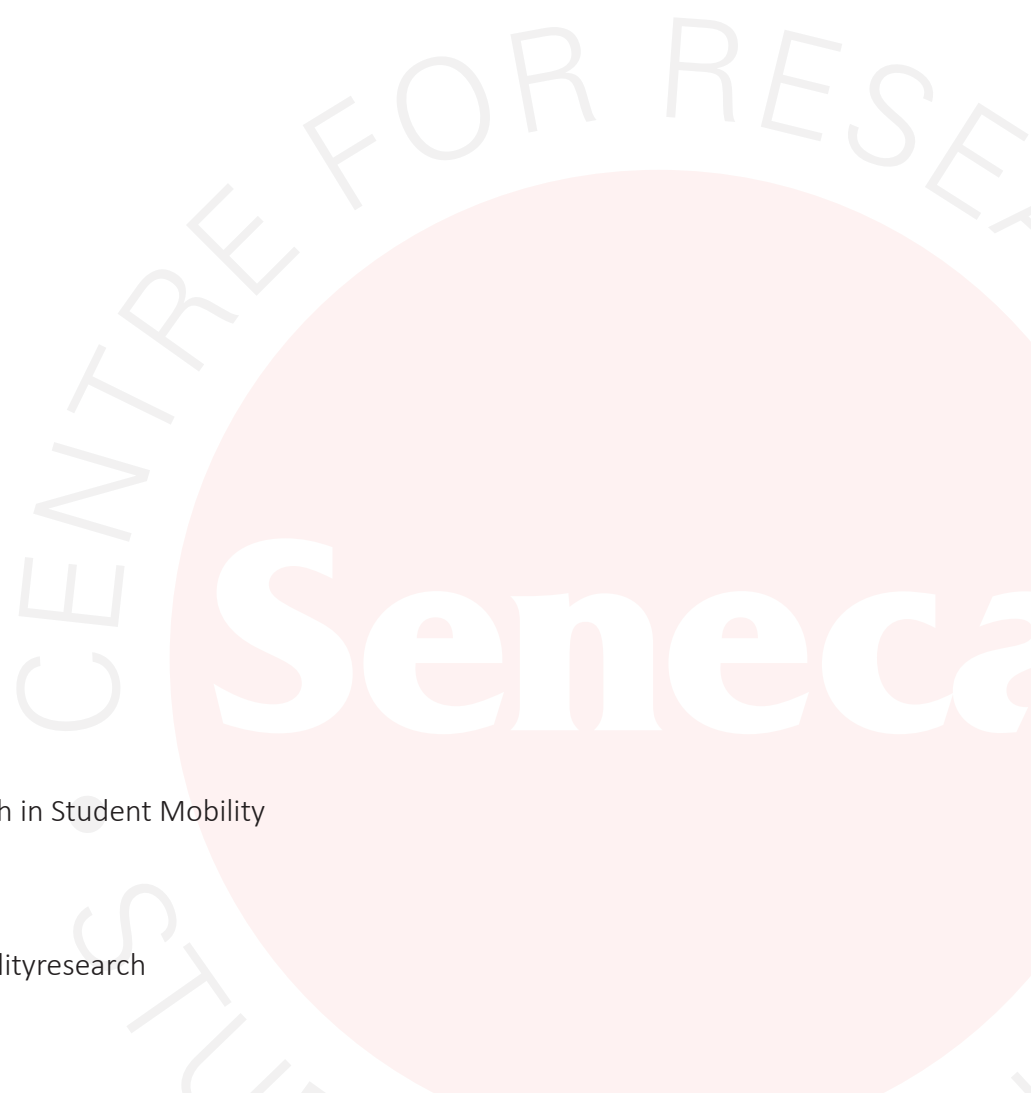


# A Qualitative Study of the York-Seneca Transfer Experience

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“I ought to go to university and get a degree. I had this thought for two years and finally my action was triggered by my co-worker who had been around and in his mid-50s. He asked me what I was waiting for, if I waited for one year I could wait for another year then nothing would happen to my life and I was no longer young.”

“I would recommend that students interested in transferring not fear the process of applying and not be intimidated by it.”

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### **Note:**

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this ONCAT funded research project was to better understand the decision-making processes of students moving between the two Ontario postsecondary sectors, in both directions, and to explore their transfer experiences by conducting focus groups with a randomly selected group of students who transferred between York University and Seneca College. The intention for the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thought process of transferring students, beyond responses to typical close-ended survey questions.

This qualitative research project aimed to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the motivating factors behind student transfer?
2. What are the experiences of transfer students with their sending and receiving institutions?
3. How might sending and receiving institutions improve the transfer experience for students?

In an attempt to understand the rationale for their decision-making and to describe the students' transfer experiences in their own words, focus group discussions were conducted with Seneca students attending York University, and with York University students attending Seneca College. The focus groups were comprised of graduates and early leavers, and provided a means to ascertain if there were any similarities and differences between the two circumstances.

In general, the responses of the focus group participants were consistent with those found in previous studies where students who transferred were attempting to increase their future economic prospects. The combination of having both a college and university education was seen as valuable regardless of where they began their educational studies. These students recognized the perceived advantages of both forms of education.

Existing structural elements such as formal transfer agreements and specific scholarships, proved to both appeal to and support decisions for transfer. And it was these structural elements that were found to make transfer easier that were cited most often as suggestions for improvement. The most common response, when asked about challenges in the transfer process, was the difficulty encountered in identifying or connecting with a person who could answer their transfer specific questions. Providing a person dedicated to supporting transfer students was suggested as a solution.

The goal of the focus group discussions was to hear the stories behind standard questionnaires (such as the Graduate Satisfaction Survey (GSS) that is part of the reporting of the Key Performance Indicators) or administrative data. The responses highlighted three themes which dominated the discussions. A number of the participants wanted to explain their circumstances to distinguish their abilities from their grades which they felt did not reflect their true potential. For them, college was seen as an opportunity to redeem themselves from poor performance at either secondary school or university. They felt their college performance reflected their true ability, rather than the previous grades which were poor because of circumstances, be it personal or as a result of poor program fit.

Although questionnaires, such as the GSS, attempt to quantify the extent of parental encouragement as a reason for further education, participants identified the pressure, whether real or perceived, for a university education. That pressure manifested itself in the original choice of schools or as one rationale for transfer.

Finally, the degree to which self-confidence played a critical role in supporting transfer decisions is clearly articulated by a number of participants in these focus groups, particularly by those who decided to transfer from college to university. It is the internalization of the encouragement from course success or faculty support, as expressed in varying levels of confidence, which ultimately lead them to pursuing other educational opportunities.

## A Qualitative Study of the York-Seneca Transfer Experience

The purpose of this ONCAT-funded research project was to better understand the decision-making processes of students moving between the two Ontario postsecondary sectors, in both directions, and to explore their transfer experiences by conducting focus group discussions with a randomly selected group of students who transferred between York University and Seneca College. This study was intended to complement a HEQCO-funded research project that examined student movement between York University and Seneca College (Smith, Decock, Lin, Sidhu, & McCloy, forthcoming 2016). The intention for this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thought process of students who transferred between the two institutions – an understanding that goes beyond responses to close-ended survey questions.

### Background

Since their inception in the 1960s, York University and Seneca College have been leaders in college-university partnership, promoting access to postsecondary education through a diverse range of programmatic offerings that support college to university pathways, student mobility, and lifelong learning. Combined, the efforts of both institutions represent a significant share of Ontario's pathway students, with York accepting the largest number of college transfer students annually and Seneca sending the highest number of graduates to university each year; in fact, York University and Seneca College are each other's largest feeder institution for transfer students. The current fiscal environment of restrained resources has renewed the emphasis on identifying efficiencies and implementing new and creative solutions. This factor, coupled with the Ontario government's ambitious policy agenda for increasing postsecondary educational attainment rates and transforming the sectors to meet the needs of an innovation economy, has created an opportunity for Seneca and York to consolidate and formalize their partnership so as to support ongoing activities, facilitate positive student learning experiences with lifelong learning in mind, and respond to the growing demand for postsecondary education in the region.

To better understand the student movement between the respective institutions, York and Seneca engaged in the development of a master data set, comprised of administrative data from each of the partners, as part of a Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) - funded research project (Smith, et al., forthcoming 2016). The purpose of that research project was to quantify student movement of this population, produce descriptive characteristics, and assess the socio-demographic factors which determine success after transfer; however, the administrative data are unable to capture motivation, decision-making processes, and the transfer experience of these students.

### Literature Review

Interest in the subject of student mobility continues to increase and the amount of research related to transfer is growing. Among the challenges, however, are the uniqueness of individual institutional studies and the inability to track students from one sector to the next. Individually, each study helps us to understand the transfer students in their particular contexts, but the disparate studies are unable to provide a collective assessment of the success of student transfer. The province of Ontario lacks a comprehensive data set, and as such, "current information about transfer is pieced together from various sources, each with limitations and none of which can be easily linked" (Kerr, McCloy & Liu, 2010,

p.27). The province is introducing an Ontario Education Number (OEN), but there continue to be challenges in implementation across both postsecondary education sectors. The Ministry-mandated Graduate Satisfaction Survey, one of five key performance indicators for colleges, is one consistent measure to assess movement, and the expansion of the transfer questions on that survey have made it an important piece for evaluating transfer at the institutional and the provincial level.

With regard to graduates who transfer from college to university, the Graduate Satisfaction Survey (GSS) asks a series of closed-ended questions as an attempt to understand the reasons for pursuing further education<sup>1</sup>. To understand motivation, the survey asks participants to state their major and minor reasons for continuing their education, from a series of closed-ended statements. Since the inception of these specific questions in 2005–06, the answers to these statements have changed little. *More opportunities for career advancement* was still the most cited major reason identified by 96 percent of the participants, followed closely by *obtaining a credential, gaining theoretical knowledge, and upgrading skills*. *Encouragement from others (family member, friends, faculty)* ranked much lower, but was still cited as a major reason by 76 percent of the participants. The survey does not provide an opportunity for participants to expand on these statements, so readers are left to interpret the meaning of these statements and follow the patterns of changes over the years.

The GSS is a snapshot in time, conducted six months after graduation and intended to understand the outcomes of graduates and the impact of their college education. For purposes of identifying the total number who pursue further education at a university, it is limited to those participants who were attending university at the time of the telephone survey. Consequently, it does not capture graduates who delay entry and as importantly, those who pursue a university education prior to college graduation. The accounting of student movement from university to college (“reverse transfer”), particularly in Ontario, has been the subject of few studies; consequently, insights into university student experiences in their pursuit of academic credentials are limited. Colleges have developed one-year certificate programs specifically to attract university graduates, and early evidence shows a large number of previous university students enrolled in a wide variety of college programs. Their specific circumstances are not well documented.

A 2013 ONCAT report, *University to College Transfer Students: Exploring Motives and Characteristics* (ONCAT, 2013), examined previous university students who were enrolled at, or had attended, Confederation College in Thunder Bay. A combination of survey and focus group questions led the authors to conclude that the “key reasons students transfer are career-related” (p.21). The participants discussed a need for practical skills and experience that would assist in making a career change or landing a job. Their college program of choice was further evidence, with two-thirds of participants commenting on career-related opportunities in their decision-making. The majority of the participants saw the college program as a practical application of the theoretical knowledge obtained in university.

The emphasis on career-related reasons for transferring to a college was also found in an earlier study by Usher and Jarvey (2012). Their study included both college and university students transferring into one of Ontario’s 24 colleges. An overwhelming number of participants cited improving career opportunities as a reason for transfer (p.15); only two participants identified low satisfaction with or a

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<sup>1</sup> (see *The Transfer Experience of Ontario College Graduates who Further their Education* (Decock, McCloy, Liu & Hu, 2011) on the HEQCO website)

negative experience at the previous school. The report listed some difficulties with the transfer process; but overall, the students who participated in that study were satisfied, and the satisfaction was largely influenced by the type of interaction with staff. The authors concluded, “Students clearly think of faculty as front-line staff – people whom they can approach for assistance with administrative problems” (p.19).

The forthcoming publication, “Transfer Pathways in Higher Education: York University and Seneca College as a Case Study” (Smith et al, 2016), documents student movement between the two institutions between 2002 and 2012. The study captures all students who began at one and transferred to the other during the time period in question, regardless of whether they completed their original program of study. A little more than one-third of transfer students (36%; n= 3343/9330) did not complete their Seneca program before entering York University. In contrast, 61% (n= 3270/5413) of transfers to Seneca College who did not complete their York University program. The characteristics of the two groups are also “markedly different”. The university-to-college group has “a greater concentration of Canadian citizens, they are slightly younger, they are more likely to have a mother tongue that is either English or French, and are more likely to have parents that have experience with PSE” (p. 44). The report utilizes administrative data in an attempt to quantify the movement and predict the probability of credential attainment. The nature of the data is such that it cannot answer questions regarding *why* the students transferred.

## Research questions

The focus group participants responded to a series of set questions and non-leading probes intended to answer the three research questions, as follows:

1. What are the motivating factors behind student transfer?
  - Why did you choose to transfer before having completed your initial program?
  - Why did you begin your studies at Seneca/York rather than at York/Seneca?
  - At what point (when) did you decide to transfer from Seneca/York to York/Seneca?
  - What did you hope to achieve by transferring?
  - What helped you in this decision-making process?
2. What are the experiences of transfer students with their sending and receiving institutions?
  - Thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you find helpful in the process? Why?
  - Again thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you struggle with or find less helpful in the process? Why?
  - Was there specific assistance provided by your sending institution (York/Seneca) that helped?
  - Was there specific assistance provided by your receiving (York/Seneca) institution that helped?
3. How might the sending and receiving institutions improve the transfer experience for students?
  - What could (York/Seneca) do to make it easier for students who have transferred?
  - Would you transfer again? What would you do the same? What would you do differently?
  - What advice might you give another student interested in transferring?

## Methodology

This research was intended to complement the HEQCO-funded research project examining student movement between York University and Seneca College (Smith et al, forthcoming 2016) by conducting six focus groups, randomly selected from a database of students transferring between the two institutions. In an attempt to understand the rationale for their decision-making and to describe the students' transfer experiences in their own words, focus group discussions with Seneca students attending York University, and focus group discussions with York University students attending Seneca College were conducted. The focus groups were comprised of graduates and early leavers, in order to identify any similarities and differences in the experiences of the two groups of students.

## Participant selection process

### York-to-Seneca participants

The Seneca-York database developed in the HEQCO project included students from the year 2000 to 2012. To facilitate ease in contacting participants and to reduce the amount of recall required to answer the questions, only students who were enrolled at the time of the study were eligible for inclusion in the study. Lists of students were derived according to the following three criteria:

1. Students who transferred within the context of an articulated agreement.
2. Students who completed their program and transferred outside of an articulated agreement.
3. Students who transferred before completing a program outside of an articulated agreement.

Emails (Appendix A) were sent to eligible students inviting them to participate in their particular focus group based on the three inclusion criteria on a specified date. Two of the sessions were conducted at Seneca's Newnham campus, the college's main and most populous site; one session was conducted at the Seneca@York campus, located on the grounds of York University, as it was more convenient for students in programs which qualified for the first criterion. To thank them for their participation, those who participated in the focus group discussions received a \$25 gift certificate to the college's bookstore (at either campus where the focus groups were held).

Based on the above criteria, and including current enrolment, it was determined there were 15 students who met criterion one; 115 who met criterion two, and 420 for criterion three respectively, for a total of 550 potential participants. Everyone in group one was sent an invitation; four responded, agreeing to participate, but none showed up at the scheduled session. The statistical software SPSS was used to randomly select 37 students from each of the second and third criterion-based groups; only eight students in total agreed to participate. An even smaller number actually participated in the sessions (see further details in the Findings section below).

### Seneca-to-York participants

The timing of the meeting and the limited pool of potential participants for one of groups may have been factors in getting enough students to participate, prompting two changes in the methodology. Rather than select students according to the three criteria, an email invitation was sent to those randomly selected from a list of *all* York students currently enrolled in any discipline who had previously attended Seneca College. The invitation provided three different time slots for the participants to attend, allowing them to select the one best suited to their schedule. As well, invitations were sent out in several waves as the responses to each were small. In total, there were five rounds of invitations, 100



at a time, randomly selected from a total pool of 2,210 students. Even with a larger number of invitations, although 21 students agreed to participate, only 12 participated in the sessions.

When the participants indicated their agreement to participate, they were asked whether or not they had completed a program at Seneca prior to attending York University. This question was to ensure that each session had at least two participants who had not completed, so they would not be singled out among those who had graduated. The self-selection of sessions proved to be random; each focus group contained representatives of the two different scenarios.

In an attempt to increase the number of responses, students who expressed a willingness to participate, but were unable to attend the focus groups, were provided an opportunity to submit a written response. A revised consent form (Appendix B) was emailed to these students, and was followed up with the exact same questions as those discussed in the focus groups. Those participating with a written response received the same agreed-upon remuneration, a \$25 bookstore gift certificate. Three responses were received in this manner.

The focus groups were recorded with the permission of the participants and the answers were transcribed and summarized into themes aligned with the research questions. Pseudonyms were agreed upon by the participants and are used here in the report. Given the small numbers, any academic (i.e., specific naming of program) or personal characteristics have been altered or deleted from the quotes and descriptions to ensure none of the participants are identifiable. The comments reported here are restricted to those applicable to the questions on their transfer experience. Other issues specific to York or Seneca were sent to the respective institutions.

## **Methodology and Ethical Considerations**

The focus group discussions were facilitated by an experienced neutral third party. Before the beginning of each discussion of the questions identified above, the facilitator reviewed the Consent form which included a request for the specific consent to audio-record the discussion (Appendix B), and answered any questions asked, before participants signed the forms. The participants were asked to self-select non-identifiable pseudonyms for themselves which were then used throughout the discussions and reporting of the discussions. The audio-recordings were deleted once the discussions were transcribed and analyzed.

## **Findings**

### **Participants**

#### **York to Seneca**

There were only three participants, all female, who attended the agreed-upon focus group sessions; two under age 25, and one was between the ages of 31 and 40. Of the three participants, two had completed a degree before attending Seneca, while the other transferred after completing the first year at York.

#### **Seneca to York**

A total of 12 participants attended one of the three scheduled sessions. An additional three participants were emailed the questions and responded in a written format for a total of 15 answers (reported

below). Of all the participants, 10 were female and five were male; 10 were under age 25, three were between the ages of 25 to 30, and two were between 31 and 40 years of age. The participants were almost equally divided; eight had completed a program at Seneca before going to York, and six did not continue; one respondent did not indicate their previous status.

## Responses

The responses for both Seneca-to-York and York-to-Seneca focus group participants are organized in accordance with the study's three research questions (each is numbered) and the accompanying subset of questions. Each of the three sections (research questions) begins with a summary of the themes, followed by a discussion.

### 1. What are the motivating factors behind student transfer?

#### 1.1 Why did you choose to transfer before having completed your initial program?

##### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- opportunity to transfer credits already earned before completing
- Seneca faculty encouragement

##### York to Seneca

- poor academic performance in York program

##### Discussion

The number of participants who did not complete their program before transferring was limited (n=6), but their comments reflected common assumptions about the reasons. The opportunity to obtain transfer credits based on partial completion was certainly appealing to those whose original intention was to enroll in a degree program.

The importance of the role of college faculty was evident. In one of the sessions, a student reported that when she was in the first year of a three-year program she was approached by one of the teachers who asked about the student's plans. The faculty member encouraged her to transfer to York at that point. The student reported: "She told me, 'You could do more if you wanted to' and this was very encouraging for me. I wasn't sure I would be successful in university and Seneca helped me to develop the confidence to apply."

Developing increased confidence was a common factor in deciding to pursue further education for those who began in a college program. Further statements about confidence are discussed below, but the impact on the decision for transfer to university was evident throughout the participants' responses.

Leaving York or any university, on the other hand, appeared to be more a function of finding the right academic fit. For Cindy, the challenge of university was one for which she felt she was not fully prepared academically. She said:

*I am not born in Canada, and English is not my first language, so that the level of York University was a little bit hard for me. Also, I wanted to get more hands-on experiences, and I knew that Seneca will have more experiences.*

As discussed further below, Cindy intends to pursue a degree after her time at Seneca. It would appear the ability to start over with the opportunity to transfer back to university has allowed her to still achieve her career goals and remain within her original discipline.

## 1.2 Why did you begin your studies at (Seneca or York) rather than at (York or Seneca)?

### Key themes

#### Seneca to York

- did not meet York admission criteria (n=6)
- Seneca transfer option to get a degree was always the goal (n=6)
- practical skills and co-op focus of college programs (n=6)
- degree was more valued and prestigious (n=3)
- not ready for university (n=2)
- smaller class sizes and more interaction with teachers at Seneca

#### York to Seneca

- ease of access because of York's location close to home
- reputation of the program at York
- pressured by parent to attend university, not college

### Discussion

The reasons for beginning at Seneca are a mix of admission criteria and the type of education the participants were pursuing, coupled with structural characteristics which supported future transfer and skill development.

Several of the students selected Seneca first because they “wanted the hands-on skills that Seneca offered.” Dan selected Seneca specifically for this reason. He did not think he would be able to succeed in university and did not want to be a university “drop out.” When he completed Seneca and began working, however, Dan realized he needed a university degree for most jobs, a common theme from the participants when asked about future achievements. Another student in Dan's focus group said she wanted a university degree but did not have the GPA required to get into York. She said she knew about the Seneca-York partnership, and that going to Seneca first was the only way to achieve her goal.

Not meeting the admission requirements to attend university was a refrain of several of the focus group participants. For some, the reality was clear; for others, like Adrian, applying to college was a way to hedge their bets. Adrian thought his grades were good enough to attend York, but he was not sure about his own preparedness for university studies; he applied to Seneca as a backup. The cheaper tuition and the recommendations from friends who were attending Seneca were also influential in Adrian's thinking. He did not get accepted to university, so he enrolled at Seneca. Natasha did not do well in secondary school and did not qualify for admission to university. She also wanted hands-on experience and was attracted to the practical aspects of her program.

A number of participants who were unable to meet the entrance requirements offered explanations to emphasize their lack of accomplishment was not related to ability, but to their circumstances. Nancy stated the following:

*While perhaps having been academically capable to pursue university studies after high school, certain family matters that occurred in the last year of my high school studies had adversely impacted my academic drive which in itself had negatively shaped my overall academic standing, precluding me from direct entry to university. Approximately two years after high school, I decided to enroll in college.*

Seneca's location and the broad range of programming made it an appealing choice. Similarly, Rachel's goal was always to study French as her major in university, but she had personal issues in Grade 12 and did not do well. Rachel stayed back a year and had to do work to complete the last five secondary credits. These credits were not the right ones for university entry, but they did allow her to go to Seneca. "I had to do something after grade 12," she said. "My parents did not want me to apply to Seneca, but I did."

Parental pressure was a common scenario for the students who began their education at university. For some, like Sally, university attendance seemed like the "natural process" after completing high school. Her family expected her to attend university and persuaded her that this kind of education was in her best interests. Sally chose York University because it was close to where she lived and easy to get to by public transit. She did not even consider going to any college at that time.

For others, like Cindy, college was not to be considered an option:

*My parents wanted me to get a degree for my future. So that I only applied to universities. I really wanted to go to [another university] but was not accepted. York accepted me. The reason why I chose York first was because my Mom [would] not allow me to go to any college ... you must get a degree – you must go to the university.*

Cindy was not born in Canada, and English was not her first language; she struggled with her courses and transferred to Seneca after only one year at York University.

*I studied really hard working on three courses, so my mom saw, 'Oh my daughter is having a hard time' – since that year my mom saw my problem so she allowed me to transfer to continue my education – she saw that I could still get to my goal of the degree.*

Cindy was also attracted by the field experience built into her program of choice, something that was very limited in a similar program at York. Similar to others who started at Seneca, Cindy benefitted from the structure which supported her circumstances: "I [developed] a lot of confidence here rather than at York."

1.3 At what point (when) did you decide to transfer from (York/Seneca) to (Seneca/York)?

#### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- after having work experience
- after completing the program at Seneca and realizing a degree was more beneficial

- when I realized grades were good enough to go to university
- while in the Seneca program, mid-way through the program

### York to Seneca

- after working post-graduation, realized needed practical skills (n=2)
- at the end of first year, when I did not do well academically at York

### Discussion

For former Seneca students, the timing of their decision to attend York University varied with the circumstances of their specific academic or career trajectory.

Two of the students commented that their success at Seneca made them think that university was possible for them; it gave them the confidence to apply to York. For Victoria, a lot of her motivation came from the encouragement she received from her teachers at Seneca. “They were really motivating and gave me the confidence to apply to York.” Three other students in her session agreed that increased confidence was motivating for them as well.

Another student mentioned that the support of the Seneca program coordinator was very helpful in this process; the coordinator provided clear information on the papers they would need to complete, guidelines and specific requirements that had to be met (e.g., which courses and grades), and the number of credits students could expect when they transferred successfully. The specific information was very helpful in making her decision.

Grades were a necessary element to gain entrance, but the process of achieving those grades instilled confidence for many of the participants in the focus groups. Combined with the transfer opportunity provided by a program, students were able to take advantage of the existing arrangements.

Adrian’s grades in the Seneca two-year program were good, which gave him the confidence that he needed to try for entry into university after graduation. The transfer option built into his program was important to him. As with Adrian, Natasha’s grades increased her confidence that she would succeed in university. She completed her diploma and realized she really liked working with children most of all, an area not specifically addressed in her original program. Natasha appreciated the practical experience she received at Seneca, but felt there was more for her to learn to do her job well, and that she wanted to learn that in child studies. She realized that the transfer program option with credit transfer was available and it influenced her decision to attend York University. Rita’s time at Seneca increased her confidence and her success, which allowed her to gain entrance to York as well as receive a York Fellowship scholarship. It was her first-ever scholarship, so Rita was naturally pleased, but it was instrumental as well in making the decision to continue.

For others in the focus groups, transfer was a planned route. Prior to starting postsecondary education, Natasha, always wanted both college and university education – she was not sure why, but she had a strong interest in practical skills and that made a difference in her decisions. Natasha’s studies at Seneca made her realize she wanted to understand more about the field and university was the place to acquire that knowledge. She looked forward, as well, to the increased choices (electives) available in the York program, compared to the Seneca program where she was allowed only one elective (i.e., one choice of four options).

In other circumstances, the realization of the need for further education came after some time in the workforce. Dan said he had difficulty getting a job after graduating from Seneca and it wasn't until he was working that he "realized (he) would not get the kind of job (he) wanted, unless (he) went to university." In one of the written responses, John was more emphatic about why he wanted to return to school and enroll in a degree program:

*Having worked on my previous job for five years, I [had] seen a lot of hidden rules in the corporation [and] offices. A person who gets more chances to be promoted or moves on to a better position or company is usually determined by [their] education level. I had trained a few new hires and worked with a lot people. I saw people with master degrees [who were] initially doing the same work as [me] and received a way better package .... but soon they either got promoted or moved on to a better place. I trained several new hires fresh from university with or without some Co-op experience. They all received better packages than I did. When I started to look for better opportunities in the market, [the] most attractive jobs require[d] a bachelor degree or a master degree. At that point if I moved on, in the following three to five years, I could merely make as much salary as a person with a degree [who] has two to three years' working experience; and by that time, I would have ten years working experience. So I decided to move on and continue education in a university. Although there was an opportunity cost, overall the life satisfaction would be greatly improved. Since I already owned a diploma from Seneca, I applied to the university as a transfer student two years ago.*

John's decision to further his education also came from his understanding of the elements required to improve his career opportunities.

Rita realized from family and friends from her country of origin that the diploma was not as valued as a degree in obtaining what were perceived to be the more desirable jobs. Her parents and relatives found out that friends who had acquired a diploma were not obtaining these jobs and encouraged her to transfer to a degree program at York University. In an era of rising credentialism, even a baccalaureate was considered inadequate given the increased competition in her country of origin. According to Rita, one needed a master's degree to get a job, even though her friends opined they were over-qualified for the work performed. "Even if they hire you, you can't get a promotion unless you continue to study and that is hard to do when you are working and takes very long."

While college-to-university students were concerned about the ability to advance within their career, the university-to-college students perceived a need to acquire practical experience to obtain their first job. Marilyn found that her studies at York were all theoretical, but they "opened (her) eyes to what (she) wanted to do, and that (she) needed practical experience." She wanted more work experience. Seneca's joint rehab program offered field experience with placements. A presentation at York during her third year opened up her eyes to the opportunity for transfer. With hindsight, Marilyn said she was glad she pursued her studies in that order.

For Sally, participating in an internship made her aware of her lack of practical skills: "I realized I did four years in university that didn't get me a job right away. I had a false hope." Sally felt "aggravated" she had spent all that "time, energy and money with no results." The recommendation of her two friends who had completed programs different from hers at Seneca made her look at Seneca as well.

#### 1.4 What did you hope to achieve by transferring?

##### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- the undergraduate degree (for all participants)
- deeper knowledge and insight (for 1 participant)

##### York to Seneca

- practical skills to get a job
- a degree

##### Discussion

Fulfilling career aspirations and acquiring desired jobs, as expressed in responses to the previous question, were echoed by a number of participants when describing their hopes in transferring. Along with the potential for career advancement come the corollary benefits. From Adrian's perspective, the degree is held in higher regard than a diploma here in this country. Although Adrian felt he was not challenged in his Seneca courses, his ultimate reason and hope for transferring was to garner the prestige in acquiring a university degree. For Nancy, obtaining a degree fulfills a family tradition:

*I had always considered attending university as most of my immediate family members (i.e., father, mother, siblings) and extended family members (i.e., uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.) have university degrees. So, by enrolling in university I hoped to continue the family 'tradition' of obtaining higher education. A university degree is held in high regard in my family. It is also considered a prerequisite to getting or achieving the types of careers that some of my family members hold (i.e., engineering, management, teaching, etc.).*

For Cindy, who had enrolled in Seneca after a poor start at York, going back to obtain that degree fulfilled her original goal and saved face for her family: "...as long as I was going to get the degree (in the end) my parents were OK with that."

In transferring from Seneca to York, Naz felt that getting the bachelor's degree was advantageous to her earlier career aspirations. Naz began to realize she really wanted a career in academia, specifically teaching in university, and therefore needed to go on to a master's and then a PhD degree program, which are now her goals. She worked extra hard on her academic studies to strengthen her application for graduate school, and felt that without that extra academic work, her York degree would not have gotten her into McGill (she began a master's degree program in political sciences there in the fall of 2014). John wrote about a similar aspiration, now that he has achieved some further success in his degree studies: "I (envision) myself at least completing the bachelor degree and preferably continuing the education in a graduate school and achieve a master's degree."

#### 1.5 What helped you in this decision-making process?

##### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- the Seneca-York partnership and transfer credits (were important factors for all)
- encouragement of professors at Seneca
- pressure from family and friends to get a degree (more prestigious)

- educational requirements for jobs sought
- greater opportunity to socialize with other students in clubs, etc. at York

### York to Seneca

- the program options at Seneca (n=2)
- post-graduation work experience
- Seneca's location – close to home

### Discussion

A deciding factor for the participants who started at York was related to the structure of the programming, which was convenient and supported the particular circumstances of these individuals. For Samantha, the close proximity of Seneca and the fact that Seneca offered an accelerated one-year diploma program were important factors. "I was getting older and really needed a job – so the length of the program was a major factor." For Marilyn, the opportunity to enroll in degree classes simultaneously with her program at the Seneca @ York campus allowed her to engage in the experience within her "comfort zone".

In the focus groups for participants who started at Seneca, there was unanimous agreement that the partnership between York and Seneca, in terms of formal transfer and the amount of credits granted, was a contributing factor in their decision to transfer.

For example, Clint's family had moved around a lot; he had been home-schooled and did not have a high school diploma. His initial goal was to go to York University, but he would have to apply as mature student at age 19. Seneca admitted him as a mature student at 18, which meant he was able to start immediately rather than wait another year. He confessed:

*I didn't know what I wanted to do in life, so Seneca was an opportunity to explore; smaller class sizes, less bureaucratic than York, a more nurturing environment – at York you are just a number in a group of 1000 students.*

His initial goal was to get into a bachelor degree program and the agreement between his program and York University meant he could get full credit for his time at Seneca. Clint was enrolled in a program for which the number of advanced credits was made clear. Many participants, however, complained about the lack of information on the timing and number of credits granted for previous education.

A number of the participants mentioned that pressure from family, directly or indirectly, was a factor. Rachel described how she felt pressured by her family to go to university: She said, "If I were not to go to university I would be the shame of the family, even though my dad went to college." Two others in the same focus group also said their families had pressured them. Dan admitted that everyone in his family had gone to university, so that was an expectation, but his family did not pressure him to do so.

For some, encouragement came in the form of observations made in the workplace, particularly in terms of pursuing a challenging career opportunity. Nancy wrote about a time in her career when she realized she needed something more challenging, something new.

*Around 2009, after having continually worked since finishing college, I had encountered a bit of a lull that made me feel that I was no longer progressing or growing at work. It seemed then that I wanted to take on more challenging projects at work or even take on a different role but still*



*within either the emergency medicine or humanitarian/crisis field. I began to research various professions and their described educational requirements. It became clear to me that I would need to embark on continued education if I wanted to make any kind of change or transition.*

After exploring the academic programs offered at the local universities, Nancy came across a program offered by York University, which was the closest to the area of specialty she wanted to explore.

John, on the other hand, conducted his own job market research to understand the educational requirements needed for the career he was interested in pursuing. Weighing the financial loss involved in going back to school against his own notions of the value of life experience, he determined that attending university to obtain a degree was the appropriate route. However, it was a final push from someone at work that triggered John's return.

*I had this thought for two years and finally my action was triggered by my co-worker who had been around and in his mid-50s. He asked me what I was waiting for, if I waited for one year I could wait for another year then nothing would happen to my life and I was no longer young.*

## 2. What are the experiences of transfer students with their sending and receiving institutions?

2.1 Thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you find helpful in the process? Why?

### Key themes

#### Seneca to York

- ease of transfer/application because of the Seneca-York partnership
- number of transfer credits
- encouragement of faculty at Seneca
- orientation to transfer options at Seneca
- specific information on what was needed to qualify for transfer credits
- information shared by friends who were or had been at York
- Seneca and York website information
- location of Seneca@York (was helpful for one student with physical disabilities)
- ease of transfer of accommodation (i.e., files from Seneca to York for the student with disabilities)

#### York to Seneca

- transfer credits received
- friends at Seneca
- Seneca website
- helpful York staff
- parental support (when parent saw that the student was not doing well at York)

### Discussion

For Natasha, it was the discussion with a professor who encouraged her to continue in university that motivated her to transfer to York. Five other participants agreed they got a lot of motivation to transfer

from teachers at Seneca who encouraged them to go on. While at Seneca, Natasha felt she had more personal discussions with professors in her field, and more interaction with professors and students, which she liked and found helpful. Seneca was a lot smaller and she did not feel she was just a face in the crowd as was her experience at York. Her parents had been very supportive of her going to Seneca, but people other than her family had told her many times that college was a lower level of education.

For Rita, it was her parents, relatives and friends who encouraged her. She also liked that at York she had more flexibility in the specific courses she would take, that the campus was bigger, and that the student population was much larger than at Seneca. The increased opportunities to socialize were important to her and she liked that she “got new thoughts and ideas.”

2.2 Again, thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you struggle with or find less helpful in the process? Why?

### Key themes

#### Seneca to York

- most challenging issue was the difficulty of getting full and specific information on transfer-related issues
- the second most frustrating issue was not knowing the number of credits and for which courses until AFTER they registered for the York program
- for some, the actual number of transfer credits granted was disappointing
- insufficient accessible information on the Seneca and York websites
- inadequate academic advisement at York
- use of different course management systems and emails (e.g., BBd vs. Moodle)
- lack of coordination on assignments and tests between Seneca and York courses in the joint programs
- irregularities in transcript information shared between Seneca and York
- large classes

#### York to Seneca

- unhelpful responses when they asked for information about the transfer process at York – redirected to others who did not know either
- wanted a program at York and the location was not good.
- poor English-language skills made studies at York difficult
- large classes at York and difficulty interacting with the professor
- automatic changes in class assignment without prior notification

### Discussion

The responses included the expected challenges of different systems at each of the respective institutions, some resulting in inability to exchange information, and others requiring adaptation. The major theme, however, was the struggle to obtain specific and timely information on the transfer process, on program guidance opportunities, and on the amount of transfer credit they would receive. Overall, the students were seeking additional support provided by knowledgeable people.

A student in one of the joint Seneca-York programs commented,

*Once at York, I was on my own. I did not get as much support and guidance in requirements as when I was at Seneca. I was not placed in a college at York, so I was excluded from finding much needed information that first-year students normally get. I missed out on the frosh experience.*

Because she and other new transfers to York were not assigned to a college, they had no orientation on “how the system worked.” Inquiries at the registration office were returned with the comment, “That does not happen, you have to be in a college” (however, when an administrator checked their records, the student was told that it must be a glitch). “But it was our entire class,” one respondent complained. “I had to go to the program coordinator to ask for email access – I had to do it all myself.”

Clint described his difficulty in choosing a major at York. Even after exposure to different disciplines and courses, and experiencing a York course, he could not decide on a major until after he had transferred to York. Clint wished there had been someone to counsel him in this area. If there was someone, he was not made aware of it. Rather, he discussed his options with friends at Seneca and realized a BA would not get him the job he wanted unless he went to grad school, so he switched to a certificate program instead.

The question of challenges for the Seneca to York students elicited boisterous discussions in the three separate focus groups. The results are summarized in the table below, with the challenges listed by priority.

Priority	Challenges identified	Number of Participants
1	not enough help with information on transfer issues	13
2	not enough academic advisement; students had to do their own internet research	8
3	disappointed with the limited credits granted	7
4	specific credits (credit assessment) were not identified until AFTER they were admitted and had registered	5
5	transfer decision based on the student’s combined GPA, not just the last ones which are usually better	4
5	not being assigned to a York college meant no orientation or communication about events	4
6	there was no information provided on post-graduate opportunities	3
6	confusion and frustration surrounding conditional acceptance	3
6	no academic advisor assigned for ongoing assistance	3
6	York asked for high school transcript	3

2.3 Was there specific assistance provided by your *sending* institution (Seneca or York) that helped?

#### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- knowing what the criteria were for eligibility to transfer
- Seneca courses prepared them well for studies at York
- orientation to Seneca-York partnership
- Seneca website

- academic advisement from program chairs and coordinators
- automatically sending transcripts to York
- help with application process
- better communication between Seneca and York in transcripts challenges

#### York to Seneca

- nothing other than York sending transcripts (and for one student, course outlines to Seneca)

2.4 Was there specific assistance provided by your *receiving* (York or Seneca) institution that helped?

#### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- York presentation at the orientation session at Seneca
- some York faculty helped as did some academic advisement at York
- York website was more informative, but difficult to find (layers upon layers)

##### York to Seneca

- transfer credits
- Registrar's office at Seneca helpful

#### Discussion

Those transferring from York University did not seek assistance other than obtaining course outlines, which did not prove difficult. In transitioning from York to Seneca, Sally found the program orientation at Seneca to be very helpful. It provided a summary of the two years of the program, which was valuable information. She wanted co-op experience and asked about the percentage of graduates from the program who found employment after graduation. The response that only one of the graduates did not get a job reassured Sally and she decided to enroll in the program. She was currently in the final semester and was starting to look for a job. Coordinators and the registrar's office were cited by other students as helpful in answering their questions.

Orientation and information sessions, both at Seneca and York, were identified as helpful by Seneca students transferring to York. Guidance from coordinators and faculty also proved helpful in academic preparation and in understanding the requirements needed to transfer. The York University assistance was largely delivered by way of group sessions, the value of which was questioned by several of the participants.

For Clint, having a clearly structured program outline was important because he really did not know what was needed. He found that Seneca's program outline was structured and clear, and that York's program outlines were more difficult to understand because there were so many more options. The Seneca program outlines made it clear which courses he would take in each semester. As well, there were clear rules about what grades would be needed to articulate. Finally, the requirement of taking an actual York course before he even graduated from Seneca, helped him to transition relatively smoothly.

### 3. How might sending and receiving institutions improve the transfer experience for students?

3.1 What could (York or Seneca) do to make it easier for students who have transferred?

#### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- more easily accessible information on the York website
- informed staff who can answer all their questions and not refer them to other resources
- have one full-time position (or phone line) dedicated to transfer issues at both Seneca and York so that all the transfer questions can be answered with one stop
- academic advisement provided one-on-one, and person to person support

##### York to Seneca

- more detailed information on the Seneca website
- informed staff who can answer all their questions and not refer them to other resources
- inform students of consequences of entry skills testing (e.g., math)
- improved signage on campus to locate classrooms
- better internet access/service in residence

#### Discussion

Specialized support for students transitioning between York and Seneca, particularly a person dedicated to those individuals, was identified as a solution to make transfer easier. John wrote,

*It would be better if York gave special support or assistance to the transfer students from college to fit in and get use to the university life (larger class, lots of readings and available campus activities) and achieve success in academics like what they currently have for mature students.*

Marilyn, who started at York and was currently attending Seneca, felt strongly that what is needed are specific coordinators at Seneca and at York whose sole responsibility is to help transferring students with scheduling of courses and other related matters.

Other infrastructure support which would be helpful, according to Nancy, included transcripts to be sent electronically from one institution to another; as well, a direct application process could be established, so as to alleviate some of the duplicate steps when applying to the respective academic institutions.

3.2 Would you transfer again? What would you do the same? What would you do differently?

#### Key themes

##### Seneca to York

- Yes (n=10)
  - all pretty well the same
- No (n=4)
  - two would have selected another university
- Maybe (n=1)

##### York to Seneca

- No (n=1)

- would attend college first
- Yes (n=2)
  - one would select another program at the university with more practical skills

### Discussion

This comment from Samantha captures the general sentiment of all participants to acquire an education which encapsulates both theoretical and practical knowledge:

*I would still go to university but I would choose something more practical ... but when you are 18 you don't think about how it will impact your job possibilities. I really enjoyed it, but now in hindsight it would have been much better to study something like being a doctor or engineer because there are going to be jobs at the end of (those programs). ..... I appreciate college because they do provide a lot of practical skills, but would still have chosen to go to university as long as it was a more practical program. I also enjoyed the challenge of higher education – the theoretical concepts.*

John stated:

*University is prone to academic training; it trains students in independent thinking and research. College is prone to applied technology training, less academic training and more hands on experience. If there is a tool, college teaches you how to use the tool and in which situation the tool should be used. University shows you how the tool was created and why the tool was created. That's one of the differences between them.*

3.3 What advice might you give another student interested in transferring?

### Key themes

#### Seneca to York

- depends on the student's goals and their situation
- get all the information you need early regarding what is required (e.g., GPA) and in relation to what you are really interested in, your strengths and your goals
- consider your options carefully
- at York you have more opportunities to socialize with students
- recommend start at Seneca then go to York because Seneca is less intimidating

#### York to Seneca

- hands-on experience in college will help you to get a job
- depends on the characteristics and goals of the student – need to be clear about what they really want to do
- in university you can get away with “cramming” for exams; because of the practical component at college, you can't do that
- costs at college are lower than university
- public transit to York is easier than to Seneca
- Seneca faculty use more PowerPoints which are helpful to learning

### Discussion

As someone who transitioned from a college diploma to a university degree program, John felt studying at York was more stressful than at Seneca in terms of degree of difficulty and workload.

*Every hour or even every minute counts. If you fail to keep up the reading or project and assignments, you will be burned in the following week or two weeks. Time management is your life saver. Keep this in mind and be ready for this.*

Sally, on the other hand, felt something similar in her move from York to Seneca. For any young person just out of York, she would want them to know that Seneca is not easier. Sally was currently in third semester and felt she never worked that hard at York, and though the work at Seneca was not harder than at York, there was more of it (“harder work load”) and it was more time consuming. She felt that at York, “you can get away with cramming” (for tests), but not in the Seneca program.” In one of Sally’s York courses it was recommended that the students read 100 to 200 pages per week, but “you could *not* do [the readings], without it affecting your grades. You can’t get away with it [in the Seneca program]. Everything is important – you need to know it to be able to do it.”

Perhaps the best advice is exemplified in the following statements:

*John: “Think thoroughly and carefully before you make your decision. Know who you are and what you want from your life is the ultimate answer from your heart.”*

*Nancy: “I would recommend that students interested in transferring not fear the process of applying and not be intimidated by it.”*

*Samantha: “Just be clear in what you want to do and you will get there.”*

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to complement an existing research project on student movement between York University and Seneca College, by conducting focus group discussions with currently enrolled students who transferred in either direction. The project itself was an exhaustive analysis of the combined administrative data from each of the respective institutions. The intention of these focus group discussions was to get beyond the responses on a questionnaire or the administrative data and hear the stories behind the answers and the results observed. There were challenges in recruiting students, resulting in a smaller group for analysis than was intended. Nevertheless, the feedback received confirmed some previous research and introduced a nuance for further refinement and analysis.

The responses were consistent with those in previous studies where students who transferred were attempting to increase their future economic prospects (ONCAT, 2013; Usher & Jarvey, 2012). The students moving from Seneca to York recognized they needed a degree to obtain their desired jobs and that further education would enhance career movement. The students moving from York to Seneca saw the need to have practical skills to augment their theoretical knowledge. The combination of having both was seen as valuable regardless of where they began their educational studies. These students have learned for themselves the perceived advantages of both forms of education. They required a systematic approach to help make it happen, which is reflected in their very practical recommendations to facilitate transfer and the movement of credit between institutions. Existing structural elements like the existence of formal transfer agreements and specific scholarships, proved to both appeal and support decisions for transfer. And it is these structural elements to make transfer easy that are cited most often as suggestions for improvement.

The students were also clear on their need for personal support, particularly at the receiving institution. Those who participated in the orientation, regardless of which direction the student transferred, stated the sessions helped develop awareness and provided the necessary understanding of what was needed. The latter was particularly helpful to those wanting to attend university. Nevertheless, the most common response when asked about challenges in the transfer process was identifying or connecting with a specific person who could answer their questions. A person dedicated to support transfer students was suggested as a solution.

The responses in these focus groups identified several examples of where institutional or questionnaire data do not fully reflect the variables they purport to measure. Secondary school grades provide one common input measure to help predict future success. A number of the participants, however, wanted to clarify their situation and explain the circumstances. Their intent was to make clear they were not to be judged based on their academic grades and these, in turn, were not to be interpreted as a measure of their ability. Grades did not capture other intangible characteristics of these participants and which would propel them to that goal for further education. And whether poor performance was exhibited in secondary school or at university, college was seen as an opportunity to redeem oneself. Their college performance was an opportunity to demonstrate their ability, not the grades which were a product of their circumstances at the time, be it personal or a result of poor program fit.

A second example is the attempt by questionnaires to quantify the extent of parental encouragement as a reason for further education. Typically, participants have ranked this measure low as a reason for college to university transfers (Decock et al, 2011). The other side of encouragement, however, is pressure, something which begins in secondary school when parental influence focuses on the choice of courses (King et al, 2009). Succumbing to parental pressure, whether real or perceived, was identified by a number of the focus group participants. That pressure largely centred around the value of a university education compared to one obtained at a college; and manifested itself in their original choice of destination or as a rationale for transfer.

Finally, the degree to which confidence played a critical role in supporting transfer decisions is clearly articulated by numerous participants in these focus groups, particularly among those who decided to transfer from college to university. College also played a role in regaining confidence for those who were unsuccessful at their previous institution, which was especially true if the original program was perceived by the participants as a poor fit. Sometimes that confidence was developed through success in courses, achievement in the program not anticipated based on previous experience. And given the responses, one cannot underestimate the power of faculty in instilling that confidence through encouragement and recognition of student abilities. Regardless, it is the internalization of the encouragement as expressed in greater levels of confidence which ultimately leads to pursuing other educational opportunities. The development of confidence is an important nuance not reflected in earlier survey research when encouragement from others was cited as a major reason.

Critics of the junior college system in the United States describe one role of the sector as the “cooling out” function, a filter to ensure only those truly capable, as demonstrated by their academic achievement, would eventually enroll and complete a baccalaureate degree at a university (Brint & Karabel, 1989). This study did not interview those who had aspirations to obtain a degree but faltered in their attempt or altered their goals as a result of their college experience. However, in speaking with



those who did transfer, this study captured the “warming up” function as described by Cohn and Brower (1996) in their response to the critics and in defense of the collegiate role of colleges.

Indeed, what continues to emerge in the studies of transfer is the non-linearity of student progression. As Andre (2001) suggests, the route by which the participants manage their educational destination resembles that of a car with various options to take according to your particular preferences: “[A]s the paths through post-secondary institutions become more diverse and decisions regarding these routes become more individualized, vigilant monitoring of student flows – by social class, gender, and race/ethnicity – is essential” (p.33). Although not a component of this study, these matters are important to monitor, in the manner by which the concepts intersect with motivation and achievement and how they inform the practices of institutions to facilitate transfer.

## Appendix A

### Email invitation

Subject of e-mail: Invitation to participate in a *Qualitative Study on Inter-Institutional Student Experience* conducted by Seneca College and York University

Dear Seneca-York student,

As an experienced transfer student, it is our pleasure to invite you to participate in a study that aims to better understand the decision making process of students that have transferred from Seneca College to York University, and vice-versa, and to gauge their transfer experiences. We want to learn more about what motivates students to transfer, what were the positive and negative aspects of their experience and what could be improved in our institutions.

By answering a few questions that relate to your transfer experience, you will be able to help us (Seneca College and York University) identify where improvements should be made in our student services, policies and/or administrative processes surrounding student transfer. You would simply need to take part in a two-hour focus-group session. First, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form after which the focus-group facilitator will ask questions related to transfer student experience. The participants of the focus group will be able to answer these questions on a voluntary basis. Please note that the focus group session will be recorded however participants will remain anonymous throughout this study.

This focus-group session will take place on XXX from 1 to 3pm in room YY at the ZZ campus of Seneca College/York University. Participants will receive a 25\$ compensation to thank them for their participation in this study.

If you are interested and available to attend this focus-group session, please RSVP your participation by simply answering this e-mail.

We thank you for your time and consideration and wish you a wonderful day!

Sincerely,

Seneca College and York University

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Study Name:** Qualitative study on Inter-Institutional Student Experience

**Researchers:**

<b>Lead:</b> Henry Decock Academic Partnerships Institutional Research Seneca College A3554 Newnham Campus 1750 Finch Ave East Toronto, M2J 2X5 T: (416)491-5050 x 22594 henry.decock@senecacollege.ca	<b>Co-Leader:</b> Richard Smith Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis York University 1021 Kaneff Tower 74 York Blvd Toronto, M3J 1P3 T: (416)736-2100 x 70400 richard.smith@yorku.ca
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**Purpose of the Research:** Qualitative study to understand the rationale behind the decision making process of students that have transferred from Seneca to York, or vice-versa, and to gauge their transfer experiences.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Students will be invited to participate in 2-hour focus-group sessions where they will be invited to answer, on a voluntary basis, questions regarding their transfer experience. Those students who are willing to participate but cannot attend the focus-group sessions will be given the opportunity to participate in a phone interview or to answer questions by email, depending on what is convenient. They will be asked to answer, on a voluntary basis, questions regarding their transfer experience.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** Answers provided by students will help both institutions improve student services, policies and administrative processes surrounding student transfer.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University or with Seneca College either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the promised compensation for agreeing to take part in this study. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University or Seneca College. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** This study will not require that students provide personal information. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Answers provided during the phone interview will be transcribed in writing and only research staff will have access to this information. Answers provided by email will only be looked at by research staff. Written data from interviews and email responses will be scanned and stored on Seneca College's Institutional Server. Paper version will be immediately destroyed following the scanning of the documents. Data collected and analyzed will be securely stored for a period of 3 yrs on Seneca College's Institutional Server which is password secured environment and is only accessible to staff of the Institutional Research Office of Seneca College. Data will be destroyed after this period. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Henry Decock by e-mail ([henry.decock@senecacollege.ca](mailto:henry.decock@senecacollege.ca)). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board as well as Seneca College's Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a

participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics at York University (e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)) or the Research Ethics Board at Seneca ([REB.Chair@senecacollege.ca](mailto:REB.Chair@senecacollege.ca) ).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the Qualitative study on Inter-Institutional Student Experience conducted by Seneca College and York University. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Questions

	Seneca students now at York	York students now at Seneca
Student completed program and transferred <u>within</u> an agreed agreement	Focus Group A	Focus Group D
Student completed program and transferred <u>without</u> an agreed agreement	Focus Group B	Focus Group E
Student transferred before completing program	Focus Group C	Focus Group F

#### Questions for all groups:

##### Motivation/Transfer Planning

1. Why did you begin your studies at Seneca rather than at York or at York rather than at Seneca?
2. At what point did you decide to transfer?
3. What did you hope to achieve by transferring?
4. What helped you in this decision-making process?

##### Student Transfer Experience

5. Thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you find helpful in the process? Why?
6. Again thinking back to your transfer experience, what did you struggle with or find less helpful in the process? Why?
7. Was there specific assistance provided by your sending institution that helped?
8. Was there specific assistance provided by your receiving institution that helped?

##### Process Issues

9. What could this institution change to make it easier for students who have transferred?
10. Would you transfer again? What would you do the same? What would you do differently?
11. What advice might you give another student interested in transferring?

##### Questions specifically for Groups C and F:

12. Why did you choose to transfer before having completed your initial program?

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