

Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer

Council Principles, Policies and Procedures

A. CONTEXT

1. Mission and Composition

The mission of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) is to be a catalyst for change and an advocate for learners in the areas of post-secondary admission and transfer. To carry out its mission Council provides leadership and direction in the improvement of educational opportunities for Alberta students through inter-institutional transfer. This requires a commitment to improving communication among Alberta post-secondary institutions, and thus to promote the advantages of a system of education, with all that this means for educational planning for the benefit of learners.

In the fulfillment of its mission, Council is engaged in the following activities:

- (a) **leadership** - including the development and formulation of policies and procedures whereby transfer credit for courses and programs may be negotiated.
- (b) **communication** - Council is committed to improving communication on matters regarding admissions and transfer.
- (c) **publication** - primarily the production and distribution of a yearly Transfer Guide listing all transfer credit arrangements for courses and programs within the Alberta post-secondary system, together with statements of relevant policies and procedures. The Council Office also produces periodic New Transfer Agreements reports, a Handbook for Contact Persons, the yearly Transfer Patterns tables, and an Annual Report.
- (d) **mediation** - as requested by institutions within the system, to resolve complaints or disputes concerning transfer arrangements and credits, and thus to ensure that the best interests of students are served.
- (e) **applied research** - on matters related to the transfer of students throughout the system.

The 15 member Council which is appointed by the Minister responsible for Advanced Education is an independent body which reports annually to the Minister. Council membership includes the Chair, 2 members of the public, 2 student members, 4 members nominated by the Universities Co-ordinating Council, 4 members nominated by the Council of College and Technical Institute Presidents, 1 member nominated by the Private Colleges Co-ordinating Council, and 1 secondary

system member from The ministry responsible for advanced education. Professional support, including service of a Directory, is supplied by The ministry responsible for advanced education.

The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer usually meets 4 times a year, generally at institutions.

2. Overview of the Post-secondary System

The Council's activities are directed primarily towards the Alberta post-secondary system, which includes 4 universities, The Banff Centre, 14 public colleges, 2 institutes of technology, 8 private colleges with accredited degree programs and other private colleges. In addition, there are a number of private non-affiliated institutions, some of which may offer courses which have transfer potential.

Although the Council's mandate is directed towards the Alberta post-secondary system, Council is sensitive to student transferability involving institutions outside of the province. To that end, institutions outside Alberta are encouraged to use the Online Alberta Transfer Guide when assessing transcripts from Alberta transfer students.

3. Admission to the Transfer System

- (a) ACAT agrees to accept for admission to the Alberta Transfer System, as a sending and receiving institution, any Alberta institution that has, on the recommendation of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, been authorized by the province of Alberta to offer a degree program(s). It is expected:
 - that the institution will adopt and abide by the Principles, Policies and Procedures of ACAT and name a Contact Person,
 - that the institution will work to establish transfer agreements with other members of the transfer system, and
 - with respect to those agreements wherein the institution acts as a *receiving institution*, that ACAT will record in its transfer agreements database and Transfer Guide only those agreements involving the degree programs that the institution is authorized to offer by the province of Alberta. (This does not preclude the possibility of recording agreements involving other courses or programs that the private institution successfully negotiates as a *sending institution* with another Alberta transfer system member.)

- (b) The membership of those private institutions which have been granted approval to offer degrees through the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB) process will be grandfathered.
- (c) *Admission criteria to the Alberta Transfer System are currently under review for all institutions that have not been authorized by the province of Alberta to grant degrees on the recommendation of the Campus Alberta Quality Council or Private Colleges Accreditation Board.*

4. Types of Transfer

Within the system of post-secondary institutions, transfer of credit for courses or programs may occur among institutions within a sector (for example, between public colleges) or among institutions of different types (for example, from a college to a university). Transfer arrangements in the Council's transfer agreements database include courses and programs transferable to universities and private university colleges and those transferable to colleges and technical institutes.

5. Definition of Terms

In dealing with matters relating to transfer, there are several commonly used terms which may require clarification. Some of the more important are:

Accessibility: the degree of openness of institutions to students seeking admission to their program. (See Principle "d".)

Advance credit: the award of credit in given courses or programs on the basis of formal and informal learning experiences including: 1) work experience, 2) maturity/life experience, 3) unstructured educational experiences such as self-study, 4) structured educational activity. (See Transfer credit.)

Affiliation: a formal agreement of association or co-operation between two institutions whereby some courses and programs offered by the sending institution are substantially the same as those offered by the receiving institution. Transfer credit is thereby awarded.

Receiving institution: an institution to which students transfer course or program credits acquired at another institution. (See Sending institution.)

Reciprocal bilateral transfer agreement: a transfer agreement that has been negotiated between two institutions whereby Institution A agrees to accept the course (or cluster of courses) taken at Institution B in lieu of its own course (or cluster of courses) and reciprocally, Institution B agrees to accept the course (or cluster of courses) taken at Institution A in lieu of its own course (or cluster of courses). Therefore, reciprocal bilateral agreements are always two-way agreements. (See Unidirectional bilateral transfer agreements.)

Selection criteria: categories of qualification, capabilities, or experience (academic or other) which provide the basis for screening and admission (or rejection) of students to programs.

Sending institution: an institution from which students may transfer course or program credits to programs at another institution. (See Receiving institution.)

Transfer: the mobility of students among post-secondary institutions on the basis of their having transfer credit. (See Transfer credit.)

Transfer courses: courses delivered by a sending institution as courses which correspond in description to courses of a particular institution.

Transfer credit: an advance credit awarded on the basis of successful completion of structured educational activities at a post-secondary institution. (See Advance credit.)

Transferable courses: courses developed by an institution to meet its own program objectives but which have transfer potential. Transfer may be negotiated either on the basis of equivalence or of relevance to programs or courses at another institution.

Unidirectional bilateral transfer agreement: a transfer agreement negotiated between a sending institution and a receiving institution which is primarily intended to be one-way. In practice, advance credit for courses involved in an agreement usually will be awarded at either institution, particularly when the agreement involves courses that are part of a university transfer program. However, in some cases credit will not be awarded in the opposite direction; for example, Institution A may agree to accept Institution B's cluster of transferable courses in lieu of one of its own courses and have the agreement entered in the Transfer Guide. However, it might not be appropriate for Institution B conversely to award transfer credits for the cluster of courses if a student with the one course from Institution A presented it for advanced credit assessment. (See Reciprocal bilateral transfer agreement.)

Virtual equivalence: See Principle "b".

B. PRINCIPLES

Council endorses the following as basic to its purpose and activities:

- (a) **Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility among institutions of higher education in Alberta shall be optimized.**

Barriers to student mobility shall be minimized. The integrity of educational programs and certification must, however, be maintained. A student should not be required to repeat previous learning experiences in which

competence has been demonstrated nor should more transfer credit be granted than previous learning experiences would warrant for successful completion of the program.

- (b) Negotiation of opportunities for student mobility shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be virtually equivalent in terms of content and rigour.**

Insofar as possible, transfer arrangements should allow for maximum recognition of previous learning experiences. The concept of virtual equivalence is vital to such arrangements.

- (c) Effective academic advising and career counselling and optimum mobility require that the student have prior knowledge of at least the minimum transfer credit which can be awarded.**

The *Alberta Transfer Guide* indicates the minimum transfer credit which is available for prior post-secondary educational experience upon admission to a post-secondary institution. Additional transfer credit may be negotiable on an individual basis.

- (d) Individual institutions have the primary responsibility for instructional programs, even though responsibility for higher education is shared among various constituents. The responsibility of institutions includes program design and delivery, determination of academic prerequisites and student admission criteria, and certification of the academic achievement of students.**

In respect of student access to institutions and programs, it is to be emphasized that factors in addition to academic prerequisites often are employed as admission criteria. That is, while possession of academic prerequisites makes an applicant eligible for admission, it does not **guarantee** admission to an institution or to a particular program.

- (e) Institutions have the responsibility and the prerogative to investigate the total educational preparation of applicants seeking admission.**

Such investigation is intended to determine admissibility and appropriate transfer credit, and to counsel applicants. The relevance and quality of the applicant's most recent educational experiences should be the basis for admissibility and for transfer decisions unless such consideration would unfairly disadvantage the applicant. Differences in earlier preparation should not adversely affect consideration of the

applicant. (See Principle "b" re virtual equivalence.)

- (f) Post-secondary institutions are committed to developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer credit and to applying them in a consistent manner.**

Students should be able to obtain an institution's rationale for a transfer decision, and institutions should have clear procedures for a student to obtain a review of a transfer decision. The clear and transparent nature of transfer credit is reflected in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.

- (g) After students are granted admission to an institution under a transfer arrangement, they shall be granted the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.**

All institutional members of Alberta's transfer system have endorsed Council's principles and endeavour to apply them with respect to transfer within the province, regionally and nationally.

C. A POLICY FOR ADMISSION AND TRANSFER OF CREDIT AMONG ALBERTA POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

1. Admission

Admission to a course or program will be granted to any applicant who has fulfilled the admission requirements for such course or program as established by the receiving institution. Where selection procedures are involved in admission to a program, each applicant shall be treated on the same basis as any other person seeking admission to that program.

In the case of students transferring from public colleges and technical institutes to universities, in lieu of the general admission requirement listed above, admission will be granted to any applicant who, upon successful completion of at least a full year's study at the sending institution, is recommended in writing by that institution as having satisfied the appropriate matriculation requirements or their equivalent. This is referred to as the Letter of Recommendation admissions category.

2. Transfer of credits

Subject to the above requirements there shall be two major transfer arrangements:

- (a) Transferable courses and programs:**

These are developed by a sending institution to meet its own program and objectives, and bear its own numbers and descriptions. Transfer may be negotiated either on the basis of

equivalence, or of relevance. The principle of equivalence refers to courses and programs of the sending institution which are identical or similar to those of the receiving institution. The principle of **relevance** refers to courses of the sending institution which are in the same areas or disciplines and at the levels of programs offered by the receiving institution, and are therefore appropriate for credit at the receiving institution.

Credits awarded in this category may involve special inter-institutional arrangements or individual assessment.

(b) Transfer courses and programs:

These are delivered by a sending institution as courses and programs which correspond in description to those of the receiving institution.

Among universities, transfer has normally been assessed on an individual basis by the receiving institution.

D. PROCEDURES FOR TRANSFER OF CREDIT AMONG ALBERTA POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

To facilitate the negotiation of transfer arrangements among post-secondary institutions, the Council has established the following set of procedures.

Objective

These procedures are designed to provide a mechanism for the negotiation of transfer and transferable courses and programs, and for their inclusion in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.

Categories

Courses and programs proposed for transfer credit are of two main types, each of which involves a different relationship between the sending and receiving institution.

1. Transferable Courses/Courses with Transfer Potential

In negotiations of transfer credit for transferable courses, the sending institution shall supply the receiving institution with the following information: (a) course description, title, grading practices, weighting and outline, (b) textbooks and other resource materials, (c) qualifications required for an instructor. Additional information may be required at stated intervals for review purposes, or at the discretion of the receiving institutions.

2. Transfer Courses/Courses in Transfer Programs

In negotiations of transfer credit for transfer courses, the sending institution shall supply the receiving institution with the following information: (a) course description, (b) textbooks

and other resource materials, (c) qualifications required for an instructor.

Transfer credit is based on initial negotiations, when the course is first offered by the sending institution. Subsequent negotiations and concurrence of the receiving institution are required where, in the view of the receiving institution, course revisions by the sending institution are sufficiently substantial to affect the transfer credit which has been negotiated.

Procedures

1. Each institution shall identify a Contact Person (e.g., Registrar or Admissions Officer) who will be responsible for both internal and external distribution of formal transfer proposals and responses.
2. Each institution shall, through its Contact Person, maintain and provide on request from other institutions (a) a list of other important institutional contacts for the purpose of facilitating appropriate preliminary discussions, and (b) a description of the internal procedures followed in the institution for the development and/or evaluation of proposals for transfer arrangements.
3. It is expected that proposals for credit will be processed as expeditiously as possible and formalized by means of the Council's Transfer Credit Proposal Form on Council's password-protected Contact Persons' Web site. If the transfer proposal is acceptable, other institutions in the system will be notified accordingly. The transfer normally will be honoured within the sub-system of which the receiving institution is a constituent.
4. If the transfer proposal is not acceptable, the receiving institution shall notify the sending institution of the reason for this decision.
5. In the event that agreement has not been reached pursuant to (3) and (4), an institution may submit to the Council a written request for mediation. Where, in its opinion, the Council determines that a dispute concerning transfer exists; the Council may mediate to resolve the dispute.
6. In the event that the agreement cannot be reached pursuant to (5), the institutions in dispute may agree to submit the dispute to Council for arbitration. The Council will then establish procedures for the resolution of the dispute, and issue its decision resolving the dispute. The arbitration decision of the Council shall be final and without appeal or review.
7. Transfer arrangements are to be regarded as relatively enduring bilateral agreements - to be altered, amended or deleted only after **mutual consultation**. Regular discussion of existing transfer arrangements should take place between sending and receiving institutions. Any institution

planning program or course changes which could bear on existing transfer arrangements as recorded in the Alberta Transfer Guide shall, insofar as possible, inform those institutions which would be primarily affected - subject, where necessary, to renegotiation. In cases where renegotiation of a transfer agreement is requested by either a sending or receiving institution, the onus is on the institution requesting the change to provide the other institution with **sufficient notice** and lead-time to permit renegotiation before the next edition of the *Transfer Guide*.

8. Renegotiation of transfer arrangements is subject to the same guidelines as for the initial negotiations (i.e., 3-6).
9. When a new agreement has been negotiated, it replaces the old agreement in the transfer agreements database for publication in the next edition of the *Transfer Guide*.

E. INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Within the context of policies and procedures of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, each institution has particular requirements and practices for admission of students and the award of transfer credit. These institutional requirements are summarized in Section III of the annual Alberta Transfer Guide. Students who are planning to transfer are advised to refer to the appropriate institutional calendar and to consult with the Registrar's Office at the receiving institution.

F. PRIVATE PROVIDERS POLICY

A policy for facilitating course transfer agreements between Alberta non degree-granting private providers and post-secondary receiving institutions

The Private Providers Policy is currently under review.

G. PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Context

Adult learners may desire recognition of their prior learning for a variety of goals including employment, further education, occupational/professional certification, and personal satisfaction. To assist adult learners to further their education and in keeping with its Terms of Reference, Council encourages post-secondary institutions to develop prior learning assessments that are granted system-wide recognition. The award of transfer credit in given courses or programs may be based on formal

or informal learning experiences including: (1) work experience, (2) maturity/life experience, (3) unstructured educational experiences such as self-study, and (4) structured educational activity. In Alberta, transfer agreements covering formal courses and programs are recorded in Council's transfer agreements database for dissemination via the Online Alberta Transfer Guide or the printed annual *Alberta Transfer Guide*. By extending recognition of prior learning to include all four varieties of learning, service to adult learners will be improved. Recognized prior learning should be transferable among programs within and beyond the post-secondary institution when it is appropriate to do so.

Framework

As learning may occur in a variety of settings, it is essential that adult learners receive appropriate recognition for prior demonstrated learning toward desired certificate, diploma or degree programs. Basic to the purpose and activity of the recognition of prior learning is Council's **principle (a)**:

Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility among institutions of higher education in Alberta shall be optimized.

Barriers to student mobility shall be minimized. The integrity of educational programs and certification must, however, be maintained. **A student should not be required to repeat previous learning experiences in which competence has been demonstrated nor should more transfer credit be granted than previous learning experiences would warrant for successful completion of the program.**

Council encourages institutions to develop procedures for the assessment of demonstrated prior learning. In keeping with its terms of reference, Council also encourages the development of procedures by which the recognized prior learning then receives system-wide recognition consistent with the educational mandates of post-secondary institutions. Recognized prior learning should be portable.

Academic principles

1. Recognition of prior learning should be based on demonstrated learning.
2. Recognition should be appropriate to the course or program in which it is accepted.
3. Recognition of prior learning should be consistent with the achievement levels required by the post-secondary program in which it is accepted.
4. Recognition of prior learning should be for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.

5. Assessment of prior learning by post-secondary institutions should be made by content specialist, with external advice as necessary.

Administrative Standards

1. Official notation of the recognition of prior learning on post-secondary institution transcripts and student records should be consistent with the institution's policies and procedures relating to maintenance of student records.
2. Institutional policies and procedures applied to assessment should be fully disclosed; e.g. in the calendar.
3. All personnel involved in the assessment of prior learning should receive training for the functions they perform and there should be provision for their continued professional development in areas related to recognition of prior learning.

4. Institutional recognition of prior learning policies and practices should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed. In keeping with its terms of reference, Council shall monitor the effectiveness of recognition of prior learning policies and practices within the Alberta post-secondary system.