

A Case Study Analysis of Ontario CAAT graduates who transfer to a university

Abstract

Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology were established to educate the Grade 12 graduate not destined for university, in an educational sector meant to be separate from universities. Even though the original mandate and focus of Ontario CAATs has been on the employment of its graduates, students have been moving from colleges to universities since inception. However, very little is known about transfer and the characteristics of the transfer student in the province of Ontario. As well, there is limited empirical evidence that measures the degree of success for college transfer students at the universities.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the demographic and academic characteristics of college-to-university students and to assess their performance at university. Using an exploratory case study of Seneca College graduates, the thesis profiles the typical transfer student, documents their performance and persistence at university and compares them to other college graduates. A questionnaire was developed and mailed to all students who had graduated from Seneca College and who had subsequently enrolled at a university as determined by their responses to the Graduate Satisfaction Survey (GSS) from 1998-99 to 2002-03. The returned questionnaires were linked with the corresponding responses to the GSS and the respondents' records on the college's Administration and Registration Information Exchange System (ARIES). Together the information gathered included data regarding age, gender, language, citizenship, aspirations, and socio-economic status of the transfer student; the college program from which they graduated and the university program into which they enrolled; and, their success at university.

The evidence suggests that an increasing number of younger students entered Seneca College directly from high school with a conscious design to use

their program and the school itself as a vehicle to enter university. Not all the programs were developed to achieve that end, nor were the pathways explicitly planned; however, the students appeared to understand the college to be a viable route to realize their goal of attending university and entered Seneca College for this purpose, expecting it to provide that opportunity. The research also shows that the route to university could only have been through the college for a large majority of these transfer students because they would not have met the university entrance requirements based on their pre-college credentials. Finally, the university-through-college process appears to be providing access to higher education and university for families with limited post-secondary experience and who come from the middle to lower socio-economic strata. Based on these results and the process for ascertaining the data, a consistent approach to measuring transfer is proposed along with curriculum and program recommendations for increasing transfer provincially.