
Council of Ontario Universities 287th Council Meeting

Held on Thursday April 2 and Friday April 3, 2009 at York University

ACADEMIC COLLEAGUE'S REPORT TO SENATE

As usual the overall meeting involved an Executive Heads' Round Table, two Academic Colleagues' Meetings, and the Council Meeting itself. The main topics that were discussed at these meetings were:

- 1. University Operating Funding:** This issue continues to be the number one priority for universities. During the late fall, financial market turmoil decreased the value of pension plans and endowments and in so doing, severely compounded the existing pressure on operating budgets. The 2009 Ontario Budget provided some much needed operating relief - \$150 million for the Post Secondary Education (PSE) sector, although the government allocated 55% of this to universities and 45% to colleges, even though the typical split in the past has been 2/3 to 1/3. The COU has registered its concern with government about this distribution. Senior government officials have indicated that the 2010 Budget will be the time when a new Reaching Higher-type plan will be delivered. COU in collaboration with the government will set up a series of meetings through the Working Group on University Capacity to deliberate on all the components of an operating framework including operating grants and tuition.
- 2. Capital Funding:** The Ontario government committed \$60 billion to a ten-year infrastructure plan. MTCU, with support from the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, is developing a long-term capital planning process to meet the province's infrastructure needs, including those in the postsecondary sector. The Courtyard Group, a third party expert, is guiding/facilitating the exercise. The federal government recently announced infrastructure funding of \$2 billion across Canada, and the province has committed to matching the funding provided to universities and colleges provided that the projects submitted are aligned with provincial priorities. Universities have made their submissions to the federal government and to the province.
- 3. Applications for 2009-10:** The Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) released preliminary data on applications for 2009-10 on March 5, 2009. As at March 5, there were 85,081 applications received from secondary school students, an increase of 1.1% from 2008. The number of applications received from non-secondary school students increased to 35,118, a 1.8% increase over the same time last year. In April, it is anticipated that the total number of non-secondary school applicants will exceed last year's record of 44,165.
- 4. Student Mobility and Pathways:** The provincial government would like student mobility and pathways enhanced at the postsecondary level in Ontario. COU is continuing its consultations with MTCU and Colleges Ontario on ways to facilitate student mobility and pathways across the province. The Ministry established a Steering Committee with representatives from COU, Colleges Ontario(CO), CUCC and student associations to develop options for a credit transfer system for Ontario. COU representatives are Alastair Summerlee, Guelph, Patrick Deane, Queen's, Dan Lang, Toronto, and Paul Genest, COU. The first meeting was held on March 24. At this meeting the committee agreed to set up a working group to support their work. Representatives will be appointed from the same four groups noted above, i.e., COU, CO, CUCC and student associations. In addition, COU established a resource group, which includes senior registrars and academic leaders to also support the work of the Steering Committee. At the council meeting a Colleagues' Working Paper on this topic was also accepted (see attached).

- 5. Quality Assurance:** Significant changes are under development for quality assurance processes at the graduate and undergraduate levels in Ontario. Oversight of graduate quality assurance is transitioning to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) from the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS). OCAV already oversees the undergraduate component. By September 2010: i) All existing graduate and undergraduate programs will be reviewed following a model similar to the one now used by UPRAC – the Undergraduate Program Review and Audit Committee; and ii) All new graduate and undergraduate programs will be appraised following a model similar to the one now used by OCGS. The Quality Assurance Transition/Implementation Task Force has been meeting on a regular basis since May 2008 to develop guidelines for the new graduate and undergraduate quality assurance processes. Members are in the process of finalizing draft guidelines which will soon be reviewed by the OCAV Executive, followed by the full OCAV membership and OCGS. It is anticipated draft documents will be sent to the university community in early June for feedback, with a deadline of September 2009 for this feedback. There was quite a lot of discussion of this item at the meetings, concern being expressed particularly about how a ‘new’ program will be defined.
- 6. Financial Health of Universities:** The CSAO (Council of Senior Administrative Officers) is assisting COU to undertake a review of the financial health of universities including the impact of the worldwide crisis in the financial markets on university assets such as endowments and pensions. CSAO conducted a financial deficit survey for the sector in December 2008 and the information was forwarded to MTCU and MOF in January 2009.
- 7. Cost Impact on Ontario Universities of GST/PST Harmonization:** At the February 12th Executive Heads meeting CSAO was asked to review the impact of sales tax harmonization on Ontario universities which are currently exempt from paying PST on a range of goods and services. CSAO discussed the issue at its winter 2009 meeting and concluded that they had no issues with sales tax harmonization providing it is cost-neutral to universities. The Government of Ontario announced in the 2009 Budget it will be proceeding with the harmonization of the PST and GST and indicated it would be indeed be cost neutral to universities. COU will continue to work with CSAO/COFO (Council of Finance Officers) to complete the cost assessment of sales tax harmonization and report to the Executive Heads.

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Principal’s Academic Colleague on COU

April, 2009.

Council of Ontario Universities

Academic Colleagues' Working Paper Series

The Ontario Transfer Credit System

A Situation Report

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April 3, 2009

THE ONTARIO TRANSFER CREDIT SYSTEM

A Situation Report

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The vast majority of students who complete university degrees are still students who enrol immediately after graduating from high school and complete their programmes of study at the university they are admitted to in the first place. However, every year in ever increasing numbers, there are university applicants who can claim to have some kind of prior learning at a university level and are looking to have this prior learning recognized and count towards their chosen programme of study¹. Most of them are students who, for whatever reason, have interrupted their university studies and are undertaking to complete them at another university, often in another programme of study. But there are also those who have studied at community colleges and have completed, or nearly completed, a programme of study at that level; they have thereafter entered the work market and gained various work experience and feel that they can now undertake university studies leading to a degree². And there are also those, in ever increasing numbers in Canada, with foreign credentials, including university level learning, who are seeking to obtain Canadian certification of their qualifications, which includes, in many cases, a university degree. This is especially true of workers in the health sector, where Canada has been registering a shortage of workers in the last several years, and has made an effort to recruit such workers abroad. Finally, there are those who have taken professional development courses related to their work, that have had university level learning and may seek to have these courses assessed and recognized for credits to be counted towards the programme of study to which they have been admitted. These are mostly adults with a technical qualification seeking to upgrade their education by completing a university degree³.

¹ This observation comes from my own involvement with admissions at my institution (RMC) between 2000 and 2007. During this period, the increase in the number of our students requesting Transfer Credits was quite notable.

² There are no available statistics that will conclusively confirm all the assertions in this paragraph; however, statistics compiled by OUAC (Ontario University Applications Centre) since 2000 indirectly provide strong support for them. The number of applications by students not in high school for a first choice of a full time programme of study at an Ontario university rose from 161,349 in 2000 to 251,378 in 2008, for an increase of 55%. Total confirmations for this category of students for the same period increased by 70.9% (from 42,194 in 2000 to 72,137 in 2008). For the purpose of comparison, the number of applications for a 1st choice of programme of study by students coming directly from high school increased by 42.5% during this period (from 473,058 in 2000 to 674,391 in 2008). Total confirmations of admission for this category of applicants rose by 45% during this period. Thus, the proportion of non-traditional students studying full time at the undergraduate level in Ontario can be estimated to have increased from 19.3% in 2000 to 21.9% in 2008. Also, tables compiled by Statistics Canada for the period between 1999 and 2006 show a stagnation in the number of students enrolled in part time studies at the undergraduate level, compared to an increase of 30.9% in full time students across Canada. At the graduate level, the increase in part time students was less than half the increase of full time students (17.5% vs. 38.7%) during the same period. This table can be viewed at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080207/t080207a-eng.htm>

³ Canadian Statistics on student mobility aren't available, and the numbers from the United States that are available are staggering at 35%, but antiquated, since they date back to the early 1990's. Interprovincial mobility of adults aged between 20 and 54 has been holding steady since the early 1990's at a national average of around 1% per annum. See André Bernard, Ross Finnie and Benoît St-Jean, "Interprovincial Mobility and Earnings", *Perspectives* (October 2008), Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008, p. 15-25.

The universities' response to these unorthodox educational paths has come traditionally under two headings: Transfer Credits (TC) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), although, conceptually, it could be argued that both should come under a single heading, since in both cases we are dealing with prior learning assessment and recognition.

The following Working Paper offers a situation report on the Transfer Credit System in Canada in general and in Ontario in particular. More specifically, it will address the situation with regard to Transfer Credits (TC) between universities, universities and colleges, and to assessment and recognition (PLAR) of professional development courses, but will not address the situation with regard to international postsecondary credentials for university credit, leaving this for another paper to focus on. When addressing the issue of Transfer Credits in Ontario, it will do so in general terms only, by providing some historical background to explain why the situation in Ontario is somewhat different from the situation in other Canadian jurisdictions. Finally, it will offer some perspective as to how the situation in Ontario could evolve in the coming years.

1. Brief historical overview

In the 1960's, with the coming of age of the post-war "baby-boomers" and the ensuing spike in the demand for postsecondary education, the pressure was such that all 10 provinces, with Federal support through the Federal Transfer Payments, invested massively in postsecondary education to rapidly increase the number of universities and colleges and to support the expansion of already existing ones. Also, at least since then, the provincial governments have been providing most of the funding for postsecondary education directly or indirectly to the institutions. Although they share with the universities and colleges an obvious interest in maintaining a postsecondary system of the highest affordable quality, the provincial governments also have an interest in keeping the cost of their respective education systems as low as possible. One way among many of maintaining education costs low consists in taking every necessary step to avoid duplication and redundancy in all postsecondary learning paths. Colleges and universities, however, do not have an evident interest in avoiding duplication and redundancy, except incidentally, when it comes to keeping the students who complete their programmes of study convinced that they have received an all round excellent education. Sparing them from taking courses that duplicate what they have already learned elsewhere might well be an ingredient in this regard, but quite a marginal one for most universities, since the demand for postsecondary education still exceeds capacity, at least in many universities in Ontario. And there are also costs involved in avoiding duplication and redundancy in university studies. The exception to this general tendency would be institutions that have made it their hallmark to facilitate the admission of students who have prior university level learning and that have found ways to compensate for the costs involved in assessing and recognizing prior learning at a university level.

That said, universities, all of which are intent on maintaining their reputation for providing postsecondary education of the highest standard, can hardly be faulted to err on the side of caution when assessing credentials from other universities within the same jurisdiction, or issued by universities from other jurisdictions, from foreign universities, especially those using a foreign language. Understandably, the reflex to err on the side of caution will be even more pronounced when universities assess prior

learning that took place at a community college or vocational institute, following a request by a college student to have such prior learning recognized for university credit, since the credibility of the institution's programmes of study is then on the line.

2. Issues with Transfer Credits from other universities and from community colleges.

Universities across Canada belong, without exception, to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Like membership in the UN, membership in the AUCC implies mutual recognition. Generally speaking, this mutual recognition does also carry over to the recognition of member institutions' degrees, and especially, as in Ontario, where there is a form of peer-review of degree programmes. However, when individual courses are looked at following a request for Transfer Credit, it is not uncommon to encounter some restrictions or hedging, if one will, and this in spite of the existence of a Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits signed by the ministers of Education in February 1995⁴. This protocol called on all Canadian universities to accept the full transferability of credits for first- and second-year university courses, whether taken at another Canadian university or at community colleges and university colleges in British Columbia and Alberta, or by CEGEPs in the Province of Québec. The Protocol is silent about courses offered by community colleges in Ontario that might be of university level. That being said, there are also the following provisions that limit its application:

1. the protocol in no way infringes on the academic autonomy of the university;
2. the protocol applies to transfer students who are deemed admissible by a university. It does not reflect on the policies and practices used by the universities in deciding upon the admissibility of students who apply for admission with advanced standing; and
3. the protocol is consistent with the integrity of university programs and the right of universities to determine program design and delivery, to determine academic prerequisites, and to establish admission criteria and certification requirements of academic achievement.

Although the effort to comply with this protocol has been noted in universities across the country, led, as one would imagine, by B.C. and Alberta, to where many students move, the response has been singularly mixed in Ontario, with a significant variance between older, well established universities intent on preserving their autonomy and reputation for academic excellence, and the more recently founded universities that have as part of their mission statement to be responsive to their immediate community and its needs for a well educated labour force. Thus, many Ontario universities still set a minimal grade for granting a transfer credit from another university that is higher than the passing grade, and will also often refuse to consider individual course credits from community colleges. Instead, they will grant advanced standing – usually the first year – to those students who have a diploma from a CEGEP or a community college in B.C., Alberta, and other parts of the country, including Ontario, in many cases. Furthermore, many universities, i.e. faculties and departments that control their own regulations for admission, impose a limit on the number of transfer credits they are willing to accept by invoking a Residency Requirement. Such a requirement typically specifies the minimal number of courses that ought to be taken at the host university to complete a given programme of study, in order to ensure the integrity of the programme and the quality of the education provided by the host university. Usually, for undergraduate programmes, the requirement ranges from 50 to 75% of courses to be taken at the host university. For some programmes, however, the requirement may be lowered, and in some rare cases, it may be waived altogether.

⁴ At : <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/transferabilit.en.stm>

It should be noted that, while university courses are fairly standardized across the country, making them relatively easy to assess with regard to level and depth across the disciplines, the same cannot be said about community college courses. These will vary greatly from one province to the next, and often from one community college to the next, as each college attempts to respond to the educational needs of its students within a given community, instead of responding to a more abstract disciplinary norm. Thus the assessment of individual community college courses is often a difficult, labour intensive and costly undertaking. For instance, in a great number of cases, individual college courses will not yield a university credit, but in combination with others, they might be deemed equivalent to a partial or even a full university credit⁵. In view of this fact, it is easier to understand why, in Ontario, there is a marked preference for programme assessment over course assessment, when, in other jurisdictions, such as in B.C. and Alberta, a course by course assessment has been systematically conducted, as part of a project that was fully funded by the provincial government, and captured in a database that is used by all the universities within those jurisdictions resulting in an automatic granting of transfer credits. The reason for this is that B. C. and Alberta, like Québec, practically built their postsecondary educational system in the 1960's, and both governments saw very early to ensuring that there would be clearly established pathways between community colleges and universities in both provinces, while virtually eliminating duplication and redundancy within these systems. In Québec, the CEGEPs are fully funded by the provincial government and answer directly to a ministry. There, the whole postsecondary system has been designed to preclude redundancy altogether.

In Ontario, the reasons for the peculiarities of the province's postsecondary system are likewise historical. Above all, the Conservative government of the day, under Premier Bill Davis, deliberately took a non-statist approach to the establishment of the many colleges that sprang up in those years, and to postsecondary education in general. And since then, the MTCU has been content with giving its approval to any new programme of study proposed by the colleges, provided certain conditions are met. In the approval process for proposed community college programmes, outcomes are mainly considered; in all other respects, the ministry trusts the institutions that deliver these programmes to do so efficiently, with all institutions conducting periodic reviews of its programmes and services. By all accounts, the approval process is not long and arduous in Ontario as it can be in other jurisdictions, including Alberta, where the bureaucratic controls are many and strict. There is thus certainly greater flexibility in college programme offerings in Ontario, but also greater variance throughout the province in the level of instruction for a large number of courses covering similar subject matters within the various programmes that are offered. More importantly, however, a number of community colleges were free to offer within their programmes courses that are at a university level, which is an important characteristic of the postsecondary system in Ontario when compared to other jurisdictions such as Québec.

Over the years, community colleges in Ontario have been concluding transfer or also so-called "laddering" agreements with universities, in most cases at the initiative of the colleges. There are now over 300 of them and they can all be perused in a database that is supported by the College University Consortium Council, which is itself sponsored by COU, the Council of Presidents (Colleges Ontario) and

⁵ By *university credit*, we are meaning here the equivalent of a standard one-term course with between 30 and 45 contact hours. Many universities would count this as a 3-credit course, while others would give it a half credit.

the MTCU⁶. While there are a number of these agreements in Arts and Business Administration, most, as one would expect, relate to professional college diplomas that can be laddered into professional undergraduate degrees, e.g. in Nursing or Criminology. Typically, a college concludes such agreements with a university located in the same region and with a mission to serve students within the same community. It is safe to say that such partnerships are viewed positively by the target audience and the public at large, and figure prominently in the outreach material issued by the college. The partnering university will accept to bear the up front costs of prior assessment of the college diploma programme and of negotiating the agreement if it can expect that the number of students the programme will draw in the future will bring in enough revenues to offset the start-up costs. There is also, for the university, the added bonus of free and highly positive publicity with the local and regional community as target audience. And surely, the college would not have sought such a partnership and chosen to bear the negotiation and implementation costs for the transfer agreement if it did not believe that it would not be recovering all of its costs through the offer of such a diploma programme that ladders into an undergraduate degree programme.

In summary, one might say that the Ontario Transfer Credit system can be characterized as resulting from a kind of *entrepreneurial* response to the phenomenon of student mobility, when compared to the B.C. and Alberta Transfer Credit system which is, since its inception, driven by state planning: there community college programmes are *designed* to ladder into university programmes, and individual courses have a predefined credit value within the university programmes. In Ontario, this kind of design has so far only been incidental.

Apart from these two systems, there is a third, which one might call *student-driven*, that is offered by universities that have made their hallmark with part-time and distance studies. These universities, and there are of course a few of them in Ontario, offer assessment services for individual courses, whether taken at a university or at a community college. In some cases, the prior learning portfolio of a mature student will also include professional development courses that may have been given at a university level, but without being tied to a university credit. There is a fee for all such assessments, either a flat fee for the whole portfolio, or a fee based on the number or the kind of courses to be assessed for university credit. These assessments will result in the denial or granting of credits, whether as equivalent to mandatory or optional courses in a given programme, or as unallocated arts or science credits, as many undergraduate programmes require arts and/or science electives.

3. Assessment and recognition of professional development courses (PLAR).

Although PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) is most often associated with experiential learning one acquires in the workplace and yields very little in terms of university credits when one submits to it, there are students, often coming from the military or from large corporations that provide high level professional development courses to their employees, particularly in the banking and technology sectors, for whom PLAR can make quite a difference. These larger organizations often make it compulsory for their members to take these courses for career advancement. These courses vary tremendously in duration, intensity and level, with a clear majority not being of university level. That said, there are some, and they are not so infrequent, which are of university level and could easily be

⁶ At : <http://www.cucc-ontario.ca>. The Ontario College University Transfer Guide (ocutg) is sponsored by the Government of Ontario.

offered within undergraduate certificate programmes. These courses are delivered by qualified and experienced personnel with university degrees, most often graduate degrees, over a sufficient length of time to be comparable to university courses, i.e. with sufficient contact hours; they require study, course work, tests and an exam. In many cases, instead of a pass-fail notation, numerical grades are awarded. In some cases, universities have been called upon to design and deliver these courses, though they would not appear among courses listed in their Calendar and hence not be granted any university credit by the delivering institution, unless a special provision would allow it.

Professional courses are even more difficult to assess for university credit than community college courses, because they have been designed to respond to a professional requirement rather than to an academic standard. The contact and study hours vary greatly from course to course, and it is not easy to distinguish between what time in class is allotted to theory and what time is allotted to practical exercises. The level of learning, in particular, is difficult to assess. It is essential, in such cases, to analyze the course outline, often infinitely more detailed than that of a university course, and become familiar with the instruction material in order to assess the level of a course.

The assessment of professional courses is, much more so than the assessment of community college courses, labour intensive and costly, and will result, in a majority of cases, in the denial of a university credit. A further concern about these assessments is that they can vary significantly from one university to the other, depending on who is called upon to conduct the assessments, and what the process is for their approval. Strict adherence to a protocol that would be signed by the Academic Vice-Presidents or the Registrars of a number of universities would be helpful for the further recognition of such credits beyond the institution that would grant them in the first instance.

4. Challenges particular to the Ontario Transfer Credit System and how they might be met.

The most obvious barriers to course credit recognition between universities across Canada, and even within Ontario, have been identified earlier, along with the legitimate reasons for these barriers, often embedded in the Academic Regulations under the headings of Residency Requirement and of Minimal Grade for Transfer Credit. If one accepts the principle of student mobility within Canada, where, despite provincial jurisdiction over postsecondary education, there is an umbrella association of Canadian universities (AUCC), it would seem logical to expect that barriers such as the Minimal Grade for Transfer Credit are to be dispensed with, while the Residency Requirement, for which there is certainly a strong justification to be maintained in one form or another, should be reduced. To this end, a protocol might be drafted to promote the acceptance of the principle of student mobility in Canada that would be based on reciprocity. The ratification of such a protocol that might be spearheaded by the AUCC would be voluntary, which would preserve the autonomy of each university. But this could start in Ontario, which has the greatest university population of all of Canada, and could be spearheaded by the COU through OCAV.

Although more types of inter-institutional cooperation could be identified⁷, three distinct approaches to the administration of transfer credits between community colleges and universities have been noted

⁷ See Daniel W. Lang, "A Lexicon of Inter-Institutional Cooperation", *Higher Education*, 44 (2002): 153-183.

above. These are: 1) *state-driven*, where the Provincial Government sees to the college-university articulation in the design of the provincial postsecondary education system; 2) *entrepreneurial*, where in most cases community colleges take the initiative of approaching a university administration, most often serving the same local community, with a view to establishing a degree-articulation agreement; and 3) *student-driven*, where universities respond to the particular requests of generally more mature students with a more varied learning path than the “normal” students who enter university after finishing high school and usually complete a programme of study at that same university.

In the wake of the Rae Report, the MTCU has pressed the postsecondary institutions of Ontario to establish an integrated postsecondary education system not unlike the one found in B.C. and Alberta. To this end, a joint Colleges Ontario (CO) and Council of Ontario Universities (COU) task force has been put together “to develop shared principles, goals and approaches that would help students make informed decisions on their postsecondary options⁸”. This CO-COU task force was established in January 2008. So far, it has found it hard to come up with a formula, beyond the *status quo*, all the stakeholders could live with.

Essentially, the way ahead for Ontario’s postsecondary institutions consists in adopting one of the three approaches indicated above, which are not all mutually exclusive. That being said, the *student-driven approach*, rather than the *state-driven* or even the *entrepreneurial*, would be best suited to the Ontario Transfer Credit system insofar as it avoids the high costs of a multiyear project for a systematic assessment of all community college courses for university credit, which would be required by a state-ordained fully integrated system. It would seem indeed to be a formidable undertaking to duplicate the kind of system B.C. and Alberta have established, and have all the available college courses systematically assessed for university credit. Instead, if one were to seek to achieve similar results, in an environment that is different because of its history, it would appear to be wiser, and also more economical, to support the best practices of the universities that have been responding to student requests for prior learning assessment and recognition, to consign all the results of the assessments – including the rejections, which will account for the majority – conducted by these universities in an accessible database, and hope that it will be used more widely as time goes by and that most, if not all, universities in Ontario will eventually contribute to it. A quick perusal of the over 850 online community college courses offered through OntarioLearn.com, the consortium of 22 community colleges of Ontario that offer complete diploma programmes online, representing a mere fraction of the programmes and courses these colleges offer on campus, will convey a sense of the magnitude of the task of assessing systematically each and every course offered by the community colleges of Ontario. Instead, the incremental addition of assessments requested by students, as they are filed within the participating institutions, to a provincially funded database would be more in tune with the Ontario postsecondary system and its particular situation, given its history and the wide variety of institutional cultures it displays today.

If a protocol for the assessment of community college and professional development courses were to be agreed upon and if, for instance, assessments were to be conducted by faculty members from more than one university, e.g. from three different universities, this would surely enhance the credibility of the assessments of individual courses to be consigned in the provincial database. A logical starting point would be to expand the existing Ontario College University Transfer Guide to include individual and block college course assessments, and eventually assessments of other types of courses, such as professional development courses and foreign credentials. Currently, the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions & Transfer, with strong representation from all parts of Canada, except Québec – presumably because of the language barrier – is working to find ways to facilitate the implementation of policies and

⁸ “System Redesign to Facilitate Student Mobility and Pathways” - A discussion paper prepared by the Council of Ontario Universities, October 17, 2008, p.1.

practices that support student mobility across Canada⁹. Among the objectives the consortium is pursuing is the creation of a single accessible pan-Canadian database that would capture all information about Transfer Credits designed for institutions and students alike, very much following the same model as the Scholar's Portal sponsored by OCUL. Obviously, the funding for such a portal is an issue. It is also obvious that the Federal Government, in particular HRDC, would have a strong interest in the creation of such a database.

The creation of an Ontario protocol for the assessment of individual college courses for university credit would, however, create a problem of its own by potentially discarding the assessments of individual courses that have already been conducted by a number of institutions. That is one issue for those who would consider developing a protocol, but there are others. For instance, are the assessments to be conducted by the faculties/departments that are directly concerned or rather by a handful of specially trained assessors within each institution, often coming from the Faculty of Education, to determine the level, depth, work load etc. of college courses, regardless of the subject-matter of the course? – It would be sensible to assess individual college courses for their equivalence with existing university courses, such as an introductory course to Psychology. It would equally make much sense to invite assessors to consider if the courses can be deemed equivalent to mandatory or optional courses within a programme of study, or as arts or science electives. This option would imply, however, involving the concerned faculties/departments in the assessment process, and precluding putting the assessments through a small cadre of specialized assessors. On the other hand, the assessment of foreign credentials for which recognition is being sought is probably one that would be best performed by faculty with first-hand knowledge of the kind of prior learning that took place abroad, and this would imply agreeing to the centralization of at least this specific type of assessment, while possibly leaving the other kinds of assessment decentralized and performed by the relevant departments. And if we are to insist on having the assessment of a community college course conducted by faculty members from three universities, in order to enhance the credibility of the assessment, will each signatory to the protocol then be committed to accept the verdict? Finally, there is the issue of stale-dating which is particularly a concern for some disciplines such as computer science and business administration. There are, of course, ways in which one could resolve these issues, but surely a minimum standard most, if not all, institutions can agree on should be identified before proceeding with any kind of official and widely accessible compilation of assessments.

The toughest choice facing Ontario universities appears to be making the leap from bloc transfer credits for the completion of a community college programme of study to the assessment of individual courses that have been successfully completed. These two approaches to the assessment of community college learning for university credit are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they are bound to lead to diverging results, with the latter approach favouring some cases, and the former approach favouring the others. This problem can be resolved by the application of the principle that, when there is divergence in the results obtained from the employment of both approaches to prior learning assessments, the one most favourable to the student, i.e. the one giving the student the most advanced standing, should be retained.

To ensure the greatest transparency, the student's transcript should reflect the source of every credit awarded within a programme of study. If university credits are awarded on the basis of prior learning, whether it was achieved at another university or at some other postsecondary institution or as a result of a professional course, then each instance should be adequately reflected on the transcript. Everyone who has a direct stake in postsecondary education, the students, the institutions themselves, their faculty and

⁹ Go to : <http://www.pccat.ca/index1.cfm>

staff, and the governments that fund the system to a high degree, has an interest in facilitating student mobility by making transparent the value of the courses students have already taken successfully or might consider taking, whether they be at the university, in a community college, or in the form of professional development courses or programmes and/or courses taken abroad that would be of university level.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Ms. Cally Warwick, manager of Assessment Services at RMC, for her help in the preparation of this paper, and Ms. Jane Marynissen for much appreciated final copy editing. I would also like to thank all my Academic Colleagues who have made many constructive suggestions to ameliorate this Working Paper, most of which I have taken into account. That being said, all the opinions expressed in this paper remain mine alone.