

# Visiting Students

## A Survey of Institutional Policies and Practices in British Columbia Post-Secondary Education

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*Prepared for BCCAT by I. S. Education Consulting Inc.*

*March 2015*



Research by

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# Visiting Students

## *A Survey of Institutional Policies and Practices in British Columbia Post-Secondary Education*

### Executive Summary

A visiting student is a student who moves from their home institution where he or she is registered usually in a degree program, to take a specified number of courses or credits at another institution. Students may or may not hold a letter of permission. Most of these students later return to the home institution and request transfer credit for the courses taken elsewhere. The rationale for the study involves gaining an enhanced picture of student mobility and credit transfer.

Visiting students often fall into the same general category as those who are assessed in studies of student mobility or credit transfer; they are a smaller group, and less easily identifiable. Providing models for policy and/or practice can assist all institutions in identifying trends and efficiencies across the British Columbia (BC) post-secondary system, thus helping students as well as administrators and faculty.

An analysis of the online information from a sample of post-secondary institutions across Canada, BC institutional websites, and responses to a questionnaire sent to BC registrars allows us to draw a few conclusions. Relatively little has been known about the motivation of students who move from one institution to another for a few courses, and the impact of this movement on institutional practices. Anecdotally, there is a significant volume of visiting students and the practice is becoming more widespread. All BC institutions with competitive entry (research-intensive universities) have policies and practices for visiting students,



with two universities expanding their definitions of visitors to make them more inclusive. The approach of open access institutions (teaching-intensive universities, colleges and institutes) is less uniform: none of the BC public institutes treat visiting students as a separate applicant category; several colleges and universities do require Letters of Permission when sending their students as visiting, or when receiving visiting students. Larger private post-secondary institutions may have a policy, but private colleges do not have policies pertaining to visiting students.

Post-secondary institutions which are not already addressing visiting students as an admission category can benefit from defining this category of students at their institutions. Further quantitative research can be conducted measuring visiting student mobility. Other possible studies can focus on visiting students' motivations, perceptions and experiences.

# Introduction

BC's community college system was created in the 1960s and '70s; while SFU and BCIT were founded in 1965 (Dunae, 2003). Before the 1960s, UBC and Victoria College (later University of Victoria) were the sole choices for post-secondary education in British Columbia. The increased number of institutions and expanded student mobility brought institutional attention to the phenomena of visiting students. Many institutions from the 1980s on began developing language and policies addressing the complex practices surrounding visiting students.

The trend towards increasing student mobility demands attention from post-secondary policy makers and administrators, as mobility can have an impact on enrolment, program and course planning, and almost every registration-related factor of PSI operations. Quite often, the term “visiting student” is used to denote mobile students.

The complex dynamics of mobility are subject to many forces, one of which is the decision a student may make, for a variety of reasons, to start their studies at one institution with every intention of completing the program there, but to complete some credits at a second institution. The purpose of sending visiting students is, officially, providing students with “opportunities to enhance the breadth and depth of their studies” through visits to other institutions (Thomson Rivers University, N.d.). From a student's point of view, the reasons for mobility may be much more practical: lack of funds to continue at a PSI where accommodation is a cost, the possibility of part-time employment, living in a location away from the home institution, or the desire to experience a different collegiate environment, or other personal reasons (BCCAT, 2012).

The ambiguity of the term “visiting student” in Canada — does the term include exchange or international

The trend towards increasing student mobility demands attention from post-secondary policy makers and administrators, as mobility can have an impact on enrolment, program and course planning, and almost every registration-related factor of PSI operations. Quite often, the term “visiting student” is used to denote mobile students.

students, for instance? — is similar to the linguistic confusion that exists when any professional group captures a word or phrase for its own use when the vernacular may impute a different meaning. Professionals in admissions and registration offices understand that a visiting student is an admissions category in which a student from one PSI enrolls temporarily at a second institution with the intent of transferring credits back to the home institution. This understanding exists even though some institutions do not have that category in their own records/admission systems.

Visiting students can be viewed from the home institution side (i.e., sending visiting students), and from the host institution side (i.e., receiving visiting students). An institution that is both sending and receiving visiting students may approach these two sides differently, e.g., have a policy for receiving visiting students, but do not pay much attention to their own students taking courses as “visitors” elsewhere, or vice versa. The home institution often requires a compelling reason from the student why some credits in a credential they

will grant should be acquired somewhere else. A concern about the quality of the transferred courses enters the equation. As for the host institution, the concern is one of numbers: acceptance of visiting students can depend on course enrolments, or on previous GPA.

Given the current trend in increased student mobility and the ambiguities of the “visiting student” definition, this report attempts to review current policies and practices that pertain to visiting students, and to identify any issues that are linked to visiting students in BC post-secondary institutions.

## Purpose, Scope, Limits, and Objectives of the Study

This report describes various policies and practices related to visiting students at post-secondary institutions in BC and at key institutions across Canada. The report focuses on Canada and on BC in particular. The study analyzes policies and practices at different types of institutions: research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, institutes, and colleges. Both public and private BC institutions were included in the study.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- to assess current policies and practices pertaining to visiting students in institutions that are within the BC Transfer System;
- to report on the perceptions of post-secondary specialists on the issue of visiting students;
- to suggest areas for future research on visiting students, and for possible next steps in the project; and
- to develop suggestions for improving practices, if applicable.

## Methodology

The project methodology involved three parts:

- a literature review;
- a review of online policies governing visiting students available on institutional websites; and
- an analysis of institutional perspectives conducted through an electronic questionnaire of institutions’ professionals overseeing visiting students. These professionals include registrars, associate registrars, academic advising/counselors, and directors of admissions. This questionnaire study was limited to visiting students, as defined above, within BC post-secondary institutions. The analysis did not include transfer students who plan to switch institutions entirely, international or domestic exchange students, or international students in general.

The questionnaire was developed to

- assess whether policies on visiting students have undergone recent revisions and, where possible, identify officers and areas responsible for policy development and revision;
- assess the need for and effectiveness of Letters of Permission;
- assess the PSI’s perspectives on current issues, challenges, and benefits of visiting student policies, as well as overall knowledge of the volume of visiting student requests and successful applications;
- report on what admissions categories visiting students are placed in; and
- document suggestions from professionals on improving efficiency and effectiveness of institutional practices regarding visiting students.

The questionnaire's validity was pre-tested before the questionnaire was sent to seventeen BC PSI's in Spring 2014. Two reminders were sent at two later times to those that had not responded. By April 30, 2014, fourteen responses had been received from BC PSI's.

## A Lack of Research on Visiting Students

For British Columbian and Canadian universities and colleges, the USA, Australia, the UK, and Europe, little research has been published about policies regarding visiting students as defined above. Other than definitions and policies described in websites of institutions, the visiting student is a largely under-researched phenomenon in post-secondary education. While student mobility, credit transfer, student transitions, exchange students, study abroad, international and multinational education, and other categories that describe the movement of students from one institution to another, are plentiful, none of these precisely capture the definition of the domestic visiting student.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT, 2014) does not isolate visiting students as a category, and a search of their website for reports or briefs using "visiting student" as a search term yields zero results. The Colleges and Institutes Canada (former Association of Canadian Community Colleges, ACCC) appears not to have published reports or studies on visiting students. Also, despite the number of joint or twinned programs between BC colleges and institutions abroad (many of which involve mechanisms similar to those supporting visiting students), it was not until 2010 that ACCC issued *Internationalizing Canadian Colleges and Institutes: The First National Report on Student Mobility* (ACCC, 2010). A search

of the reports and studies published by the Canadian Bureau of International Education similarly yields little addressing visiting students.

Other searches for "visiting student" or "admissions categories" in numerous databases, including the Education Information Resources Centre (ERIC), EBSCO-Host, Sage Journals, UBC Library and SFU Library, Canadian Business and Current Affairs plus all Canadian education-related academic journals listed in the Canadian Association of Learned Journals yielded few results. Expanding the search to include related keywords (e.g., "transfer", "student mobility", "exchange students") brought results that do not directly regard visiting students as defined above.

The literature on student mobility, international education, globalization, and study abroad programs shows a range of educational settings and programs in which students may be defined as "visiting." This literature, however, does not specifically address institutional business practices regarding visiting students; instead it covers international education, globalization, study abroad, student exchanges, multicultural education, peace education, and international trade in educational services. In Australia and Europe, a well-developed

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research literature exists on cross-border education and student mobility (Weber, 2007). Numerous organizations, conventions, projects, and publications document concerted efforts on the part of European institutions to establish principles and policy for many aspects of tertiary education. Themes addressed include policy on issues such as quality assurance, credentialing, admissions, student life, and criteria for exchange or transfer of credits (Edelstein, 2014).

Some topics that might help universities seeking to refine their policies and practice were raised at a recent Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) seminar (deWit, 2011). While aimed at international student mobility, the suggestions also apply to research regarding visiting students: there is a need for clarity in defining admissions categories; for encouragement of research on enrolment and admissions; and for a better understanding of the dynamics of cross-institutional program planning, transfer credit outcomes, student tracking capacities, and the outcomes of visiting student experiences, both for institutions and for students. The identified lack of research literature pertaining to visiting students suggested more attention to the analysis of institutional online policies and other information on the topic, which will be covered in the following sections.

## Definitions and Categories of Visiting Students

In this report, we define a visiting student as one who, while registered in a program (usually degree or post-graduate) at the home institution, registers at a host institution in order to take courses for credit to be transferred back to the home institution. The term

“home” institution indicates the institution in which a student is registered for degree or diploma matriculation, and “host” institution indicates the school to which the student applies for temporary registration status. These arrangements may involve credit transfer. A well-developed BC Transfer System enables visiting students to achieve credit transfer when they choose courses wisely and understand thoroughly the requirements of the credential they seek at the home institution.

Often, such credit transfer must be pre-approved by the home institution through a Letter of Permission (LOP) if the credit is to be applied to program requirements at the home institution. A Letter of Permission from the home institution is usually accompanied by an official transcript and documentation describing the requested length of the visit to the host institution (normally one or two semesters at most), the courses in which the student wishes to register, and the courses the student will receive credit for at the home institution.

Admissions and registration professionals who are closely connected with the visiting student phenomenon have a deep understanding of this registration category. However, wider post-secondary audiences and the general public may have a lack of clarity regarding students visiting for a limited time with or without an LOP, exchange students, students gaining admission through a joint or twin project abroad, general international students, dual credit students, and students who for reasons of professional or personal interest want to attend classes but not earn a credential.

The difference is that a visiting student remains a candidate for graduation at the home institution with the intent of returning to that school, and often requests permission from the home institution as well as the host institution to attend courses and transfer a specified number of courses back to the home institution. This is the arrangement that often attends student exchanges, as well as some international joint or twinning programs (ACCC, 2010).

McMaster University's 2009 description, although it applies to graduate students only, is useful for the overall definition of visiting students, as it provides detail on program enrolment, the goal of visit, registration time limits, host departmental acceptance, and fee payment (McMaster University, 2014):

*“Visiting Students” are individuals who are currently registered in a graduate degree program in another university, and who have made arrangements through both their home university and a graduate program at McMaster to spend some time at McMaster as part of their degree program at the home university. They are not (and will not be) enrolled in a degree program at McMaster. They are not part of any official exchange agreement including Ontario Visiting Graduate Student (OVGS) arrangement, although there may be an agreement between the McMaster program and their home institution. They may be at McMaster to take particular courses, or they may be here to engage in research relevant for this degree under the supervision of a McMaster faculty member, but in any case will be registered as full-time students for a maximum of one year. Acceptance is on the recommendation of the department or program here. The student is expected to pay the relevant tuition (Canadian or visa, as the case may be) and appropriate student fees for the time that they are registered here. It may also be necessary for them to enrol in the UHIP program to ensure adequate health insurance coverage during their stay.”*

The usual maximum number of credits a visiting student may acquire at a host institution is equivalent to two semesters of full-time coursework (24 to 30 credits) although some institutions allow fewer. The residency requirements (the amount of time spent and

credits received at a home institution) vary among institutions and even programs within one institution.

In BC (consistent with Ontario results reported by Camman, Hamade & Zhou (2014)) the minimum residency requirements usually range from 25% to 50%, while some programs set higher minimums, and some institutions do not have residency minimums at all.

## **International and Exchange Students vs. Visiting Students**

For Canadian and BC institutions, international education can involve the broader definition of visiting students (beyond the scope of this study), mainly when a twinned or joint program between a Canadian and a foreign university sends a student from a university abroad. The student is registered at the Canadian institution to obtain a credential issued by either institution. However, joint international programs should not be considered as a part of visiting students as the student completes a specified number of credits in their home institution and then comes to British Columbia to complete the program.<sup>1</sup> International students are not included in this analysis, as they are part of an international cohort who do not fit the definition of visiting student. Rather, these students follow a set program path, typically 2+2 or 3+2, towards a degree awarded by one or both institutions, in Canada and in the foreign university.

Due to everyday usage of the term visiting student, there is sometimes cross-over in the language about policies and practices for visiting students and exchange students. This may be the result of individual departments at institutions creating their own terminology, as apart from the language of admissions and

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the International Business Administration Degree offered jointly through Capilano University and the North China Institute of Science and Technology (NCIST), 2000 to 2012. Personal communication with Weng Yifei and Botao Yan, NCIST, 2009-2012.

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registration. Exchange students, however, are typically admitted under formal exchange agreements, whereas visiting students can arrive from any “degree program at another recognized institution” (University of Calgary, 2014). Visiting students are usually responsible for paying tuition at the host institution, while exchange students often enjoy no additional tuition at the host institution as per the exchange agreement between their home and host partner institutions (Douglas College, 2014). Exchange students are beyond the scope of this study.

### ***Visiting Students as an Admissions Category***

Visiting students have become a subset of an emerging larger category of “other”, non-traditional students used at some institutions (e.g., York University, UBC, Emily Carr University of Art and Design) for providing greater access to post-secondary courses for seniors, professionals who wish to expand their knowledge base without earning a credential, and for those who, for matters of personal interest, wish to take courses but not earn credential.

A UBC admission category called “Non-degree Studies”, for example, includes Visiting, Unclassified (an applicant has completed an undergraduate degree), and Access Students (taking courses for general interest, not toward a UBC degree). The criteria for admission as a Visiting student are current registration in an undergraduate degree at another institution (a description completely consistent with visiting student as defined above, and as in most BC PSI’s), an LOP from their home institution, and meeting the registration requirements of specific UBC departments. SFU has the same criteria for application as a visiting student, and their visiting student applicant “will be evaluated as a University Transfer applicant”.<sup>2</sup>

Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECUAD) has a similar system, where visiting students are accepted under the “Unclassified” admission umbrella. Such students can register at ECUAD for one semester and must be enrolled at another accredited art school in an undergraduate program.

Laval University uses the term “visiting students” to denote exchange, and mostly international, students

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/students/admission-requirements/canadian-transfer/visiting-students.html>

<sup>3</sup> Medical students are not included in this study of visiting students. As a specialized cohort whose academic and residency requirements are jointly set by professional bodies and universities, they fall into a different category than regular visiting students.

(Laval University, 2014b). On the other hand, the arrangements for “Études libres” (Free Studies) resemble those for visiting students as per the definition in this analysis – those studying for a degree at a home institution and taking courses at Laval. “Études libres” are listed under Non-Degree Studies admissions category (Laval University, 2014a).

The University of Western Ontario admits visiting undergraduate students, and visiting undergraduate students with a “Research Only” option. The students visiting for research purposes follow similar admissions requirements as regular visiting students, but cannot take courses at the university (University of Western Ontario, 2014). Visiting student researchers (as a subcategory of Special Students) are also a newly-adopted admissions category at the University of Ottawa (University of Ottawa, N.d.). The “non-research” visiting student option is only used for medical students at the university (University of Ottawa, 2014).<sup>3</sup>

At Queen’s University, the term “visiting students” is restricted to those applying to Non-Degree Distance Studies who “wish to take online courses in the Faculty of Arts and Science on a Letter of Permission” (Queens’ University, 2014; p. 21), and to on-campus medical students.

## Visiting Graduate Students

For graduate students, the ability of different universities to offer a broader scope than can be found at a single institution is very appealing, especially in discipline areas where a particular faculty member is known for his or her work, or where a department has expertise in a specific research area. For graduate students, the visiting student category seems to embody the intended nature of a scholarly visit: to enhance and broaden the student’s experience, their exposure to a discipline, and research possibilities. Both in policy

and practice, the provisions for post-graduate study and/or research are distinct from arrangements for undergraduates.

In Western Canada, the Western Deans’ Agreement (WDA) an arrangement that allows considerable latitude in exchanges between students registered in Graduate Studies, provided the graduate student obtains an authorization form (similar to a Letter of Permission) from their home institution (Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies, 2014). The Western Deans’ Agreement was established in 1974 as

*“an expression of co-operation and mutual support among universities offering graduate programs in western Canada. Its primary purpose is the reciprocal enrichment of graduate programs throughout western Canada. Under the terms of this agreement, graduate students of the member institutions may take courses at another member institution without having to pay the host university’s tuition fees.”(University of British Columbia, 2014)*

Similar to the WDA, the Graduate Exchange Agreement between UBC, McGill University, the University of Toronto, and the University of Montreal, allows students to take courses at participating institutions without paying additional tuition fees.

The Province of Ontario has also streamlined the visiting student category for graduate students through the Ontario Visiting Graduate Student Agreement (OVGS) (University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies, 2014). Under this plan, the requirements at the University of Toronto, for example, are that the student

- is registered at a home institution in an accredited graduate program;
- has good academic standing;
- takes a limited number of program course credits not available at the home institution;

- pays tuition to the home institution;
- is classified as a non-degree student at the host institution;
- is responsible for arranging the transmission of all transcripts and credit transfer documents to the home institution; and
- achieves a grade of B- or better in order for transfer credit to be accepted at U of T (University of Toronto, 2014).

Some universities have special arrangements for visiting scholars at the graduate level. The University of Alberta offers a supervisory function to visiting researchers under the Western Deans Agreement (WDA) extending the offer of research assistance to visitors (University of Alberta, 2014). The University of Waterloo has created a Visiting Faculty or Research Scholars (Non-Credit) category for undergraduate, graduate, or postdoctoral students, or faculty, working in areas of mutual interest and approved on a case-by-case basis by individual departments or research centres (University of Waterloo, 2014).

A major distinction between visiting graduate students and undergraduates pertains to paying fees. Graduate students taking courses at host institutions, as well as those completing research, usually pay tuition to the home institution, while undergraduate visiting students usually pay tuition and all other regular fees to the temporary or host institution. In several cases, the fees payable by undergraduate visiting students equate to international student fees.

The common factors across most competitive entry (research-intensive) universities in Canada,<sup>4</sup> are that Visiting Student is one of several admissions categories, often requiring a Letter of Permission from the home institution. Other admissions requirements include appropriateness of desired courses to the home degree program, a limit of one year maximum visit, and a record of previous study, usually through a transcript from the home institution, to accompany the student's application for admission.

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<sup>4</sup> Such as Concordia University, Dalhousie University, Laval University, McGill University, Queen's University, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, University of Ottawa, University of Saskatchewan, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, University of Western Ontario, and York University.

## Summary

Overall, the analysis allows several assertions:

- post-secondary institutions create their own policy and practice for visiting students, and these become part of the culture of the individual institution;
- students at both the undergraduate level and the graduate level are interested in visiting schools other than their own home institution, in order to obtain transfer credits;
- the visiting student is subject to academic regulations, restrictions and limits decided upon by the home and host institutions;
- the visiting student will normally port credits back to a home PSI to complete a program of study;
- undergraduate fees are usually payable to the host institution; this differs at the graduate level.

## The BC Transfer System and Visiting Students Policies

The BC Transfer System organized through the British Columbia Council on Transfer and Admissions (BCCAT) is known to be robust. Gaber, Gordon and Jodoin (2011) comment on BC's transfer credit system, observing that mobile students (those who move from one PSI to another, in any direction) outnumber traditional college-to-university transfer students. In this mix there is an unknown number of visiting students.

### *Tracking Mobile Students in BC*

Tracking student mobility in BC is possible through the Personal Education Number (PEN) assigned to each student in public K-12 schools, independent schools, public post-secondary institutions and to students

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being home schooled (British Columbia Ministry of Education, N.d.). Ontario has a similar system, using the Ontario Education Number (OEN) (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2014). In BC, the efforts to track patterns of student mobility are also aided by statistics kept by the Central Data Warehouse, which reports twice a year on post-secondary student registration at 21 public institutions (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2014). The student pathways identified in the Student Transitions Project (STP) capture numbers of students moving between institutions and returning to a home institution, but do not necessarily identify visiting students because Visiting Student is not a category of registration in all BC PSI's (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012).

Although BCCAT has published a number of studies on student mobility, none of these studies directly address visiting students. A recent Survey of Movers (BCCAT, 2013) analyzed mobile students system-wide

and by sector, but it was impossible to identify visiting students among all movers. Moreover, as visiting students often move for one semester and then return to their home institutions for the next semester, they might have been excluded from the Survey of Movers altogether – the students who were registered at more than one institution during 2010/11 academic year were removed from the sample (BCCAT, 2013).

In 2002, almost half (47%) of 316 respondents who took online courses and transferred credits to their 4-year degree program at a home institution identified course availability as the reason for studying at a host institution, Open Learning Agency (Giguere, 2002, p. 19). The motivation for others included participation in a joint program, living distantly, working full-time, disliking instructor at the home institution, avoiding certain courses, perceiving correspondence courses as easier than at home institution, dislike of the home institution, being late for registration at the home institution, or other personal circumstances. Some of these mobil-

ity drivers, especially those related to the quality of courses at a host institution, prompt deeper investigation of the visiting student phenomenon.

## ***A Review of Online Institutional Policies Regarding Visiting Students in BC***

Letters of Permission (LOPs) can be viewed as a measure for institutions to track in-coming and out-going visiting student volume. Policies regarding LOPs are published in on-line calendars and admissions-related and, sometimes, graduation-related web-pages.

As institutional policies can require LOPs to track visiting students from both the home institution and host institution perspectives, this specification drove the analysis. Another important distinction was the type of institution: an open access institution may have more leeway (and/or fewer resources) in how they treat visiting students than a competitive entry university. Table 1 summarizes the information for BC public institutions.

**Table 1. Requirements of Letter of Permission for visiting students in online policies of BC public post-secondary institutions.**

	Competitive Entry (4 institutions)		Open Access (21 institutions)	
	Required	No Info	Required	No Info
<b>As Home Institution</b>	SFU UBC UNBC UVic		COTR LANG (Business Programs) NIC (to U of Manitoba) RRU (to VIU) TRU UFV (recommended) VIU	BCIT CAM CAPU CNC DOUG ECUAD JIBC NIC NLC NVIT NWCC OKAN SEL VCC
<b>As Host Institution</b>	UBC UVic	SFU UNBC	CAPU CAM COTR KPU (for international) OKAN TRU (recommended) UFV (recommended) VIU	BCIT CNC DOUG ECUAD JIBC LANG NIC NLC NVIT NWCC RRU SEL VCC

Note: Full institutional names are listed in Appendix B.

All competitive entry universities require LOPs for their students taking courses elsewhere as visiting students; however, no information on LOP requirements was found at SFU and UNBC web-sites for in-coming visiting students. Among open access institutions, three colleges (Camosun, College of the Rockies, and Okanagan) require LOPs from in-coming visiting students; and three colleges (College of the Rockies, North Island, and Langara) require LOPs from their students visiting other places. However, such policy at Langara applies only to specific programs. North Island College sends its visiting students on a signed agreement with the University of Manitoba, which makes this case a borderline with arrangements for exchange students.

None of the public institutes require an LOP. Among open access universities, three of them (Capilano, Kwantlen, and Vancouver Island) require LOPs as host institutions. TRU and UFV polices “strongly advise” obtaining an LOP for their in-coming visiting students. TRU, on the other hand, requires an LOP for their out-going students (Thompson Rivers University, N.d.), and so does VIU, while UFV recommends it. Royal Roads requires an LOP for visiting students going for Vancouver Island University (given that VIU requires LOPs for all in-coming visiting students), and RRU use of the term “visiting student” is restricted to RRU students visiting VIU.

As for the private institutions that are members of the BC Transfer System, Trinity Western and University Canada West require LOPs for both in-coming and out-going visiting students. Quest University accepts students as visitors, but does not include online requirements for an LOP. Fairleigh Dickinson University requires an LOP as a home institution, but no information for in-coming visiting students was found. None of the other private institutions within the BC Transfer System publish online material governing visiting students.

This analysis confirms the assertion that institutions with larger capacity make effort to monitor what courses their students take as visitors elsewhere. On the other hand, colleges and institutes rarely track with LOPs what courses are brought by their visiting students. As receiving (host) institutions, there is less consistency in LOP requirements regarding in-coming visiting students. Different enrolment management styles, different administrative priorities, different student populations, or different financial arrangements are all at play as factors shaping the development (or lack of) visiting students policy.

## BC Admissions/ Registrarial Professionals’ Perspectives on Visiting Students

The analysis based on the questionnaire responses augments the review of the online sources. The questionnaire inquired about policies and practices around visiting students (Appendix A). This part of the study is specifically aimed at assessing successes and issues regarding visiting students as perceived by the respondents.

### *Institutions Surveyed*

We would like to thank all institutions who participated in the study, and, in particular, the individuals who took time to respond to the questionnaire (Table 2).

Table 2: BC post-secondary institutions responding to questionnaire on Visiting Students

Institution	Competitive / Open Access / Private	Type of PSI
British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)	Open Access	Institute
Camosun College (CAM)	Open Access	College
Capilano University (CAPU)	Open Access	University
College of the Rockies (COTR)	Open Access	College
Coquitlam College	Private	College
Douglas College (DOUG)	Open Access	College
Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU)	Private	University
Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU)	Open Access	University
Okanagan College (OKAN)	Open Access	College
Simon Fraser University (SFU)	Competitive Entry	University
Thomson River University (TRU)	Open Access	University
Trinity Western University (TWU)	Private	University
University of British Columbia (UBC)	Competitive Entry	University
University of Fraser Valley (UFV)	Open Access	University

All but three respondents (BCIT, Douglas College, and Coquitlam College) publish information on Visiting Students.

### ***Knowing the Volume of Sent and Received Visiting Students***

None of the home institutions collects information about the students they send to take courses at another approved PSI. The only monitoring happens at the time the student returns to their home institution and requests transfer of credits taken at the second, or host institution. The competitive entry universities require students to make use of LOP's for that purpose. Other institutions may allow for the transfer of articulated courses that fit the student's program even without pre-approval through an LOP. Some institutions waive the official requirement for an LOP when students insist on registering without one. Although not based on quantifiable data, respondents observe that inter-province visiting students mainly come from and go to Ontario, Alberta, and Quebec.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

Only four institutions voiced concerns in questionnaire responses about the visiting student policy and/or practices. The identified issues include the following:

- some faculty advising offices expressed concerns about students taking courses at local or international institutions with LOP's. Some faculties restrict LOP's to a maximum of 12 credits, allowing none if the course is offered by their own institution;
- students who are unable to provide LOPs when they are asked for one; the concern is the students' abilities to transfer back course credits to their home institutions;
- visiting students who try to register for courses that do not match their program at the home institution

- clarity of communication and information available to students so students understand that course selection can have an impact on course transfer back to their home institution; and
- students avoiding “difficult” courses by visiting another institution with different course quality.

### **Patterns Students Follow (Terms, Courses) when Requesting LOPs or Registration**

Summer and spring terms appear to be most popular for visiting student requests for LOP’s and for registration. The main reasons range from students needing to upgrade courses in which they failed or under-performed, students (at a few institutions) avoiding difficult courses, students going home to another province for the summer term; and students wanting courses not offered during that term. Two institutions specifically identified ENGL 100 as one course where there seems to be a noticeable number of requests for transfer credit. This might suggest that students are avoiding this course at their home institutions. Institutions see high demands for business, psychology, biology, and math courses for visiting students.

### **Suggestions for Improvement of Policies and Practices Regarding Visiting Students**

Seven respondents suggested that their system allows for improvement of visiting students policies and practices. Examples of suggestions include the following:

*“We are planning a few minor tweaks to the policy for Letters of Permission (our students who wish to study elsewhere as visiting students). Specifically, we are discussing the introduction of a limit to the number of semester hours students can complete elsewhere after enrolling. That limit has not yet been*

*determined. It is considered minor because only a very few students ever exceed 12 semester hours.”*

*“Currently we have no way of tracking which issued LOPs are being acted upon, and the policies for LOPs are varied across faculties and can be subject to change. Additionally, any credit granted for a student visiting another institution on an LOP is not generally articulated in the same manner in which we articulate transfer credit for admissions.”*

*“We should have a more formalized policy on visiting students for either sending or receiving students.”*

A few institutions felt the system they have in place already works well for their needs.

## **Conclusions**

Visiting Student is an admissions category widely, but not universally, used in post-secondary institutions in BC and across Canada. However, the research literature, such as published articles or commentary, on the visiting student phenomenon in BC, Canada, or abroad is quite scarce. Online institutional policies present a wider field for the analysis of approaches to visiting students.

Visiting students are distinct from exchange and joint programs students, however, some confusion exists in the use of the term. Moreover, institutional approaches differ to visiting students as an admissions category. Institutions usually include them into “Unclassified”, “Non-Degree” or directly “Visiting Students” admissions category; while some institutions restrict the admission of visiting students to certain programs.

A major difference in arrangements for graduate and undergraduate visiting students pertains to paying tuition: graduate students do not pay tuition to the host institution, while undergraduates do. In BC, the Western Deans' Agreement has been instrumental in facilitating visiting arrangements for graduate students, including research exchanges and one-way visits.

BC and Canadian competitive entry institutions typically exercise more control over their students going elsewhere through Letters of Permission. The approach of BC open access institutions vary: most universities tend to issue and require Letters of Permission, but few colleges and none of the institutes do so. The approach among private BC Transfer System institutions resemble that of their public counterparts: colleges do not require LOPs, while universities pay more attention to sending and receiving visiting students.

Given the growing trend in student mobility, a clear identification of policies and practices regarding visiting students may be advisable for institutions that have not addressed the visiting student phenomenon. The systematic capture of data on visiting students within an institutional student information system could be beneficial for institutions that perceive sending and/or receiving high volume of visiting students. Introducing measures on visiting students to provincially collected databases would provide a system-wide monitoring of the visiting student mobility.

Given the growing trend in student mobility, a clear identification of policies and practices regarding visiting students may be advisable for institutions that have not addressed the visiting student phenomenon.

## Future Research

This study has not systematically investigated the reasons for student decisions to attend another institution as a visiting student. The suggestion that students may be avoiding taking specific courses at their own institution, identified in previous studies and raised by several questionnaire respondents, might be a cause for concern. Further research may assist in better understanding student motivations and related policy issues.

There are virtually no quantitative studies either in Canada or BC on visiting students distinct from general student mobility studies. Obtaining a precise statistical picture of visiting students would help in understanding of their impact on registrar and admissions offices. Other areas, so far uninvestigated, include the visiting student experiences and outcomes, as well as problems and challenges as perceived by visiting students. Exploring this group of students and their experiences would inform post-secondary decision-makers on this aspect of student mobility.

Ontario universities requires all applicants to undergraduate studies to apply through the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) (2014). The trend to rely on centralized provincial post-secondary application service (such as ApplyBC in BC) offers opportunities of including visiting student as an admissions category to such services, and of introducing automated request for an LOP from and/ or to the institution that requires it. For example, Campus Manitoba (2014), a partnership of the government of Manitoba and seven PSIs, allows students to request an LOP when applying to register in any of their online courses, and facilitates obtaining a visiting student number and paying fees. Other jurisdictions may find value in exploring the possibility of an automated request for an LOP to facilitate student mobility, and provide systematic information on visiting student patterns.

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# Appendix A:

## The Questionnaire

1. Do you have policies and procedures on receiving and sending students as Visiting Students? Are they published on your institution's website? If yes, please send link. If not, please send a copy of your policies and procedures on visiting students
2. Do you accept courses for transfer that your student takes at another BC post-secondary institution, that is member of BCCAT, while they are registered or during their tenure at your institution? Is this with or without a letter of permission?
3. Do you track students in your student record system to ensure they only complete certain courses/terms when you send them as visiting students (your student going out to another institution), or as you receive them as visiting students (students you admit as visiting students)?
4. Do you accept any student coming as a visiting student from BC post-secondary institution that is a member of BCCAT? Are there any priorities given to them or any advantages? Do you have minimum requirements for such students, including English language proficiency? Is this applicable to all of your programs? Is there a limit to number of courses or terms? Do you require all transcripts and documentation when you admit them as visiting students or only documents relevant to the course(s) they are taking at your institution?
5. Do you have any issues or concerns regarding visiting students from either the perspective as the sending institution or the receiving institution? Please provide information.
6. Do you notice a pattern that students follow in requesting letters of permission? For instance, during specific academic terms, when they fall behind in grades...etc.? Is there a pattern for type of courses or specific courses that students come to your institution for as visiting students? Is there a pattern for type of courses or specific courses that students at your institution ask to take elsewhere on a letter of permission?
7. Do you send and/or receive out-of-province visiting students? If yes, to and from which province do you send or receive the majority of student requests?
8. Do you consider your practice as "best practice"? If not, can you suggest a method or an example as best practice for sending or receiving visiting students

## Appendix B:

### The List of Full Names of Institutions

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Name</b>
BCIT	British Columbia Institute of Technology
CAM	Camosun College
CAPU	Capilano University
CNC	College of New Caledonia
COTR	College of the Rockies
DOUG	Douglas College
ECUAD	Emily Carr University of Art and Design
JIBC	Justice Institute of British Columbia
KPU	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
LANG	Langara College
NVIT	Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
INC	North Island College
NLC	Northern Lights College
NWCC	Northwest Community College
OKAN	Okanagan College
RRU	Royal Roads University
SEL	Selkirk College
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TRU	Thompson Rivers University
UBC	University of British Columbia
UFV	University of the Fraser Valley
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
UVic	University of Victoria
VCC	Vancouver Community College
VIU	Vancouver Island University

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