

Task Force on Standards & Processes

Final Report as Approved by Council

December 12, 1997

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BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The original committee was formed at the May 1995 meeting of institutional contact persons, in response to issues relating to the transfer process. At that time, membership was:

Norma Macovi	Open Learning Agency
Penny Gallagher	Langara College
Dale Gruntman	College of New Caledonia
Ray Pillar	University College of the Cariboo
Nick Heath	Simon Fraser University (Chair)

The committee met on 28 March 1996, during the B.C. Registrars' Association annual workshop in Nanaimo, to discuss methods of identifying and evaluating relevant issues. They produced a draft report on the basis of which BCCAT renamed the committee the "Task Force on Standards and Processes." At this point Penny Gallagher regrettably resigned from the committee and membership of the Task Force expanded to include:

Alan McMillan	Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design
Kathleen Cook	student
Mary Cooney	University of B.C.
Barbara Robertson	Capilano College
Finola Finlay	BCCAT
Maria Romanelli	BCCAT

Later additions:

Jean Karlinski	BCCAT (to replace Maria Romanelli)
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At our first meeting as a Task Force terms of reference were established (see Appendix A). The Task Force was formed to identify impediments to transfer related to administrative standards and processes. It was not in our mandate to deal with or consider any articulation-related issues, since this is the purview of articulation committees and other bodies.

CONSULTATION

Our first task was to gather more information about perceptions of transfer issues from knowledgeable sources in the post-secondary system. We designed a survey and distributed it to counselors and advisors in all public institutions. The GDA Report "Student Transfer Issues

Revealed in B.C.'s Post-Secondary Education Student Outcomes Surveys: An Analysis Intended to Enhance the Survey's Future Utility" also provided information and insight on transfer difficulties in B.C. In addition, the expanded membership was helpful in providing more comprehensive coverage of different types of institutions.

Concurrently with the work of the Task Force, the B.C. Registrars' Association (BCRA) established a Transcript Standards Committee to "examine the feasibility of recommending a set of common transcript standards for all B.C. post-secondary institutions." BCCAT provided support for this committee. As part of their information gathering activities all registrars of public post-secondary institutions in B.C. were surveyed regarding transcript recording and interpreting practices. This data has provided much useful information for the Task Force.

A draft of this report was circulated widely throughout the post-secondary system, and several presentations on the work of the Task Force were made to representative organizations such as the Senior Educational Services Officers, the BC Registrars' Association, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the Institutional Contact persons group of the BCCAT. Valuable and thoughtful feedback was received as a result of this consultation and all input and advice was considered in developing the final report.

THE REPORT

In this report we have tried to illustrate current problems with examples but have chosen to not identify specific institutions in order to enable a free discussion of the issues. We feel that assignment of blame is not part of the Task Force's mandate. Rather, our goal is to identify and raise awareness of impediments to smooth, efficient student transfer.

All post-secondary institutions in B.C. are relatively autonomous. This has many advantages, but it also means that students can be faced with a bewildering variety of regulations and requirements as they move between institutions. We have tried to examine our practices in the light of students' experiences and perceptions of the difficulties they face. Our guiding principle has been that students should not be disadvantaged as a result of the administrative processes in place at their institutions or at the institutions to which they wish to transfer. We believe that institutional practices which are consistent across the system, may provide a more equitable environment for students seeking to transfer.

We recognize that such practices evolve within the context of a single institution and may be functional and effective for that institution. However, student mobility and access is fundamental to both the values and the operations of the B.C. post-secondary system. In order to facilitate equity in access and transfer, some attention must be paid across the system to those practices which govern the ways in which students are able to move between institutions. In some cases, relatively minor changes in processes can make big differences for students. Where we have made recommendations for changes to administrative processes or institutional practices our intent has not been to impinge on autonomy, but to suggest alternative patterns which can benefit students through the provision of a more level playing field. Institutions may

also benefit since demands on staff by anxious students pursuing, for example, “missing” transcripts can be considerable.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource issues within admissions and registration offices have major impacts on the transfer process. Admissions offices at all institutions have difficulty coping with the influx of, in some cases, thousands of documents at specific times of the year. In the course of its inquiries the Task Force became aware that some institutions are experiencing significant difficulties in processing all documents in a timely manner despite the implementation of excellent and efficient procedures. This is especially true for large institutions and for those which have grown rapidly in recent years. Unless these resource issues are addressed institutions will continue to face significant challenges in processing student documents and students will continue to experience delays and frustrations.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

1. Timing Issues for Transfer Students

A student attending college ‘A’ might take courses in a Fall semester or in a Fall - Winter session and should be able to transfer smoothly and without a break to another college or to a university. However, another student attending college ‘B’ may take identical courses and receive identical grades in the same semester or session and yet be unable to transfer out in a timely manner. These timing problems are not apparent to the student before s/he registers and they seem to be imperfectly understood in the institutions.

Efficient business practices are evident at some of the largest and most complex colleges and universities, which are capable of producing final transcripts for virtually all students within approximately one week of the last examination in that session. This level of service is highly desirable for transferring students. Advantages which might be gained through transmitting and receiving transcripts through Electronic Data Interchange are likely to be illusory, if the fundamental timelines are flawed.

a) Marking and review time lines

Limits on the time permitted for the marking of final exams and papers are normally governed by administrative or academic regulations or guidelines, although they may also be referenced in some faculty collective agreements. Marking deadlines are often regarded as a workload issue, and can also be rooted in the evaluation philosophy of the institution. Faculty are committed to thoughtful, fair and accurate grading, and this takes time. Limits vary widely, from 24 hours to four weeks. However, the majority of respondents to the Registrars’

Survey indicated that at their institutions final grades are submitted between three and seven days following the exam or the exam period. The limits appear to be independent of the size of the institution or the size of its classes. Exam schedules also vary widely, a factor independent of the marking deadline, so even an early marking deadline can still result in grades which arrive in the registrar's office after a student has already transferred. After the term's grades are received by the Registrar, some institutions also hold a progress or status review of each student. At university 'X' this takes place approximately 24 hours after the deadline for receipt of final grades but at university 'Z' this process is much more lengthy, taking several weeks.

University 'N' accepts between 700 and 800 transfer students in January. College 'A' gets its transcripts to the university by mid December, ensuring that all of its students can be assessed for admission in time for January. University-College 'B' has a ten day turnaround time on grades, and their grades can arrive at the university by as late as mid-January. Students from this institution are seriously disadvantaged by this situation, since many of them may be relying on their final semester grades to gain admission. Even if they can be admitted on the basis of previous work, it is unlikely that their transfer credits can be assessed in a timely manner.

Recommendations

- 1 a.1 That each institution review its marking deadline for final exams and the time required for end of semester/term evaluation and adjust these, if necessary, to ensure that final grades are available in time to allow transfer students to meet deadlines of receiving institutions.*
- 1 a.2 That receiving institutions make their deadlines known to all sending institutions.*

Rationale

Institutions have a responsibility not only to continuing students but also to transferring students and should provide final transcripts in a manner which helps students transfer smoothly. Ideally, students should have their transcripts before they start classes in the following semester.

b) Late grades

Delays and accidents happen. When an instructor falls ill, meets with an accident, is called away unexpectedly, or even meets with an untimely end, grades can be delayed or even impossible to assign. Obviously, this is not the student's fault, and students should not be penalized in any way as a result. However, some institutions end up penalizing the student unwittingly, by either submitting a transcript with a grade of INC (which can be interpreted as an F by the receiving institution) or by not issuing a transcript until all grades have been finalized. Some institutions have programs, policies or practices which dictate that all grades must be received before a transcript can be generated. Resulting delays can have serious effects on students who are transferring out.

It is important in circumstances where a missing grade is clearly not the student's fault that registrars are enabled to generate a transcript at a student's request. It is also critical that some neutral term, acceptable to and recognizable by all institutions, is used to designate the grade. Typically, institutions have used designators such as INC (incomplete), CIP (course in progress), DEF (deferred), ENR (enrolled) or a blank. However, receiving institutions may interpret any of these to reflect a variety of circumstances, since they are used inconsistently across the system. Any of them may be interpreted by the receiving institution as designating a circumstance over which the student had control. Therefore, whatever term is used should be used consistently across the system and should clearly indicate no penalty to the student.

Recommendations

1 b.1 That the Registrar of each institution should be given the authority to enter a "no grade reported" notation for cases in which no valid grade has been received by the grade deadline, to enable an official transcript to be issued without delay.

1 b.2 That the grade "no grade reported" be GPA-neutral on the transcript, for the purposes of calculating GPA at both sending and receiving institutions.

1 b.3 That institutions should issue revised, final transcripts at no additional cost to the student if the original final transcripts included a 'no grade available' notation, once a final grade has been received.

Rationale

To a student who is transferring out, a missing grade which is beyond her/his control can be a deadly blow. All institutions have a responsibility to ensure that a final transcript is issued promptly, even if it is incomplete, because the student might be admissible elsewhere with three of four final grades, but will only be considered if a transcript is issued. They also have a responsibility to ensure that their grading practices do not result in unfair penalties to students.

c) Semester/term dates

Session dates sometimes appear to be set by institutions without reference to possible impact on those students who are transferring out. Local traditions, faculty and staff collective agreements, counts of total instructional days and statutory holidays are among the factors used to decide when a term will start and end. Occasionally these session dates don't quite mesh across the system. For instance, college 'C' might decide to schedule a longer break at New Year, finishing the Winter term as late as May instead of the traditional time of mid April. This can present a problem for any student wishing to continue her/his education at another institution the following term. However, these problems appear to be isolated and occur less frequently than in the past.

Some consistency in date setting may be an advantage for transferring students. We also recognize that each institution's Education Council, or Senate/ Board of Governors ultimately approves session dates taking into account a variety of circumstances.

Recommendations

- 1 c.1 That BCCAT request the B.C. Registrars' Association to develop a sub-committee to convene annually to establish suggested sessional dates for the public post-secondary system two or three years ahead of schedule. BCCAT should provide support for such a sub-committee.*
- 1 c.2 That in the meantime, all institutions should take into account the needs of students who might be transferring out or in at the end of a session and that the session dates be communicated for information to other BC institutions through the BC Registrars' Association.*

Rationale

Although there are relatively few problems concerning session dates, they arise from time to time and present an obvious barrier to efficient transfer.

d) Non-refundable deposits

Some institutions make students pay non-refundable deposits to hold places in programs. In the case of university transfer students mobility between institutions is fundamental to their progress towards a degree. In many instances college students may be awaiting an offer of admission to a degree program which has not arrived by the registration deadline of their current institution or the one they hope to attend. This delay may force them to pay a registration deposit at more than one institution or risk being unable to register anywhere. In some cases, where the receiving institution must process extensive waitlists, or for other reasons is unable to notify students of acceptance or rejection early, students may wait up to the first day of classes for notification.

Recommendation

- 1 d.1 That sending institutions consider making refunds available when university transfer students are able to prove acceptance at other B.C. institutions by a specific date.*

Rationale

Substantial deposits which must be forfeited may constitute a barrier to transfer.

2. Tracking Issues

Transferring students can be keenly aware of tracking issues, such as when their transcripts appear to not arrive as promised at the receiving institution. Although these problems can have a serious effect on transfers, the perception of this type of problem can sometimes be worse than the problem itself.

In the admission process, the applicant should be given accurate, timely feedback both at critical decision points and on demand. Responding to the inquiries of applicants takes up resources yet must be treated as an essential service to the client. See also reference to resource issues in introduction.

a) Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Electronic Data Interchange systems significantly increase the speed, reliability and accuracy of sending and receiving transcripts since transmission is accomplished electronically. Add-on software can also automate the transfer evaluation process, improving accuracy and turn-around time for students. It is understood that institutions may need to weigh the benefits of implementing EDI systems against their cost.

Recommendation

2 a.1 That BCCAT support the efforts of institutions to move towards the installation and implementation of EDI systems, including automated transfer evaluation capabilities.

Rationale

EDI in conjunction with automated transfer evaluation systems and automated degree audit systems are currently the best administrative tools for speeding up transfer processes.

b) 'Lost' documents

Transferring students request that transcripts be sent by their institution at specified times. Frequently, the student will inquire if these documents have been received. At the receiving institution, this inquiry can be answered best by checking a computer record or by checking an applicant's paper file. The reality of many registrar's and admissions offices is that the paper transcripts are not processed immediately, but may be held for a period, especially if there are other work priorities. Consequently, the student may be told or may assume that their document has not yet been received, even if it has arrived safely at its intended destination. The student then requests a further transcript from their institution. The result is anxiety on the part of the applicant and needless work on the part of both sending and receiving institutions.

Recommendation

2b.1 That all receiving institutions record the receipt of incoming documents and file them in a retrievable format within five working days of receipt, so that students can be informed whether or not their transcript has arrived.

Rationale

Efficiency in the transfer process assists students and reduces the total effort required by the institutions.

c) Incomplete evaluations

University 'X' issues a letter of admission to a transfer applicant showing detailed transfer credit awarded. However, the institution fails to advise the applicant that the transfer credit evaluation is incomplete; there are further courses still to be evaluated. Since the applicant is unaware of this, s/he assumes that s/he is losing credit on transfer. At best, this gives rise to needless inquiries. At worst, it leads to inappropriate course selection and registration in duplicate courses. If the evaluation is not done in a timely fashion, this effect is exacerbated. For instance, if the student learns part-way through the year that s/he now has transfer credit for a course s/he is now taking, the result is a waste of instructional resources and of the student's time and funds.

Recommendations

- 2 c.1 *That all institutions should advise students when and if there are additional credits still to be evaluated.*

- 2 c.2 *Ideally, the applicant's transfer credit should be fully determined before registration starts. However, at the least, the evaluation should be completed before the last day to change courses for that term or semester. [NOTE: In cases where documentation is submitted late, or where an institution continues to accept students into the first week of classes, these recommendations may not be feasible.]*

Rationale

Efficient transfer depends on timely and clear communication to the student of all transfer credit awarded.

d) Transfer credit evaluations in collaborative or partnership programs

If a student whose credential is granted by university 'Y' applies for a program at university-college 'G' and the student has taken courses outside B.C. (or B.C. courses which are not yet articulated), non-standard transfer credit sometimes cannot be determined at university-college 'G'. Instead, outlines must be sent to university 'Y' for evaluation at the departmental level. The Registrar at university 'Y' may assume no responsibility in this process and does not track these evaluation requests. If the department is slow in its evaluation or completely fails to evaluate the material, there is little that university-college 'G' or the student can do, even though there is a serious impact on the student. S/he may be unable to move ahead in the program and both the student and the staff at university-college 'G' face uncertainty over whether requirements have been met, and the length of her/his program. In addition, there is a strong risk of duplicating work for which the student might eventually receive transfer credit.

For example, a student who applies to a collaborative BSW program may be accepted to the program by the university college and asked to submit transcripts. The transcripts may contain courses not articulated within the B.C. system, therefore the transcript is forwarded to the Social Work department at the university for evaluation. The student may be well into his or her first semester by the time the evaluation is completed.

This situation also arises within a single institution, but there are more obvious responsibilities to track these requests, and to apply appropriate pressure to ensure that evaluations are done in a timely manner.

Recommendation

2 d.1 In any future collaborative agreement, institutions involved in evaluating credits for students should design an efficient method of tracking these requests, to enable the student and other institutions involved in the student's program to offer sound advice on course selection and progress towards the credential. Responsibility for tracking students should be assigned to a specific office. These processes should be written into the formal agreement.

Rationale

A student cannot make efficient progress toward her/his educational goal unless s/he receives a timely decision on initial transfer credit and a clear plan of what requirements remain to be completed.

3. Record-keeping Issues

Accepted practices of record - keeping are reflected in publications of professional organizations such as AACRAO, but typically allow for a broad range of acceptable options. Some of the following issues might be resolved if all institutions followed such recommendations but other issues have a more local flavour.

The final report of the Transcript Standards Committee will contain several recommendations aimed at increased consistency of transcribing practices in B.C. institutions.

a) Course numbers and discipline prefixes

Every year, an unknown number of transfer students lose credit because a sending institution changes its course discipline prefix or number, without advising other institutions. Some institutions are even inconsistent and appear to change prefixes almost randomly! One might think that it would be obvious that a course designated FREN 102 is likely the same course as one articulated as (and readily recognized by humans as) FRENCH 102, but a number of large receiving institutions are using computers to determine transfer credit, from large, complex

articulation tables. Maintenance of these tables is a high priority, but success depends completely on accurate, timely notification of the most trivial details about a course's number and discipline prefix.

The BCCAT's "BC Transfer Credit Evaluation & Information Form" recently introduced for use by all B.C. institutions should be a considerable help.

Recommendation

3 a.1 That course numbers and prefixes should be changed only when a 'BC Transfer Credit Evaluation & Information Form' has been submitted to BCCAT and to all other BC institutions which offer transfer credit for the course and when the following details have been specified:

implementation date;

whether the change is prospective or retroactive;

if/when the change will appear on the official transcript;

if/when the change will appear in the institution's Calendar.

Rationale

Efficient transfer depends on highly accurate summary information to identify courses. The best efforts of faculty and administrators to articulate credit will be lost if the data formats are inconsistent.

4. Information/Communication Issues

The GDA Report in its analysis of student responses to questions regarding transfer problems identified "the serious information void that students faced when attempting to move from one part of the post-secondary system to another." They go on to say "After only two or three years in the system, students generally appeared to have only a limited grasp of 'the big picture' and their comments often betrayed their confusion. A notable example involved comments from students who expressed dismay at finding out that a significant portion of the credits they had earned, while transferable to one of the main universities, would not be accepted by a second (nearby) university."

Our own investigations indicated to the Task Force that students are not the only ones who are confused. The complexity and inconsistency of transfer arrangements and degree requirements between post-secondary institutions can create confusion and misunderstanding even among faculty, advisors, and educational administrators.

Advisors who responded to our survey made many concrete suggestions to bridge this information gap. They also identified sources of unhelpful or erroneous information which has created confusion for transfer students.

a) Information for post-secondary system on transfer processes

In the course of the Task Force research and survey efforts we came to understand that in some cases there is a lack of understanding among members of the post-secondary community about the process of transfer itself and about rules and regulations affecting transfer at different institutions. We feel there may be a role for BCCAT in disseminating information on and clarifying the transfer process for students, faculty, administrators, advisors and others. The following are examples of items where it came to our attention that there was a lack of clarity/understanding of key processes that underline the transfer system.

1. Second order transfer credit
2. Reciprocity and reversibility
3. Pan-Canadian Transfer Protocol
4. Applicability of transfer credit to program of choice
5. What constitutes a transfer problem, and what does not?

Recommendation

4 a.1 That Council consider setting as a future project the provision of a forum for the discussion of such issues.

Rationale

Misunderstandings about the transfer process can create needless problems for students and for institutions.

b) Student-oriented planning guide

The analysis of the GDA Report and the Advisors survey identified the large information gap often evident in student responses and actions. This information gap appeared to range from total ignorance of the transfer process to commonly held misperceptions. There are currently no system-wide user friendly publications (print or electronic) which students can use to help them take responsibility for planning their own transfer program.

Recommendation

4 b.1 That Council allocate funds for, and develop student-oriented materials to be used at the secondary and post-secondary level, aimed at helping students plan their transfer program and avoid pitfalls.

Rationale

This is a cost effective way of avoiding numerous real or perceived transfer problems. Well developed materials can be invaluable advising and planning tools for all students and advisors in the system.

c) “Official” and institutional transfer guides

The Advisors Survey pointed out frequently that there are differences between the BC Transfer Guide and transfer guides published by individual institutions or departments. This can result from different publication dates, but also in some cases from using different sources of information. The net result is that students may be accessing erroneous or conflicting information.

Recommendations

- 4 c.1 That Council request all institutions to recognize the B.C. Transfer Guide as the “official” Transfer Guide of the B.C. post-secondary system.*
- 4 c.2 That institutions publishing their own transfer guide utilize current data from the BCCAT database, clearly referencing the source, and direct readers to where the most up to date information is available (i.e. BCCAT print or online Transfer Guide).*

Rationale

Erroneous or out of date information can cause students to register for courses which no longer have transfer credit, or are not applicable to their programs.

d) Access to transfer guides

Advisors’ Survey responses revealed that access to transfer guides is very limited in many institutions. Interestingly, there was strong endorsement from advisors for retaining a print version of the Transfer Guide. It is evident that in many institutions access to the BCCAT website for transfer information planning purposes is still not an everyday reality.

Recommendations

- 4 d.1 That copies of the Transfer Guide should be available in every campus library and resource or advising center.*
- 4 d.2 That all personnel engaged in advising transfer students have reasonable access to the on-line transfer guide.*
- 4 d.3 That students have access to a computer equipped with a web browser and internet connection at their institution.*

Rationale

Maintaining a current and accessible transfer database is expensive. The value of the transfer guide database information is much enhanced if advisors and students have good access to it.

e) Course outlines

This topic is mostly relevant to the course articulation process, but also affects students who are transferring between institutions if they have courses which have not been articulated, or

where the articulation has changed over the years. It is common for a receiving institution to ask the student to provide a course outline in order to evaluate it for possible further transfer credit. The student might have a copy of this outline, but frequently does not, or s/he has an unofficial, partial or incorrectly dated copy. If all institutions adopted a general policy of maintaining course outlines in a central location, access to these outlines for transfer credit evaluation would be much improved. Additionally, if the outlines were posted on institutional web sites, and an historical record maintained, receiving institutions could check outlines easily and quickly, without placing the onus on students to track them down.

We realize that there are resource and expertise implications to establishing and maintaining such a record. Perhaps institutions could begin now, or as resources permit, to post course outlines for each semester. The historical record may take longer to build. It is understood that any possible confidentiality and copyright implications of doing so will need to be investigated.

The definition of course outline appears to vary from institution to institution. What a student is asked to produce is generally the outline or syllabus for the particular section in which he or she was registered.

Recommendations

- 4 e.1 That all institutions be encouraged to keep an historical record of all appropriate course outlines so that students can obtain copies as required.*

- 4 e.2 That all institutions be encouraged to establish and maintain an historical record of all appropriate course outlines on their institutional WWW sites as resources to do so are available.*

Rationale

Quicker and more accurate evaluations will assist student transfers and will reduce loss of credit resulting from inadequate information.

f) Institutional Transfer Liaison Persons

Many advisors identified the need for “a human voice” for students and others to talk to when difficulties arose with the transfer process. 87% of respondents rated a “Transfer Liaison Officer” at receiving institutions as either of “great value” or “some value” and 84% gave the same rating for a “Transfer Liaison Officer” at sending institutions.

The committee felt that such officers, as a group, would become a valuable source of information on systemic or institutional transfer issues.

Recommendations

- 4 f.1 *That BCCAT encourage post-secondary institutions to designate at least one “Transfer Liaison Officer” within each institution with responsibility to respond to inquiries and follow up on transfer issues.*
- 4 f.2 *That BCCAT provide a forum for Transfer Liaison Officers, such as an annual meeting and/or listserv, etc. to enable TLO’s to meet and discuss common transfer concerns.*

Rationale

A knowledgeable person with responsibility for dealing with transfer issues can help students sort out problems and cut down on frustrations and confusions.

g) Transfer appeals processes

Currently some institutions provide information on transfer appeals processes to students and others do not. Some incorporate transfer appeals into their general academic appeals policies. Other institutions have not formulated a formal transfer appeals process or do not have any policy in this area. In many institutions students have either no right of appeal where they feel that their transfer credit has been unfairly or erroneously assessed, or no knowledge of their rights in this regard.

With no clear pathways for expressing their concerns or requesting a review, students may feel thwarted in their intentions to be careful planners of their own academic program.

Recommendations

- 4 g.1 *That every institution have a process for transfer credit appeals which is impartial, clear and well publicized.*
- 4 g.2 *hat BCCAT convene a committee to formulate a suggested template/model for transfer appeals processes and committees.*

Rationale

Students need access to reliable and impartial sources of information and to mechanisms for resolving disputes.

5. Other Issues

There are further issues which are important yet do not fit neatly into any of the above categories.

a) Credit value of transfer courses

Courses at sending institutions may be of any credit value. If the receiving institution uses a credit system similar to that of the sending institution, or one that is scaled directly on the credit system (e.g. a credit at college F is equivalent to .5 units at University W), one might expect that a three credit course would yield three transfer credits at the receiving institution. However this is not always the case. In some cases, the assignment of a different credit amount is deliberate and is an outcome of course articulation, so will not be pursued here. However, in other cases, differences might be the result of error or oversight in the articulation process.

Within the 1995-96 BC Transfer Guide, one can readily find examples of inconsistency.

E.g. College D:

ANTH 192 (6 credits)

Receives 6 transfer credits at six receiving institutions, but only 3 transfer credits at University College H and at University V

BIOL 110 (5 credits)

Receives 4 transfer credits at University X and University U, but only 3 transfer credits at seven other receiving institutions

CHEM 105 (5 credits)

Receives 5 transfer credits at University X, 4 transfer credits at University U, but only 3 transfer credits at six other receiving institutions.

Similar examples exist elsewhere, e.g. University College K:

GEOL 210 (4 credits)

Receives 4 transfer credits at Universities X and V but only 3 transfer credits at six other receiving institutions.

A minor difficulty arises because neither the on-line transfer guide nor the printed transfer guide gives the source credit for the course, which must be looked up in the institution's Calendar.

These credit value patterns are often erratic.

Recommendation

5 a.1 That the BCCAT add the source course credit values to the database, and that institutions be encouraged to use the data to identify and review credit anomalies.

Rationale

While it cannot be always assumed that a credit at one institution represents the same work and achievement level as a credit at another, there must be a clear rationale for differences since these have a potentially serious effect on the length of a student's program and can result in unnecessary additional work to complete a credential.

CONCLUSION

We have identified a few problems in the transfer process which can be remedied in many cases at very little cost. While individual institutions may have to consider changing some of their practices (and change is not always easy!) the benefits to students, and indeed to the institutions themselves will more than repay the effort.

BCCAT will consider establishing future Task Forces should concerns with transfer processes continue to occur. If institutions keep the transfer student in mind, problems of this kind should become less common in future.

Articulation problems are another issue entirely, which lie outside the mandate of this Task Force. Suffice it to say that the established provincial articulation committees continue to perform a very valuable function.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Timing Issues for Transfer Students

a) Marking and review time lines

1 a.1 That each institution review its marking deadline for final exams and the time required for end of semester/term evaluation and adjust these, if necessary, to ensure that final grades are available in time to allow transfer students to meet deadlines of receiving institutions.

1 a.2 That receiving institutions make their deadlines known to all sending institutions.

b) Late grades

1 b.1 That the Registrar of each institution should be given the authority to enter a “no grade reported” notation for cases in which no valid grade has been received by the grade deadline, to enable an official transcript to be issued without delay.

1 b.2 That the grade “no grade reported” be GPA-neutral on the transcript, for the purposes of calculating GPA at both sending and receiving institutions.

1 b.3 That institutions should issue revised, final transcripts at no additional cost to the student if the original final transcripts included a ‘no grade available’ notation, once a final grade has been received.

c) Semester/term dates

1 c.1 That BCCAT request the B.C. Registrars’ Association to develop a sub-committee to convene annually to establish suggested sessional dates for the public post-secondary system two or three years ahead of schedule. BCCAT should provide support for such a sub-committee.

1 c.2 That in the meantime, all institutions should take into account the needs of students who might be transferring out or in at the end of a session and that the session dates be communicated for information to other BC institutions through the BC Registrars’ Association.

d) Non-refundable deposits

1 d.1 That sending institutions consider making refunds available when university transfer students are able to prove acceptance at other B.C. institutions by a specific date.

2. Tracking Issues

a) Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

2 a.1 That BCCAT support the efforts of institutions to move towards the installation and implementation of EDI systems, including automated transfer evaluation capabilities.

b) 'Lost' documents

2b.1 That all receiving institutions record the receipt of incoming documents and file them in a retrievable format within five working days of receipt, so that students can be informed whether or not their transcript has arrived.

c) Incomplete evaluations

2 c.1 That all institutions should advise students when and if there are additional credits still to be evaluated.

2 c.2 Ideally, the applicant's transfer credit should be fully determined before registration starts. However, at the least, the evaluation should be completed before the last day to change courses for that term or semester. [NOTE: In cases where documentation is submitted late, or where an institution continues to accept students into the first week of classes, these recommendations may not be feasible.]

d) Transfer credit evaluations in collaborative or partnership programs

2 d.1 In any future collaborative agreement, institutions involved in evaluating credits for students should design an efficient method of tracking these requests, to enable the student and other institutions involved in the student's program to offer sound advice on course selection and progress towards the credential. Responsibility for tracking students should be assigned to a specific office. These processes should be written into the formal agreement.

3. Record-keeping Issues

a) Course numbers and discipline prefixes

3 a.1 That course numbers and prefixes should be changed only when a 'BC Transfer Credit Evaluation & Information Form' has been submitted to BCCAT and to all other BC institutions which offer transfer credit for the course and when the following details have been specified:

implementation date;

whether the change is prospective or retroactive;

if/when the change will appear on the official transcript;

if/when the change will appear in the institution's Calendar.

4. Information/Communication Issues

a) Information for post-secondary system on transfer processes

4 a.1 That Council consider setting as a future project the provision of a forum for the discussion of such issues.

b) Student-oriented planning guide

4 b.1 That Council allocate funds for, and develop student-oriented materials to be used at the secondary and post-secondary level, aimed at helping students plan their transfer program and avoid pitfalls.

c) “Official” and institutional transfer guides

4 c.1 That Council request all institutions to recognize the B.C. Transfer Guide as the “official” Transfer Guide of the B.C. post-secondary system.

4 c.2 That institutions publishing their own transfer guide utilize current data from the BCCAT database, clearly referencing the source, and direct readers to where the most up to date information is available (i.e. BCCAT print or online Transfer Guide).

d) Access to transfer guides

4 d.1 That copies of the Transfer Guide should be available in every campus library and resource or advising center.

4 d.2 That all personnel engaged in advising transfer students have reasonable access to the on-line transfer guide.

4 d.3 That students have access to a computer equipped with a web browser and Internet connection at their institution.

e) Course outlines

4 e.1 That all institutions be encouraged to keep an historical record of all appropriate course outlines so that students can obtain copies as required.

4 e.2 That all institutions be encouraged to establish and maintain an historical record of all appropriate course outlines on their institutional WWW sites as resources to do so are available.

f) Institutional Transfer Liaison Persons

4 f.1 That BCCAT encourage post-secondary institutions to designate at least one “Transfer Liaison Officer” within each institution with responsibility to respond to inquiries and follow up on transfer issues.

4 f.2 That BCCAT provide a forum for Transfer Liaison Officers, such as an annual meeting and/or listserv, etc. to enable TLOs to meet and discuss common transfer concerns.

g) Transfer appeals processes

4 g.1 That every institution have a process for transfer credit appeals which is impartial, clear and well publicized.

4 g.2 That BCCAT convene a committee to formulate a suggested template/model for transfer appeals processes and committees.

5. Other Issues

a) Credit value of transfer courses

5 a.1 That the BCCAT add the source course credit values to the database, and that institutions be encouraged to use the data to identify and review credit anomalies.

APPENDIX A - Terms of Reference of Task Force

- To identify impediments to smooth and efficient student transfer which may result from processes in use in our institutions;
- To make recommendations through the Council to the institutions for improvements to these processes.

Method

- Review available research on transfer problems to identify process-related issues.
- Seek input from B.C. post-secondary academic and administrative staff, students and others on perceived obstacles or problems in transfer.
- Analyze and prioritize issues.
- Recommendations for discussion.
- Seek feedback on Recommendations.
- Send recommendations to Council or institutions as appropriate.