



Faculty Perspectives on Diploma-Degree Pathways and Student Preparedness

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Executive Summary

Funded by the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), this study investigated faculty perspectives on students' academic preparedness and social adjustment, as well as their views on the effectiveness of pathways in supporting student's academic goals and the college's enrolment objectives. The research focused on three intra-institutional, diploma-degree pathways and combined interviews, an online survey and an analysis of student grades to address the research questions.

Faculty perspectives on pathway students' academic preparedness and social integration is important because of the role that they play in promoting these opportunities and influencing student experience. The associate deans, program coordinators and faculty that participated in this study recognized the value of pathways in meeting strategic enrolment targets, improving student access to advanced credentials and enhancing students' employment prospects. They were also cognizant of the need for comprehensive curriculum mapping to ensure that pathway students acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills to ease the transfer from diploma to degree programs. Further, they recognized the value of and often took part in various strategies and events that promote pathways and orientate students to their new programs.

The pathways examined in this study were intra-institutional block transfers typically involving multiple students from the same cohort. The nature of this transition is not likely to create the same level of "transfer shock" or administrative, academic and social challenges often associated with credit transfer and inter-institutional pathways (e.g., see Decock & Janzen, 2015; Ishitani, 2008; Toblowsky & Cox, 2012). However, faculty were sensitive to potential issues, particularly those related to the social integration of pathway students and took steps to facilitate a cohesive classroom environment.

Finally, while faculty believed that in general, students were appropriately prepared for degree studies, they also reported that pathway students were less skilled in areas such as writing, research and foundational content than their non-pathway colleagues. However, analysis of student grades and academic standing showed pathway students outperformed their colleagues in every semester.

As the first line in promoting pathways and shaping the student experience, it is important to ensure that faculty have an accurate and complete understanding of the successes and challenges associated with pathway programs and in particular, student performance.