



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of approximately 150,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario.

POLICY BRIEF: STUDENT MOBILITY AND CREDIT TRANSFER

Ontario's post-secondary institutions continue to provide students with exciting and diverse learning opportunities across various fields of study. Today, many students are choosing to pursue non-traditional pathways, relying on the possibility of mobility and credit transfer to achieve their academic goals. With over 55,000 students transferring between Ontario's publically assisted post-secondary institutions each year, it is important that Ontario's students are supported by a comprehensive transfer system that will ensure they can succeed.

THE PROBLEM

Insufficient data collection and resources

Students have raised concern over the lack of data collected and made available about transfer activities. More specifically, there is worry that the raw data collected through Ontario Education Number (OEN) tracking is not being utilized to its fullest potential to inform policy and support student mobility. Additionally, students worry that not all institutions have the administrative capacity to effectively support transfer activity, and without additional information, this may become even more challenging for institutions.

Lack of system design towards student mobility and transfer

Students worry that Ontario's post-secondary system is not designed in a way that strengthens transfer pathways and student mobility. The provincial government's commitment to differentiation is important, however, students worry that such efforts might undermine transfer activities. Courses unique to individual institutions may be negatively affected by the facilitation of credit transfer and increased student mobility, and on the other hand, learning outcomes of similar courses may differ, making it difficult for students to successfully pursue credit transfer or retake courses.

There is also concern that OSAP's Distance Grant requirements may impede student mobility and choice because students must be able to prove that their family home address is located at least 80km away from the closest institution they are attending. Moreover, students are concerned about not having their transfer credit assessments results before the OSAP deadline. Additionally, because most joint college and university programs are clustered in south central Ontario, students worry that opportunities are limited for those who wish to pursue joint programs not located in the same region.

Inconsistency in fees, timelines, and procedures

Students understand that certain costs are necessary in order for universities to facilitate transfer activities, however, there is concern that high and unpredictable costs may deter student mobility. Supplementary document fees for credit transfer assessments and applications differ across institutions, and the ranges in price may impact a student's ability to pursue transfer options. Additionally, students are concerned over the lack of information about the true cost of these services and fees as well as that only some institutions accredit PLAR-based experiences, granting students an inconsistent number of transferable credits based on their choice of institution.

When students are receiving offers of admission from various institutions at different times, they may feel pressured to choose the institution that sent their letter of admission first. Additionally, students worry that not all institutions provide transfer credit assessment results with offers of admission. There is worry that this may force students to make decisions and/or submit payments without knowing how many credits are approved. On top of this, students also worry that institutions may not consider accrediting courses that are non-English language based, even if course material is the same, and that not enough information and supports are available for this particular type of transfer.

Uncertainty and missing student support

Students worry that while the ONtransfer.ca website provides program and course pathway searches, it does not specify the number of approved transferable credits. Additionally, because ONCAT relies on its member institutions to provide updates about transfer pathways, there is concern that the website content may not be updated and reviewed regularly.

Students are not provided with definitive reasoning as to why some credits are transferable and others are not. Furthermore, the criteria used for assessing

credit transfer eligibility varies across post-secondary institutions, making it challenging for students to decide which institution would be best suited to their academic path.

For college-to-university transfer students, there is worry that during the assessment process, universities may evaluate and weigh college credits unfavourably and that universities may rely more heavily on numerical grading over learning outcomes. College transfer students are facing difficulties in adapting to the university environment and some institutions do not have additional supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving data collection and utilizing resources

Students recommend improving data collection on transfer and student mobility in Ontario, and to effectively utilize already existing tools. As such, students recommend that the raw data collected through OEN tracking of transfer students be provided to ONCAT in order to identify student pathways and ensure students are able to succeed. ONCAT should also develop an online portal to clearly indicate transfer pathways, access, and success rates. The provincial government should also mandate Ontario post-secondary institutions to collect qualitative data about the experiences of transfer students leaving their institutions, producing reports to ONCAT annually.

Student transfer as a component of Ontario's post-secondary system

Students suggest that the provincial government mandate that all non-specialized direct-entry courses at institutions have set common learning outcomes. Furthermore, HEQCO should maintain a database of standardized learning outcomes for non-specialized direct-entry courses made available to institutions. Students recommend that the provincial government pursue a policy of moderate differentiation to encourage institutional specialization but also to facilitate student mobility.

Students also recommend that OSAP's Distance Grant should be amended to require a student's home address to be located 40km or more away from the closest post-secondary institution, however, it should not require an institution with similar program offering be offered within 80km as this limits student mobility. MAESD should also ensure that all transfer credit assessments are completed prior to the OSAP application deadline.

MAESD should also encourage the development of articulation agreements between colleges and universities that provide joint degree-granting programs where they do not already exist, and outside of south central Ontario, outlining specific measures that will be taken to do so in their SMAs. To aid this process, MAESD should develop

standardized articulation agreements as guides for institutions.

Improving consistency and setting common goals

Students want to ensure institutional autonomy, however, they also see that there is a need for more cross-institutional standards. As such, students recommend that the provincial government set certain standards, including mandating the implementation and use of PLAR, while also subsidizing costs. MAESD should also develop a guide based on best practices in Ontario, to create guides for the development of bridging programs to support those transferring from non-English programs. ONCAT should enable research and data collection on the experiences of these transfer students as well. To remove barriers and set common timelines, MAESD should mandate that all admissions offices have credit transfer assessments complete and sent to students before key deadlines.

Improving transparency and student resources

As a key resource for students seeking to transfer, students want to ensure that the Ontario transfer website is of the highest quality and easy to navigate. The provincial government should allocate funding for ONCAT to improve site maintenance, content, and services. ONCAT should also develop a clear list of transferable courses with their credit equivalencies, made available on the ONtransfer.ca website. Students also believe that the provincial government can help improve transparency and support students by establishing guidelines that ensure all credit transfer information, including transfer decisions, is accessible to students. Additionally, ONCAT should develop best practices based on BCCAT's recommended transfer appeals model to guide institutions in setting their own appeals framework. To support college transfer students, HECQO should develop a common language that facilitates the use of learning outcomes for college-to-university transfer. In addition, MAESD should develop a guide to help institutions create transitioning programs to better support and retain college transfer students.