

FINAL REPORT
RESEARCH RELATED TO POSTSECONDARY STUDENT MOBILITY

Understanding Student Experiences and Graduate Outcomes for Durham College Fast Track Programs

SUBMITTED TO THE ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER
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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that there is considerable interest among Ontario students in obtaining multiple credentials from both universities and colleges. For colleges wishing to attract university graduates and offer a practical, hands-on experience that will improve graduates' employability, a better understanding of the experiences and outcomes of students moving from university to college is required.

This study focuses on university graduates who have enrolled in accelerated ("Fast Track") diploma programs at Durham College. The college has been offering Fast Track program options within the School of Science and Engineering Technology for the last four years. These programs are geared toward domestic and international students who hold a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Engineering degree, depending on the program.

To understand the experiences of Fast Track students and outcomes of graduates, this study employs a mixed methods design that includes a survey of Fast Track students and graduates, and focus groups with Fast Track students. This data is also supplemented by information from the Durham College student database, and data available from the 2010-11 and 2011-12 KPI Student and Graduate Satisfaction Surveys.

Upon project completion, there are three key recommendations that can improve the experience of Fast Track students at Durham College:

- (1) Increase pathway affinity and simplify the transfer process;
- (2) Strengthen and enrich the field placement opportunity; and
- (3) Develop relevant and opportune social opportunities to encourage school-life balance.

In addition, there are three key recommendations to improve the outcomes of Fast Track graduates:

- (1) Provide more assistance to Fast Track graduates to locate employment;
- (2) Foster connections between field placements and future employment opportunities;
and
- (3) Set expectations early on and develop a support network for at-risk students.

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SECTION I: BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the experiences and outcomes of university graduates that have enrolled in accelerated (“Fast Track”) diploma programs at Durham College.

Durham College has been offering Fast Track program options within the School of Science and Engineering Technology for the last four years. Programs include Biomedical Engineering Technology, Biotechnology Technologist, Chemical Engineering Technology, Electronic Engineering Technology, Environmental Technology, and Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology. These programs have been developed for both domestic and international students who hold a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Engineering degree, depending on the program. Eligible students can take advantage of the compressed opportunity to complete their advanced diploma requirements in two semesters.

Research Questions

To better understand the experiences and outcomes of Durham College Fast Track students and graduates, the following research questions are addressed in this report:

1. What are the experiences of students entering Fast Track programs at Durham College, and how can we develop strategies that will improve the experience?
 - a. Why do students choose to enrol in a Fast Track program?
 - b. What success factors do students and graduates identify?
 - c. What is the level of affinity between students’ prior education and their Fast Track program?
 - d. To what extent are students entering Fast Track programs / graduates who completed Fast Track programs satisfied with their transfer experience?
 - e. What strategies could Durham College implement to improve Fast Track students’ satisfaction with their transfer experience?
2. What are some of the specific outcomes of students that complete Fast Track programs?
 - a. How do completion rates differ, if at all, between Fast Track students and students who complete the full three-year program?
 - b. What is the correlation between students’ first term marks and program completion?
 - c. How do employment rates differ, if at all, between Fast Track students and students who complete the full three-year program six months after graduation?
 - d. What best practices can be identified from examining the differences in completion rates, employment rates, and the relationship between first term marks and program completion?

Definitions of Key Terms

The following is a list of key terms that are used throughout this report:

- Banner: Durham College's student record information system
- COU: Council of Ontario Universities
- Fast Track program: a compressed opportunity to complete advanced diploma requirements in two semesters
- KPI: Key Performance Indicator
- KPI Graduate Satisfaction Survey: annual telephone survey conducted by MTCU among a sample of graduates who attended colleges in Ontario
- KPI Student Satisfaction Survey: annual online survey conducted by MTCU among a sample of students attending colleges in Ontario
- MTCU: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- OCAS: Ontario College Application Service
- ONCAT: Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer
- Three-year program: standard advanced diploma program (six semesters)

Limitations of the Study

Although the objectives of this research have been achieved, generalizability of the findings is limited. The survey and focus group were conducted among small samples of Fast Track students and graduates at Durham College (n=26 and n=10, respectively). Because of the small sample sizes, results for key subgroups (e.g. students vs. graduates, cohort, etc.) could not be compared. In addition, the focus is on Durham College students only. Therefore, conclusions and recommendations must be interpreted within this particular context.

SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Ontario's Further Education Boom

According to Colleges Ontario (2009), the movement of students from university-to-college and college-to-college in Ontario has become more common in recent years. Based on KPI student satisfaction survey responses in 2007-08, Colleges Ontario indicates that approximately 17% of college students had previous university experience and 9% had a university degree. The same survey indicates that a growing percentage of college students are attending college to prepare for further college or university study increasing from 16% in 2000-01 to 21% in 2007-08. Data from the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS) shows that in 2007, the percentage of applicants with university experience (12.6%) had more than doubled since 2000. Similarly, the 2005 Council of Ontario Universities (COU) graduate survey showed that 11.5% of university graduates were attending college six months after graduation and 9.4% of university graduates were attending college two years after graduation. Clearly, there is considerable interest among Ontario students in obtaining multiple credentials.

In the past, the movement of students was thought to be a linear flow or pipeline from high school to college and to university. That movement was considered unidirectional, with some exits occurring at each connection point. The term “reverse transfer,” used to describe the movement of students from university-to-college, confirms the once accepted view of student movement through the pipeline (Vaala, n.d.). However, Goyder suggests that we should consider changing our thinking from “levels” of higher education to “combinations” of higher education (2009) with students moving in multiple directions through the education system.

Further Education and the Labour Market

The new website for the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) promotes Ontario college graduate certificates and accelerated diploma programs to university graduates as a way of gaining additional job-specific skills that build on their degree foundation. The ONCAT website states:

You want to build on your postsecondary knowledge and experience, add a specialization, or develop additional skills to advance your career. Ontario Colleges offer scores of programs designed or adapted specifically for university graduates. These programs have been developed in collaboration with experts from the employment sector and often include practical work experience.

Similarly, the message to college graduates interested in graduate certificate programs proclaims the following:

- Programs include specialized skills and knowledge to prepare graduates for immediate entry to a career field;
- [Programs are] sometimes designed to provide advanced study in a defined discipline for graduates of college diploma or advanced diploma programs;
- [Programs are] sometimes designed to provide a highly focused employment related credential for graduates of a university degree program in an unrelated discipline;
- [Programs are] normally completed in one year (two academic semesters); and
- [Programs] require a college diploma or university degree or equivalent, plus additional requirements specific to the program.

Although it is generally assumed that multiple postsecondary credentials will lead to better labour market outcomes, research indicates that earnings vary by credential or type of postsecondary experience obtained, field of study, the timing of credential completion, as well as student characteristics (Kerr, McCloy, & Liu, 2010). For colleges wishing to attract university graduates and offer a practical, hands-on experience that will improve graduates' employability, a better understanding of the student success factors and outcomes for students moving from university-to-college and college-to-college is required.

In line with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities policy statement on Ontario's credit transfer system (<http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca>), there is a desire on the part of colleges to increase and improve student transfer pathways, including university-to-college pathways and college-to-college pathways. Thus, this study will build on previous research to identify best practices and strategies for improving the experience and outcomes of Fast Track students at Durham College.

SECTION III: METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

This research project involves full-time students who enrolled in a Fast Track program in the 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 academic years. In 2009-10, 24 full-time students enrolled in a Fast Track program as of the November audit headcount. These numbers have grown to 45 in 2010-11 and 56 in 2011-12.

Data Collection Methods

The methodology for this research is a non-experimental mixed methods design, which concurrently utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data. First, primary quantitative data is based on an online survey of Fast Track students and graduates (please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire). Secondly, primary qualitative data is based on focus groups with current Fast Track students (please refer to Appendix B for a copy of the discussion guide). Finally, this research is also supplemented with information contained in Durham College's student database ("Banner") and data from the Ministry's KPI Student and Graduate Satisfaction Surveys from the past three years.

A. Online Survey

Target Respondent:	All Durham College Fast Track students and graduates were invited to participate in the survey
Sample Source:	Durham College's Banner System
Sample Size:	Total of 26 completed surveys (19 current students and 7 graduates)
Response Rate:	26 of 125 (21%)
Field Dates:	March 5 th to March 28 th , 2012
Completion Length:	Approximately 10 minutes, on average
Screening Criteria:	Provision of informed consent prior to completing survey
Incentive:	Entry into a draw for a chance to win 1 of 3 Best Buy gift cards valued at \$100
Weighting:	None required; sample is representative of the student population
Summary	Respondents were asked a set of questions to understand their university background, reasons for choosing their program, support services accessed, and anticipated/actual outcomes. The survey data was quantified and reported, and used to inform the identification of some of the common themes that were explored in the student focus groups. Where possible, results from students and graduates are compared and contrasted.

B. Focus Group

Target Respondent:	After completing the online survey, all respondents were invited to participate in the focus group to explore key themes in greater detail
Sample Source:	Durham College's Banner System/Online Survey
Sample Size:	Total of 10 focus group participants (current students)
Session Dates:	March 29 th , 2012 (12-1pm); April 5 th , 2012 (2-3pm)
Group Length:	60 minutes (2 sessions)
Screening Criteria:	Provision of informed consent prior to participating in focus group
Incentive:	Pizza lunch provided to participants
Summary	A set of open-ended questions was designed to elicit information at a deeper level, particularly to understand their reasons for attending the Fast Track program, their transfer and adjustment experience, their experiences in the Fast Track program, support services accessed, and goals upon graduation. Common themes from the focus group are identified and described in further detail throughout the report.

C. Supplemental Data

Data from Banner, KPI Student Satisfaction Survey and KPI Graduate Satisfaction Survey has been extracted to identify and compare student completion rates, employment rates, and to determine the correlation between entering marks and program completion.

SECTION IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis has been divided into two subsections: Fast Track student experiences and Fast Track graduate outcomes. Within each subsection, relevant research questions are analyzed independently and then findings are summarized to identify strategies for improvement.

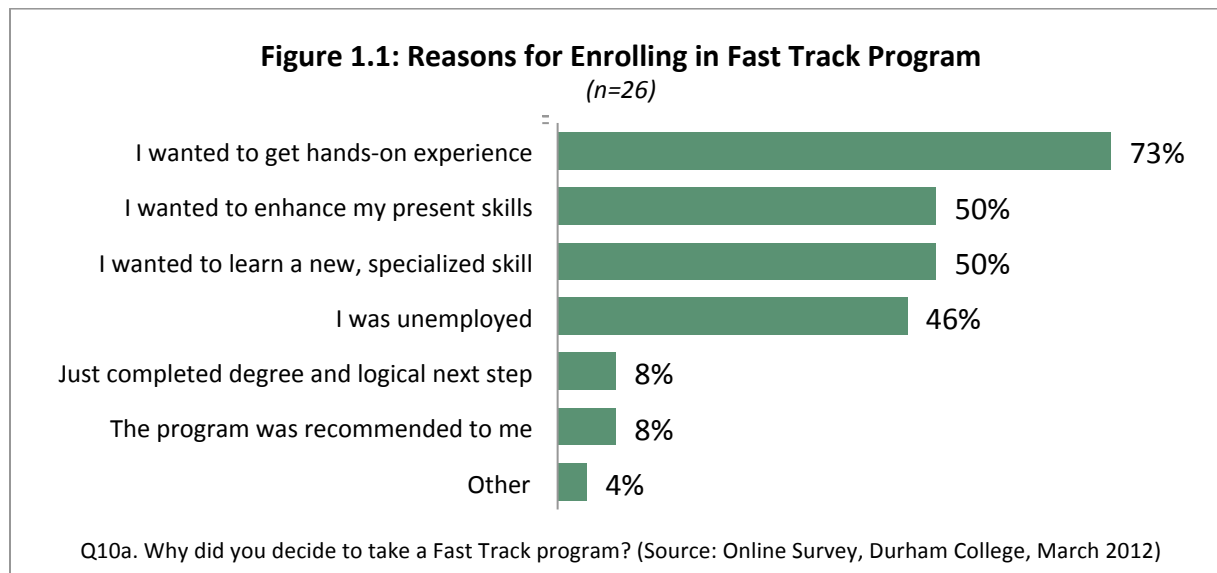
To provide context, the following table displays a demographic summary of the Fast Track student universe (2009-10 to 2011-12), survey respondents and focus group participants:

	Universe	Online Survey	Focus Groups
Total Sample Sizes	<i>n=125</i>	<i>n=26</i>	<i>n=10</i>
Gender			
Male	54%	50%	80%
Female	46%	50%	20%
Age Group			
Less than 21	0%	0%	0%
21-25	54%	73%	60%
26-30	26%	19%	30%
31-35	6%	0%	0%
More than 35	14%	8%	10%
Fast Track Program			
Biomedical Engineering Technology	1%	0%	0%
Biotechnology Technologist	30%	19%	10%
Chemical Engineering Technology	8%	15%	10%
Electronics Engineering Technology	1%	4%	10%
Environmental Technology	17%	15%	10%
Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology	43%	46%	60%
Current Academic Year/Year of Entry			
2009-10	19%	4%	0%
2010-11	36%	23%	10%
2011-12	45%	73%	90%
Graduation Status			
Current Student	45%	73%	100%
Graduate	55%	27%	0%
Prior Education Completed			
University Degree	100%	100%	100%
Other	0%	0%	0%
Agreed to Participate in Focus Group			
Yes	n/a	38%	100%
No	n/a	62%	0%

Experiences of Students Entering Fast Track Programs

Why do students choose to enrol in a Fast Track program?

Among Durham College Fast Track students and graduates, motivations for enrolling in a Fast Track program are directly linked to improving labour market opportunities. The primary reason is to gain hands-on experience while secondary reasons include a desire to enhance current skills, a desire to learn a new, specialized skill and unemployment (see Figure 1.1).



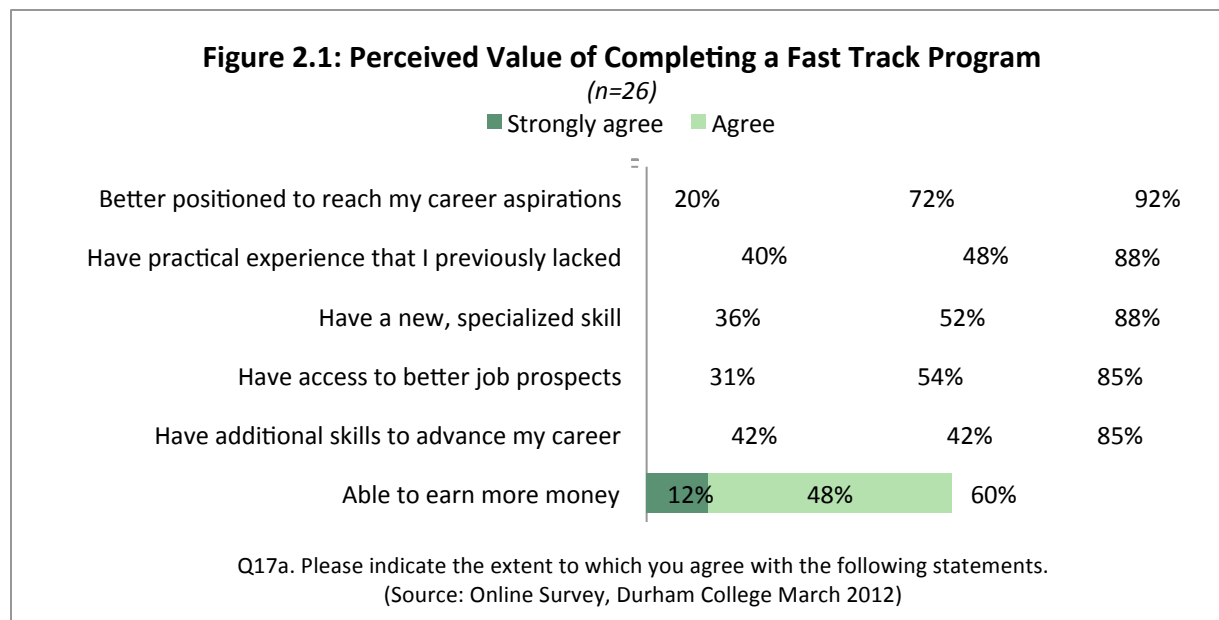
Focus group participants indicated that they had trouble locating employment and felt their prospects would improve if they supplemented their university education with an additional credential that offered “real world” experience. All agreed that the hands-on experience gained through college education is valuable and important. Many linked this type of experience with increased employment opportunities and easier entry into the labour market. One student emphasized the importance of gaining hands on experience in a college environment: “...university doesn't provide too much hand-on [experience] with [the] equipment used in everyday labs in the outside world.”

In the KPI Student Satisfaction Survey, which is conducted on an annual basis, respondents were asked to identify the single most important factor in their decision to attend Durham College. Among Fast Track students who attended the college in the past three years (2009-10 to 2011-12), leading factors included “Offered the program I wanted” (53%) and co-op work opportunities (25%). On the other hand, students taking the three-year advanced diploma program indicated that program offerings (38%) and location (35%) were the top factors motivating their decision to attend Durham College.

What success factors do students and graduates identify?

There is a strong perception among Fast Track students and graduates that positive labour market outcomes are driven by a combination of theoretical education and practical application of academic coursework (see Figure 2.1). While most are confident that their ability to gain employment will improve, fewer “strongly agreed” that they are currently earning or will be able to earn more money after completing a Fast Track program. This implies that Fast track programs offer better opportunities to be employed but not necessarily better paid.

By enrolling in a Fast Track program, almost all (92%) “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they will be in a better position to reach their career aspirations after completing a Fast Track program. The majority are also positive about having practical experience, gaining a new, specialized skill, having access to improved job prospects and having additional skills to advance their careers. When asked what factors helped them personally succeed in their program, many echoed that practical experience (e.g. lab work, field placements) was a key component of their success.



In addition to describing the importance of gaining practical exposure, Fast Track students and graduates also suggest that the workload and expectations are very high, and hence, strong time management skills and organizational skills are vital for success in a Fast Track program. One survey respondent stated “...there is just SO MUCH work. The sheer volumes of reports required every week is beyond intense. If you're not always on top of your homework and motivated to get it done, you'll be so far behind, it'll seem impossible to catch up.”

To be successful, focus group participants also felt that prospective students should be well prepared and expect to do a lot of work in a short period of time. Some felt that Fast Track coursework is not more difficult or challenging compared to what they learned in university,

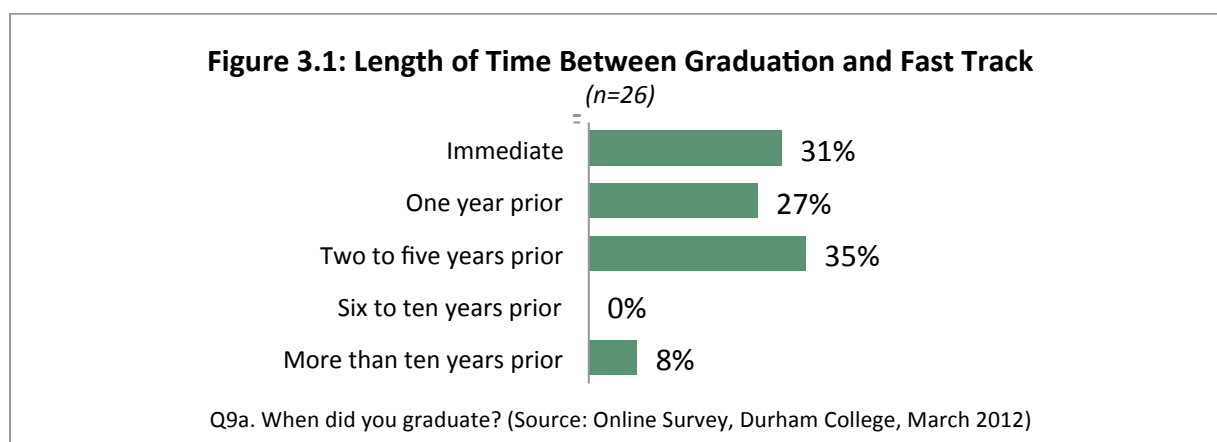
but the volume of assignments and tests is considerably higher. Most agreed that they had little time for social activities or employment, and had to dedicate most of their time to studying and completing academic assignments or tests.

To cope with the amount of work, focus groups indicated that students often rely on support from other students and instructors. One student suggested, “having small class sizes gives the students a chance to talk with the professors. And, unlike university, these professors have spent most of their adult lives 'in industry' and are extremely helpful when it comes to asking for advice on anything to do with jobs.” Focus group participants generally agreed that college faculty and staff were more approachable than in university, and that their industry experience should be seen as an invaluable resource for incoming Fast Track students.

What is the level of affinity between students’ prior education and their Fast Track program?

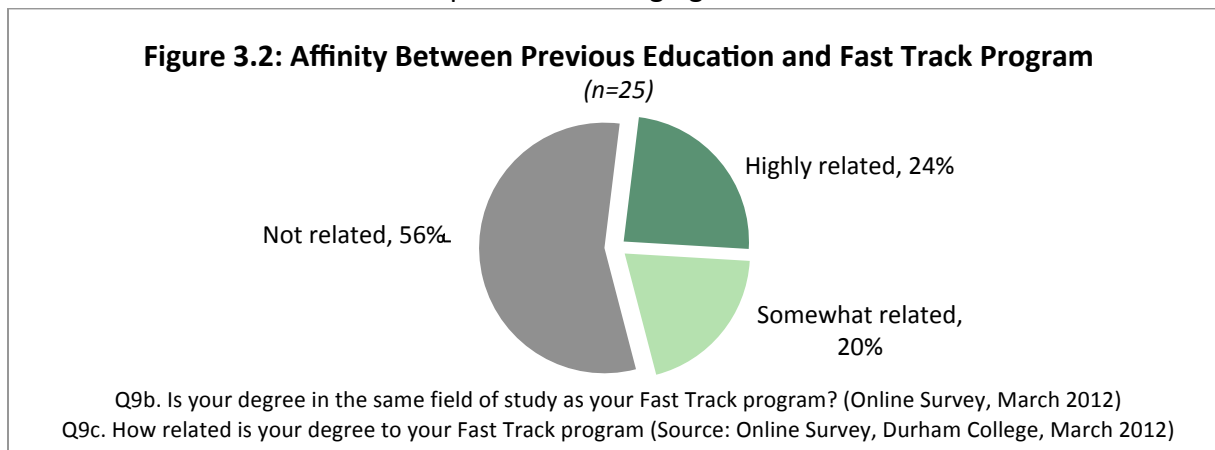
Key Factors Affecting Student Satisfaction

Research suggests satisfaction with a new program or institution may be influenced by the length of time between completion of one program, and enrolment in another. Some studies (e.g. Hango, 2011) have shown that university students who delay their transfer can find it more difficult to adjust to a postsecondary environment. Most university graduates surveyed transferred to a Fast Track program fairly soon after completing their degree and some even did so immediately (see Figure 3.1). The majority of students and graduates enrolled in a Fast Track program at Durham College within five years of graduating from university; 31% enrolled immediately after completing their university education, 27% enrolled after one year and 35% enrolled after two to five years. Very few (8%) waited more than five years before beginning their Fast Track program.



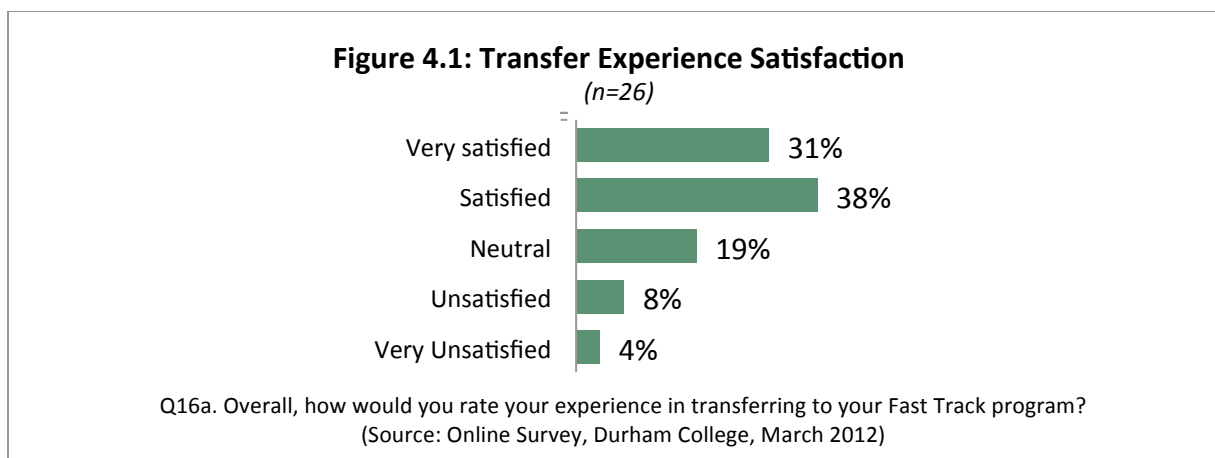
Another factor that may have an impact on Fast Track student satisfaction is the affinity between a student’s university education and their Fast Track program. It is sometimes assumed that university and college graduates will continue their education in a related field of

study; however, this is not always the case and often depends on program availability and labour market conditions. In fact, slightly less than half of students and graduates surveyed (44%) indicated that their degree was in the same field of study as their Fast Track program (see Figure 3.2). Overall, 24% said their Fast Track program was “highly related” while 20% said it was only “somewhat related” to their degree. When asked if they faced any difficulties prior to enrolling, one student stated, “my university degree did not relate to my fast track program,” and that this made the admissions process challenging.



To what extent are students entering Fast Track programs / graduates who completed Fast Track programs satisfied with their transfer experience?

When asked to rate their satisfaction, the majority of students and graduates (69%) indicated they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their transfer experience (see Figure 4.1). However, 19% were neutral and although few, 12% indicated they were “unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied.” This level of indifference is something that should continue to be monitored over time.



When asked to provide more clarity in the focus group, many said that they were satisfied with their Fast Track program overall, particularly the helpfulness of the instructors, practical application of the course content, and increased opportunities for employment. However,

despite high overall satisfaction, students and graduates did experience some pre- and post-enrolment difficulties, particularly in terms of the admissions process/prerequisites, acceptance requirements, placement/career opportunities, and scheduling.

Pre-Enrolment Difficulties

Figure 4.2 outlines some of the difficulties students and graduates of Durham College Fast-Track programs faced when entering their new program and institution. The majority of those surveyed suggested that they had no difficulties, with 76% indicating that they experienced no difficulties in the transition prior to enrolment in their new program.

The primary difficulties faced by Fast Track students and graduates when entering their new program at Durham was finding out about the student services offered at the College, and determining whether the program was right for them. 36% of students and graduates who were surveyed indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced difficulties both finding out about what student services were offered at Durham College, and determining whether or not the program was a good fit.

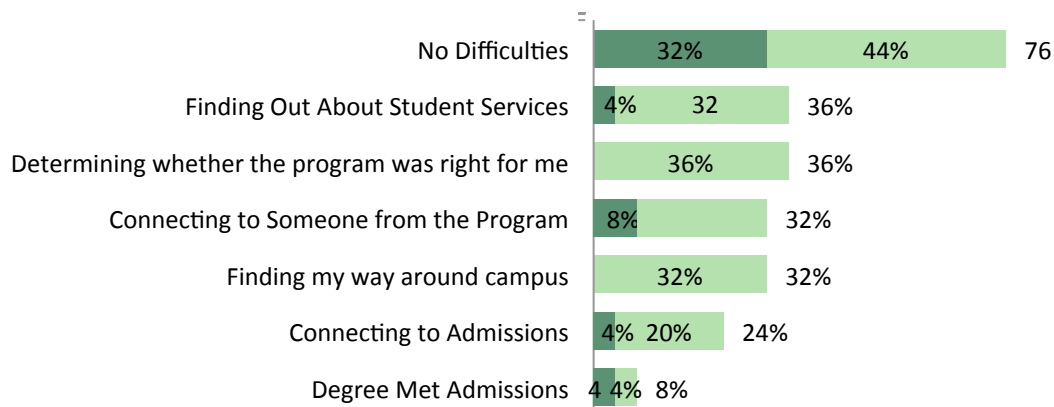
Some students and graduates also reported that they had difficulties related to the admissions process at Durham College. Approximately one quarter of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulties connecting to admissions, and 8 percent indicated that they had difficulties finding out whether their degree met the program's admission requirements. Some focus group participants elaborated on this particular issue. Many were required to provide detailed proof that they met the requirements of the program and submit multiple transcripts, which were often difficult to obtain (particularly for international students and those who did not recently complete their degree). This suggests that admission requirements may not be well communicated to prospective students and many have to make extra efforts to demonstrate their qualifications that they were not completely prepared for.

Aside from these challenges, one in three students and graduates also indicated that they experienced difficulties connecting with someone from the program, and finding their way around campus.

Figure 4.2: Difficulties Experienced Prior to Enrolment in Fast Track

(n=26)

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



Q11. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced any difficulties transitioning to a new program/institution prior to enrolling? (Source: Online Survey, Durham College, March 2012)

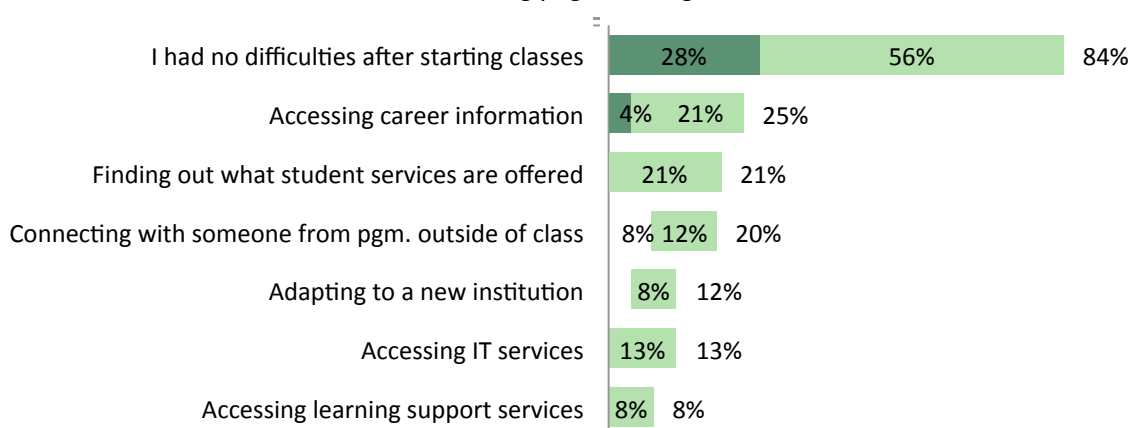
Post-Enrolment Difficulties

Similar to the results of Figure 4.2, most students and graduates (84%) of Durham College Fast Track programs “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they had no difficulties with the transition to their new program after enrolment (see Figure 4.3). The primary difficulties that some students did face were accessing career information, determining what student services Durham College offers and connecting with someone from their program outside of class hours.

Figure 4.3: Difficulties Experienced After Enrolment in Fast Track

(n=26)

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree



Q13. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced any difficulties transitioning to a new program/institution after starting classes? (Source: Online Survey, Durham College, March 2012)

Overall, focus group participants felt that the college atmosphere was very different from what they had become accustomed to while in university. Students agreed that classes are less formal, students are more disruptive and because requirements are compressed, the workload is much heavier. In addition, because of the heavy workload, very few felt they had any time for a social life. This was exacerbated by the fact that students often did not feel a connection between themselves and their three-year regular program counterparts, primarily due to the differences in academic experience and age. One student commented that it was difficult “adjusting to the class style, the other students and teachers. All very different than [what] I was used to.”

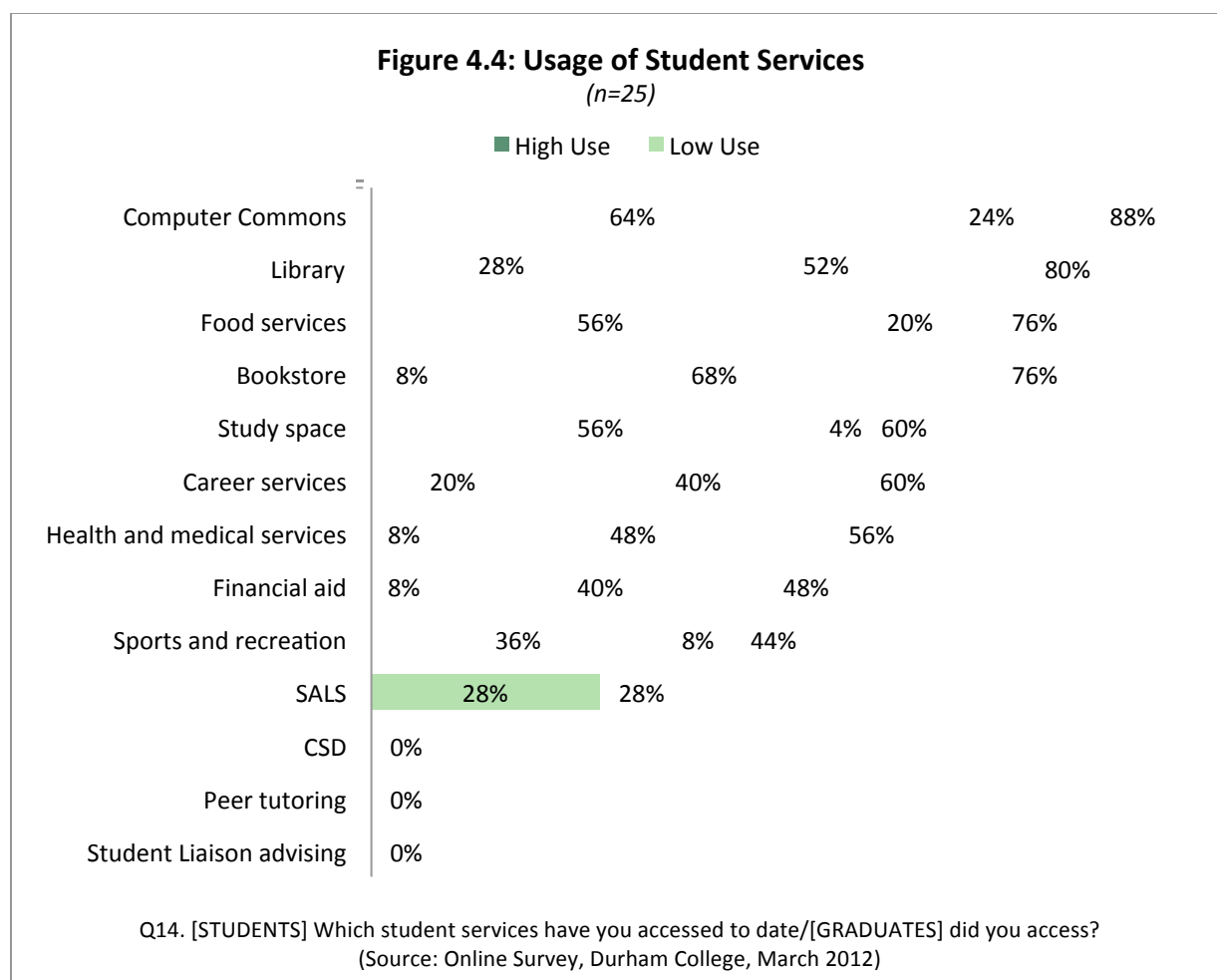
On a positive note, while the environment often made it difficult for Fast Track students to make social connections with other peers, college professors were perceived as more supportive and more approachable than university professors. Some even helped prepare their students for the labour market by providing interview tips and lists of potential employers. One respondent mentioned “I really liked how closely all the instructors worked with the students in their classes, and that for the most part professors instruct their own laboratory sessions (this is not the case in university).”

Student Services Needs

Fast Track students and graduates were most likely to report using the computer commons, the library, food services, the bookstore, study spaces and career services (see Figure 4.4). However, many mentioned that it was often difficult to find study spaces and computers on campus and many of the study spaces did not meet laptop requirements. One respondent stated, “There is just not enough space! And, where there is space, there are either no plugs or the outlets are broken.”

In addition to these concerns, participants in the focus group also indicated that they could have been provided with more information about career services and resume development. All agreed that this was the most important service, and overall, they were much less concerned with taking advantage of academic or learning support services (e.g. peer tutoring and student liaison advising) since they already had post-secondary experience.

These findings are not very surprising since the majority enrolled in their Fast Track program to augment their university education with hands-on experience and increase their employment opportunities. Thus, career-building supports (e.g. resume writing, interview preparation, etc.) would be most beneficial for this particular group of students.



What strategies could Durham College implement to improve Fast Track students' satisfaction with their transfer experience?

In terms of strategies/recommendations for improvement, students and graduates of Fast Track programs had five key suggestions:

- i. Increase Fast Track program awareness and comprehension;
- ii. Clarify entry requirements and simplify the admissions process;
- iii. Improve class scheduling and loosen time requirements;
- iv. Expand focus on and enrich practical experience; and
- v. Provide more assistance to students to locate field placement opportunities.

First, given the substantial benefits of Fast Track programs, students and graduates suggest that awareness levels, particularly among current university students, need to increase. One student made this very clear suggesting "Fast Track programs could be made better if Durham College

were to advertise them better. I think this would attract more prospective students. I had no idea that this program even existed until a few months before I started it.”

In addition to awareness, many members of the focus group believed they did not have a strong understanding of how the program worked or what it would actually entail. One in three “strongly agreed” or agreed’ that they experienced difficulties determining whether the program was even right for them. Students did not always realize what type of commitment the program required and were surprised by the fast pace and workload when they started classes. Students said they did not receive a lot of information prior to starting their classes.

Second, there seems to be some confusion around entry requirements. Approximately 8% of students and graduates “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they experienced difficulties finding out whether their degree even satisfied admission requirements. Focus group participants also expressed that program prerequisites did not always correspond with the actual course material. In some cases, the material was perceived as too easy or a repeat of what they already learned in university; however, in other cases, it was perceived as too advanced or too difficult.

Overall, most felt the admissions process could be simplified. More specifically, many indicated there should be greater clarification around who would be a good candidate for a Fast Track program as well as closer links between what is required for acceptance into the program and what is actually being taught.

Third, there were some notable concerns regarding class scheduling and time requirements. Focus groups showed that Fast Track students have little to no time for social activities and most could not work part-time while completing their diploma. Many indicated that the stress levels are very high because of competing priorities and deadlines. Some felt frustrated because classes are not evenly distributed throughout the school week leading to some extremely long days on campus. In addition, breaks between classes are perceived as either too short or too long, thus making it even more difficult to achieve a school-life balance. Despite these concerns, most felt that the compressed format was important because it allowed them to get out into the labour market more quickly.

Fourth, many students believed that Fast Track programs would be more attractive to employers if they were re-classified as *graduate* certificates or *graduate* diplomas (rather than advanced diplomas). Some felt that this type of classification would better signify the “applied” nature of the programs. In addition, some indicated that prospective students would benefit from an increased focus on laboratory experience rather than theory. Hands-on learning (with high program affinity) was identified as the most important aspect of Fast Track programs among the vast majority of Fast Track students.

Finally, students would have preferred a higher level of support to find a placement. While many enjoyed the opportunity, there often were not enough placements available to students, particularly those with a direct relation to their program. Most felt they would have benefitted

from more assistance finding a placement. One student suggested that program graduates could become ambassadors for Durham College to provide support to current Fast Track students and help them locate potential placement, and even employment opportunities.

When asked to describe strategies that Durham College could implement to improve the experience of Fast Track students, one respondent wanted the College to “Help students get work placements, not tell students to find ones on their own. It was very difficult trying to find a placement in such a short time frame while having 7 to 8 courses a semester.” Another specified, “I... think it would be better if there was more selection and guidance with regard to student placements.” Some also would have preferred to extend coursework over the Fall and Winter semesters (to ease workload) and then complete their placement in the summer months.

Outcomes of Students that Complete Fast Track Programs

How do completion rates differ, if at all, between Fast Track students and students who complete the full three-year program?

For the following analysis, completion rates for Fast Track programs are based on standard program length. To be considered complete, a Fast Track student must meet all program requirements within two semesters.

However, it would be unfair to only compare completion rates for one-year Fast Track programs to full three-year programs. To provide a more holistic view, completion rates for full three-year programs have been viewed in two ways: overall completion rates (see Figure 6.1) and final year completion rates (see Figure 6.2). The former is based on standard program length (to be considered complete, a student must meet all program requirements within six semesters). The latter is based on the length of the final year only (to be considered complete, a third year student must meet all of their third year requirements within two semesters).

Encouragingly, the heavy workload and fast pace do not seem to have a notable impact on completion of a Fast Track program. Regardless of program, completion rates of Fast Track programs are strong and significantly higher when compared to three-year advanced diploma programs. The vast majority of Fast Track students complete their program within the required two semesters, compared to less than half of three-year students completing their program within the required six semesters (depending on the program).

Figure 6.1: Overall Completion Rates* by Program Type

Completion Term*	Winter 2010		Winter 2011		Winter 2012		TOTAL	
Program Type	Three Year	Fast Track	Three Year	Fast Track	Three Year	Fast Track	Three Year	Fast Track
TOTAL	42% (72/173)	100% (24/24)	43% (74/174)	80% (36/45)	41% (71/175)	91% (51/56)	42% (217/522)	89% (111/125)
Biomedical Engineering Technology	39% (9/23)	n/a	41% (7/17)	n/a	41% (9/22)	0% (0/1)	40% (25/62)	0% (0/1)
Biotechnology Technologist	48% (14/29)	100% (6/6)	55% (16/29)	65% (11/17)	33% (10/30)	87% (13/15)	45% (40/88)	79% (30/38)
Chemical Engineering Technology	50% (11/22)	100% (4/4)	52% (12/23)	100% (1/1)	35% (8/23)	100% (5/5)	46% (31/68)	100% (10/10)
Electronic Engineering Technology	28% (13/47)	n/a	32% (14/44)	n/a	34% (14/41)	100% (1/1)	31% (41/132)	100% (1/1)
Environmental Technology	48% (15/31)	100% (6/6)	44% (15/34)	90% (9/10)	44% (16/36)	100% (5/5)	46% (46/101)	95% (20/21)
Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology	48% (10/21)	100% (8/8)	37% (10/27)	88% (15/17)	61% (14/23)	93% (27/29)	48% (34/71)	93% (50/54)

Based on standard completion rates (i.e. Three-year students who started in Fall 2007 and completed in Winter 2010, started in Fall 2008 and completed in Winter 2011 and started in Fall 2009 and completed in Winter 2012; Fast Track students who started in Fall 2009 and completed in Winter 2010, started in Fall 2010 and completed in Winter 2011 and started in Fall 2011 and completed in Winter 2012). Only students who started in a Fall semester have been included. (Source: Durham College Banner System, June 2012)

When comparing the full program length of Fast Track programs (i.e. one year) to just the final year of study in full three-year programs, completion rates are more similar than when comparing Fast Track completion rates with full three year advanced diploma completion rates. Completion rates of Fast Track programs are still generally higher than final year completion rates of advanced diploma programs. This could perhaps be attributed to the fact that Fast Track students have previously graduated from a university degree program and are more accustomed to heavy academic workloads.

Figure 6.2: Final Year Completion Rates* by Program Type								
Completion Term*	Winter 2010		Winter 2011		Winter 2012		TOTAL	
Program Type	Third Year	Fast Track	Third Year	Fast Track	Third Year	Fast Track	Third Year	Fast Track
TOTAL	78% (72/92)	100% (24/24)	64% (74/115)	80% (36/45)	64% (71/111)	91% (51/56)	68% (217/318)	89% (111/125)
Biomedical Engineering Technology	90% (9/10)	n/a	70% (7/10)	n/a	53% (9/17)	0% (0/1)	68% (25/37)	0% (0/1)
Biotechnology Technologist	78% (14/18)	100% (6/6)	73% (16/22)	65% (11/17)	71% (10/14)	87% (13/15)	74% (40/54)	79% (30/38)
Chemical Engineering Technology	73% (11/15)	100% (4/4)	67% (12/18)	100% (1/1)	89% (8/9)	100% (5/5)	74% (31/42)	100% (10/10)
Electronic Engineering Technology	62% (13/21)	n/a	58% (14/24)	n/a	50% (14/28)	100% (1/1)	56% (41/73)	100% (1/1)
Environmental Technology	100% (15/15)	100% (6/6)	63% (15/24)	90% (9/10)	70% (16/23)	100% (5/5)	74% (46/62)	95% (20/21)
Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology	77% (10/13)	100% (8/8)	59% (10/17)	88% (15/17)	70% (14/20)	93% (27/29)	68% (34/50)	93% (50/54)

Based on standard 'final year' completion rates (i.e. Three-year students who started their third year in Fall 2009 and completed in Winter 2010, started their third year in Fall 2010 and completed in Winter 2011 and started their third year in Fall 2011 and completed in Winter 2012; Fast Track students who started in Fall 2009 and completed in Winter 2010, started in Fall 2010 and completed in Winter 2011 and started in Fall 2011 and completed in Winter 2012). Only students who started in a Fall semester have been included. (Source: Durham College Banner System, June 2012)

While completion rates are very high for Fast Track programs, completion rates for the Fast Track Biotechnology Technologist program have been fluctuating year over year, and tend to be lower than other Fast Track programs. This is something that should continue to be monitored to ensure there are no systemic issues influencing this program's rate of attrition.

What is the relationship between students' first term marks and program completion?

There is a strong relationship between first term GPA (Grade Point Average) and program completion rates for both Fast Track and three-year advanced diploma students (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2, respectively). Consistently, GPAs are lower among students who did not complete their program in the required time frame.

To improve the transfer experience of students and eventual outcomes of graduates, it is important to identify these at-risk students early on and provide support to address their specific needs. This type of support can help further strengthen Fast Track programs at Durham College.

Figure 7.1 Correlation Between First Term GPA and Completion (Fast Track Students)

First Term	Fall 2009		Fall 2010		Fall 2011	
Status	Complete (n=24)	Incomplete (n=0)	Complete (n=36)	Incomplete (n=9)	Complete (n=51)	Incomplete (n=6)
AVERAGE GPA	3.93	n/a	3.96	2.18	3.79	0.09
0.00 to 0.99	0%	n/a	0%	22%	0%	100%
1.00 to 1.99	0%	n/a	3%	33%	2%	0%
2.00 to 2.99	21%	n/a	14%	11%	20%	0%
3.00 to 3.99	25%	n/a	28%	11%	31%	0%
4.00 or higher	54%	n/a	56%	22%	47%	0%

Figure 7.2 Correlation Between First Term GPA and Completion (Three Year Students)

First Term	Fall 2007		Fall 2008		Fall 2009	
Status	Complete (n=72)	Incomplete (n=101)	Complete (n=74)	Incomplete (n=100)	Complete (n=71)	Incomplete (n=104)
AVERAGE GPA	3.56	2.01	3.68	1.98	3.98	2.31
0.00 to 0.99	0%	31%	1%	32%	0%	21%
1.00 to 1.99	3%	13%	1%	18%	0%	14%
2.00 to 2.99	24%	28%	20%	24%	7%	25%
3.00 to 3.99	38%	19%	38%	15%	39%	29%
4.00 or higher	36%	10%	39%	11%	54%	11%

How do employment rates differ, if at all, between Fast Track students and students who complete the full three-year program six months after graduation?

Unlike completion rates, employment rates six months after graduation are generally higher for regular three-year advanced diploma programs compared to equivalent Fast Track programs (see Figure 8.1). This is an area of concern given that the primary drivers of Fast Track enrollment are related to finding employment and enhancing labour market outcomes.

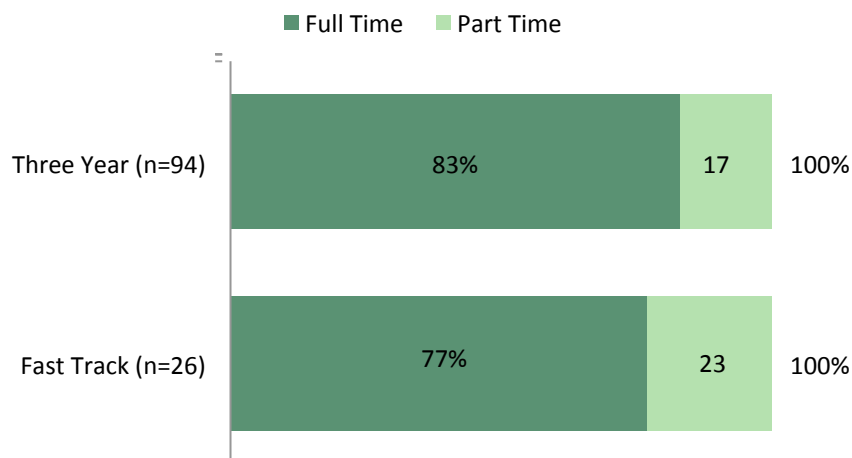
Overall, the Biotechnology Technologist and Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology Fast Track programs have the lowest employment rates among recent graduates (six months after graduation). According to Service Canada, the labour market for these types of occupations may be limited in the coming years because “the actual value (after inflation) of investments in the chemical industry (which include the pharmaceuticals and drug manufacturing sectors) fell by almost 75% between 2001 and 2010.”

Figure 8.1 Employment Rates* by Program Type						
Survey Year	2010-11		2011-12		TOTAL	
Program Type	Three Year	Fast Track	Three Year	Fast Track	Three Year	Fast Track
TOTAL	73% (37/51)	60% (9/15)	90% (42/47)	63% (12/19)	81% (79/98)	62% (21/34)
Biomedical Engineering Technology	75% (3/4)	n/a	100% (7/7)	n/a	91% (10/11)	n/a
Biotechnology Technologist	56% (5/9)	40% (2/5)	60% (3/5)	67% (4/6)	57% (8/14)	55% (6/11)
Chemical Engineering Technology	67% (6/9)	100% (1/1)	100% (7/7)	100% (1/1)	81% (13/16)	100% (2/2)
Electronic Engineering Technology	80% (8/10)	n/a	92% (11/12)	n/a	87% (19/22)	n/a
Environmental Technology	75% (9/12)	50% (2/4)	88% (7/8)	83% (5/6)	80% (16/20)	70% (7/10)
Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology	86% (6/7)	80% (4/5)	88% (7/8)	33% (2/6)	87% (13/15)	54% (6/11)

Source: KPI Graduate Satisfaction survey, which is conducted six months after graduation and funded by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities. 2009-10 graduates completed the survey in 2010-11 while 2010-11 graduates completed the survey in 2011-12.

Moreover, among Fast Track graduates who did find employment six months after graduation over the past two years, 23% indicated they were only working part-time hours (see Figure 8.2). This is slightly higher than the percentage of three-year students who indicated they were only working part-time (17%).

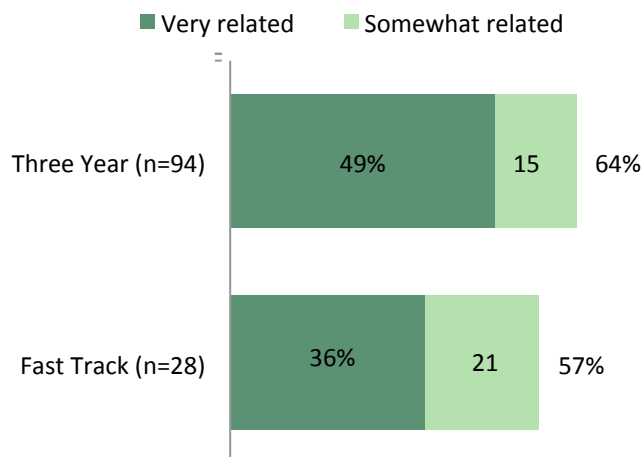
Figure 8.2: Full-Time Versus Part-Time Employment



Q16. How many hours per week do/did you work at your job, excluding overtime?
(Source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 KPI Graduate Satisfaction surveys, MTCU)

Only 57% of Fast Track graduates indicated that their job is related or partially related to the program they graduated from, compared to 64% of employed graduates of full three-year Advanced Diploma programs (see Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3: Graduates Working in a Field Related to Their Program

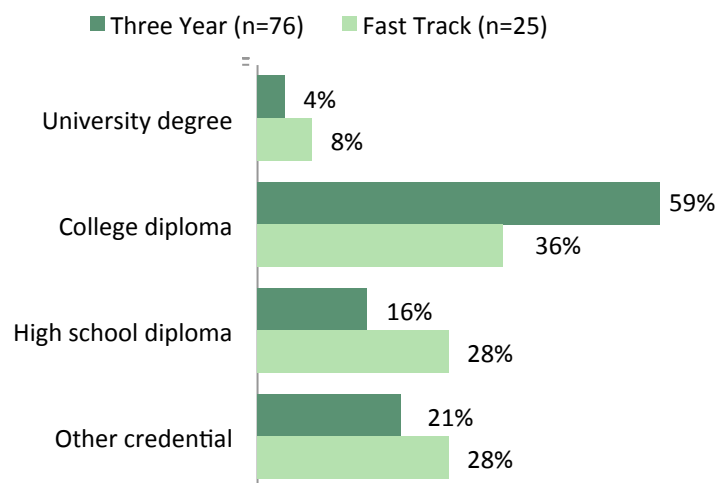


Q20. Was this job related to the program that you graduated from?
(Source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 KPI Graduate Satisfaction surveys, MTCU)

In addition, despite holding a university degree, most employed Fast Track graduates (64%) indicated that a high school diploma or college diploma were the highest levels of education

needed to attain their current position. Only 8% of Fast Track graduates reported that their job required them to have a university degree (see Figure 8.4).

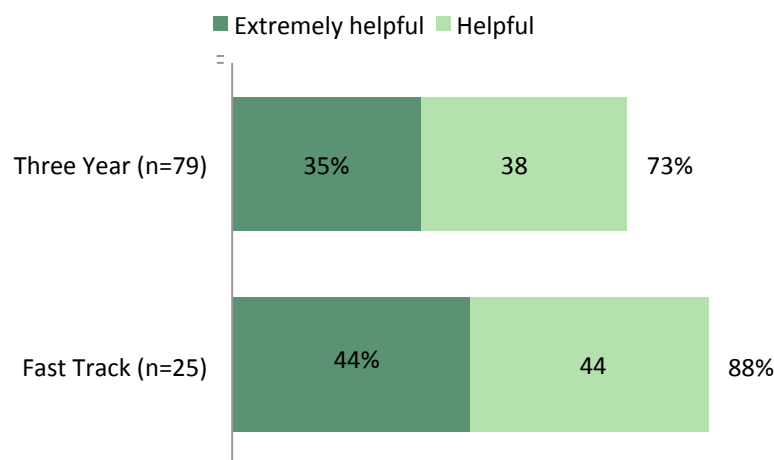
Figure 8.4: Highest Level of Education Needed for Current Role



Q19. When you were selected for this job, what was the highest level of educational needed to get this job?
(Source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 KPI Graduate Satisfaction surveys, MTCU)

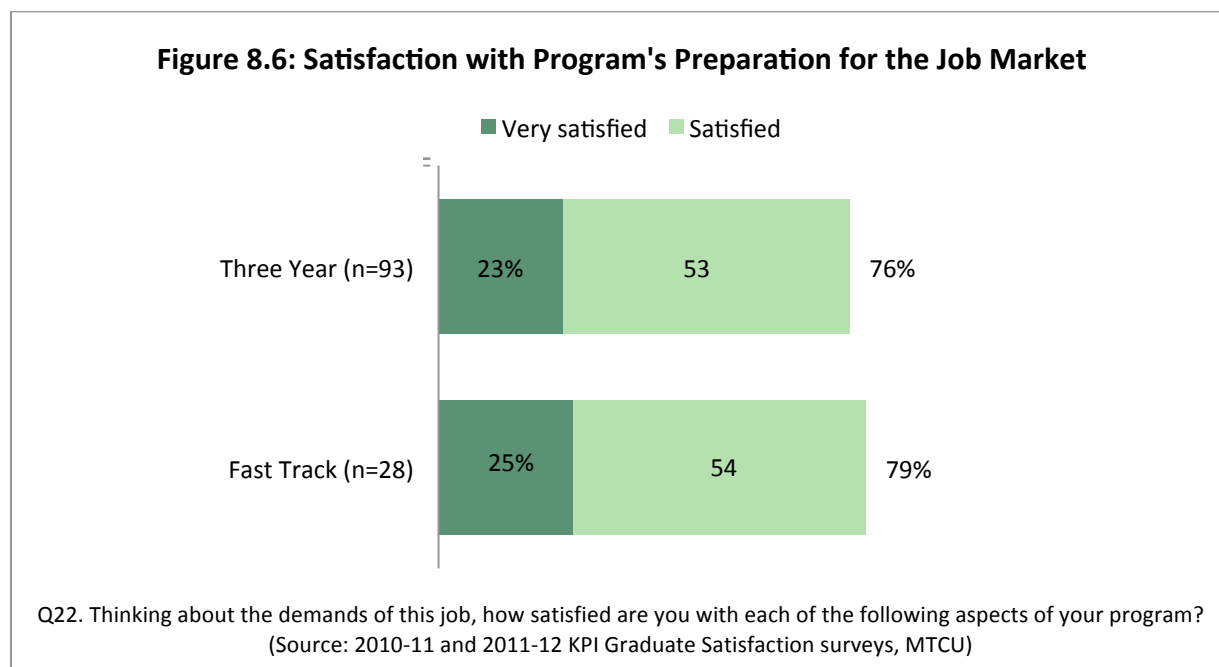
Despite low employment rates and a lack of related employment, the majority of employed Fast Track graduates (88%) from the past two years felt that the skills they developed in their program were “extremely helpful” or “helpful” in terms of locating employment (see Figure 8.5). Although still high, fewer three-year graduates (73%) felt the same way.

Figure 8.5: Helpfulness of Program Skills in Locating Employment



Q21. To what extent did the skills you developed during college help you get your job?
(Source: 2010-11 and 2011-12 KPI Graduate Satisfaction surveys, MTCU)

Moreover, when asked to think about the demands of their job, 25% of Fast Track graduates said they were “very satisfied” with the preparation they received from their program and another 54% said they were “satisfied” with this aspect (see Figure 8.6). Albeit slightly lower, satisfaction ratings were similar among three-year graduates.



What best practices can be identified from examining the differences in completion rates, employment rates, and the relationship between first term marks and program completion?

Fast Track programs are often perceived as a way to move students through college programs more quickly and reduce their chances for attrition. Completion rates are very strong among Fast Track students with almost all students completing their programs within the standard time frame (i.e. two semesters). Additionally, Fast Track students are significantly more likely to complete their programs than three-year students who are enrolled in the same programs. However, although still relatively high, on average, only three quarters of Biotechnology Technologist students end up completing the program in two semesters. Thus, it is important to determine the barriers to completion of this program and identify strategies to improve retention.

Although Fast Track graduates have a university degree as well as an advanced college diploma, employment rates are generally better for three-year graduates (who may or may not have more than one credential). While employed graduates found their programs helpful in locating employment and were satisfied with the preparation they received for the job market, many had yet to find a job six months after graduation and a high proportion were working part-time. Furthermore, many did not find a job that was related to the program they graduated from.

These are substantial areas of concern particularly since improving employment opportunities is the primary reason why students enrol in a Fast Track program.

Although labour market conditions are outside the control of the college, job searching strategies and career counselling are examples of how the college might help to improve Fast Track employment rates. Since the program is so compressed, it may be difficult to offer as much support to these students; however, guidance from the college would help ease the transition to the labour market and increase employment. These and other best practices to improve Fast Track student outcomes are discussed in greater detail in the recommendations section (please refer to Section V).

SECTION V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

To improve students' satisfaction and graduates' employability, this research has focused on developing a better understanding of the experiences and outcomes of students moving from a university degree to a Fast Track college diploma. This understanding can help develop strategies that will enrich the experience of these students and improve the outcomes of those who complete their diploma program. University-to-college transfer students come to college armed with different knowledge and experiences than regular students. Coming from a university environment, their needs and expectations are decidedly different from students who are entering college directly from high school.

In particular, this study focused on Fast Track students at Durham College. For the last four years, Durham College has been offering Fast Track program options within the School of Science and Engineering Technology. These programs were developed for both domestic and international students with a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Engineering degree, depending on the program. Eligible students can take advantage of the compressed opportunity to complete their advanced diploma requirements in two semesters.

The first part of this study examined the transfer experiences of Fast Track students and graduates. Overall, students are positive about Fast Track programs at Durham College and most end up completing their programs, but this research revealed that there are some opportunities to increase satisfaction and engagement. Students identified five strategies that Durham College could implement to improve Fast Track students' satisfaction with their transfer experience including increasing Fast Track program awareness and comprehension, clarifying entry requirements and simplifying the admissions process, refining class scheduling and loosening time requirements, expanding focus on and enriching practical experience, and providing more assistance to students to locate placement opportunities.

The second part of this study examined the outcomes of Fast Track graduates. Although it is generally assumed that multiple postsecondary credentials will lead to better labour market outcomes, this is not always the case. While program completion rates are very strong, particularly compared to three-year programs, employment rates (six months after graduation) are actually lower, on average (62% versus 81%, respectively) for Fast Track graduates. Moreover, among those who are employed, 23% are working in part-time positions and only 57% indicate that they are working in a field related to their program. There is clearly an opportunity to improve the labour market outcomes of students who complete Fast Track programs.

Recommendations for Improving the Experiences of Fast Track Students

From this research, we have identified three key recommendations that can improve the experience of Fast Track students at Durham College:

- (1) Increase pathway affinity and simplify the transfer process;
- (2) Strengthen and enrich the field placement opportunity; and
- (3) Develop relevant and opportune social opportunities to encourage school-life balance.

Increase Pathway Affinity and Simplify the Transfer Process

Students are increasingly pursuing multiple credentials through the postsecondary education system. According to College Ontario, the movement of students between colleges and universities is becoming more common. Students attending Ontario colleges are more likely to have previous postsecondary experience than in the past, and this trend is growing. Therefore, the continued development of university-to-college pathways is critical. More importantly, these pathways should have a high degree of affinity to ease the transition process.

Program affinity between the college and other postsecondary institutions needs to improve as this has been defined by the ONCAT as one of the elements making current college-university partnerships successful. However, over one half of Fast Track students and graduates surveyed indicated that their Fast Track program was “not at all related” to their university degree. Some study participants said they were dissatisfied with the lack of fit between what they learned in their degree program and what they were learning at Durham College. Focus groups also revealed that the program requirements did not always correspond to course material.

Related to program affinity, a clearly defined articulation agreement will also have a significantly positive impact on students transferring into Fast Track programs. A Colleges Ontario report (2008) indicates that “The ability of colleges to provide clear information is currently hampered by a lack of common terminology related to transfers (e.g., equivalency, advanced standing, exemption, substitution) and their appropriate uses in credit recognition” (2008).

A lack of clear information about the transfer process was a frequently cited issue by students and graduates. Many students experienced difficulties determining whether their degree satisfied admission requirements. There was often confusion about prerequisites and miscommunications about transcripts. Some did not feel prepared for the heavy workload and competing time commitments. Student and graduate focus groups highlighted the need to simplify the admissions process, clarify requirements, and provide more information to students so they can make informed decisions about their education. To increase student success, admissions criteria should also emphasize program rigour so there are no surprises upon enrollment.

Strengthen and Enrich the Field Placement Opportunity

University graduates who enter a Fast Track program at Durham College are predominantly looking to gain hands-on experience to strengthen their resume and find employment. This is often a driving factor in their pursuit of further education and emphasizes the importance of finding relevant and meaningful field placement opportunities.

Focus groups revealed that students were excited about their program's field placement opportunities. Many had already experienced some difficulties finding meaningful employment and as a result, were looking to develop the practical skills to give them an edge in the labour market. Students look to field placement as a way to develop the hands on experience that is needed to complement the theoretical background they have already gained in previous education.

Despite the importance that many place on field placement, many of the students included in this study indicated that due to the heavy workload in the program, they struggled to find the necessary placements, and some even indicated that professors provided little or no guidance to help. This was evident as students surveyed indicated that accessing placement/career information was the primary difficulty they experienced after enrolment in the program. Many indicated they ended up in a placement that was not highly related to their program or was a departure from the type of career they were hoping to find. In addition, some argued that their experience with field placement was often too rushed and not meaningful enough to make a positive impact on their career search.

A compressed program requires an intensive time commitment from students. A support network that includes professors, Fast Track graduate ambassadors, peers and career service staff, could help alleviate some of the added stress of finding placements. This type of support is particularly important given that many students cited a lack of school-life balance while completing their Fast Track program.

Develop Relevant and Opportune Social Opportunities to Encourage a School-Life Balance

A solid support network is also important for other areas of college life as balancing schoolwork, a social life and in some cases, part-time work, can be challenging for students. Fast Track students, in particular, need to find strategies to manage their fast-paced workload. It is also important that students develop time management skills that would provide them with the ability to allot time for social activities. Almost all focus group participants agreed that they spent most of their time studying for tests or working on assignments and did not have much time for a social life.

Moreover, because of the age gap, many were unable to connect with younger three-year advanced diploma students who may have shared classes with them. Fast Track students have already graduated from university and thus, their experiences and needs are quite different from the majority of other students. They are also strong academically and do not see a lot of value in academic supports such as student liaisons or peer tutors; however, other types of on-campus resources or supports could help alleviate the stresses of a demanding program.

Focus groups highlighted the need to offer unique, voluntary social networking opportunities for Fast Track students and their peers. Ultimately, these opportunities need to be tailored toward the needs and wants of this particular group. Some examples might include peer study groups, group fitness challenges or lunch and learn sessions. Peer study groups would give Fast Track students the opportunity to lean on other students to ask questions, help solve complex problems, and take advantage of other students' strengths. Group fitness challenges would provide Fast Track students with a list of nutrition and wellness activities that exist outside the gym and help them stay motivated in a team environment. Finally, Fast Track student lunch and learn sessions could include speakers such as former graduates, professors or industry employers to provide students with a wider support network and focus on relevant issues such as, interviewing skills, resume writing and employment opportunities.

Recommendations for Improving the Outcomes of Fast Track Graduates

In addition to improving the experience of current students, we have also identified three key recommendations to improve the outcomes of Fast Track graduates:

- (1) Provide more assistance to Fast Track graduates to locate employment;
- (2) Foster connections between field placements and future employment opportunities;
and
- (3) Set expectations early on and develop a support network for at-risk students.

Provide More Assistance to Fast Track Graduates to Locate Employment

The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) promotes accelerated diploma programs (i.e. Fast Track programs) to university graduates as a way of gaining additional job-specific skills that build on their degree foundation. Students generally enter into Fast Track programs with the intention of gaining practical experience to build on their theoretical knowledge and find employment after graduation. However, while completion rates are very strong among Fast Track students with almost all students completing their programs within the standard time frame (i.e. two semesters), employment rates (six months after graduation) are not nearly as robust. Although Fast Track graduates have a university degree as well as an advanced college diploma, employment rates are generally better for three-year graduates.

While employed graduates found their programs helpful in locating employment and are generally satisfied with the preparation they received for the job market, many had yet to find a job six months after graduation and many were working part-time at the time of the survey. Furthermore, many indicated they were working in positions that were not related to the program from which they graduated. These are substantial areas of concern particularly since improving employment opportunities is the primary reason why students enrol in a Fast Track program.

By their very nature, Fast Track programs are so compressed that there is little time to provide students with the preparation they require for the job market. Nonetheless, skills like resume writing, interviewing, and networking should all be incorporated (where possible) into the curriculum. In particular, the field placement is a good place to integrate career-building techniques such as networking (this is discussed in further detail below). As mentioned earlier, since time is a barrier, lunch and learn sessions could also provide Fast Track students with valuable lessons from former graduates, professors and industry-specific employers. Proactive strategies such as these can help improve the eventual outcomes of Fast Track graduates in the labour market.

Foster Connections Between Field Placements and Future Employment Opportunities

The field placement is an opportunity for students to gain valuable practical experience in the field in which they hope to find employment. It can provide students with soft skills such as interpersonal, communication and teamwork skills and ideally, it provides work experience that is directly related to the student's area of study. Many Fast Track students believed they could leverage their placement opportunity into a future career. This is not surprising since the main reason for enrolling in a Fast Track program is to complement university education with job-ready experience.

However, focus groups revealed that students were often disappointed with their placement experience and many did not feel the opportunity was "meaningful." By meaningful, many indicated the placement was not related to their program, did not offer enough work experience (observation rather than participation) and supervisors did not or could not provide constructive feedback. In some cases, there also seemed to be a lack of communication

between professors and field supervisors so students often felt they were not always supported by the College, and program faculty.

To improve employment rates among Fast Track students, the field placement opportunity should be well connected to the labour market in order to bolster students' employability. This should be the place where students can learn what will be expected of them in the workforce, and apply what is being taught in the classroom. Placement opportunities should give students the experience they need to be successful in the job market.

Set Expectations Early on and Develop a Support Network for At-Risk Students

There is a strong relationship between first term grades and final program completion rates. While most Fast Track students are strong academically, those who have below average grades in their first semester are often at risk of leaving. This underscores another area in which setting expectations during the admissions process (for example, emphasizing heavy workload and conflicting time demands), and providing a support network, could benefit Fast Track students.

Fostering collaboration in classrooms (e.g. having students work together or evaluate one another) is one way to help build a support network. Professors can also continue to let students ask questions and when needed, meet with them after hours to provide extra help. These small steps can help further strengthen Fast Track programs at Durham College.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Fast Track Student and Graduate Online Survey

Durham College is conducting this survey as part of a research project to better understand the experiences of students in “Fast Track” programs. Fast Track programs are designed for students who have already completed a degree program. Eligible students can take advantage of the compressed, fast-track opportunity to complete their advanced diploma requirements in two semesters. This study will explore the transfer from the degree program to the accelerated program. This study will also explore anticipated and/or actual outcomes after graduation, including completion rates and employment rates. The purpose of the research project is to develop strategies that will improve the student experience.

We are interested in hearing about your experiences. Your participation is completely voluntary. Only the research team will have access to your responses. Responses to the questions will not be linked to individual respondents in any reporting and no one will be identifiable in any reporting.

If you decide not to participate, there will be no impact on your future dealings with Durham College. If you decide to participate in the survey, you may end the survey at any time without giving a reason; in this case, any data you have provided will not be used. If you decide to participate, all of your responses will be kept confidential. If you have any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please skip them. The data will be stored on a secure Durham College server. All data collected from this survey will be destroyed seven years after the full completion of all reports as per Durham College policy.

The survey will take less than 15 minutes to complete. By completing the survey, you will be entered into a draw for one of three prizes of a Best Buy gift card valued at \$100.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Debbie McKee Demczyk, Principal Investigator, at Debbie.mckeedemczyk@durhamcollege.ca

1. [COMPUTED] Number of surveys completed: 26
2. Informed Consent: By checking the “yes” box below, you confirm that you have read and understand the information about this research project. You agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give your consent freely. You understand you can withdraw from the survey at any time, without penalty, and you do not have to give any reason for withdrawal.

- ☐ Yes, I give my full consent to participate in this study.
- ☐ No, I do not want to continue with this survey.

Demographics

3. Please identify the Fast Track program that you enrolled in:
 - € Biomedical Engineering Technology
 - € Biotechnology Technologist
 - € Chemical Engineering Technology
 - € Electronic Engineering Technology
 - € Environmental Technology
 - € Pharmaceutical and Food Science Technology
4. In which academic year did you enrol in this Fast Track program?
 - € 2009-2010
 - € 2010-2011
 - € 2011-2012
5. [COMPUTED] Graduated
 - € Yes [IF Q2 = 2009-10 or 2010-11]
 - € No [IF Q2 = 2011-12]
6. Your current age:
 - € Less than 21
 - € 21-25
 - € 26-30
 - € 31-35
 - € More than 35
7. Your gender:
 - € Male
 - € Female
8. The education you completed before entering this program: (Select all that apply)
 - € University degree [if yes, go to next question]
 - € Other: please specify: _____
- 9a. When did you graduate? [only for those who completed a university degree]
 - € The academic year immediately preceding enrolment in the Fast Track program
 - € One year prior
 - € Two to five years prior
 - € Six to ten years prior

€ More than ten years prior

9b. Is your degree in the same field of study as your Fast Track program?

€ Yes

€ No

€ Not applicable: please explain: _____

9c. [IF YES AT Q9b] How related is your degree to your Fast Track program?

€ Highly related

€ Somewhat related

€ Not at all related

Decision to Enrol/Transfer

10a. Why did you decide to take a Fast Track program? (select all that apply)

€ I just completed my degree and this was the logical next step

€ I was unemployed

€ I wanted to get hands-on experience

€ I wanted to enhance my present skills

€ I wanted to learn a new, specialized skill

€ The program was recommended to me

€ My employer paid for all/part of the fees

€ Other: please specify: _____

11. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced any difficulties transitioning to a new program/institution prior to enrolling.

Prior to enrolling, I had difficulties...		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Finding out whether my degree met the admissions requirement.				
2	Connecting with someone from admissions.				
3	Connecting with someone from the program.				
4	Finding out what student services are offered.				
5	Finding my way around campus.				
6	Determining whether the program was right for me.				

7	I had no difficulties in the transition prior to enrolling.				
---	---	--	--	--	--

12. Please describe any other difficulties you faced prior to enrolling:

Experiences While in the Program

13. Please indicate the extent to which you experienced any difficulties transitioning to a new program/institution after starting classes.

After starting classes, I had difficulties...		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Connecting with someone from the program outside of class hours.				
2	Finding out what student services are offered.				
3	Accessing career information.				
4	Adapting to a new institution.				
5	Accessing IT services.				
6	Accessing learning support services.				
7	I had no difficulties in the transition after starting classes.				

14. Please describe any other difficulties you faced after starting classes:

15. Which student services have you accessed to date [current students]/did you access [graduates]?

[fourth and fifth column only appear if "yes" in column three]

	Service	Yes/No (15a)	If yes (15b)	Any difficulties? Please describe: (15c)
1	Student Academic Learning Services (SALS)	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
2	Centre for Students with Disabilities	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
3	Peer tutoring	€ Yes	€ High use	

		€ No	€ Low use	
4	Computer commons	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
5	Library	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
6	Study space	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
7	Food services	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
8	Student liaison advising	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
9	Bookstore	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
10	Sports and recreation	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
11	Health and medical services	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
12	Career services	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	
13	Financial aid/ scholarships/bursaries	€ Yes € No	€ High use € Low use	

16a. Overall, how would you rate your experience in transferring to your Fast Track program?

- € Very satisfied
- € Satisfied
- € Neutral
- € Unsatisfied
- € Very Unsatisfied

16b. Additional comments on your transfer experience:

Perceptions about the value of a Fast Track program

17a. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. [for current students]

After completing a Fast Track program, I will...	Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Strongly
--	----------	----------	-------	----------

		Disagree			Agree
1	Have access to better job prospects.				
2	Be able to earn more money.				
3	Be better positioned to reach my career aspirations.				
4	Have real-world, practical experience that I previously lacked.				
5	Have a new, specialized skill.				
6	Have additional skills to advance my career.				

17a. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. [for graduates]

	After completing a Fast Track program, I...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Have access to better job prospects.				
2	Am able to earn more money.				
3	Am better positioned to reach my career aspirations.				
4	Have real-world, practical experience that I previously lacked.				
5	Have a new, specialized skill.				
6	Have additional skills to advance my career.				

17b. Please describe any additional factors that make a Fast Track program attractive to prospective students:

Success Factors

18. Reflecting on your experiences both while deciding to enrol and after you enrolled, what factors would you say have helped you personally to succeed that you would like to share with prospective students so that they can be successful?

Strategies that Durham College could implement

19. Reflecting on your experience both while deciding to enrol and after you enrolled, what strategies could Durham College implement that would make Fast Track programs better?

Think about the application process and the program itself.

Additional comments

20. Please provide any additional comments that would be helpful in this study:

21. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group to explore these topics further?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Draw for \$100 Best Buy Gift Card (optional)

Please provide the following information if you wish to have your name included in the draw for three \$100 Best Buy gift cards. Your personal information will not be connected to any survey responses and will only be used for purposes of the draw.

Name _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Appendix B: Fast Track Student Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

- Review Information Letter
- Review confidentiality
- Explain nature of research project, role of note taker, PI
- Max time 1 hour
- Participants may withdraw at any time

Informed Consent

- Ensure signed consent forms received from all participants

Questions

- Why did you choose to enrol in a Fast Track program?
 - Why Durham College?
 - Why not a full three-year option?
 - Impact on personal life (especially for those with families, commuters, working)
- Describe your transfer experience
 - Challenges getting information?
 - Hard to return to school?
 - Feel supporting by the college? By family and friends?
- Describe your experience in your program and how you think it will affect your career after graduation
 - Better job prospects?
 - If working – promotion? More pay?
 - New job/career opportunities?
 - What are your goals?
- What student services are you using?
 - Why or why not?
- What would you recommend to prospective students thinking about enrolling in a Fast Track program?
 - Why?

- What would you recommend to Durham College administration to improve Fast Track programs
 - Why?

