Introduction and Background

In June 2008 the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) approved a new policy to publish in the BC Transfer Guide block transfer agreements (BTAs) between BC Transfer System member institutions and private post-secondary institutions accredited by the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA). This new policy was directed at facilitating cooperation between the public and private sectors and at improving transfer opportunities for private college students. It also provided an informal way of measuring the volume of private to public student mobility and to see if what we suspected was true: that some private/public block transfer or informal transfer agreements were already in place but just not widely known. In passing this new policy, the Council’s intent was not to force institutions into agreements but rather to record agreements already in place and to encourage cooperation in forging new ones. The full text of the policy can be found at bccat.ca/pubs/PCTIAblock.pdf and is titled Recording Block Transfer Agreements with PCTIA-accredited Institutions: Policy and Process.

More than a year later, few private/public block transfer agreements have been submitted for publication in the BC Transfer Guide, leaving us to wonder why that is. Is the volume of student transfer lower than we thought? Are there fewer agreements in place than we suspected? Are BTAs not the useful tools that we think they are? It may be that there is not a sufficiently large volume of private college students wanting to transfer to public institutions to warrant a multitude of formal block transfer agreements. A brief and informal survey of public institutions suggests that transfer students from private career colleges represent a sufficiently small group that they are easily assessed on a case-by-case basis and administrators apply whichever credit transfer tools are practical in their particular business environments. Block transfer agreements are certainly one of those tools but, perhaps, they are simply one option among others. The extent to which BTAs are used to facilitate the admission of private career college students to public institutions is unclear right now but current BCCAT research may offer some insight in the near future. A project is currently underway to evaluate the degree to which BTAs published in BCCAT’s Block Transfer Guide are effective and efficient; findings may be available by this Spring.

Meanwhile, BCCAT remains committed to its obligation to facilitate private/public cooperation by providing the BTA policy and process framework and encouraging institutions to use it. One of the core values of the BC Transfer System, and the primary function of the BC Transfer Guide, is to equip students with reliable knowledge of how and to where their course work will transfer between BC institutions. Believing that students empowered with reliable knowledge have, and make, the best choices possible for credential completion, the Council intends the private/public BTA policy to promote this core value and function. To that end, this paper explains BTAs and explores the benefits of using them to highlight their potential as versatile and efficient articulation tools. It also briefly examines the current evidence for student mobility from accredited private career training colleges to public institutions.

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Block Transfer Agreements Explained

Block transfer agreements are an efficient vehicle for credit transfer where course content is sufficiently different that course-to-course equivalencies cannot be established.

These agreements are typically used when students choose private education for training and employment purposes and are satisfied with their education and they have high post-graduation job market mobility numbers to rely upon. For example, Thompson Rivers University monitors grades, writing skills and class participation carefully and reports similar performance from their private college transfer students as from other types of students; they have similar rates of success in academics as well as in the post-graduation job market (T. Wykes, personal communication, February, 2009).

Using the TRU and RRU agreements as examples, there is every reason to believe that cooperation between the public and private sectors benefits institutions as well as students. Transfer agreements can create a pool of prospective students for public institutions for admission to the second and third years of a program where attrition can be a challenge. They encourage the private college sector to adopt the norms and standards of the public system where it is appropriate and practical. Students may also pursue any further studies and of those, more than half (55%) chose a private career college again. If we can assume that private college graduates in BC are not significantly different than the survey population in general (i.e. all Canadian private college graduates) then we are talking about a pool of approximately 2043 potential transfer students that are interested in BC’s public universities and colleges. This suggests that the volume of private to public student transfer is relatively low because the appetite for it is relatively low. If this is true and if public institution administrators are finding practical ways to assess and award credit to those private career college students that do get them, then there is a problem here at all? It may be that the number of administrators perceiving that the problem is greater than it is because public institutions are dealing with private college transfer students on a case-by-case basis and not as much through negotiating formal articulation agreements with the private career institutions. Perhaps there is not a large-scale problem but rather an isolated one and an opportunity to identify best practice.

Compared to public college students, private career college students tend to be older (mean age of 29), predominantly females (72%) with dependent children and are less likely to have access to financial assistance from their own parents. Eighty percent of students surveyed indicated that private career college was their first choice. Twelve percent would have preferred a public college and eight percent would have preferred a public university. Second of graduates surveyed reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their private college experience and 79% of them were employed within nine months of graduation, predominantly (80%) in the fields of, or closely related to, their education.

This suggests that the majority of private career college students specifically choose private education for training and employment purposes and are satisfied with their choice. Even so, we also know that having credits transferable to the public system is very important to them. Eighty-seven percent of private career college students rated this as being important or very important in the PCTIA’s 2007 publication of survey results titled Private Career Training Quality Initiatives in British Columbia. From this, we know that they want to transfer but do they actually do so? It appears that they want to be assured of the option, and rightly so, but they may not actually exercise the option in large numbers as far as we can tell. There are no firm mobility numbers to rely upon because private college students cannot currently be tracked with PEn numbers as public institution students are.

Statistics from the PCTIA’s 2008-2009 Annual Report indicate that there were 41,257 graduates from their member colleges in 2008. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation’s Graduate Survey results indicate that only 8% of graduates surveyed pursued any further studies and of those, more than half (55%) chose a private career college again. If we can assume that private college graduates in BC are not significantly different than the survey population in general (i.e. all Canadian private college graduates) then we are talking about a pool of approximately 2043 potential transfer students that are interested in BC’s public universities and colleges. This suggests that the volume of private to public student transfer is relatively low because the appetite for it is relatively low. If this is true and if public institution administrators are finding practical ways to assess and award credit to those private career college students that do get them, then there is a problem here at all? It may be that the number of administrators perceiving that the problem is greater than it is because public institutions are dealing with private college transfer students on a case-by-case basis and not as much through negotiating formal articulation agreements with the private career institutions. Perhaps there is not a large-scale problem but rather an isolated one and an opportunity to identify best practice.

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How to Articulate:

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We encourage all public and private institutions that are currently considering an agreement to refer to BCCAT’s online resources and to contact us with questions or for guidance. Public institutions with block transfer agreements already in place with PCTIA-accredited private institutions are asked to forward them to BCCAT for publication using the form attached to our Recording Block Transfer Agreements with PCTIA-accredited Institutions policy which can be found at bccat.ca/pubs/PCTIAblock.pdf.
References


