

# BCCAT *THEN AND NOW*

*Reflections on the history of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer  
to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Council, held on September 30, 2011.*

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*(Executive Director and Council Co-Chair, 1993-2010;  
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On September 30, 2011, the Council convened its 100<sup>th</sup> meeting since it was first established, in 1989. To commemorate the occasion, we invited four guests to share from their experiences and perspectives on the history of BCCAT. Their reflections are summarized throughout this paper.

## A Word about the Council

The **BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT)** was established in 1989 by the Ministry responsible for Advanced Education to oversee the BC Transfer System.<sup>1</sup> The mandate of the council is to facilitate admission, articulation, and transfer arrangements among BC post-secondary institutions<sup>2</sup> for the benefit of students.

The Council plays a coordinating role, enabling important links between the BC post-secondary institutions, the education ministries, and the public and private education sectors.

The Council's consultative and professional approach to developing policy, conducting research, and managing projects fosters inter-institutional collaboration in support of an accessible and responsive BC Transfer System.

The Minister appoints Council members from across BC post-secondary institutions to serve the overall best interests of the system.<sup>3</sup> The Council guides the work of four standing committees,<sup>4</sup> each devoted to different aspects of the Council's mandate.

The work of the Council and committees is coordinated by a small team of staff members<sup>5</sup> responsible for day-to-day operations and a variety of services supporting credit transfer and student mobility.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Council was established as a result of a recommendation in a 1988 report entitled *Access to Advanced Education and Job Training in British Columbia* (commonly referred to as the *Access for All* report). For an overview of the history of the BC Transfer System, see [bccat.ca/system/history](http://bccat.ca/system/history).

<sup>2</sup> See [bccat.ca/system/psec](http://bccat.ca/system/psec) for more information regarding the BC post-secondary system.

<sup>3</sup> See [bccat.ca/about/council](http://bccat.ca/about/council) for details.

<sup>4</sup> See [bccat.ca/about/committees](http://bccat.ca/about/committees).

<sup>5</sup> See [bccat.ca/about/staff](http://bccat.ca/about/staff).

<sup>6</sup> See [bccat.ca/about/services](http://bccat.ca/about/services) for an overview of the Council's services.



# The Concept of Credit Transfer

*Dr. John Dennison, Council Co-Chair, 1993-1999,  
and Professor Emeritus, Administrative, Adult & Higher Education, UBC.*

In the early years of the BC Transfer System, the notion of “credit transfer” was a groundbreaking concept. The idea that one institution would recognize and award academic credits earned by a student from another institution was virtually unknown in Canada when the college system in BC was first established in the early 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

Understandably, the Senate of the University of British Columbia was reluctant to institute a transfer of credit policy until extensive consultation was conducted by the relevant departments in the Faculties of Arts and Science. This process was directed by UBC’s former Dean of Arts, Sperrin Chant, who held high credibility and respect in academic circles.

Meetings between university departments and their counterparts in the colleges, designated as “discipline committees”, were held to create a protocol for the transfer of credit. Ultimately, under specific conditions the practice of granting credit for previous college coursework was approved. Later, studies were conducted to determine the performance of transfer students.<sup>8</sup> The results indicated that these students performed well in their university studies.

Eventually a provincial committee was created to monitor and coordinate transfer policy. This body became the *BC Council on Admissions and Transfer*.

*BCCAT research findings continue to indicate that transfer students perform as well as those who are admitted directly from secondary school. See [bccat.ca/pubs/rr\\_apr10.pdf](http://bccat.ca/pubs/rr_apr10.pdf) for an example of a recent summary report and [bccat.ca/pubs/waterhouse.pdf](http://bccat.ca/pubs/waterhouse.pdf) for an assessment of BCCAT research.*

***It is useful to reflect upon the fact that, although today transfer credit is accepted as routine, the practice was initially approved after much debate and some controversy as a new and as yet unproven practice in BC. In fact, BC was the first jurisdiction in Canada to create a Council to oversee transfer and articulation.***

<sup>7</sup> Four years earlier a transfer credit policy was established between Lethbridge Community College and the University of Alberta under very stringent conditions.

<sup>8</sup> At this time only two colleges, the then Vancouver City and Selkirk had sent transfer students to the University, the only fully established university in the province.



# Consensus Through Consultation

*Dr. Frank Gelin, Executive Director & Council Co-Chair, 1993-2010;  
Executive Director Emeritus, 2010 to present.*

Consultation with BC post-secondary partners as a first step for informing and shaping policy development is a vital component of the Council's approach. This was demonstrated in 1996 when the Council faced what may have been its greatest challenge to date. A recommendation in the report, *Charting a New Course, A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute, and Agency System*,<sup>9</sup> proposed that block transfer agreements be developed to replace course-by-course transfer agreements. (These agreements were foundational to the BC Transfer Guide at that time.)

The Council responded by undertaking a thorough consultation with the system. The result was a strong consensus that student transfer was in fact working well but could be enhanced. On this basis, the Council agreed to support and encourage the development and promotion of block transfer arrangements that would supplement, but not replace, the current system of course-by-course transfer agreements in order to provide even greater flexibility in enabling institutions to develop innovative approaches to the curriculum.

*This exercise served to reinforce the importance of developing and recommending policy by engaging in comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders in the transfer system and making recommendations that are supported by evidence-based research. This collaborative and consultative approach to dealing with system-wide issues has become integral to the role of the Council.*



<sup>9</sup> British Columbia Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. (1996). *Charting a New Course: A strategic plan for the future of British Columbia's college, institute, and agency system*. Victoria, BC: Ministry of Education, Skills and Training.



# Navigating System Changes

*Ms. Finola Finlay; Associate Director, Transfer & Articulation, BCCAT, 1996-2010.*

The BC post-secondary system has seen extensive changes and considerable expansion through the years. (See Figures 1 and 2 for an overview of institutional changes in the system to date.) The Council has addressed those changes in responsive and innovative ways.

In 1991-92, there were only three private institutions in the BC Transfer System.<sup>10</sup> Since then, eight more have become members. The introduction of private institutions to the system has taught us much about quality assurance processes and inducting new members. It has also taught us how to take a government policy of this magnitude and negotiate a way forward that can be accepted across institutions.

A key part of the Council's mandate is providing resources to assist system partners in matters related to admissions, transfer, and articulation, and planning tools and information to support student planning. When I first joined BCCAT, there were few concrete resources available to system members. Since that time, a whole suite of resources have been developed, with the help of many volunteers from institutions across the system. (For example, the *How to Articulate* handbook, the *New Members' Resource Book*, and the *Articulation Committee Companion* to name a few.) As well, the move from a paper-based transfer guide to the wealth of resources now available on BCCAT websites ([BCCAT.ca](http://BCCAT.ca), [EducationPlanner.ca](http://EducationPlanner.ca), and [BCTransferGuide.ca](http://BCTransferGuide.ca)) has been both essential and ground-breaking.<sup>11</sup>

*The evolving nature of the BC post-secondary system has brought a steady stream of changes. Throughout these changes, BCCAT has remained one of a few constants; in fact, it has emerged as the only persisting system-wide agency during its existence. The Council's work has been heavily influenced by the need to respond to change, while keeping our eye on the main prize - supporting the mobility and transfer of BC students.*

Figure 1

## BC Transfer System: 1989

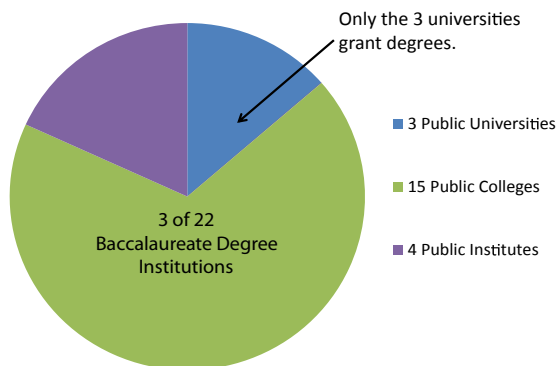
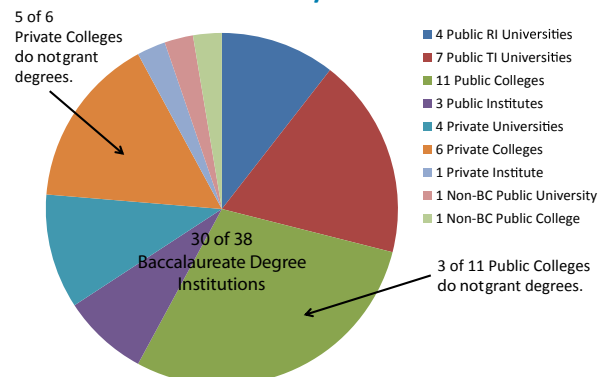


Figure 2

## BC Transfer System: 2011



<sup>10</sup> Columbia College, Coquitlam College and Trinity Western University, as approved by The University Presidents' Council.

<sup>11</sup> BCCAT published the first, single, annual (paper-based) *BC Transfer Guide* in 1990, replacing individual university transfer guides. In 1995 BCCAT launched the first, searchable web-based BC Transfer Guide as an adjunct to the paper-based version. The final edition of the paper-based publication was published in 2003. In 2004, BCCAT launched [EducationPlanner.ca](http://EducationPlanner.ca), a redeveloped version of the former Opening Doors website. Education Planner provides access to information on undergraduate programs at a wide range of post-secondary institutions throughout BC.





# The Dynamics of the BC Transfer System

*Dr. Dan Birch; Council Co-Chair, 2005-2011, and Vice-President Emeritus, Academic and Provost, UBC.*

In my recently completed six years as Co-Chair of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, I had many occasions to ask educational leaders in our Province what it is that makes the BC institutions of post-secondary and higher education the BC “system”. Without exception, their replies included the “transfer system” that enables students to attend two or more institutions, serially or even concurrently, and to earn an academic credential, usually without losing time.

The BC Transfer System is sustained by the participation of numerous individuals at institutions and across post-secondary sectors through the facilitation and coordination of BCCAT. BCCAT carries out this mandate in a way that is dynamic, student oriented, and evidence based.

In recent years, advances in BCCAT research, in collaboration with the Student Transitions Project (STP),<sup>12</sup> have illuminated and informed our understanding of student mobility in BC. As a result, we now understand that student transfer is no longer merely *uni-directional*<sup>13</sup> but *multi-directional*. (See Figures 3 & 4.) This kind of research is critically important as it enables evidence-based decision making throughout the system.

This approach to decision making, informed by current and reliable information, extends to other areas of the Council’s work. Through a system-wide consultation, known as the *Recalibrating the BC Transfer System* project, BCCAT was able to explore alternative models of transfer, with a view to increasing transfer options for students and improving the efficiency of the BC Transfer Guide.

Finally, the outstanding use of current information technology enables BCCAT to support the transfer and mobility of BC post-secondary students. BCCAT websites, particularly [BCTransferGuide.ca](http://BCTransferGuide.ca) and [EducationPlanner.ca](http://EducationPlanner.ca), are accessible, accurate, and updated on an ongoing basis. They are widely recognized by students and counsellors as “go-to” resources for post-secondary planning.<sup>14</sup>

**The active participation by members of the BC Transfer System with BCCAT’s interactive information technology resources in support of student educational planning has enabled BC post-secondary institutions and BCCAT to maintain a constantly evolving transfer system that functions efficiently for the benefit of students.**

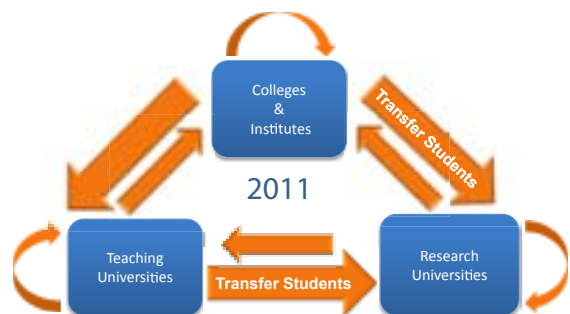
Figure 3

## BC Public System Transfer & Mobility



Figure 4

## BC Public System Transfer & Mobility



<sup>12</sup> The Student Transitions Project (STP) is a collaborative effort between the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and BC public post-secondary institutions to link data about students in the BC public post-secondary system with information from the K-12 system to answer important questions about student transitions. See [www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student\\_transitions](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student_transitions) for more information.

<sup>13</sup> From a “sending” institution, usually a college, to a “receiving” institution, usually a research university.

<sup>14</sup> In September 2011, both [EducationPlanner.ca](http://EducationPlanner.ca) and [BCTransferGuide.ca](http://BCTransferGuide.ca) (combined) saw nearly 200,000 unique visits. (A visit is defined as a user who enters and leaves the site in one session.)

# BC and Beyond

The story of the development of the BC Transfer System is encouraging, instructive, and ongoing. While the primary focus of the Council remains on its coordinating role in BC, BCCAT also plays a leading role in facilitating and promoting policies and practices that strengthen and improve credit transfer and student mobility across provincial jurisdictions.

Some examples of these activities are provided below.

- **Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)**  
Working Group on Credit Transfer (WGTC)
- **Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT)**  
Annual Meetings and Conferences and Mobility Research
- **Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC)**  
Student Mobility Track at Biennial Conference (June 2012)
- **Transfer, Articulation, Pathways (TAP) Committee**<sup>15</sup>  
Pan-Canadian Transfer Credit Forum (Spring or Fall 2012)
- **Western Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (WestCAT)**  
Annual Meetings and Resource Sharing

In this way, the Council continues to build upon the lessons and advances of the ever-changing BC Transfer System to support student mobility in BC and beyond.

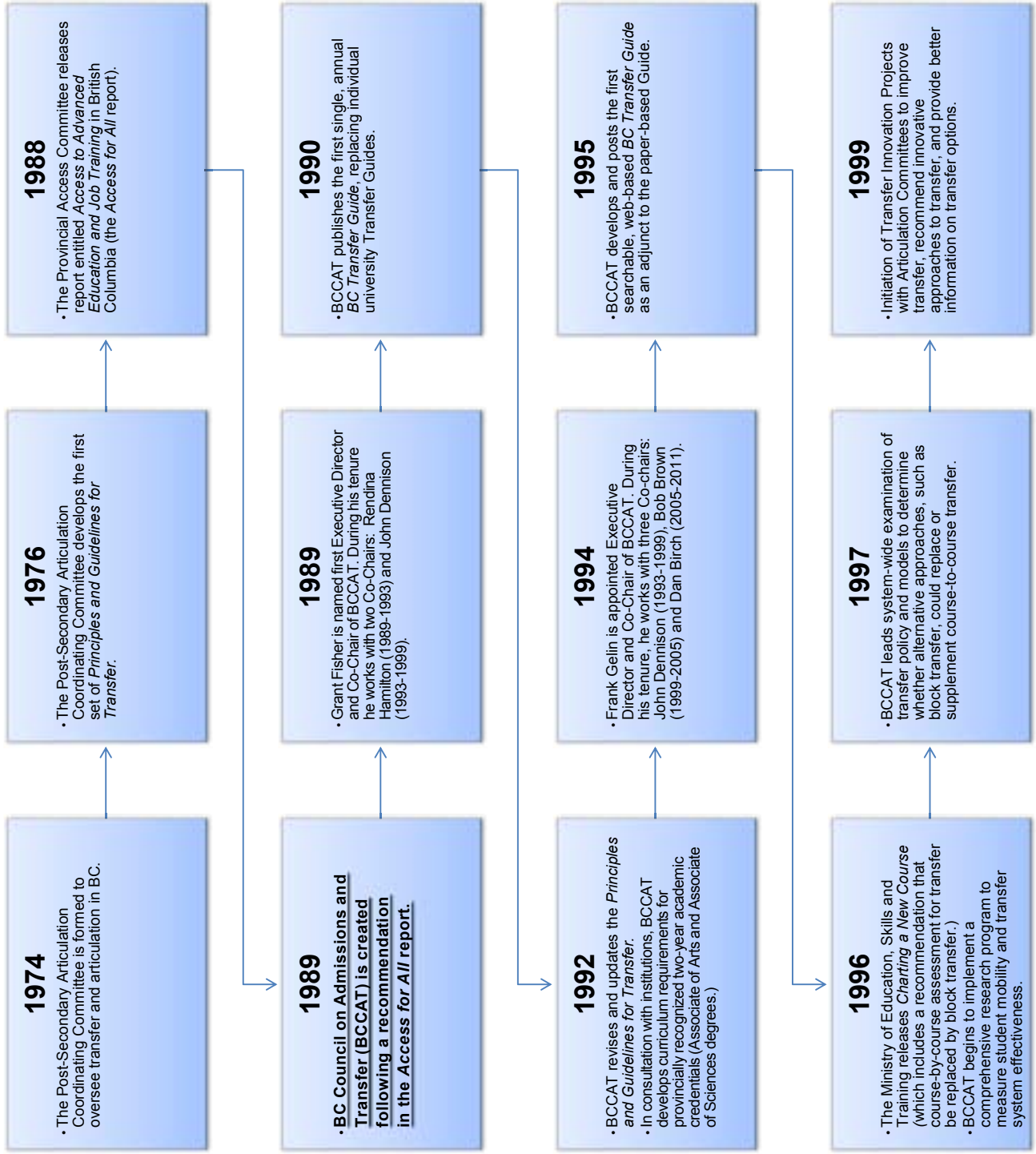
*British Columbia has taken the California model and developed it into what is possibly the most extensive credit accumulation and transfer arrangement in the world.*

- Bahram, Bekhradnia, *Credit Accumulation and Transfer and the Bologna Process: an Overview*, Higher Education Policy Institute, United Kingdom, October, 2004.

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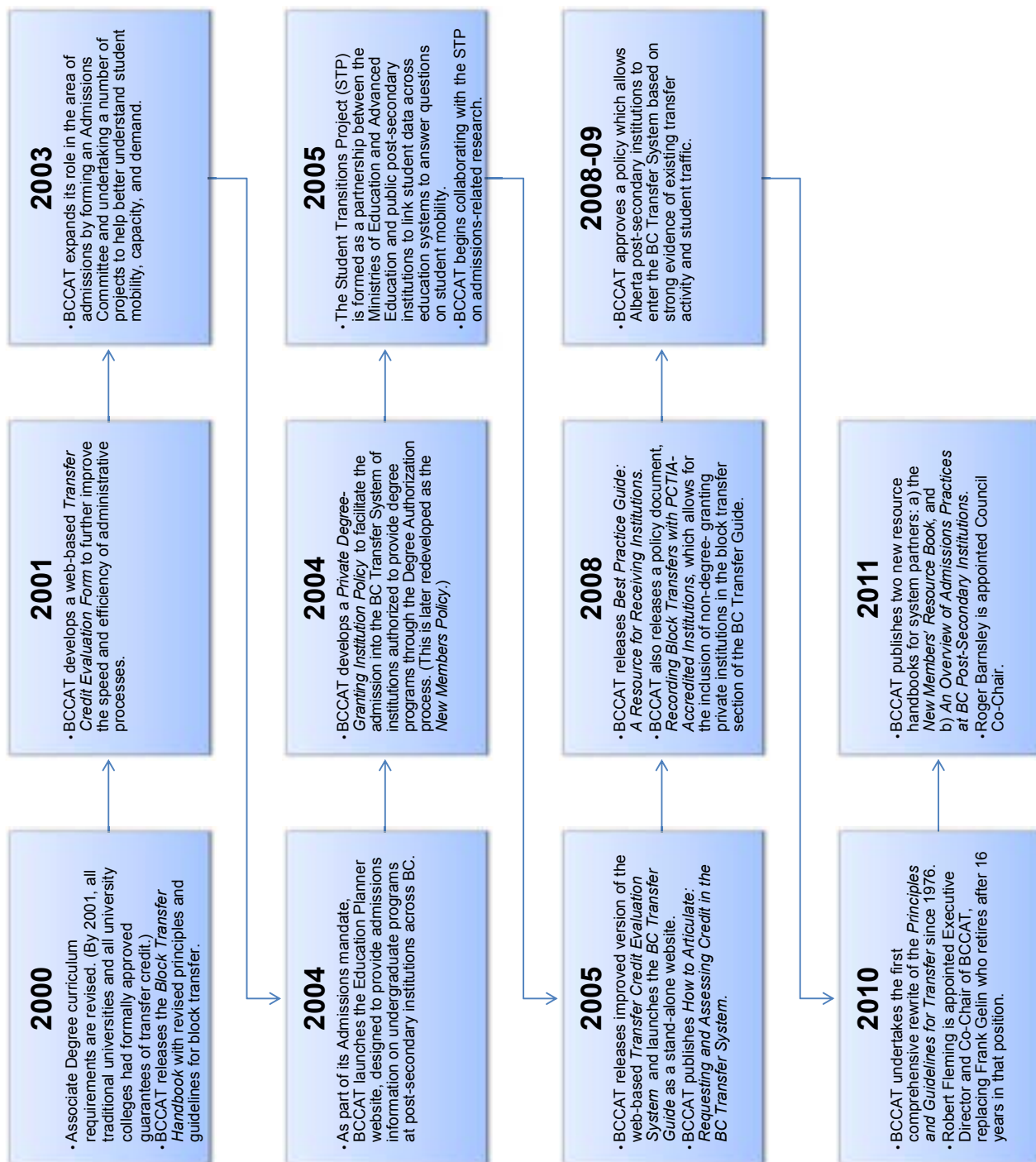
<sup>15</sup> The TAP Committee is a committee of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).

# TIMELINE OF MAJOR BCCAT EVENTS



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# TIMELINE OF MAJOR BCCAT EVENTS (cont'd)



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