

STUDENT MOBILITY: UPDATE ON THE COU WORKING GROUP Presentation to OURA

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“The globalization of higher education has led to the need to be able to compare and contrast the variety of qualifications granted by academic institutions for transfer credit, graduate study preparation and professional qualification. Similarly, jurisdictions with decentralized systems are looking for ways to measure academic equivalencies. In addition, in order to be able to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of all aspects of instruction, institutions, accrediting authorities and funding bodies have begun to clarify the outcomes expected of graduates.”

(OCAV, introduction to *Guidelines for University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations*, updated 2007)

- issue of mobility across institutions and systems is very much alive in the Ontario context; Ontario government has a strong interest in this issue in the context of postsecondary education in Ontario and of the province's competitiveness and economic wellbeing
- universities and colleges themselves, through the Council of Ontario Universities and Colleges Ontario and their affiliates, have also been seized with this issue
- this quote on the slide comes from an OCAV document calling upon the universities to develop undergraduate degree level expectations (UUDLEs)
- the UUDLEs initiative represents a change in emphasis away from counting numbers of courses and looking at where they were taken towards a focus on the quality of content and learning outcomes (e.g., application of knowledge, communication skills, autonomy); this is important for the creation of a positive climate for the promotion of student mobility; it is expected to provide a framework for assessment of transfer credit from a wide range of different types of institutions and jurisdictions

BACKGROUND: Provincial

- goal of the Ontario postsecondary education system: to provide students with the best opportunities for academic success
- complex transfer credit system in place for college to university transfer
- currently about 300 “collaborative agreements” involving Ontario universities and colleges
- lack of consistency in admissions process and standards across the province
- Ontario Government collaborating with universities and colleges, through COU and CO, to explore system changes to:
 - address capacity challenges
 - promote pathways and linkages
 - enhance system differentiation and efficiency
- January 2008: establishment of joint COU/CO task force to recommend approaches to student choices and mobility to offer students informed choices
- July 2008: discussion paper issued
- October 2008: establishment of working group to discuss operationalization
- February 2009: HEQCO Research Report on broadening student access to postsecondary education

- as part of objectives in relation to postsecondary education in Ontario, the current provincial government (like governments before it) has sought to bring greater clarity and ease to students’ movement among institutions and particularly to transfers between colleges and universities (in both directions) through collaboration agreements among institutions and clear paths for individual students seeking to transfer
- collaborative agreements have been in place in Ontario for many years, though they have not been developed and designed in any systematic way; they are listed in the Ontario College University Transfer Guide, which includes almost 300 agreements; there are a range of models, from what are essentially very smooth advanced standing arrangements to fully integrated programs planned and administered jointly by the two institutions
- there is a lack of consistency across the province in admissions and transfer standards and processes
- the transfer “landscape” has been made even more complex by the addition a few years ago of “applied degrees” to the credentials offered by the CAATs; they are not very well understood or well defined in terms of their relationship to university degrees (and therefore their “status” in relation to transfer credit and admission to graduate programs)
- COU, in 2006, issued a statement on advanced study at universities to clarify eligibility and admissibility of students with undergraduate degrees to graduate study and professional programs, emphasizing the commitment of universities to accept into graduate and professional programs the most highly qualified students who are most likely to succeed; the autonomy of universities re. admissions standards; that each applicant is considered on her/his merits; and that not all who meet minimum standards will be accepted; this statement is used as a guideline by most Ontario universities
- against this backdrop of confusion and inconsistency around transfer credit, COU and Colleges Ontario have been collaborating with government to develop clearer pathways for postsecondary education in Ontario
- in January of 2008 a joint COU-CO task force was established to consider and recommend approaches to student choices and mobility; the task force engaged in extensive consultations over the summer of 2008 and as a result articulated several options; and in October 2008 a working group was established to explore implementation of one of the options; that is the process that is currently under way
- a very recent development is publication earlier this month of a research report, “Degrees of Opportunity: Broadening Student Access by Increasing Institutional Differentiation in Ontario Higher Education” by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (a government agency); it identifies as a gap in the Ontario postsecondary system “effective pathways for students who start their postsecondary education in a college to attain a baccalaureate degree and be able, if they are so inclined, to continue on to graduate study”; paper suggests several options to address demand for access to university degree programs, including an “open university” (like Athabasca), or providing some colleges with a new and more substantial role in baccalaureate programming or a greater role in transfer programs in basic university subject areas; report will no doubt stimulate further discussion

BACKGROUND: National

Council of Ministers of Education of Canada - Principles:

- protection of academic integrity of programs and institutions
- collaboration among institutions to enhance transfer opportunities, recognizing "that the substance of learning experiences may be equivalent in terms of content and rigour, although the learning has occurred in different ways"
- academic prerequisites establish eligibility but do not guarantee admission to particular program
- institutions provide early information to students about transfer credit opportunities and limitations, policies and procedures
- consistency of consideration of transfer requests with clearly stated policies
- students not advantaged or disadvantaged by credit transfer process

- The issue of student mobility is also a national issue
- In 2002, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) issued a statement on transfer credit in Canada, which also forms a backdrop for, and informs, the Ontario discussions
- Principles articulated are echoed in proposals we see developing in Ontario



YORK EXPERIENCE: Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York from CAATs, 1996-2006

Highlights of the Study (commissioned by CUCC):

- CAAT transfers account for a sizable and increasing proportion of York University's new student intake
- this growth is in part attributable to successful ongoing and new CAAT collaborations and partnerships
- the highest proportion of CAAT transfers has been and remains those who come from colleges with established collaborations and partnerships with York
- colleges located in the GTA are becoming an increasing source of CAAT transfers to York
- demographically, the profile of CAAT students has shifted over the past decade, with CAAT students becoming more similar to the secondary school cohort with respect to gender, full-time/part-time status, and age
- CAAT transfers are entering the University with more transfer credit than a decade ago
- the social sciences and humanities are disciplines of choice for CAAT transfers
- fewer CAAT transfers are dropping out now compared to ten years ago
- graduation rates for the CAAT cohort have increased and CAAT students are graduating earlier than a decade ago

• would like to digress for a few moments to describe and reflect on our experience at York University, as an example of the current situation, before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the COU initiatives in relation to college-university mobility

- York has been a leader in Ontario in the development of university/CAAT collaborations and receives the largest proportion of CAAT transfers (just under 20%, whereas York is roughly 11% of the system in terms of size)

- we currently have about 20 collaborative agreements, encompassing a range of models including transfer credit arrangements, articulation agreements, and very closely planned and integrated joint programs

- in recent years, York has introduced collaborative programs in areas such as Professional Writing, Applied Biotechnology, and Urban Sustainability; we have a particularly close relationship with Seneca as a result of the College's location on the York campus and Seneca is a major source of transfer students (over 35%)

- since 2001, York's Senate-endorsed principles have governed such agreements:

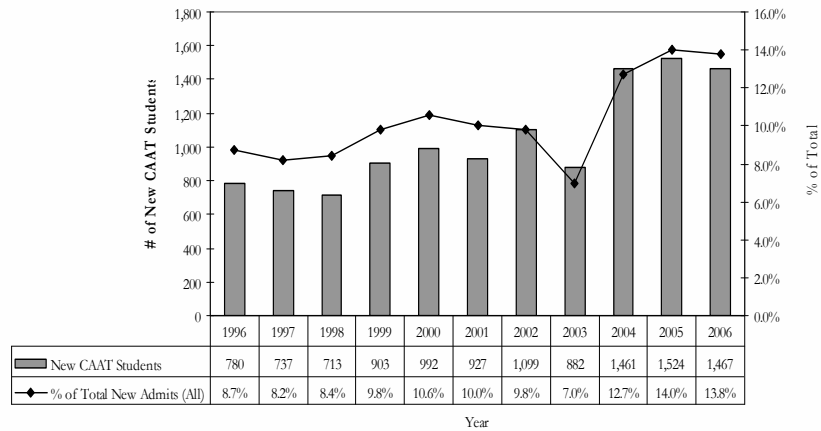
- quality is paramount; and the program should offer enhanced opportunities for students and respond to clear need/demand
- initiatives should be consistent with the mission and plans of both partners and based on a complementary educational philosophy
- requirements of the York degree must be respected and strengthened
- initiatives must contribute mutual benefits to the institutions, based on complementary strengths (neither institution can offer the program alone)

- York was commissioned by the College University Consortium Council to undertake a study of the patterns of students transferring to this university over the last decade, and a report was issued in 2007 (CUCC also published a report on college-university transfers in Ontario in the same year)

• the major conclusions of our report are that CAAT transfers to York are increasing, in part as a result of collaborative agreements, and particularly coming from colleges in the GTA; CAAT students are similar to students coming directly from high school in terms of age and gender and their pursuit of full- or part-time study; transfer students are receiving more transfer credit now and graduation rates have increased

• based on the results of this study, we continue to believe formal collaboration agreements are valuable and facilitate mobility

YORK EXPERIENCE: New CAAT Transfers as a Percentage of Total York University Admits

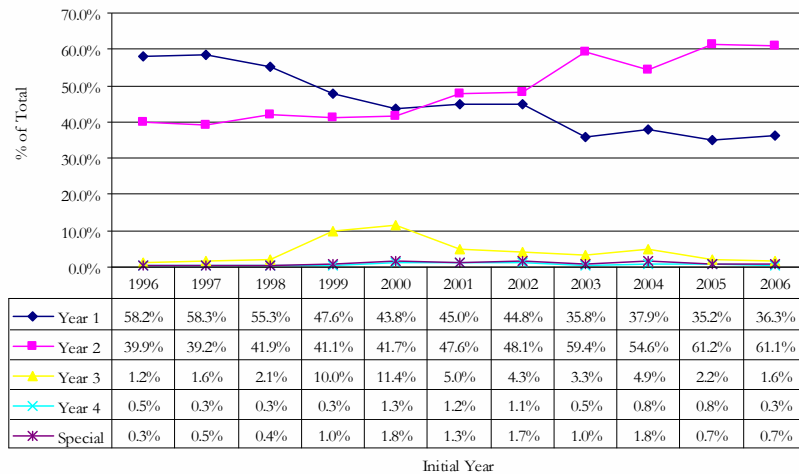


Source: An Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York University from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Between 1996 and 2006 (York University report commissioned by CUCC)

- next few slides briefly illustrate some of the findings of the study
- this slide shows that as the overall number of York admits is increasing, the number and proportion of admits who are CAAT transfers has also increased (the dramatic decrease in CAAT transfers as a percentage of total new admits in 2003 was due to the significant increase in secondary school admits in this year as a result of the impact of the double cohort)



YORK EXPERIENCE: CAAT Transfers - Entry by Study Level

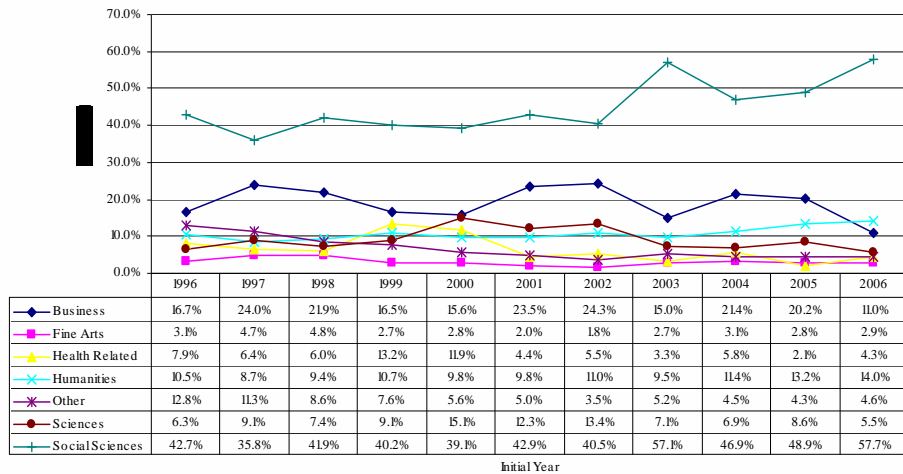


Source: An Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York University from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Between 1996 and 2006 (York University report commissioned by CUCC)

- there has been a decline in the proportion of CAAT students entering York in study level 1 but a corresponding increase in those entering in level 2, reflecting an increase in transfer credit awarded
- in 1997, York made changes in its policies for CAAT transfers to increase the minimum GPA required (from 2.6 to 3.0) but also to increase the maximum transfer credit that could be awarded to 42; calculation (on a grid system) of transfer credit is based on category type of CAAT program students are in, number of semesters completed successfully, and GPA (previously students had been required to complete the CAAT program before transfer credit would be considered)



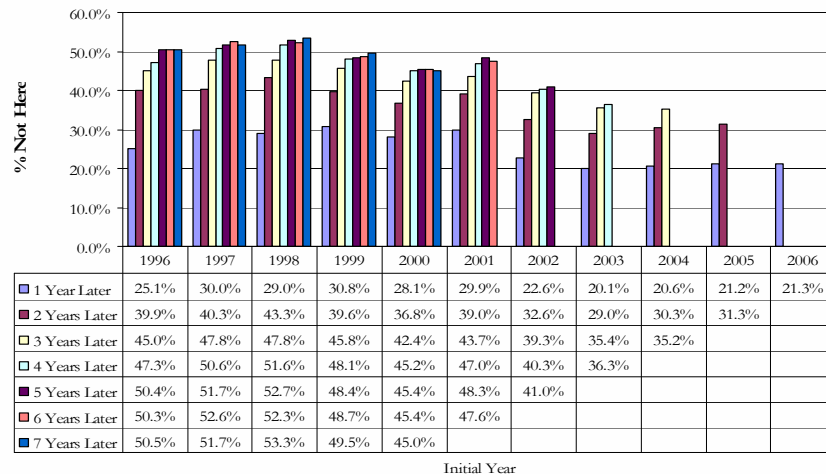
YORK EXPERIENCE: CAAT Transfers' Choice of Discipline at Entry to York



Source: An Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York University from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Between 1996 and 2006 (York University report commissioned by CUCC)

- the social sciences have consistently attracted the largest number of transfers over the study period
- transfers to business programs have decreased, perhaps reflecting the small number of places available and very high entrance standards
- declines in sciences may reflect the decline in market demand in computer science, which had been one of the larger areas of transfer

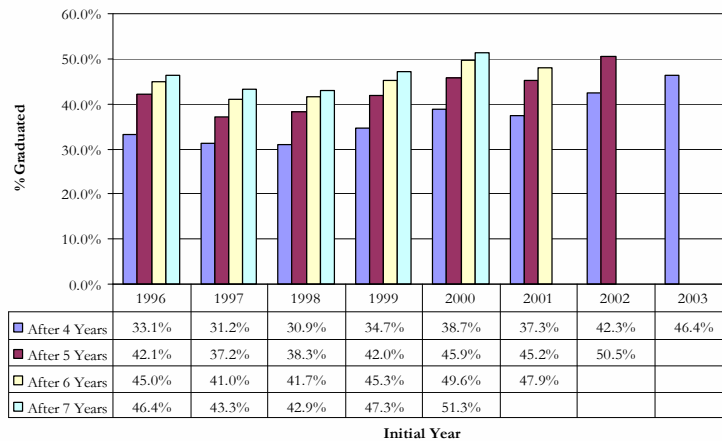
YORK EXPERIENCE: Drop-out Rates of CAAT Transfers



Source: An Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York University from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Between 1996 and 2006 (York University report commissioned by CUCC)

- while the drop-out rate for CAAT transfers has declined, it still remains higher than the rate for the secondary school cohort
- improved retention may reflect York's enhanced retention efforts, as well as higher entry standards

YORK EXPERIENCE: Graduation Rates of CAAT Transfers



Source: An Analysis of Undergraduate Students Admitted to York University from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Between 1996 and 2006 (York University report commissioned by CUCC)

- finally, graduation rates for CAAT transfers are improving and students graduate earlier, in part reflecting increased transfer credit, but they still graduate at a lower rate than the secondary school cohort (51.3% vs. 66.5% after 7 years)



YORK EXPERIENCE: UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

- instituted a review process to ensure programs are of high quality, addressing:
 - program attractiveness/demand
 - appropriateness of program structure
 - appropriateness of curriculum
 - student satisfaction
 - equity/access
 - administrative issues
 - program strengths
 - program weaknesses
 - costs and benefits of program
- major themes emerging from reviews:
 - programs are of high quality
 - limited demand
 - enhanced visibility?
 - changes to program structure, curriculum?
 - discontinue program?
 - importance of “value added” for career prospects
 - importance of ongoing institutional consultation/collaboration

- to turn briefly to the issue of quality assurance as we have experienced it at York:

- while we have for many years had an undergraduate program review process in place at York (and UPRs are mandated provincially), the collaborative programs had not been subject to review; we identified this as a gap in our quality assurance framework, so in 2004 we introduced a review process intended to assess and, where appropriate, improve the programs in terms of their interest and benefit to students; objectives of the review: “to ensure that they continue to serve their academic objectives, that they are of high quality, that they serve the students well, that they are profiled effectively, and that they are operated in an efficient way”

- internal collegial process; reviewers are asked to take into account the issues listed on the slide

- some results and conclusions:

- the programs are generally of high quality
- even in some cases where relatively few students take advantage of these programs, those who do are generally positive about them
- difficulty of identifying and tracking students in and/or applying to the program and beyond
- small numbers are partly a result of program visibility: how to effectively publicize the programs and to whom is a major issue
- the extent to which they are seen to prepare students for careers seems to be an important factor in the attractiveness/success of the programs (“value added”)
- care needs to be taken in structuring of programs to ensure the university and college components fit together well, complement each other, and do not overlap
- there are frequently logistical barriers, e.g., scheduling and location of courses, that may limit student accessibility to programs, which in some cases can be addressed through changes to program structure without affecting quality or cost
- costs associated with the programs are minimal
- ongoing close consultation, communication, and planning between the two institutions is crucial to the vitality and success of the programs (this can be remarkably hard to do beyond the time when the initial “champions” are in charge, so we need to formalize at least an annual “touchpoint” for each program)

COU-CO TASK FORCE: DISCUSSION PAPER

- COU Task Force stated as an overarching objective: “Students need to be able to navigate and find opportunities for movement through the postsecondary system, within and between institutions that account for and build on previous training and educational experiences. The pathways and options should be transparent and explicit and readily available to all students.”
- discussion paper in summer of 2008 made a number of recommendations, including:
 - creation of a Student Mobility and Recognition of Transfer System to provide clear information about postsecondary pathways and enhance opportunities
 - that MTCU allocate resources to support the system
 - that a more coordinated approach to Letters of Permission be considered
 - that the Ministry provide financial and reporting incentives in support of collaborative arrangements
 - exploration of establishment of a common entry portal for college and university applications

- to return to the provincial discussions of the COU-CO bodies, within the overall objective on the slide, the purpose of the deliberations has been to ensure students “receive transfer credit for courses they have successfully completed with content/outcomes demonstrably equivalent to those offered by the host institution” and to ensure that “students who wish to take advantage of mobility opportunities to sample educational experiences at another institution” receive credit towards the degree or diploma at the home institution
- in a discussion paper in summer 2008, recommendations were made in three areas: improving student mobility and pathways, enhancing joint college-university programming, and better access to information and application/transfer processes; the major recommendations, both structural and financial, are noted on the slide

CO-COU TASK FORCE: ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH CONSULTATIONS

Need for:

- comprehensive approach to serve student and system interests
- broad perspective on a range of mobility paths, including bilateral agreements
- protection of institutional autonomy
- evidence-based information
- mobility based on academic rigour
- quality assurance

-consultations undertaken by the Task Force around the discussion paper revealed considerable support for increased coordination and transparency, but identified a number of key issues moving forward

-most significant were:

- the need for a wide-ranging approach to mobility encompassing various kinds of collaboratively-developed agreements that work best for institutions involved;
- need for decision-making based on statistical analysis rather than simply anecdotal information (the study at York just described is a step in this direction, as is the CUCC study)
- need for mobility mechanisms that make academic sense for institutions and students
- finally, quality assurance needs to be built in



CO-COU TASK FORCE: BARRIERS TO MOBILITY/COLLABORATION

- differences in funding policies
- differences in admissions policies
- institutional costs
- enrolment issues

- the consultations also identified barriers to greater collaboration and mobility:

- Funding policies: e.g., differences between colleges and universities in counting students for funding, funding and approval processes follow different paths in MTCU (no central coordination), different tuition and ancillary fees policies in colleges and universities
- Different admission requirements: how to bridge the gaps
- Institutional costs: planning, start-up and ongoing costs, including costs of coordination
- Enrolment issues: determination of which institution is “home” institution for funding purposes in joint programs; complexity of record-keeping and counting; impact on student access to scholarships, services, OSAP, etc. (a student in a collaborative program shows up on records as a part-time student at 2 institutions rather than a full-time student taking courses at 2 institutions)

CO-COU TASK FORCE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MOBILITY

- development of student-focused solutions to expand and facilitate mobility
- provision of clear and explicit information
- preservation of institutional autonomy re. admission standards and program integrity
- establishment of mechanisms for tracking and analysis of mobility and performance
- achievement of savings for students (cost and time)
- clarification of degree and applied degree recognition for graduate programs

-as a result of consultations, the Task Force articulated revised guiding principles in support of mobility, as detailed on the slide

-major overarching questions that will need to be addressed relate to the issue of “buy-in” from the institutions to mobility initiatives, i.e., willingness to participate (or will participation be mandatory?), the costs of participating and who will cover them (will there be provincial support?)

CO-COU TASK FORCE: OPTIONS PROPOSED TO FACILITATE MOBILITY

- Option 1: curricular model based on program-by-program assessments and curricular requirements approved by Senates, possibly with elements of models such as the “Berkeley model” and coordinated by a central agency (program-by-program)*
- Option 2: transfer credit model involving assessment and granting of credits, possibly with a central coordinating body to share information (course-by-course)
- Option 3: model based on collaborative programs developed to serve specific needs and on facilitated transfers; MTCU to provide policy framework and supports

* Working group was asked to consider ways to operationalize Option 1

-Three options were proposed, and a working group was set up to consider ways of implementing Option 1

CO-COU WORKING GROUP: FRAMEWORK

- Working group comprises Vice-Presidents and Registrars representing universities and colleges

Agreement:

- goal to develop clear and transparent pathways
- institutional autonomy preserved in relation to admission standards
- institutions required to set and publish their standards for admission for the student mobility initiative
- need for clear and shared understanding of terminology

Issues:

- will all institutions be willing to participate?
- need for incentives from MTCU for institutions to participate
 - financial
 - inclusion in MYA
- need for tracking and reporting mechanisms (perhaps through HEQCO)
- increased need for bridging programs to support mobility

-Working group's deliberations and report to form the basis for discussions among universities, colleges and MTCU

-There is general agreement about the need to develop and communicate clear pathways for postsecondary mobility, together with the need for institutional autonomy

-As noted, a major issue will be the willingness of all institutions to participate in an initiative to enhance mobility through collegially negotiated, clearly stated and published transfer information; one reason that systems now in place in other jurisdictions (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta) work is that all institutions are required to participate and to work together to make the system successful

-Government incentives will be necessary but will they be sufficient?

-Enhanced bridging courses and programs will also be costly; how will they be developed and funded?

-HEQCO could play a role in data tracking and analysis

“BERKELEY MODEL”

- Objective: “to identify applicants who are most likely to contribute to Berkeley’s intellectual and cultural community and, ultimately, to the State of California”
- admission process for students based on comprehensive qualitative and quantitative review of academic and personal material submitted by applicants; assessment of merit based on:
 - academic background and record
 - personal qualities (e.g., leadership, intellectual independence, initiative, concern for others and community)
 - potential contributions to intellectual and cultural vitality of campus
 - achievement in academic enrichment programs
 - other evidence of achievement
- considered in context of opportunities applicant has had
- race, gender, etc. not part of criteria
- for transfer students also consider whether number/pattern of courses meet breadth/general education requirements and provide continuity with major courses, as well as GPA in transferable courses

- model for assessing admissions that was initiated at UC Berkeley, and has been put in place at other campuses of the University of California
- referred to as a “comprehensive” or “holistic” review that goes beyond academic achievements to take into account personal qualities and applicants’ potential to contribute to the intellectual and cultural life of the campus and ultimately the potential to contribute to the broader community; it also takes into account the applicant’s personal circumstances and resulting opportunities or lack of opportunities
- typical “equity” factors (race, gender, religion, etc.) cannot be explicitly taken into account, but this approach has resulted in increased admission of minority students
- consideration of transfer students also takes the same comprehensive approach
- preference given to applicants from local community
- can be a very labour-intensive means of assessment; who would bear the costs?

OTHER MODELS?

British Columbia:

- overseen by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT)
- designed to facilitate student mobility
- respect institutional autonomy
- based on equivalency of academic achievement and knowledge and skills acquired
- institutions must publish minimum conditions for admitting transfer students
- early access to information for students
- process for “flexible and innovative transfer”

Alberta:

- Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT)

-Other systems in place in Canada are also cited as examples for consideration

-BC system is based on a series of transfer agreements negotiated between institutions on a program by program basis, and easily searchable for students on the BCCAT web site

-Like the proposed Ontario system, the BC system is designed to facilitate student mobility and promote accessibility while protecting institutional standards and program integrity

-Course/program transfer credit is based on equivalency of academic achievement and of knowledge and skills acquired

-Minimum conditions for admitting transfer students must be published, but the receiving institutions may limit admissions based on resources available and may stipulate criteria pertinent to particular programs in addition to academic performance

-Academic prerequisites establish eligibility, but do not guarantee acceptance to a particular program

-To ensure effectiveness of transfer arrangements, students must have early information about course equivalencies, prerequisites, and levels of achievement for admission and transfer credit

-Recognizing the increasing complexity of the B.C. postsecondary system, BCCAT is fostering development of more flexible and efficient transfer arrangements and has also provided guidelines for “flexible and innovative transfers” based on the assumption that students should not be advantaged or disadvantaged as a result of the transfer process

- BCCAT also publishes “best practices” for receiving institutions

-In Alberta, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer serves a similar role to that of BCCAT, providing lists of course and program transfer agreements among institutions in the province, including University Transfer programs at colleges, which offer up to two years of university-level courses

-Courses can be transferred individually, as a block, or as a program

NEXT STEPS

Working group to consider and report on implementation issues, for example:

- agreement on a coordinated approach to student mobility/transfer credit
- models?
- institutional participation: require or strongly encourage?
- incentives/penalties for participation/non-participation
- process for negotiation of agreements among institutions
- coordinating body/"enabling agency" to oversee process and dissemination of information for students
- counting and tracking issues
- how would costs associated with the process be addressed?

•Working group has not yet begun its deliberations, but it will need to consider a number of issues before making recommendations to Executive Heads:

- Agreement that a more coordinated approach to student mobility and transfer credit, province-wide and across college and university systems, is the way to go at this time
- Assuming agreement, what about the models such as the Berkeley model or those in place in B.C. and Alberta; what can we learn from them? would they work in our context?
- Key issues relating to whether institutions would be required to participate or simply encouraged to do so; what incentives or penalties could/should be put in place; how and by whom would participation be "policed"
- A process would need to be put in place to facilitate and regularize negotiations among institutions
- In both B.C. and Alberta a provincial body is responsible for overseeing and managing the process and information dissemination (e.g., through a clear, well-organized, searchable web site), making sure it is up-to-date, collecting and analyzing data, conducting research, etc.; how would these functions be carried out in Ontario? (perhaps through HEQCO?)
- Issues re. tracking and counting students, especially in collaborative programs (as discussed in relation to barriers to transfer and collaboration) need to be addressed
- There will be substantial costs at the institutional level as well as for whatever coordinating body is established; what will be the costs and who will be responsible for them?