

# TRANSFER LITERACY: ASSESSING INFORMATIONAL SYMMETRIES AND ASYMMETRIES

Tuesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2014

START



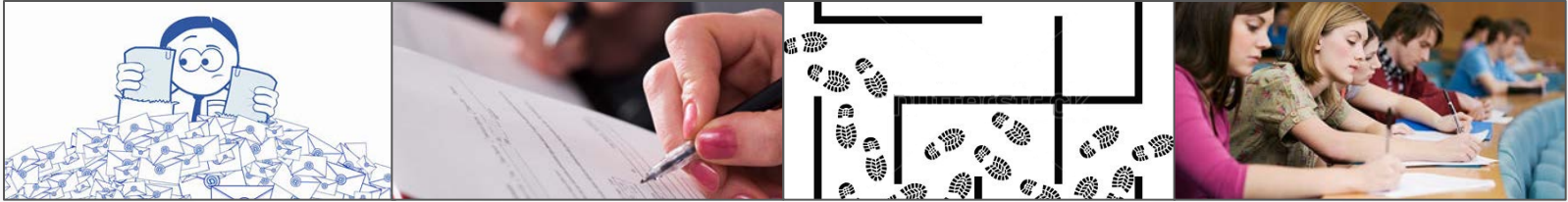
# MY LIFE

REASONS I HAVE DARK CIRCLES UNDER MY EYES & WILL NOT RUN A MARATHON THIS YEAR



# PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

## FRAMEWORK



- 1) In consideration of current student transfer demands, existing regulatory and advising practices by Government, agencies and institutions and the present state of transfer literacy among all stakeholders, to what extent is the college-to-university transfer information system performing efficiently?
- 2) What (a)symmetries exist in stakeholders' understanding of this process which affects students' facility to transfer and universities' ability to accommodate transfer students?

# OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

## PROFILE

- 1) Establishing a baseline of credit transfer information that Government, agencies and institutions view as being necessary for students to navigate the transfer system;
- 2) Assessing current regulatory and advising practices;
- 3) Identifying (a)symmetries within the college-to-university transfer information system from which literacy programs might be constructed; and
- 4) Generating data for discussion in the field.



# TRANSFER LITERACY

## DEFINITION



*Ability to comprehend credit transfer procedures, policies and outcomes. It refers to a set of knowledge and skills that allow individuals to advise and/or make informed decisions about admission and the mobilization of academic credits between colleges and universities to avoid the repetition of coursework, lack of financial assistance and misaligned institutional and program fit.*

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## APPROACH



**Phase I:** Document Analysis

**Phase II:** 75 min. focus group/interviews conducted with administrators, advisors/counsellors, staff and faculty (110 participants)

Identified big themes across all institutions in the study (7 universities and 6 colleges)

Constructivist methodology- participants play a role in the data interpretation

# INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPANTS

## FUNCTIONAL AREAS & POSITIONS

Participants' Functional Areas	Positions
Academic	Advisor/Coordinator/Associate Vice President/Assistant Director
Program	Manager/Chair/Coordinator/Administrator
Pathways	Consultant/Coordinator/Specialist
Degree and Transfer Credit	Assessor/Coordinator/Manager/Officer/Clerk
Career/Employment	Counsellor/Consultant/Advisor
Registrar	Assistant Registrar/ Associate Registrar/Analyst
Admissions/Entry	Assessor/Advisor/Liaison Officer/Manager/Associate Director/Assistant Director/Director
Recruitment	Assistant/Officer/Manager/Advisor
Student Success	Specialist/Advisor/Director/Officer
Faculty	Lecturer/Chair/Associate Dean/Dean
Administration	Officer/Assistant
Client Services	Manager/Officer

# AGENDA: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TRANSFER LITERACY

(A)SYMMETRIES

TRANSFER ELEMENTS

CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL



# TRANSFER LITERACY



Terminology, Policies and Procedures		Literature and Publicity		Centrality of Information	
Responsibility and Processing		Self- Recognition and Merits		Assessment and Competition	
Advising, Forecasting and Preparation		Program Affinity and Coursework		Outcomes and Career Prospects	

# TRANSFER LITERACY

DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS



## Terminology, Policies and Procedures:

'Block credit,' 'advanced standing,' 'collaborative programs,' 'direct entry programs,' 'degree completion,' 'consecutive,' 'concurrent,' 'joint/integrated,' 'blended program agreements,' 'articulated/blended program agreements,' 'accelerated/intensive,' 'laddering' and 'bridging courses/programs'

"**Very plain language and in steps**, so that a student would just be able to do that [transfer] really easily and that it would be very **transparent**, that I could understand it, they could understand it... Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, and not a mystery and read 12 pages."

"Maybe **stricter, sharper definitions** in terms of what we mean by partnership, pathways, collaboration, because these **terms are used rather loosely**."

"**Specified credits versus unspecified credits, dual elective credits and context credits**. Those terms that fly around that students really don't understand."

# TRANSFER LITERACY

DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS



## Literature and Publicity/Centrality of Information:

**Institutional Websites-** “Websites with easily navigable items (ex. course descriptions).” “One centralized place that will house the [articulation] agreements [on each college and university’s website], the archive – if you want to find the details on a bunch of articulation agreements, you’ll likely have to go to a variety of different academic faculties’ sites.”

**Transfer Booklets/Guides-** “University wide transfer booklets with general, not complicated, guidelines for programs.” “Wouldn’t it be great if every university in Ontario composed a booklet with articulation agreements, transfer models and the admissions process in it?”

**Ontario Postsecondary Transfer Guide-** “When students start to even think about where they can go after school, they don’t even know on the website what to look up. The “Transfer Guide” is not exactly an intuitive term.”

# TRANSFER LITERACY

## DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS



### Self-Recognition of Position and Merits/Assessment and Competition:

“Understanding that there is such a thing as transfer is fundamental. I recently spoke to a young man a couple weeks ago who had completed a three-year diploma from a college and he had no idea that he would actually be considered a transfer student, and that he’s **entitled to take that education and apply it towards a degree.**”

“You’re a transfer student, you’re coming from another institution but then when they’re looking on university websites, **are they return students or transfer students?**”

“Every institution is different ... **some universities will take the credit and the grade and some universities won’t.** It depends on the home institution’s policies and procedures. Students are legitimately confused about whether the mark will come into play or not.”

# TRANSFER LITERACY

DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS



## Advising, Forecasting and Preparation:

**University Admission-** “I have to remind them partway through their college studies, just because you don’t make the cut for one of our joint programs or partnerships, you can still go to university,’ and a lot of times they don’t hear that and think that if they fail one course, ‘I’m not going to university so I might as well drop out.’”

**Institutional Choice-** “The benefit of choosing one institution over another as opposed to how the process works ... . This is why [University X] would be your best choice. I think we have a challenge in terms of varying students and making sure they are ready for what happens.”

**Minimums and the Application Process-** “What options are out there, understanding that what is published is the minimum and how to proceed with the application process.”

# A SIGNALLING GAME

CHOOSING A MESSAGE FROM A SET OF POSSIBLE MESSAGES

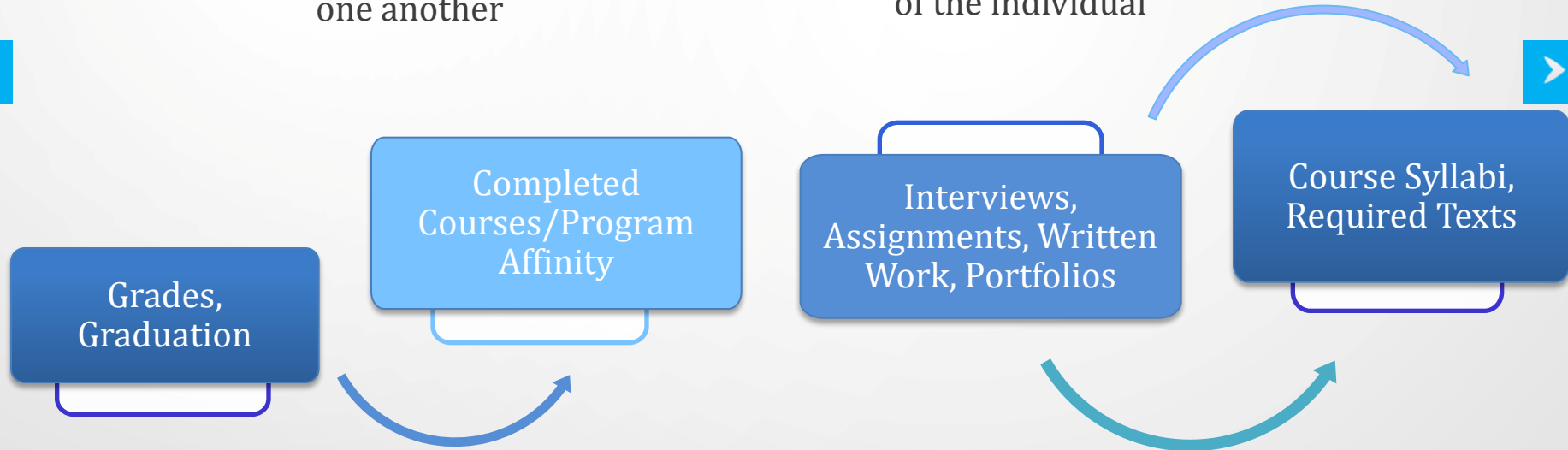


# CONTRACT THEORY: A PARADIGM FOR INTERPRETATION

PEACH OR LEMON?

**Adverse Selection:** Both parties seek to determine the value of one another

**Signalling:** Plethora of personal data in the form of observable characteristics and attributes of the individual





# ASYMMETRY

## DEFINITION



*Refers to an incongruity in information resulting in non-uniform knowledge across relevant stakeholders. In this case, some stakeholder(s) would directly benefit from additional information from the other(s) that is not being fully disseminated. This may arise if stakeholders have incentives to withhold information, the costs/challenges of collecting and disseminating information are too high, or the information is simply too complex for stakeholder(s) to reasonably comprehend.*





# SYMMETRY

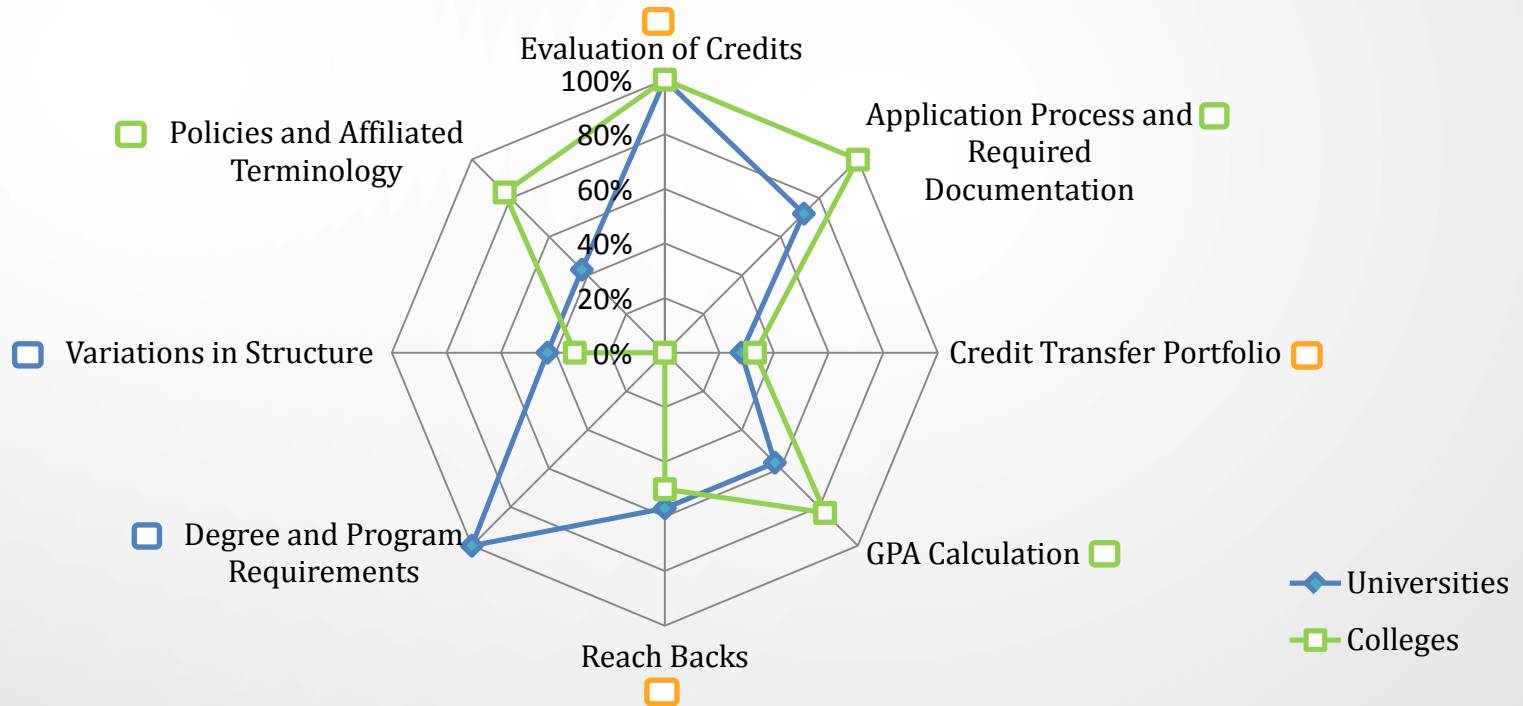
## DEFINITION



*Refers to a congruity in credit transfer information between stakeholders. This includes *shared* (or uniform) knowledge about the credit transfer process as well as *shared* (or uniform) confusion. In other words, symmetry of information arises when all of the relevant stakeholders are ‘on the same page’: there is no withholding of information, they share common knowledge about the credit transfer environment (even if this knowledge is incomplete), and they hold common beliefs/expectations about future outcomes.*

# INFORMATIONAL ASYMMETRIES

COMPARISON COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



# EVALUATION OF CREDITS



## PROGRAM AFFINITY, EQUIVALENCIES & RECOGNITION

- Students express frustration over their attempts to determine the amount of transfer credit they will receive upon applying to university.

## ADVANCED STANDING

- Students require clarification with regard to the concept of advanced standing and the accompanying conditions.

## RE-EVALUATIONS

- Degree and faculty changes made by students throughout the course of their education may require transfer credit re-evaluation, additional advising and a reconfiguration of program plans.



# PROGRAM AFFINITY, EQUIVALENCIES AND RECOGNITION

## COMMUNICATION & ALIGNMENT

*While some students are satisfied to switch program areas regardless of awarded credit, others regret not having made more aligned program choices.*

“They're [students] coming from a Business Diploma at a college, and they want to go into Landscape Architecture at a university, I think they get that they are not aligned. That they are different... When you get down again to the nitty-gritty of what courses you're going to get from Business to Landscape Architecture which is probably going to be a grand total of one, if any. Then they're like, ‘**whoa, wait a second. I did a three-year diploma.**’”

“**They're confused [students] about the number of credits they are receiving,** because they may be applying to Science where they will get 30, but also applying to Engineering where they are getting 18. ‘Why am I not getting the same thing? I am graduating from the same program from the same college; I am coming to the same university?’”



# ADVANCED STANDING

ALL CREDIT VS. PREDETERMINED ACHIEVED LEVELS

*Students  
investigating/applying to a  
variety of institutions must  
keep track of these differences,  
ultimately learning to speak  
several 'transfer dialects.'*

“For us advanced standing means any transfer credit, whereas students when they are asking about admission they often call us to ask ‘**what level should I pick? I’m a postsecondary student should I choose on the application that I want advanced standing or... ?**’ They don’t understand what advance standing means to us.”

“To receive advanced standing [awarded credit] you have to have completed [a specific number of sessions] in the same program. If there is a **change of program, then they're not eligible for those credits**. And they, well, some of them, I won't generalize, but some of them don't realize that that's one of the conditions. So when we have to **withdraw the advanced standing**, there is great confusion there.”

# RE-EVALUATIONS

FULL VS. PROGRAM BASED EVALUATIONS

*Students must be aware of universities' methods and sequences for conducting transfer credit evaluations.*

“When transferring degrees or faculties students may need to be re-evaluated for credit. For example, if you switched majors from Anthropology to History, the college transfer student would not have been evaluated for credit for a B.A. in History.”

“We went back to giving a full assessment ... because they [students] may change after year one and have to go back to Admissions ... I think that was a huge change, advising them that they may not all fit [credits] and the reason they don't all fit is because after first year you may not choose to stay in Business or Visual Arts, and you can re-assess using those.”



# REACH BACKS

YEAR OF STUDY & COURSE SELECTION

*Students are primarily concerned about “fast-tracking”. They focus more attention on their year of academic standing than details regarding required courses and offerings.*

“If they have done a technical program, they can receive advanced standing for third year courses, second year courses, but not the first year courses... *Sometimes they have difficulties in their course selection after because they were a little bit all over the place.*”

“They *assume that they can take courses all year long*. I’ll take this, this and this in the year, and then all summer I’m going to take these five, which we don’t offer. They don’t understand that it’s a process with varying registration dates.”

# APPLICATION PROCESS, GPA CALCULATIONS AND POLICIES



## ENROLMENT & FOLLOW-UP

- Credit transfer students experience a multifaceted enrolment process.

## ADMISSIONS CUT-OFF AVERAGES

- The shifting nature of admissions cut-offs often proves difficult for advisors/counsellors and students for whom ranges must be used.

## GRADING SCALES & GPA CALCULATIONS

- Varied grading scales, GPA calculations and regulations regarding course repeats cause confusion for students.

## POLICIES & TERMINOLOGY

- In order to function in a university setting, students must acclimatize to a new set of policies and terminology.





# ENROLMENT & FOLLOW-UP

COMPETITION, PREREQUISITES & DOCUMENTATION

*Applying for admission to university is only the beginning of a chain of events that must occur before transfer students walk into a classroom.*

“Students don’t necessarily know why they would go to university or how it’s different. Or they **don’t necessarily have a good concept of what a credit or transcript is** and what that is used for. They’re still thinking of report cards.”

“One of the things that just really throws college students when they go to apply to universities is the **multitude of deadlines**. ‘They offer a February boost right?’ I say, well no not exactly. If it’s Nursing, it’s February 15<sup>th</sup>, for everything else it’s June 1<sup>st</sup>...”

“Every teacher in every college and university has said to them [students] on the first day: ‘**Here's your course outline, keep this for the next 25 years.**’”



# ADMISSIONS CUT-OFF AVERAGES

YEARLY DECISIONS & RIGIDITY

*Averages are dependent on discipline, applicant pool, annual targets and funding.*

“‘3.0, okay, I’ll do that.’ But then it’s not 3.0. **It sometimes floats up.** And all of a sudden they [students] feel as though they’ve been robbed. You know, ‘I received a 3.1. Why didn’t I get in? I mean, we’re just it, right? It’s based on last year?’”

“A number of students, although you can say the words to them, and they can say ‘Yes, this GPA is required,’ when it comes down to it they ask: ‘If I get a 2.94? **That’s probably close enough, right?**’ They don’t really get it.”

“**It’s very difficult, I think, for universities to give specific grade points without being committed to it.** You have a target to meet, right? Meeting the target may require that you have to work with that range a little bit so that you don’t over commit or you don’t under commit, right? If you say, “Okay, 2.5. You’re definitely in,” it’s difficult to do that.”



# GRADING SCALES AND GPA CALCULATIONS

VARYING SCALES, INTERPRETATIONS & STUDENT ACCESS

*What point scale will be used?  
What courses will be included?  
Do course repeats count? Do my  
college grades impact my new  
university average?*

They [students] don't know on the other end in the university zone who is looking at their GPA, how is it being perceived, **does the university know what the GPA calculation measures are for the college in question** or do they see a C+ and it is in a different numeric category than what the college deemed it to be?

"There should be a **generic scale that we have in our course outlines**. Do a conversion between a GPA and a letter D grade, as a percentage."

"Some colleges and universities have a **GPA calculator** which is attached to their systems. Students enter their grades and play scenarios. If I retake this D and I get a B what happens? If we could have that on the system for student access ... . What a great tool to have for degree transfer."

# ONTARIO UNIVERSITY GRADE POINT SCALES

VARYING SCALES, INTERPRETATIONS & STUDENT ACCESS

Point Scale	University
4.0	University of Toronto
4.3	Ryerson University, Queens University
9.0	York University
10.0	Ottawa University
12.0	Carleton University, Wilfred Laurier University, McMaster University
13.0	Windsor University
100%	Algoma University, Brock University, Guelph University, Western University, Waterloo University, Trent University, OCAD University, Laurentian University, Lakehead University, Nipissing University, Windsor University

Note: Table adapted from University of Windsor Senate. (2011). *Grading Scales*. Windsor: ON.

# DEGREE AND PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND STRUCTURE



## APPLICATION OF CREDIT EVALUATION

- Regardless of the program, it is important that students understand their transfer credit evaluation and how it applies to both degree and program requirements.



## PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

- University programs are less prescribed than that of the colleges; students manage their own course selections. Given this flexibility, students have the responsibility of determining how they wish to proceed in achieving their degree.

# APPLICATION OF CREDIT EVALUATION

## APPLICATION & FIT

*Students are often so focused on the number of credits they will receive that they do not contemplate the type of credit awarded.*

**Generic, Unassigned, and/or Unspecified Credits-** “Understanding what a generic credit can and can’t do. It can’t fulfill a program requirement so there are some students who don’t quite understand how they use the generic credit towards their degree.”

**Exclusions-** “If students have a course with an exclusion, depending on what course it is that they were excluded from and the level of the unspecified credit, we would take it or we would give it an alternative. But those arrangements are made by each individual department because we sign off on their program.”

**Level of Credits-** “Sometimes students receive something like five transfer credits and they are all at the 100 level and then they come here and because they can’t use those credits towards the program ... the program requires three credits at the 100 level, a lot of times they’ll say ‘can I get rid of those transfer credits?’”



# PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

## FLEXIBILITY & ADVISING

*Advising around  
fundamental program  
decisions and the timing  
for completion may be  
required.*

“They’re [students] not used to being able to flip in between part time and full time. For us it’s just the number of credits you’re taking. **There’s no prescription of courses**, you need to do these this year in order to move onto next year. It’s a totally different culture in terms of understanding how you choose courses and progress through your degree than when you were at college.”

In the Faculty of Arts, it is somewhat the opposite. You have a lot of electives, with a small number of disciplinary courses. So transfer students coming from colleges, when they are admitted, let’s say in a major, we say, “Well, **you can’t graduate just with a major, you’ve got to add a second discipline to your program**, either another major or minor.”

# INFORMATIONAL SYMMETRIES

CLARITY & CONFUSION



Program Choice  
Residency Requirement  
Articulation Agreements



Applied Bachelor Degrees  
Advising Practices (Internal & External)  
Degree and Program Requirements  
Information Location/Relevance



# SYMMETRY SPECIFICS

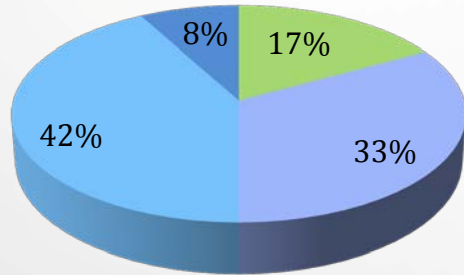
## DETAILS & COMMONALITIES

University	College & University
<b>Timing and Method of Transfer Credit Assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Pre or post admissions</li><li>Automatically assessed or application required</li></ul>	<b>Applied Bachelor Degrees</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Evaluation of credit when transferring from an applied bachelor degree to university</li><li>Role of college degrees in applied areas of study</li></ul>
College	
<b>Information Location/Relevance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tracking down information and wait times at universities</li><li>Data sharing between institutions and professional associations</li></ul> <b>GPA Calculation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Shifting university admissions GPA averages</li><li>Varying GPA schemes (program vs. cumulative, repeats)</li></ul> <b>Terminology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Articulation agreements (varying terms and language used)</li><li>Credit value/hours (full credits vs. half credits etc...)</li></ul> <b>Applicant Pool</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Quota of reserved seats for college transfers</li></ul>	<b>Advising Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Communication lines between colleges and universities</li><li>Multi-campus distinctions in policies and procedures</li><li>High school guidance counsellors' advisement practices regarding pathways</li></ul> <b>Information Location/Relevance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Internal contact information and resource sharing between units</li><li>Publishing and updating transfer agreements internally (web)</li><li>Setting research priorities (credit transfer activity/outcomes/(dis)advantages)</li><li>Consistency of information and level of guidance provided</li><li>Ease of access to information</li><li>ONCAT Portal</li></ul>

# TRANSFER ELEMENTS

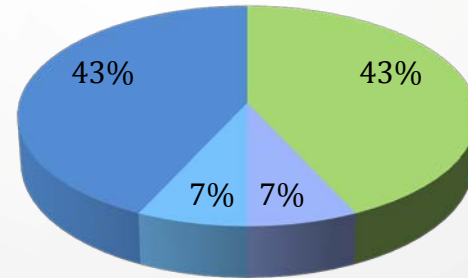
COMPREHENSION & APPLICATION

## Colleges



- Program and Course Planning
- Articulation and Transfer Models
- Admissions
- Credit Review and Evaluation

## Universities



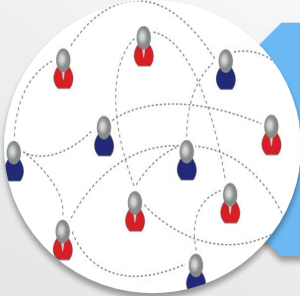
- Program and Course Planning
- Articulation and Transfer Models
- Admissions
- Credit Review and Evaluation

# CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

## THEMES FOR CONSIDERATION



*1. Develop a searchable centralized database for identifying previous student registrations and the electronic archiving of course outlines/descriptions.*



*2. Institute and publicly post policies regarding the evaluation of applied degree credits at Ontario universities.*

# CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

## THEMES FOR CONSIDERATION



*3. Establish more transparent and system-wide academic regulations across institutions to assist both institutional administrators and students.*

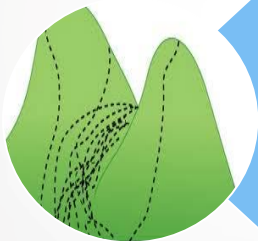
(ex. grading scales, GPA calculations, credit values/weight, credit evaluation fees and timing, course repeats and declarations of previous postsecondary education)



*4. Educate students about credit transfer pathways and institutional offerings earlier in their educational careers.*

# CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

## THEMES FOR CONSIDERATION



### 5. *Create standard credit transfer terminology.*

(ex. 'direct entry,' 'blended/joint/integrated/concurrent/collaborative/consecutive/accelerated,' 'advanced standing,' 'equivalencies,' 'exclusions' and 'exemptions')



### 6. *Open communication lines and resource sharing among college and university credit transfer advisors/counsellors.*

(ex. program versus degree requirements; generic, unassigned and unspecified credits; reach backs; and the importance of program major and minor declarations)

# CONTACT INFORMATION

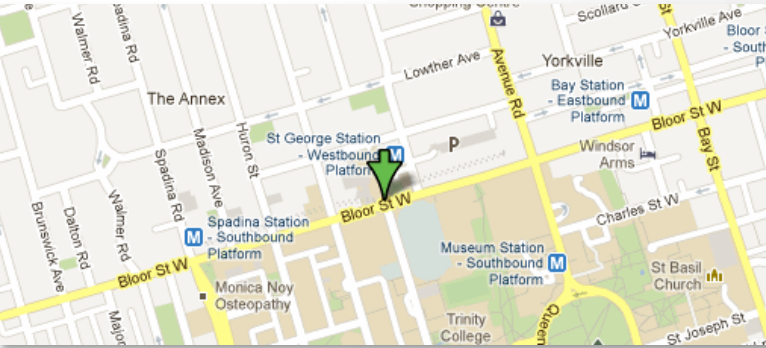
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