Credit Transfer at Ontario Universities

Our commitment

Ontario’s publicly-assisted universities are committed to improving student mobility through policies and practices that facilitate all types of credit transfer. The guiding principle of credit transfer decisions at Ontario universities is student success. This means that university faculty and staff take great care to ensure that all transferring students—whether they are transferring from colleges or other universities—have sufficient academic preparation to succeed in their new programs and/or institutions. At the same time, universities do their utmost to recognize relevant learning already completed at the appropriate level of mastery so that transferring students get full value for the time and resources that they have already invested in postsecondary education.

College-to-University Credit Transfer

There are many different options available to college students who want to transfer to university programs. These students may receive transfer credits for specific courses (“course-by-course” transfer credit), just like university students who transfer between programs and/or institutions or may receive “block” credits for work done at the college level. This means that a block of several college-level courses (or a completed specific college credential) will be recognized as completing part of a degree program’s requirements.

Some universities have policies that grant advanced standing to students who transfer from specific college programs to specific university programs. For example, some universities offer advanced standing in business programs to students who graduate from specific college business studies programs.

Another option for college students who wish to transfer to a university is to do so through enrolling in college programs that are expressly designed to provide students with an entry point into a university program. These programs result from credit transfer agreements between institutions. These agreements define clear pathways enabling students to transfer from specific college programs to specific university programs. This option often enables students to receive a greater amount of transfer credit due to the affinity of the programs.

Credit transfer agreements (sometimes called “articulation agreements”) are collaborations between colleges and universities that enable students to benefit from both the applied learning of colleges and the breadth and depth offered by university curriculum.
There are many different types of credit transfer agreements. Agreements may be made between one college and one university (bilateral agreements), or between many postsecondary institutions (multilateral agreements). There are now more than five hundred such credit transfer agreements and many more under active development. Credit transfer agreements typically define the transfer credits that a qualified graduate of a specific college diploma program will receive on admission to a university, and the requirements for completing a specific degree program.

Some students choose to enroll in special programs offered collaboratively by a college and a university. Normally these joint programs offer two credentials: a university degree and a college diploma or certificate. E-info, a guide to Ontario’s university programs for secondary school students, has more information about joint programs here.

**Principles of College-to-University Credit Transfer**

In cooperation with Ontario colleges, and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Ontario universities adopted principles for college-to-university credit transfer in 2010 including:

*Universities will optimize pathways for students and minimize barriers to their mobility by basing credit transfer agreements on maximum recognition of students’ previous learning experiences, while taking into account the background and knowledge required for academic success post-transfer.*

*Universities will award qualifying students transferring between Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges and universities with credit for relevant learning already demonstrably completed at the appropriate level of mastery.*

*Universities will maintain fairness and equity for all students by entitling any student who gains admission to an institution under a transfer agreement to the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.*

**University-to-University Credit Transfer**

Credit transfer involves not just college students seeking to transfer to universities but also university students wishing to transfer between universities or between programs at one university. University faculty and staff who make credit transfer decisions aim to maximize the amount of transfer credit granted to students while ensuring that these students are academically prepared to succeed in their new program and/or institution.

**Principles of University-to-University Credit Transfer**

The following principles are the agreed-upon basis for credit transfer decisions at Ontario’s publicly-assisted universities:

*Acceptance of transfer credits among Ontario universities shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be essentially
equivalent in terms of their content and rigour. Insofar as possible, acceptance of transfer credit should allow for maximum recognition of previous learning experience in university-level courses.

Subject to degree, grade and program requirements, any course offered for credit by one Ontario university shall be accepted for credit by another Ontario university when there is an essential equivalency in course content.

(Council of Ontario Universities, 1994)

Recognizing prior studies

As long as a student has received a certain minimum grade in a course, almost all course credits from any Ontario university will be accepted for transfer credit at other Ontario universities. This means that transferring students get recognition for relevant prior studies at the university level.

How a student’s transfer credits are applied or assigned to the requirements of the program into which the student is transferring depends on a number of factors, including whether the student is changing programs of study, and whether the student has completed the prerequisite courses for the year of study, and program of study into which they are transferring.

For example, after completing the first two years of an undergraduate degree with a double major in English and history, a student might decide to switch programs and pursue a major in psychology at another university. If she or he meets the minimum grade requirements, the student will be accepted as a transfer student. The student will likely get significant transfer credit for the courses she or he has previously taken in English and history. But she or he may still be required to take some first and second-year courses that are the foundation of an undergraduate degree in psychology.

This is because many university programs are highly structured with each year’s courses building on the knowledge achieved in the previous year’s courses. A student transferring into the third year of a psychology program without having taken the same introductory courses as other students in the program may not have a sufficient foundation to succeed in the new program.

Every university program has its own distinct set of course requirements for specific programs, and each program is structured differently. These differences are part of what gives each university, and each university program, its own distinct identity.

Another factor in credit transfer decisions is that sometimes courses which appear to be similar, such as first-year introductory courses in a specific subject, may actually be substantively different in approach, content, requirements, and learning outcomes. For example, an introductory anatomy course that is required for students majoring in kinesiology might not be the same in content or approach as an introductory anatomy course required for a medical biology program.
Assessing credit transfer

Registrars, admissions staff, deans, department chairs, program chairs and faculty members may all be involved in helping to assess student transcripts and course outlines in order to decide whether and what type of transfer credit is granted for a course taken at another institution. Whether a transfer student is transferring from a college to a university, between programs at one university, or between universities, the primary concern of those who make credit transfer decisions is that a student’s prior studies are recognized, and that the student is equipped to succeed in the new program and/or institution to which he or she is transferring.

Professional Accreditation

Many university programs are accredited and regulated by professional bodies. For example, undergraduate engineering programs are accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board. Undergraduate nursing education programs are accredited by the Canadian Association of Nursing, and all nursing education programs must be formally approved by the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), the regulatory body for the profession. Teacher education programs are accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

This means that accreditation and regulatory bodies are closely involved in how these programs are structured and what requirements are set for students. Professional accreditation requirements may make it necessary for students to take very specific set of courses and in a specific sequence. This may affect even those students who are transferring to a similar program at another institution.

For example, the engineering program at one university may be structured differently than the engineering program at another university. In some engineering programs, everyone takes the same basic menu of introductory courses in their first year and then applies for a specific engineering major. In other engineering programs, students immediately enter a specific stream of engineering in their first year. For this reason, a student wishing to transfer in the second year might not have taken the same introductory courses as the other students in the program to which she or he is transferring.

Residency Requirements

Universities take pride in their degrees: each institution’s degrees reflect a unique institutional identity and history. Universities are also accountable for the quality of their courses and the curricular integrity of their degree programs, and want to protect the value of their degrees for students seeking employment or further educational credentials. For this reason, each university sets its own residency requirements; that is, students are required to complete a certain number of courses in their major at the university from which they expect to receive a degree. Typically, Ontario universities require students to take at least fifty percent of their required courses there in order to receive a degree from that university. Some Ontario universities set a different threshold for its residency requirement, and some specific programs within universities have a different threshold.
Grades

Just as each university sets its own standards for the grade level a student must achieve in order to be admitted to a specific program, each university also sets its own standards for the minimum grade a student must have achieved in a course taken elsewhere in order to receive transfer credit for that course. Universities require a minimum grade in order to ensure that students have the academic foundation to do well in the program into which they are transferring.

When students receive transfer credit for courses taken at another institution, in most instances the institution to which they transfer (the “receiving institution”) does not show the grades of the transferred courses on their transcripts. Instead, transcripts at the receiving institution show only that the student passed the course and received transfer credit. This is because different programs and different universities use different grade scales. A university transcript is a record of marks given for courses taken at the institution that produces the transcript. In all cases, students can receive transcripts of grades they achieved in the institution from which they are transferring.

Letter of Permission

A Letter of Permission enables a student to take courses at another university that may be considered for credit towards their degree at their home university. Students complete a Letter of Permission form at their home university and obtain the approval of their academic advisor. By enabling students to take courses at other universities while still enrolled at their home institution, a Letter of Permission offers an alternative to the credit transfer process, and allows students to determine in advance whether they can receive transfer credit for courses taken elsewhere. There is a longstanding established record of mobility for university students using Letters of Permission to take courses at other universities in Ontario and around the world.

The Future of Credit Transfer

Ontario universities are committed to maximizing student mobility. The measure of optimal credit transfer arrangements is student success, and student success is the foundation of Ontario universities’ commitment to streamlining and improving credit transfer pathways for postsecondary education students.