



Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer

26 September 2002
College Board Room
Mount Royal College
Calgary

PRESENT: Lucille Walter (Chair), Ed Behnke, Catherine Eddy, Matthew Glass, Peter Haney, Gretchen Hess, Shirley Holloway, Judith Hughes, Vance MacNichol, Rick Morrow, Lynne Mulder, Kevin Paul (for Peggy Patterson), Marilyn Patton (Executive Officer), Marena Fakli (Manager), Patti Papirnik (Manager)

ABSENT: Shirley Barg, Peggy Patterson, Harry Reding, Jean Valgardson

The Chair extended a warm welcome to the new members, Lynne Mulder, Gretchen Hess and Matthew Glass. The Chair reported that Shirley Barg, Harry Reding and Peggy Patterson expressed regret that they would not be able to attend the meeting. After members introduced themselves, the agenda was accepted as circulated with no additions or deletions.

1. Presentation from Mount Royal College

Lynda Wallace-Hulecki, Executive Director of Enrolment Services and Michelle VanThiel, Registrar, welcomed members to Mount Royal College. At the request of ACAT, a brief overview of the College and its programs was provided. This is a period of growth and expansion, both in terms of student numbers and capital infrastructure, for the College as it endeavours to meet the needs of students and projected enrolment pressures. Mount Royal College aspires to be a degree-granting institution and blend theoretical and practical teaching.

Mount Royal is very involved in the transfer system. Ms. Wallace-Hulecki indicated that the institution experiences some challenges with the transfer system. The recognition of applied degrees for further studies is a challenge as is the issue of the variations in timing at institutions for implementation of the new grading system. The Executive Officer committed to follow-up with the institution to obtain more detail on these issues.

Members indicated their appreciation of this institutional overview. The Chair requested a hard copy of that part of the presentation. The hard copy will be provided to members.

2. Phil Gougeon, Assistant Deputy Minister, Adult Learning

Phil Gougeon is the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of the Adult Learning Division of Alberta Learning. He attended an ACAT meeting one year ago and returned to this meeting to hear the concerns and comments of Council members.

At the March 2001 Council meeting, the ADM had described a restructuring of the Chair's position and of the Secretariat. At that time, he had committed to increasing the resources of the Secretariat and to providing greater support without impinging on Council's autonomy. A year later, he feels this has been accomplished. He also noted that as part of

the restructuring, there are now resources of the department available to the Council. These resources could assist with policy development or research, for example.

A member responded that the resource materials for each meeting and the support provided by the Secretariat are very helpful.

Referring to previous correspondence, the Chair raised the lingering concern that the government wanted to legislate transfer and erode institutional autonomy. The ADM assured members that this was not the intention.

He then went on to give his thoughts about how ACAT operates and its relationship to the Minister. As a Minister's advisory committee, he challenged members to help the Minister understand ACAT and to offer recommendations on how to make the system better. ACAT needs to be seen by the Minister as a responsive instrument for change.

The ADM next raised the issue of the ongoing legislative review of the *Universities Act*, *Colleges Act*, *Technical Institutes Act* and the *Banff Centre Act*. He felt that ACAT could make its views known on this as well. Two topics currently being discussed in the system are issues about applied degrees, and the extension of degree-granting status to colleges and technical institutes. On the latter issue, he noted that there are system-wide pressures to increase degree access and discussion is needed on the optimum way to respond to these pressures. This could have a tremendous impact on what ACAT does and how it does it. Therefore, ACAT should provide comment.

It was suggested that the Minister of Learning be invited to attend an ACAT meeting. The ADM committed to follow-up with the Minister about this.

Returning to the ADM's original question about changes to the Chair's position and the Secretariat, one member commented that the Chair had been doing a good job and that strengthening the Secretariat has been helpful. Another member suggested that the past year has been a continuation of the quality provided for the past 10 years. The member suggested that concerns over the restructuring relate to ensuring protection of the 'honest broker' voice for quality, the student and community. The ADM agreed that ACAT can provide leadership and advice to the Minister through an honest broker role. It has representation from all sectors of the post-secondary system and so can provide a voice that is different than those of individual institutions.

Another member commented that over the years ACAT has quietly done its work such that people take for granted what a good transfer system we have. Its past success of gradually building confidence and trust between institutions provides the foundation for future successes. ACAT must not lose sight of the need to facilitate such relationship-building activities.

Agreeing that ACAT's role is to identify the issues, another member cited one example of where ACAT had made a recommendation that had not been acted upon. The ADM observed that the Minister receives advice from many sources. Acceptance of advice is often related to knowledge of and confidence in the source.

The Chair expressed appreciation to the ADM for attending the meeting and accepted his offer to return to a future meeting at any time.

Continuing the discussion after the ADM left, one member commented that ACAT can raise its profile but that it may not always be able to speak with one voice. However, presenting various sides to an issue is still valuable.

3. Minutes, 19 June 2002

It was MOVED and SECONDED that the 19 June 2002 Council minutes be adopted as amended.

CARRIED

4. ACAT Chair and Secretariat reports

The Chair provided a list of various meetings she had attended during the months of April through June. A written report from the Executive Officer was included with the agenda package.

The Chair highlighted her June meeting with Frank Gelin, Co-chair of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) and reflected on the possibility of shared research. She also spoke about the sessions she had attended at the ARUCC (Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada) conference.

The Executive Officer summarized her participation as Alberta's representative on the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) working group on credit transfer. The working group has prepared a set of principles and an action plan on credit transfer for the Ministers' consideration in October 2002. Both ACAT's and BCCAT's principles were reviewed during the process. She undertook to report to Council at its next meeting on the results of CMEC's discussion.

Response to 12 August 2002 letter from Phil Gougeon regarding the legislation review

The four Acts which govern the post-secondary institutions in the province are being reviewed and ACAT has been given an opportunity to comment. A member suggested that it was important that any revision to the Acts have no adverse impact on institutional autonomy. Members generally felt that legislation should be 'enabling' and should let the learning system be innovative, creative and responsive to learner needs in the future. In order to protect and encourage transfer, it was suggested that the Acts reflect the existing principles of ACAT to which all member institutions ascribe. The principles reflect the appropriate balance between institutional autonomy and not inhibiting student transfer.

Members agreed that the legislation would be improved by clarifying academic nomenclature regarding terms such as "University", "University College", "College", "degree", and "applied degree", and by providing guidelines with respect to degree nomenclature. The original intent of "applied degrees" was discussed and members commented that the place of these degrees is not well understood by students. Acceptance of applied degrees for admission to after degree programs or graduate studies is beginning to be an issue.

Members did not reach consensus on a recommendation with respect to the proposal to have one omnibus piece of legislation rather than separate Acts for each sector. Members noted that more information on the perceived disadvantages of the current structure of four governing Acts and the advantages of one omnibus Act would be helpful.

Members AGREED that a response to the letter from the ADM would be prepared by the Chair, on behalf of the Council, and submitted to Alberta Learning with a request that Council be given the opportunity to comment on draft legislation.

5. Continued discussion of the future directions of ACAT

At the June Council meeting, members approved the 2002-2005 ACAT Business Plan. Part of the discussion focused on the question, "What would improve the transfer system?" One item identified for further action was a research initiative on the success of the transfer experience. J. Hughes volunteered to draft a research proposal to investigate this question. This will involve a retrospective look at transcripts. To inform the proposal, the Executive Officer will ask each Contact Person to provide a sample transcript for a graduate who has received transfer credit. A research proposal will be presented at a future Council meeting.

A second research question was identified during discussion of removing barriers to student admission. ACAT members suggested that a common format for admission requirements would be helpful. Another suggestion was that ACAT encourage institutions to simplify and facilitate a smooth process for students, rather than make the system standardized. One possibility might be to encourage institutions to provide the capability via their Web sites to enable a prospective student to enter his/her Alberta high school courses and find out to which programs he/she may be eligible for admission. This will be discussed with the Contact Persons.

The discussion of the future directions of ACAT will continue at the next Council meeting.

6. ACAT Communications Plan

Marena Fakli, of the Secretariat, introduced the idea of a communications plan for Council and presented a draft plan for discussion. Members suggested that effort be concentrated on those topics students really are interested in and focus groups or a survey instrument for students were suggested. Parents or parent groups were also suggested as a valid group at which to target information.

It was decided that this topic would also be discussed at the Committee of Contact Persons meeting in Grande Prairie on 23 October.

The Chair also asked members if they would be interested in and available to participate in presentations regarding ACAT and the admissions and transfer system. Members indicated that they could participate, pending workload and time availability.

7. Alberta Transfer Guide

Each year Council produces the *Alberta Transfer Guide* which is distributed widely to post-secondary institutions in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, as well as to libraries and professional associations. New transfer agreements are being negotiated regularly throughout the year. The next edition of the *Guide* will be produced in Spring 2003.

The Executive Officer drew members' attention to two tables included in the agenda package. The first table shows the number of transfer agreements that have been finalized

since the publication of the *Guide* last spring, and the second table is a summary of the transfer proposals currently under consideration in the transfer system.

A member commented that it is important to 'weed out' stale and outdated agreements from the *Transfer Guide*. The Executive Officer confirmed that this is done yearly in preparation for the published *Guide*. It is the ongoing responsibility of each institution to maintain the currency of their agreements by informing their institutional partners of curriculum or program changes. She also stated that the Web site is now updated once a week.

8. Secondary – Post-Secondary articulation

ACAT seeks to promote smooth transitions as students move from high school to post-secondary programs.

(a) English Language Arts

Implementation of the new high school English Language Arts curriculum is underway. The new curriculum at the Grade 10 level was implemented in September 2001 and the Grade 11 implementation proceeded this September.

A letter and report to help post-secondary institutions make their decisions about acceptance of the new English Language Arts courses sequences for admission to post-secondary institutions was distributed to the institutions in May. The report includes comparative information about the current English 10, 20, 30/English 13, 23, 33 and the new ELA 10-1, 20-1, 30-1/ELA 10-2, 20-2, 30-2 course sequences. To date 10 institutions have responded to ACAT's letter and report on the acceptance of the ELA 10, 20, 30 course sequence for post-secondary admission. All reporting institutions have indicated the ELA 30-1 will be accepted for admission to programs where English 30 was accepted; ELA 30-2 will be accepted for admission to programs where English 33 was accepted.

(b) Social Studies

The next high school curriculum to be revised is Social Studies. Provincial implementation dates call for a Grade 10 implementation in Fall 2006.

At the request of the Social Studies program manager, Shirley Douglas, the Chair and Executive Officer has met with her in early September to discuss the possibility of establishing an articulation committee. The proposed revisions to the curriculum mean the change is rated as a major change. As such, the Council considered creating a secondary to post-secondary articulation committee. The purpose of such a committee initially would be to compile a list of required skills they would expect Social Studies 30 students to have in order to succeed in their post-secondary studies.

Members discussed the potential composition of an articulation committee and suggested committee members would need a strong interdisciplinary grounding in history/social sciences/political sciences/economics. These are the subject areas at which Social 30 is particularly targeted. Committee members also need an understanding of their own institutional admission criteria.

R. Morrow commented that a Social Studies articulation committee would be beneficial.

It was MOVED and SECONDED that a Social Studies Secondary to Post-Secondary Articulation Committee be struck.

CARRIED

Secretariat staff will begin to bring together this committee.

(c) Science

The science courses in high school are also scheduled for curricular changes although the department has indicated that the changes would be considered minor with minimal content change. At this point, members felt that the need for an articulation committee was minimal.

(d) Updates on curriculum developments

The Chair invited R. Morrow to provide updates about the development of curriculum at the secondary level. Given the number of new members, he suggested that the Curriculum Development diagram be presented again at a future meeting. He also referred to the *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* which was in the agenda package. This policy paper is part of Alberta Learning's commitment to enhance educational opportunities for Aboriginal learners in the province. He also provided an update on Alberta's Commission on Learning. Part of the Commission's mandate is to examine transitions. This has direct relevance to the work of ACAT.

9. Committee of Contact Persons' meeting – 23 October

To facilitate communication both among the institutions as well as with ACAT itself, ACAT established an informal network of post-secondary institutional representatives called "Contact Persons". The network of Contact Persons currently includes 35 institutions. Each year the Chair and Executive Officer meet with Contact Persons and their assistants to discuss issues of importance to the work of ACAT. The 2002 meeting will be held in Grande Prairie on October 23 and hosted by Grande Prairie Regional College.

The Executive Officer drew members' attention to last year's agenda and invited Council members to suggest any issues they wish to have discussed this year. One item identified at a previous meeting is with respect to best practices about notification of changes to admission requirements. As previously mentioned Contact Persons will be asked to provide a copy of a typical student transcript to facilitate a research project on student mobility. Members suggested they could be asked to identify practices in place at each institution to maintain the accuracy and currency of all transfer agreements.

10. Common Grading Scale/Acceptance of Minimal Passing Grades

By June 2001, all four universities and the private university colleges in Alberta have agreed to adopt a 4.0 Alpha grading scale. Many public colleges and technical institutes have also begun to convert to the common grading scale. The Executive Officer noted that each

Contact Person will be asked to provide a progress report from his/her institution at their October meeting.

The Chair raised the issue of acceptance of minimal passing grades on transfer. The issue, which had arisen during her visit to Athabasca University, concerns the system as a whole. If an Athabasca student achieves a grade in a course that falls between 50 and 60 percent, he/she is not given transfer credit by the University of Alberta (UofA). Concern also arose when Lakeland College discovered that on moving from a 9.0 scale to the common grading scale, the minimal pass grade of "1" is not recognized for transfer credit by the UofA.

Underlying this concern is the question of the different grade distributions at each institution. If the grade distribution were similar at different institutions, a minimal passing grade would be more comparable across the system and would support greater ease of acceptance.

The Chair wondered if ACAT could play an intermediary role among institutions by collecting grade distribution data for analysis by an independent researcher. Some members felt this was not appropriate in that it infringed on institutional autonomy, there could be a variety of interpretations of grade distributions, and that transfer agreements are based on a certain level of trust. Other members felt that this might be a useful exercise but stringent controls would be needed and that variables such as entrance averages, and withdrawal and repeating of courses policies also need to be considered.

The Chair thanked members for their thoughtful comments and the good discussion. It was felt that such a discussion, to clarify the issue, was appropriate for ACAT and was sufficient at this time.

11. Post-secondary Transitions in Alberta 2000

ACAT has collaborated with partners in Alberta Learning to study the transitions that Grade 12 students make as they enroll in post-secondary programs. The report, "Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta: Education Outcomes of 1999/2000 Grade 12 Students" is the latest publication resulting from the collaboration. This report, which was included in the agenda package, is distributed to participating post-secondary institutions and school jurisdictions.

This report is based on the Duplicate Application Detection (DAD) database. Major findings of the analysis are:

- approximately 28% of 1999/2000 grade 12 students and 36% of 1999/2000 graduates were attending a post-secondary institution in the fall of 2000;
- less than 10% of those enrolled at Alberta's three residential universities were without a diploma, in contrast to 33% of students at one public college;
- proportionally more females than males were attending post-secondary institutions;
- new students at the former vocational colleges were significantly older than students entering all other sectors;
- students attending university had the highest grade 12 average (78%) of all post secondary groups;
- across public, separate and Francophone authorities, as well as across census divisions, there were noticeable differences in the percentage of grade 12 graduates continuing immediately to post-secondary education; Francophone (43%) and Catholic

jurisdictions (40%) sent a significantly greater proportion of their graduates to Alberta's post-secondary institutions than did the non-Catholic jurisdictions (35%); and

- about 5% of the 1998/1999 grade 12 students entered the post-secondary system on a delayed basis in the fall of 2000.

12. Items for information

The Executive Officer drew members' attention to the following news articles and documents included in the agenda package.

- *Final Report of the MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning*, May 2002. The recommendations contained in the report were forwarded to the Minister of Learning.
- "Alberta's Commission on Learning Prepares to Hear From Albertans". Alberta Learning News Release, 26 August 2002. Alberta's Commission on Learning is the first in-depth review of Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system to be conducted since 1972.
- "Programs to promote articulation". *American Association of Community Colleges*, Vol. XIV, No. 14. July 9, 2002. As an awareness of the need for articulation of the 2-year college associate degree expands into the American consciousness, community colleges tweak, and test programs to do that.
- "UofC 101 earning top marks". *Calgary Herald*. August 22, 2002. UofC has designed a course specifically to assist those new to the university with the transition to university life.
- "Schools not relevant to most, Clark says: overhaul to target 80 per cent who bypass university". *Vancouver Sun*. 3 September 2002. British Columbia is planning an overhaul of its education system because schools are not meeting the needs of the vast majority of students, says Education Minister Christy Clark.
- "State Policies Affect Transfer Rate From 2-Year to 4-Year Institutions, Study Finds". *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 5 September, 2002. The premise of the article is that when states set clear goals and have stronger centralized higher education governance structures, they have better success with transfer from 2-year to 4-year programs.
- For the first time, Alberta and other provinces will be part of UNESCO's International Adult Learners' Week on 8-14 September. Canada has joined more than 30 other countries in celebrating this week in order to make a concerted effort to raise the profile and promote adult learning throughout life. This year's theme in Alberta is "Explore the Possibilities". Further information is available on the Web site, www.adultlearning.unesco.ca.

The Executive Officer invited members to forward articles of interest that could be included in future agenda packages.

It was MOVED and SECONDED that the meeting be adjourned.

CARRIED