



Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer
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July 29, 2013

The Honourable Brad Duguid, MPP
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
3rd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Minister:

Re: Submission to the Provincial Government on Credit Transfer in Ontario

On behalf of the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), we are pleased to present a submission to the provincial government on credit transfer, in an effort to inform the roundtable discussions on credit transfer reform.

Established in 2011, ONCAT was created to enhance student pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's 44 publicly funded postsecondary institutions. As a member driven organization, ONCAT has continued to play a leadership role in the development of credit transfer policies and practices in Ontario. With the ministry's ongoing funding of \$15 million over two years, ONCAT is committed to continuing to drive innovation for credit transfer in the province with the goal of achieving the ministry's vision by 2015.

This submission is intended to highlight successes to date and begin to outline potential directions for future system enhancements. The information contained in this submission is informed by ONCAT's experience in delivering credit transfer options to students in Ontario, and through our relationships with our members and other stakeholders, including credit transfer professionals at both colleges and universities.

If you have any further questions about the contents of this report, please do not hesitate to contact Glenn Craney at gcraney@ontransfer.ca.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Lovisa".

Don Lovisa
Co-Chair, ONCAT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenn Craney".

Glenn Craney
Executive Director, ONCAT

cc: Andrew Block, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, MTCU
Deborah Newman, Deputy Minister, MTCU

ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER
SUBMISSION TO MINISTRY OF TRAINING COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON CREDIT TRANSFER
JULY 2013

Executive summary

Established in 2011, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) was created to enhance student pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's 44 publicly funded postsecondary institutions.

Students today regard access to different types of education as vital to their success in the workplace; they believe it is essential that they equip themselves with a diverse range of job-ready skills in a way that best speaks to their own interests and aptitudes. This is most obvious in new and emerging fields such as Game Design. The work of this recently funded project showed that students want the ability to pick and choose from among the array of learning outcomes associated with a diploma and a degree, in order to enhance their workplace marketability.

Furthermore, employers are demanding that their new employees be able to think critically; understand the importance of innovation and creativity; appreciate the significance of design, while being able to communicate and execute ideas; they want their employees to build objects and systems in increasingly inventive ways.

But the movement of students between colleges and universities, and in and out of diploma and degree programs was not a part of the historical design of Ontario's Postsecondary Education System. Originally, universities provided mainly theoretical training, while colleges were established to provide vocationally oriented, applied education and training so as to quickly respond to the demands of their local economies.

The Ontario Government clearly understands the needs of students and employers and has established a policy framework to support student access to this new educational experience; government would like an education and training network that not only produces future employees, but also employers of the future. This will enable our provincial economy to innovate and grow.

It is clear that Ontario's universities and colleges share the desire to be responsive to the needs of students and employers. All institutions identified articulation and credit transfer as an area of priority in their Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to government in the fall of 2012. However, issues related to the design of the sectors need to be taken into account: both universities and colleges are governed by bodies charged with ensuring new programming makes sense for their institutions, and both require the time it takes to approve such new programming.

For its part, ONCAT was created as a member organization to work with all institutions to enable the system to develop as rapidly as possible, while also respecting institutional autonomy. This work has already begun and to date Ontario boasts: approximately 630 student transfer pathways in six broad program clusters (Applied Arts, Liberal Arts & Humanities, Business & Commerce, Health Sciences & Applied Health, Engineering & Technology, Social Sciences & Services, and Sciences & Applied Sciences); a greater understanding of the student transfer experience through funded research initiatives; enhanced information for students; and better data collection mechanisms. These are all critical to helping achieve enhanced transparency, accountability and greater mobility for students seeking to move between institutions.

While ONCAT and its member institutions have reason to celebrate the system's successes, there is still much room for improvement. This document outlines some of the potential directions Ontario should take, and the rationale for some proposed future activities.

Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer

ONCAT is a government-funded organization that promotes student mobility among Ontario's 44 publicly assisted postsecondary institutions. ONCAT is the successor organization to the College University Consortium Council (CUCC), established in 1996 as an advisory body to government with representation from the college and university sectors.

To accelerate the development of a more comprehensive credit transfer system in Ontario, in 2011, the Minister responsible for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), replaced the CUCC with ONCAT. This new member-driven organization was provided with an enhanced leadership role in the development of credit transfer policies and practices in Ontario. At the same time, the Minister announced a new provincial credit transfer framework.

The government also committed \$73.7 million over five years to develop a more comprehensive and transparent system of pathways and credit transfer. As part of that, ONCAT was tasked with supporting institutions and government to develop the infrastructure required to facilitate student mobility, innovation for credit transfer in the province, as well as developing a fully fledged accountability framework.

Enhanced information channels for students

ONCAT continues to work with students to ensure that there is a better understanding of the transfer and mobility opportunities afforded by our system.

- ONCAT maintains the ONTransfer.ca website, which provides students with up-to-date, authoritative information on block credit agreements, and pathways between postsecondary institutions. This new site replaces the original transfer guide that was originally available in paper form. In 2012, this site was visited by more than 80,000 people, and in the last six months, that total was already surpassed.

- ONCAT continues to work with partner institutions to ensure that all pathways and agreements are available on the ONTransfer.ca website. Since 2011, the total number of agreements has increased from about 300 in 2011 to approximately 630 in 2013. During this time ONCAT has worked with institutions to ensure the information is consistently updated. *A list of agreements by type of sending institution can be found in Appendix I.*
- ONCAT is working to develop a course equivalency search tool that will allow students to identify which specific courses will be accepted by institutions for those students who do not qualify for the block credit pathway. In total, almost 30 institutions have expressed strong interest in participating in the project and are currently working on internal implementation strategies. ONCAT plans to move ahead as quickly as possible with the initiative and will launch the database this fall with about 15 participating institutions.

ONCAT is also improving the understanding of the policies and practices around credit transfer at each publicly assisted college and university. Because the transfer process differs by institution, ONCAT is collecting a set of FAQs about the transfer process at each college and university, including a link to institutional policies, timelines for decisions on total credit awarded, the avenue for appeals – if necessary – and a primary contact for questions. The answers to each of these questions will be available on the ONTransfer.ca website to ensure that students have accurate and timely information regarding their transfer opportunities and options.

Engaged collaboration between postsecondary institutions to build enhanced pathways

ONCAT is helping member institutions to collaborate in offering the type of educational experiences that students and employers are demanding for today and the future. Through the Credit Transfer Innovation Fund, ONCAT has supported more than 65 projects spanning all types of student transfer, including apprenticeship to diploma, diploma to diploma, and diploma to degree. Most of these projects are multi-institutional by nature; are designed to identify gaps in the curriculum, and develop programming to fill those gaps. This work will be of direct benefit to students by providing them with more options to continue their education, and improve their likelihood of graduating.

A full list of programs by category can be found in Appendix II.

In an effort to create a more common foundational year experience, ONCAT supported three large-scale projects that will allow students to move between programs of both high affinity and among like institutions, in order to improve mobility across the province.

These include:

- Developing greater ease of movement for those students wishing to transition from college-based general education programs into arts and science programming at the province's universities. With Seneca and McMaster as lead institutions, program partners included: Algoma, Carleton, UOIT, York, Cambrian, Georgian, Mohawk, and Niagara.
- Through the mapping of learning outcomes, create greater synergies between all colleges' programs in business administration and general education. Both of these projects had the participation of almost all of the colleges.

In the fall of 2013, ONCAT will be looking to identify and launch a new series of projects.

Knowledge gathering

ONCAT is equally committed to knowledge-gathering. There are two essential elements to this work: supporting research, as well as gathering data and creating better mechanisms for its collection. This will help develop more robust indicators of our success, both as an organization and a province, with respect to credit transfer, and will help us measure our successes against our goals.

Broadly speaking, the research projects funded by ONCAT examine and analyze the student experience of transfer, on a pre-, during and post-transfer basis. More specifically, much of the research activity sought to better understand what the particular needs of transfer students are, whether they have been outfitted with the appropriate academic preparation required of their program of destination, what sorts of supports work best for students in their receiving institutions, and whether students coming through a more formal articulation arrangement meant students experienced better outcomes in their destination program and institution. A number of the other research initiatives looked at the characteristics of successful student transfers (ie. grades and graduation rates) and compared those characteristics to a sample of the larger student population.

Better data

In partnership with the Ministry, ONCAT has endeavoured to develop better data collection and management systems in an effort to build a comprehensive Accountability Framework for Credit Transfer (CT) activity in Ontario.

For its part, ONCAT is undertaking two streams of work in support of the development of a framework: first, to conduct an audit of all institutions with the view to determine the current availability of CT data at each of Ontario's 44 publicly supported postsecondary institutions; and second, to conduct a pilot project with nine institutions to test and refine the Ministry's proposed indicators that have been developed with the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group.

ONCAT has received the preliminary reports from all institutions, which outlined the general state of their CT data; but the final reports for this stream of work are not expected until early to mid summer. ONCAT is planning to report some basic metrics for the majority of institutions by the end of summer 2013. It is important to note that this data has never been collected in Ontario. ONCAT is also in the process of developing a plan with all institutions so that they can identify and track the progress of transfer students through their studies.

Outreach to the broader community

ONCAT continues to engage and consult widely with our member institutions and the broader community.

Early in the New Year, ONCAT hosted its 2nd annual Student Pathways Conference, which was attended by more than 250 credit transfer professionals, with over 40 sessions delivered by experts from across North America. Given its tremendous success, ONCAT is currently in the planning stages for the 3rd annual conference. However, ONCAT will augment its annual event with more numerous regional professional development activities across the province, and establish more active communities of practice with ongoing support.

ONCAT has also established a Student Advisory Board with representation from ONCAT Board, Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario (CFS-O), College Student Alliance (CSA) and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). ONCAT has made presentations at events across Canada, PCCAT, CDOG (College Degree Operating Group), Ontario Universities Fair, Ontario Colleges Fair, Ontario School Counsellors' Association (OSCA).

ONCAT continues to work closely with other groups that support student mobility: COU Credit Transfer Resource Group, CO Task force on Credit Transfer, Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), and the Coordinating Committee of Vice-Presidents, Academic (CCVPA), to name a few.

In the winter semester, ONCAT expanded paid advertising of the ONTransfer.ca website to include Google Ads and transit advertising which has generated a significant amount of student traffic.

Moving forward

New projects

After a full year of operation, there are many lessons learned and future opportunities identified. There is already a considerable amount of student transfer activity in the province, based on the level of engagement by all publicly funded PSE institutions and the amount of activity that has already occurred.

In analyzing the research from our projects, and with discussions with our members, ONCAT has identified a number of gaps with respect to the availability of pathways in a number of program clusters, including:

- Engineering and IT,
- Health Sciences, and
- Social and Community Services.

Out of these consultations, ONCAT foresees a fairly high demand from the institutions to develop programming that includes a component of online learning. Not only will online learning help minimize students' need to bear the financial burden of relocation to attend a postsecondary program, it will also serve as a well-built and thoughtful bridging programming, where needed.

ONCAT would also like to support partnered programming that grow from the commonalities among institutions, be it shared regional mandates or similar student characteristics. For example, strong institutional partnerships have emerged on the basis of common regional-economic, cultural or linguistic grounds; ONCAT wants to find ways to support those naturally evolving partnering arrangements.

Finally, there is still work to be done on implementing the projects already funded and underway; not all of our bridging programming has been finalized by the governing bodies at each of the participating institutions. ONCAT would like to find ways to support institutions – through financial and other means – to fully implement their newly created transfer pathways.

Learning Outcomes

Furthermore, learning outcomes continue to be regarded as critical building blocks to a comprehensive and transparent system of more easily accessible system pathways and credit transfer. As a critical component in the ONCAT funded work of our project partners, learning outcomes served as the place where all discussions began, as colleges and universities sought to establish a common language that could launch their bridge-building work.

To facilitate future work, ONCAT is proposing a new Learning Outcomes project, which will be guided by a steering committee established over the course of the summer. The committee will be comprised of experts from the college and university communities, who will review the work already done by two of our project committees (these projects are the Environmental Technology and the Game Design). The steering committee will provide advice on how to best proceed in a landscape of well established learning outcomes for the college sector, multiple on-going learning outcomes projects in the university sector and new learning outcome projects funded by other organizations such as HEQCO. This work will help ONCAT better understand the role of learning outcomes in the transfer credit process and improve existing and future pathways.

As well, this project in particular will advance ONCAT's strategic priorities in the following ways:

- i. Help support students earn maximum credits;
- ii. Minimize students need to repeat prior learning;
- iii. Increase student options for continuing their education, leading to timely completion;
- iv. Work with institutions to develop transparent credit transfer policies and practices; and,
- v. Improve stakeholder awareness and knowledge of transfer opportunities, outcomes and progress.

Future knowledge gathering

Research

A new call for research project submissions will be developed over the summer of 2013 in consultation with the college and university communities. The call will be more targeted towards research gaps identified by an analysis of the research conducted to date. It is expected that a formal RFP process will be launched in the early fall of 2013.

In terms of future research funding opportunities, ONCAT will be issuing a call for another round of research projects that puts students at the centre of the research question. ONCAT's goal is to help institutions better understand the diverse interests of various student communities.

Some of those research questions may include:

- How would First Generation students engage a more robust credit transfer system?
- Is the range of programming choice sufficiently diverse for Francophone students?
- Would a greater number of articulation agreements in the North and other remote areas of the province assist Aboriginal students in particular finish their programs of study?
- Is the current system of credit transfer sufficient to support mature learners and lifelong learning?

Data collection and accountability

ONCAT will continue to refine the pilot projects and work with institutions to collect common data. It is anticipated that by the end of the summer there will be first a comprehensive set of student statistics on credit transferring, including how many students transfer, where they transfer from and where they transfer to, and what programs are studying. Over the course of the next year, ONCAT will work with its member institutions to ensure that they can provide the data that is required to support the implementation of the Credit Transfer Accountability Framework. In addition, the work of the ONCAT-supported Credit Transfer Accountability Framework Pilot Working Group will provide recommendations by the fall of 2013 on the best way to implement the Ministry's Accountability Framework.

Concluding thoughts

While ONCAT and its members have reason to celebrate their successes, there is still much room for improvement. It is important to note that institutions are fully committed to building a more comprehensive and transparent system of credit transfer. In fact, many institutions' SMA submissions cited credit transfer as a key priority in their strategic plans. ONCAT looks forward to supporting institutions' goals in this area.

With its approximately 630 student transfer pathways in six broad program clusters; a greater understanding of the student transfer experience; enhanced information for students; and better data collection mechanisms, ONCAT and its member institutions are well on their way to meeting the credit transfer goals as established by the Ministry by 2015.

ONCAT would like to acknowledge and support the Ministry's commitment to creating this forum in which colleges and universities will come together to discuss the future possibilities of credit transfer within the province. ONCAT is supportive of the measures the Government would like to initiate to accelerate the adoption of a PSE system characterized by comprehensive, transparent, and evenly applied credit transfer policies, practices and procedures.