

## 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 beneficial 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 to promoting 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 continuous updating and maintenance of the official *Online Alberta Transfer Guide* and the production and distribution of the printed annual *Alberta Transfer Guide*, both of which list 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 a Business Plan, Annual Report, newsletters and the annual Transfer Patterns report.
- (d) **mediation** - as requested by institutions within the system, resolve complaints or disputes concerning transfer arrangements and credits, and thus ensure that the best interests of students are served.
- (e) **applied research** - on matters related to the transfer of students throughout the system.

The 16 member Council is appointed by the Minister responsible for advanced education and 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 Alberta Universities Association, 4 members nominated by the Alberta Council of College and Technical Institute Presidents, 1 member nominated by the Post-secondary Accredited Private Institutions Council, 1 member nominated by the First Nations Adult & Higher Education Consortium, and 1 secondary system member from the ministry responsible for K-12 education.

Professional support, including service of a Director, is supplied by the ministry responsible for advanced education.

The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer usually meets 3 - 4 times a year, generally at institutions, but may meet via video- or teleconference.

#### 2. Overview of the Alberta Transfer System

The Council's activities are directed primarily towards the Alberta post-secondary system, which includes 4 universities, 14 public colleges, 2 institutes of technology, 8 private colleges with accredited degree programs, The Banff Centre, First Nations colleges and other not-for-profit 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

##### Definitions

For the purpose of admission to the Alberta Transfer System, the following definitions apply:

- (a) **Alberta Transfer System** – Those institutions which are members of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer and whose transfer agreements are included in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*, both online and printed.

- (b) **Significant number** – A number of transferring students requesting transfer credit that is large enough that accommodation on a case by case basis is no longer efficient, viable or recommended, and that clearly indicates there is a need for course by course or program by program inter-institutional agreements.
- (c) **Sponsoring institution** – An ACAT member institution which chooses to support another non-member institution for membership due to the existence between them of a significant number of credit transfer agreements and successfully transferring students.
- (d) **Alberta-based publicly funded institution** – An institution receiving operating support from the Alberta Government, that is:
- Established under the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* as a recognized public post-secondary institution; or
  - A non-profit private university college that has been granted Lieutenant Governor in Council approval to offer degree programs.
- (e) **Alberta-based private not for profit institution (not-for-profit)** – An institution controlled or managed by a body most of whose members are not selected by a public authority, that is not established for the purpose of distributing profits to individual directors, employees, owners or shareholders. These institutions operate exclusively for social, educational, professional, religious, health, charitable or any other not-for-profit purpose.
- (f) **Receiving institution:** An institution to which students transfer course or program credits acquired at another institution. (see Sending institution.)
- (g) **Sending institution:** An institution from which students may transfer course or program credits to programs at another institution. (see Receiving institution.)
- Any ACAT member institution may fulfill the role of sending or receiving institution, and many institutions fulfill both roles.*

## Policy

Institutions applying for admission to the Alberta Transfer system are expected to have developed a culture of transfer by having built transfer agreements with other Alberta post-secondary institutions. They will have a proven

track record of transfer arrangements which have led to student support and success.

- (a) ACAT may accept for admission to the Alberta Transfer System, as a sending and receiving institution, the following:
- **An Alberta-based publicly-funded institution**, with satisfactory evidence of transfer demand and student success, institutional capacity and other criteria addressed by the “Questionnaire on Admission to the Alberta Transfer System” (Questionnaire); or
  - **An Alberta-based private not-for-profit institution**, with satisfactory evidence of transfer demand and student success, institutional capacity and other criteria addressed by the “Questionnaire on Admission to the Alberta Transfer System” (Questionnaire).

**Out of province public or private not-for-profit institutions** demonstrating evidence of a significant number of agreements with Alberta member institutions and the participation of a significant number of Alberta students may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, the above eligible institutions may:

- Have been recommended by the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) and approved by the Alberta government to offer degrees; or
- Have a mandate or mission to offer non-degree programs.

Application for admission to the Alberta Transfer system may be strengthened by sponsorship from an ACAT member institution

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, as will those from the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

## Procedures

Institutions interested in applying for admission into the Alberta Transfer System should contact the ACAT Secretariat at (780) 422-9021 or [acat@gov.ab.ca](mailto:acat@gov.ab.ca) for detailed admission procedures and to request the *Admission into the Alberta Transfer System* information package. All documents describing the

application process are available at [www.acat.gov.ab.ca](http://www.acat.gov.ab.ca).

ACAT expects applicant institutions to be prepared to:

- Adopt and abide by the Principles, Policies and Procedures of ACAT and name a Contact Person;
- Actively participate in the stewardship of the Alberta Transfer System; and
- Continually work to establish transfer agreements with other members of the transfer system to the benefit of Alberta's learners.

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.)

#### **Criteria to Remain in Good Standing:**

To maintain membership in ACAT, member institutions must be able to demonstrate they are in good standing by:

- Complying with ACAT's Principles, Policies and Procedures;
- Continually working to establish transfer agreements with other members of the transfer system to the benefit of Alberta's learners;
- Continually maintaining or developing quality credit transfer arrangements; and
- Actively participating in the stewardship of the Alberta Transfer System.

In the event of a change to mandate or mission, the institution will advise Council who will then review the change and determine whether any further action is required.

Upon a decision by Council that a member is not in good standing, Council may take the following actions:

- Make contact with the institution in an attempt to resolve issues and concerns

that may be affecting active participation.

- Follow up with written notification of withdrawal of membership if there is no effort to resolve outstanding issues and concerns, providing a deadline for compliance with the above criteria.
- If efforts are not made to resolve outstanding issues, follow up in writing with notification of membership termination by a specified date.

## **4. Private Providers**

### **Framework**

The primary goal of ACAT is to provide leadership and direction in the improvement and enlargement of educational opportunities for Alberta's learners through inter-institutional transfer.

To this end, Council has a continuing responsibility for facilitating improvement in communications and working relationships among all institutions regarding the admission of transfer students and the awarding of transfer credit.

Recognizing that learners are served by a variety of providers, this process is intended to serve learners by improving transferability, where academically appropriate, between courses and programs of private providers of adult learning and institution members of the Alberta Transfer System.

While this process is neither mandatory nor regulatory, the completion of a Private Provider's Questionnaire will provide receiving institutions with valuable information and will facilitate the commencement of transfer credit negotiations.

It is recommended that institutions interested in pursuing transfer credit arrangements with members of the Alberta Transfer System should contact the ACAT Secretariat at (780) 422-9021 or [acat@gov.ab.ca](mailto:acat@gov.ab.ca) for more detailed procedures and to request the Private Providers Questionnaire.

## **5 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.

## 6 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.

**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.

**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. 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*.
7. Renegotiation of transfer arrangements is subject to the same guidelines as for the initial negotiations (i.e., 3-6).
8. 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 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