in credential names, when second credentials involve a significantly smaller number of credits than normal because the student applied credits from a previous credential.

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SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Double-counting

The practice of double-counting credits is widespread and well-understood when it comes to credit transfer in the progression from lower to higher credentials, with the maximum allowable amount of double-counted credit generally being 50%. However, with non-progressive multiple credentials, the practice is less clear. If the student is using credit acquired at the same institution, the credit is being internally “transferred” and the double-counting is more visible because it is being internally applied.

Two related questions arise: (1) Should there be an absolute minimum (in addition to a percentage) number of new credits for each type of credential, given that credentials may vary slightly in length across programs and institutions? and (2) Should a system-wide approach to residency be incorporated in this guideline, or would it be better to leave this decision to each institution?

While there is no universal standard at BC post-secondary institutions regarding double-counting of credits, at most institutions at least 50 percent of the credits in a second credential, if that credential is at an equivalent or lower level as the first credential, must be new credits.

This minimum is considerably higher than the percentage of credits from each institution in some existing international dual degree programs. Although it may be easy in principle to endorse the “50% new” standard on the grounds of academic integrity, this guideline may disadvantage some programs in terms of competitive recruitment and marketing to international students.

An alternative approach regarding the proportion of credits within dual credentials is to borrow an approach used in other fields called the Rule of Thirds¹²:

- At least one-third of each credential should be non-overlapping;
- At least one-third should overlap; and,
- Where the program is offered by two institutions, no less than one-third of the credits should be taken at each institution.

Regardless of whether either of these standards is deemed appropriate, we recommend that the BC system should discuss the practice of double-counting of credits, and its rationale in common circumstances, communicate it widely, and encourage institutional alignment where possible.

¹² For example, the Rule of Thirds used by divers to plan how much breathing gas is needed for a particular dive, see: <https://www.revolve.com/page/Rule-of-thirds-%28diving%29>

Credential Name

Using different names for similar programs and credentials is confusing. The recommended approach should foster clarity within the BC post-secondary system while acknowledging and respecting different approaches and nomenclature in other jurisdictions. Standard BC terminology should be used for credentials among BC post-secondary institutions, adding (when appropriate) a parenthetical comment about the terminology used at the partner institution, for example, “BC University’s joint BA in International Relations with Science Po (known at Science Po as the dual BA in International Relations)”.

Transcripts

Credentials and transcripts provide important signals for stakeholders and therefore should be as clear and unambiguous as possible. When a second credential at an equivalent or lower level is awarded concurrently or subsequently to the first (in contrast to progressive laddering) and where the required number of new credits is less than two-thirds of the normal requirement for the credential, we recommend that a notation on the transcript would be helpful. An example of this situation is an “overlapping” certificate taken after completion of a bachelor’s degree.

This would inform stakeholders that the student has completed fewer credits than is normal for that credential, but that the institution has determined that the student has achieved the same learning as in a longer version of the credential. BC already uses descriptors with some credentials, e.g., advanced diplomas, post-baccalaureate certificates, joint bachelor’s degrees.

Specific Cases

1. Post-Baccalaureate Certificates and Diplomas

In contrast to graduate certificates and diplomas, post-baccalaureate certificates and diplomas often consist of undergraduate courses, with a bachelor’s degree required for admission to the program. These post-baccalaureate credentials generally require only 50% of the number of credits required for regular undergraduate certificates and diplomas.

If the standard of “50% new credits” (discussed above) is applied, it could be interpreted as meaning that only 50% of a post-baccalaureate credential, that is already only half as long as similarly named undergraduate credential, need be new: that is, 25% (= 50% of 50%) as many credits as regular certificates and diplomas. This type of situation could be avoided by specifying an absolute number of new credits that need to be completed at the post-baccalaureate level. We would recommend that an absolute number of new credits be stipulated, perhaps in the range of 12 to 15 new credits for a post-baccalaureate certificate, and 24 to 30 new credits for a post-baccalaureate diploma.

2. *Embedded Credentials*

Certificates and diplomas embedded in bachelor programs represent a special case of second credentials at a lower level: one which involves concurrent rather than subsequent enrolment. They can be intentionally designed into the bachelor's program, as are dual degrees, but differ from dual degrees in that they are a shorter credential rather than an equivalent one. By definition, an embedded credential should be built into the program structure such that the entire shorter, lower-level credential is included in the longer, higher-level credential.

This study merely noted the existence of embedded credentials and did not examine the rationales supporting them. However, if the "50% new credits" standard is adopted, some embedded credentials could experience a significant disruption. Institutional policy should address, for example, whether students may acquire a separate certificate or diploma using courses they have already taken to acquire a degree. This issue needs to be noted so that embedded credentials are not inadvertently affected by other decisions about multiple credentials.

Quantitative Measures

We were not able to provide a quantitative measure of the extent to which post-secondary institutions in BC allow students to use the same credit for multiple credentials. This was because institutions generally do not track this phenomenon. It may be possible to use centralized data sets from the Central Data Warehouse and the Student Transitions Project, but this would require a significant effort well beyond the resources available for this study. For example, there would be a need to consult across the system to ensure the conceptualization underlying the research methodology is appropriate for all institutions.

Our research did show that many, if not most, BC post-secondary institutions do make some provision for multiple credentialing, although the specifics vary in the amount of detail and whether they have been formally codified. The interviews with Vice-Presidents and Registrars suggest that multiple credentialing is infrequent, but has the potential to grow. We did not find data on whether multiple credentialing is actually growing. If institutions decide they wish to start tracking the amount of multiple credentialing, it would be desirable for the post-secondary system to adopt a shared approach, or a few compatible approaches, to facilitate data aggregation across institutions.

Our research did show that many, if not most, BC post-secondary institutions do make some provision for multiple credentialing, although the specifics vary in the amount of detail and whether they have been formally codified.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR REGISTRARS

Background

Our research focuses on analyzing the various policies and practices used by post-secondary institutions in BC when applying credits earned by students to more than one credential. Our focus is on credentials at the undergraduate level only, and on reverse or lateral laddering (rather than ordinary laddering from a lower to a higher credential).

We are interested in you informing us of the circumstances in which your institution permits credit for multiple credentials, if this is identified in a formal policy, whether there are any notable trends in this practice at your institution, and how well the practices function at your institution.

The interview will take approximately 30 mins.

Questions

1. To what extent does your institution allow for credits previously used towards one credential to be used for a second credential or subsequent credit at the undergraduate level?
e.g., common – somewhat available – not permitted
2. Approximately how many students are using credit towards multiple credentials at your institution?
e.g., many, a few, hardly any, negligible, don't know, really varies across the disciplines and by type of credential
3. What are some of the fields of study where multiple credentialing occurs the most?
4. What are some examples of the range of practices at your institution for permitting students to use credit for multiple credentials?
e.g., do you offer a program where a student could earn an undergraduate certificate and then use the same credit plus additional credit to earn either an undergraduate diploma or an undergraduate degree?
5. Which of those practices seem to be the most successful? Why do you think that is?
6. Have some of the practices been problematic? Why do you think that is?
7. Does your institution have a formal policy on using credit for multiple credentials? If so, where is it located on your website? (If not, from whom could we obtain a copy/)
8. Do you know if there was any background documentation on the policy's justification?
9. Is there an appeals process for decisions where multiple credit has been denied? If so, how does this appeals process work?
10. What, if anything, do you think your institution could do to improve its policy or practices regarding the use of credit towards multiple credentials?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VICE-PRESIDENTS

Background

Our research focuses on analyzing the various policies and practices used by post-secondary institutions in BC when applying credits earned by students to more than one credential. Our focus is on credentials at the undergraduate level only, and on reverse or lateral laddering (rather than ordinary laddering from a lower to a higher credential).

We are interested in you informing us of the circumstances in which your institution permits credit for multiple credentials, if this is identified in a formal policy, whether there are any notable trends in this practice at your institution, and how well the practices function at your institution.

The interview will take approximately 30 mins.

Questions

1. To what extent does your institution allow for credits previously used towards one credential for a second credential or subsequent credit at the undergraduate level?
e.g., common – somewhat available – not permitted
2. From an institutional perspective, in what circumstances does your institution feel it is desirable for students to be able to use credit towards multiple credentials? In what circumstances does your institution feel it is not appropriate and why?
3. Why does your institution take that perspective? What is the background context to that institutional perspective?
4. What are the key factors that might cause that institutional perspective to be reconsidered?
5. What are some types of issues that have been encountered at your institution in putting that perspective into practice? *e.g., different application among different programs*
6. What, if anything, do you think your institution could do to improve its policy or practices regarding the use of credit towards multiple credentials?
7. Do you have any other observations on the use of credit for multiple credentials?

The bottom portion of the page features a teal background with a perspective effect. Several light-colored lines radiate from the center towards the bottom corners, creating a sense of depth. Overlaid on these lines are several semi-transparent arrows pointing outwards in various directions.

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