

Instructor Qualifications for Transferable Courses

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Instructor Qualifications for Transferable Courses

Position Statement

The following represents BCCAT's position on instructor qualifications within the BC Transfer System:

1. BC Transfer System Instructor Qualification Standards

- a) Based on long-standing precedents in the BC Transfer System, BCCAT expects that instructors who teach academic, degree-level transfer courses will usually possess, at a minimum, a master's degree or equivalent in the discipline or in a closely related area.
- b) Instructors teaching in other transferable programs (e.g. diploma programs) will usually possess, at a minimum, credentials consistent with the normative requirements for that program in the BC Transfer System.
- c) It is recognized that there may be programs in which other qualifications are equally, or more, appropriate. (Examples of alternately qualified instructors: First Nations elders, practicing artists, acknowledged or renowned experts or practitioners.)
- d) When, for legitimate reasons, it is not possible to engage faculty who meet the standards described above, institutions should provide appropriate mentoring and supervision.

2. Establishing and Monitoring Expectations

- a) BCCAT expects institutions participating in the BC Transfer System to develop and/or make explicit and accessible their policies on instructor qualifications for
 - i. hiring of instructors in programs for which transfer credit may be negotiated, and for
 - ii. awarding transfer credit for courses taught at other institutions.
- b) It is reasonable for any receiving institution upon occasion to seek assurance as to the hiring policies or practices at a sending institution, or to request specific information about the qualifications of an instructor for an articulated course.
- c) In the event that a concern arises that cannot be resolved between the institutions, BCCAT can provide mediation services, if requested. Mediation entails facilitating further discussions between the institutions with the goal of achieving a mutually acceptable outcome. Although BCCAT may suggest possible solutions, it has no authority to impose a binding resolution to the issues in dispute.

Background

Within the BC Transfer System, the matter of instructor qualifications has raised, and continues to raise, controversy where receiving institutions suspect that courses at a sending institution are not being taught by a suitably qualified instructor.

In the past, when a course was being initially articulated, it was usual to provide some brief details about the qualifications of the instructor. A brief statement sufficed, consisting of the relevant degree(s) held, the discipline, where and when conferred. e.g. John Doe, MA in History, SFU, conferred 1992. Jane Smith, MBA with emphasis on Accounting, U of London, 1989.

In the spring of 2004 BCCAT conducted an extensive consultation with members of the BC Transfer System in the course of developing a Provincial Transfer-Friendly Course Outline Form. Overwhelmingly, the input received supported removing individual instructor qualifications from the course outline. All institutions that responded asserted that it is the responsibility of individual institutions to ensure that transfer courses are taught at the right level and to hire instructors with the appropriate qualifications. Therefore BCCAT now recommends that rather than identifying the specific qualifications of intended instructor(s) on a course outline submitted for articulation, the sending institution should specify its policy with respect to instructor qualifications for the course in question.

Special Circumstances

In some specialized disciplines (e.g. indigenous languages) or degree programs (e.g. emerging technologies, fine and performing arts) it is often appropriate and preferable to hire instructors with qualifications other than postgraduate degrees. All institutions within the BC Transfer System recognize that there are legitimate circumstances under which it would be inappropriate or even impossible to insist on a master's degree as the required or only possible qualification.

In addition, there are many non-degree program areas in which transfer is common (e.g. between applied business technology programs) but in which instructors are not expected to possess postgraduate degrees. In these cases, receiving institutions should ensure that they make explicit any expectation they have about the qualifications of instructors at their own institutions as well as at sending institutions.

Some institutions, especially smaller ones, occasionally find themselves in the position of having to hire a sessional instructor with less than optimal qualifications. BCCAT research into this issue indicates that no institution does this by choice, or consistently, and that institutions are careful about their hiring policies for academic programs and have instituted appropriate supervisory safeguards. For example, one college's policy states that an instructor can be hired on a sessional basis (but not to a regular position) to teach a UT course without a master's degree, provided he/she teaches "under the auspices" of an articulating instructor.

The reference to the "articulating instructor" is to a regular faculty member who has the appropriate qualifications, and "under the auspices" means that he/she would check the course outline, approve the final exam, and mentor or supervise the sessional instructor in appropriate ways.

When Concerns Arise

It is BCCAT's position that receiving institutions can place reliance and trust in the integrity of the long established sending institutions, and in the well developed articulation processes in BC, including the articulation committees. Thus, they can choose with confidence not to over-emphasize instructor qualifications, by avoiding practices such as requesting a Curriculum Vitae or routinely questioning instructor qualifications once the course has been articulated for transfer credit. Best practice is to concentrate instead on assessing curriculum-related matters stated in the course outline such as equivalence of the academic standards, topics covered, evaluation methods, expectations of students, learning outcomes, etc.

Nevertheless, where an institution develops a concern regarding the practice at a specific sending institution BCCAT advises that it take the matter up with that institution directly. It is reasonable for any receiving institution upon occasion to seek assurance as to the hiring policies or practices at a sending institution, or to request specific information about the qualifications of an instructor or instructors for an articulated course. In the event that the concern can not be resolved between the institutions, BCCAT is also prepared to offer its mediation services, if requested.

Conclusion

As the BC Transfer System expands and changes and welcomes new members, institutions which have been in the past predominantly sending will increasingly find themselves in the role of receiving institution. In such situations institutions that may have objected to supplying information on instructor credentials to other receiving institutions may in turn find that seeking assurance in regards to qualifications of the instructional staff, while only one of multiple determinants in a transfer credit decision, is often an appropriate and sensible thing to do.