Alberta

Alberta Council on
Admissions and Transfer (ACAT)

BEST PRACTICES IN TRANSFER REVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Best Practices in Transfer is a review of the internal business processes used by Alberta post-secondary institutions in the administration of credit transfer agreements established via the ACAT transfer system. There were two primary purposes for the review: (1) to document the common existing internal business processes and, (2) to recommend Best Practices regarding these business processes. The document will assist both new personnel in the ACAT system and those institutions seeking to improve their business processes.

The project had three phases: research, analysis and writing/review. Research included the administration of an on-line survey and an interview survey. The on-line survey ascertained which institutions were considered by peers and themselves to be best practice institutions. The interview survey delved into the business process details at 25 institutions and was administered to Contact Persons, Contact Persons Assistants, academic administrators, and faculty. The research findings were analyzed in the context of general best practice literature and a draft report submitted to the ACAT Best Practices Advisory Group. The Advisory Group reviewed the document and endorsed it with minor edits.

The document itself contains three sections of background information, eight sections containing the 26 Best Practices and five appendices with sample documents and explanations. The background information includes sections on the project's research methodology, as well as general information on best practices and an overview of the Alberta post-secondary transfer system.

The eight sections of best practices include two on system leadership and then six sections broken roughly into the various stages through which a transfer agreement passes. The best practices in leadership stressed the need for strong support from the senior administration of both the provincial government and the post-secondary institutions. This leadership articulates the vision for the system and manages the central tools such as the Contact Person Webset. As well, operational leadership is required from the Contact Persons which necessitates careful selection, empowerment and resourcing of the position. The position also needs to be strategically placed within institutional structures and processes in order to fulfill the required tasks.

Six sections of best practices deal with operational business processes in the development and maintenance of transfer agreements. The first examined processes of program development and how transfer consideration fit into that process. Best practice institutions included transfer consideration very early in the process and included the Contact Person in the process. They also did not inundate the system with low value transfer agreements. The second section reviewed the processing of a transfer agreement proposal once it is received at an institution, and how it flowed between the Contact Person and the subject matter expert making the determination on transfer. Best practice institutions provided clear instructions to the subject matter experts on the process, tracked the process, established performance expectations of the process and explored all transfer alternatives. The third section reviewed the maintenance of transfer agreements. Best practice institutions considered transfer implications early in the curriculum change process, gave timely notice of changes to their trading partners and monitored student performance to ensure transfer credit was appropriate. The fourth section reviewed communication surrounding transfer agreements. Best practice institutions used the Contact Person Website effectively for standard communication and contacted their trading partners through the Contact Person regarding nonstandard issues. The fifth section reviewed institutions and program areas which were new to the transfer system. Best practice institutions researched which institutions would be the most appropriate trading partners, and engaged in a relationship building process with these potential partners. The final section reviewed the communication of transfer agreements to students. Best practice institutions had close communication, through a variety of means, between the staff managing the transfer agreement processes and those advising with students.

Throughout the 26 best practices there were a number of common themes, including:

- Transfer consideration should be formally included as early as possible in an institution's business processes.
- The Contact Person at each institution should be formally included in the institutional business processes involving transfer.
- Institutions need to ensure that the trust and efficiency upon which the transfer system is based is maintained throughout the entire transfer process.
- Institutions need to continue to improve the systematization and monitoring of their transfer processes.
- The transfer agreement system requires continued central leadership and support and increased research and investment in order to advance.

In general the system is performing well and Alberta will continue to lead the field if it maintains its development in the area.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Best Practices in Transfer Review

Background Historically, the majority of students admitted to post-secondary studies remained within their original program and institution until graduation. Over the last several decades, however, there has been a gradual increase in student mobility between programs and institutions. In addition to this generalized trend toward greater individual mobility, the Province of Alberta has encouraged mobility through the development of regional colleges and programs. Students may obtain the first portion of their post-secondary education at these regional sites and then complete their program/degree requirements at a larger centre. For this systematic mobility, or transfer, to work efficiently it requires general acceptance in principle that students should not have to repeat successful learning experiences.

Prior to the 1970's in Alberta, and currently in many jurisdictions, evaluating the transferability of a student's learning experience has been done at an individual student level. This required evaluation of individual transcripts on a course-by-course basis. This was a laborious task for post-secondary institutions in Alberta and it met with mixed results. Students wanting to transfer from one institution to another were not always guaranteed they would receive full credit for their learning experience from a receiving institution.

In order to address this problem, Alberta post-secondary institutions (PSIs) and the provincial government worked together to establish the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT). The Council's mandate included the development and maintenance of a system of inter-institutional, intra-provincial credit transfer agreements. These agreements define what courses and programs are transferable between institutions. The existence of these agreements allows a student to transfer earned credit between institutions with predictability and to use credits earned at one institution to fulfill program requirements at another, eliminating the need to repeat learning experiences.

Current Situation While the Alberta transfer agreement system, coordinated by ACAT, is world class there is normal attrition of key personnel every year, both at ACAT and the post-secondaries. This has brought new personnel into the system who may be unfamiliar with critical processes that keep the system viable. There is currently no reference documentation on certain key aspects of the transfer agreement system, including documentation on internal business processes and best practices. Over the past few years, personnel from the PSIs and ACAT have requested that this type of information be available in document form.

Additionally, some aspects of the transfer agreement system depend on business processes internal to PSIs. These processes differ from institution to institution with varying degrees of efficiency and effectiveness. Existing personnel have also requested that a document be available that would assist them in developing efficient and effective business processes related to establishment and maintenance of transfer agreements.

Scope of the Best Practices in Transfer Review

High quality administration of the existing Alberta transfer agreement system is dependent upon:

- ❖ system-wide commitment to the principles of transfer
- ❖ efficient and effective administration of an inter-institutional system that supports the processing of transfer agreements and communicates these agreements to the public
- ❖ sustainable institutional business processes that support efficient and effective processing of transfer agreements within and between PSIs

It is the responsibility of ACAT to oversee the first two areas. Member institutions commit to stated transfer principles upon entering the transfer system. ACAT monitors the commitment to transfer principles through its work with the provincial Department of Advanced Education, PSI Senior Academic Officers who comprise the majority of the Council's membership, various standing and *ad hoc* inter-institutional committees, and with PSI administrators (Contact Persons) who process the transfer agreements.

ACAT delivers an inter-institutional transfer agreement tool through its state-of-the-art web-based Contact Person Website (CPW) and transfer agreement database.[1] It is through the CPW that PSIs launch, review, set and maintain transfer agreements. The details of these agreements are held within a transfer agreement database which is the source for data that populates an interactive web-based transfer reference system, the Alberta On-Line Transfer Guide and the annual publication of the hard-copy version of the transfer guide. Both formats of the guide provide students with detailed information on how courses and programs transfer between institutions within the province of Alberta.

As the provincial coordinating body for credit transfer, ACAT has been asked by the PSI's to develop reference documentation on the third area mentioned above; the PSIs own business processes. This is the purpose and scope of the Best Practices in Transfer Review. Consequently, the following report will:

- ❖ document the key intra-institutional business processes involved in establishing credit transfer agreements,
- ❖ recommend best practices associated with transfer agreement business processes.

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[1] This review does not focus on the CPW and was not intended to provide feedback on the relative merits or shortcomings of that system other than as they relate to the intra-institutional processes that interface with it. As well, the review does not comment on institutional transfer decision-making criteria or policy, student services, student success in transfer, or transfer principles.

BEST PRACTICES REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Overview

There are four approaches generally used in determining best practices:

- Self-Assessment – this entails an organization documenting what its' members feel is working well within the organization. Self-assessment is a subjective process, although it provides experienced professionals the opportunity to assess what works well within their organization and where there are performance gaps. A third party is often employed to facilitate these assessments.
- Peer Review – similar to self-assessment, peer review is a relatively subjective form of evaluation. Nonetheless, peer review provides a greater measure of objectivity due to the application of external and multiple perspectives in evaluation.
- Third Party Expert Review – while third part review is another subjective means of evaluation, it provides the perspective of specialized expertise and the objectivity of a third party.
- Developmental Metrics – this process relies upon empirical performance measures to establish whether business processes qualify as a best practice. Developmental metrics involves establishing performance baselines and setting targets for improvement, as well as tracking improvement and evaluating progress in the context of a pre-established, quality improvement continuum.

The Best Practices in Transfer Review

The Best Practices in Transfer Review utilized peer review, self-assessment, and third party expert review. Gordon Preston, Associate Professor of Business at The King's University College in Edmonton, was retained by ACAT to lead the review and function as the third party expert. He has worked directly with the Alberta transfer credit system for over ten years in various post-secondary managerial roles.

It was decided that since the key personnel involved in transfer agreement processing are the ACAT Contact Persons, these individuals should be the primary sources of information for this review. The peer review evaluation of best practices was therefore administered through an *ad hoc* ACAT Contact Person's advisory group. Other Contact Persons were invited to identify and comment on institutions with potential best practices through an on-line survey. Finally, self-assessment of best practices was administered to ACAT Contact Persons and other institutional personnel through both an on-line survey as well as through individual, key informant interviews.

The Process First, via an on-line survey Contact Persons evaluated two aspects of the transfer system: the efficiency and effectiveness of their own institutional processes, and also, those institutions within the Alberta transfer system that consistently performed well as a transfer agreement partner. Based on the results of the self-assessments and peer review feedback, it was possible to identify a number of potential best practice institutions.

Following the on-line survey, interviews were conducted with representatives from 25 of the 35 ACAT member institutions. 12 interviews were conducted in-person and 13 were via telephone. Those interviewed included: 23 Contact Persons, 11 Contact Persons Assistants, 2 Program Development Administrators, 3 Information Technology staff, 7 Academic Administrators and a number of faculty members. A standardized interview questionnaire was used as the basis for the surveys. Questions were modified as appropriate depending on an individual's role in their institution, and taking into account the ways in which different institutions administered the transfer agreement process.

Both the on-line survey and the interview questionnaire were developed by the consultant, reviewed by sociologist Dr. David Long, and vetted with the ACAT Advisory Group on Transfer Best Practice prior to implementation.

After review of survey results, and coupled with general knowledge of best practices, the consultant identified best transfer practices and institutions in a draft report to the Advisory Group. After receiving comments from the advisory group and making the necessary revisions, the report was presented to the ACAT Council for acceptance.

PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

The following brief overview provides a context for understanding Best Practices in Transfer. The concept of Best Practice is best viewed as a movement toward, rather than arrival at, the optimum methods for accomplishing a goal. In other words, Best Practices involve a process of quality improvement.

Techniques to improve organizational processes have flown under many banners - Total Quality Management, Continuous Quality Improvement, Sigma Six, Business Process Re-engineering, Performance Benchmarking to name a few. Most of these approaches contain common elements, each briefly outlined below. The Best Practices in Transfer Review used these common elements as a starting point in the design of the research.[2]

Support from Senior Levels Organizational analysis has shown that without strong support from senior personnel, efforts to develop and maintain best practices tend to fail. This support may take various forms, including focusing, resourcing, championing, recognizing and rewarding.

The need for senior support is needed within the Alberta transfer agreement system at both the provincial and institutional levels. Within the Alberta system, a great deal of inter-institutional coordination and cooperation occurs at the provincial level via ACAT. Institutional level support is needed to maintain the system since the processes are largely resourced at the institutional level. Full participation and cooperation between both trading partners is required to establish and maintain a transfer agreement. Support at these levels occurs when the principles of transfer are highly valued.

A Culture of Quality and Improvement While the support of senior officials is requisite for best practices, a culture of quality and improvement needs to infuse an organization. Best practices are largely developed and maintained by key individuals working within the organization.

The Best Practices in Transfer Review sought to identify where there was broad commitment to quality and improvement in the transfer agreement proposal processes. In particular, the Review examined support involving two key groups. The Review examined the practices of faculty and academic administrators as they develop courses and programs that may go out for transfer, as well as assessing the transfer agreements coming to their institution. The Review also examined the ways in which Contact Persons and their Assistants manage the pertinent internal processes. The goal was to identify the extent to which members of these two key groups value the concept of transfer and were willing to work toward improving transfer to and from their institution.

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[2] See Appendix #1 for further reading on quality improvement and best practices in higher education administration.

Developmental Metrics As mentioned, best practice is more of a movement toward, rather than an arrival at, optimum methods to achieve a goal. Consequently, best practices can be measured by the degree to which they indicate progressive achievement towards a clearly defined performance target or goal.

The goal within the Alberta transfer system is for no students to unnecessarily repeat previously completed learning. The purpose of establishing transfer agreements via a central system is to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in achieving that goal. The Best Practices in Transfer Review examined whether there was a progressive improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of an institution's transfer agreement process.

Overview of the Alberta Transfer System

Within the Alberta post-secondary transfer system there are different types of transfer agreements, although some types are more common within different sectors of the transfer system than others. The sectors have become increasingly blurred in recent years and will continue to do so, although it is still helpful to understand the different post-secondary sectors and types of transfer agreements.

Post-Secondary Sectors

The Alberta post-secondary transfer sectors include colleges and technical institutes, private institutions offering university degrees, and public universities.

Colleges & Technical Institutes Traditionally, colleges and technical institutes have offered one-year certificate and two-year diploma training programs, generally with a vocational focus. Some colleges are public community colleges and some are private cultural colleges. A number of colleges have also offered university transfer (UT) courses designed to ladder into specific degree programs at a university. UT courses were often modelled after a specific university's curriculum and students receive program advising related to degree completion at that university. The situation with colleges and technical institutes is currently changing as the province has approved program expansion at a number of these institutions to now include the offering of applied degrees.

Private Institutions Offering University Degrees Within Alberta a number of private, largely faith-based, post-secondary institutions are authorized by the province to confer three-year and four-year degrees within specific disciplines. In most cases, the title of these institutions includes use of the term "University College." Also, DeVry Institute, a for-profit degree granting institution participates within this sector.

Public Universities There are four public universities in Alberta, three residential and one distance, that confer three and four-year degrees. These are the main receiving institutions for degree completion.

Transfer Types

Program Articulation In general, transfer within the college and technical institute sector involves the articulation of program transfer i.e., the first year of one institution's program ladders into the second year of another institution's diploma program. These are called One Plus One (1+1) agreements. Similarly, articulation from a two-year diploma program from the colleges or technical institutes ladders into a four-year degree, or a Two Plus Two (2+2) agreement. In Program Articulation agreements transfer credit may be given as a block, or as advanced standing with program completion requirements articulated at the receiving institution.

Credit Transfer While transfer between institutions at the course-by-course level has been used primarily between the universities, or between college based university transfer programs and the universities, it is increasingly common between diploma programs and in some cases between diploma programs and degree programs. Course-by-course transfer generally takes one of two forms, a transfer course or a transferable course.

A transfer course is developed with transfer in mind by a sending institution and is generally modeled after the same course at a particular receiving institution, possibly sharing course numbering and title. These courses generally receive specific course equivalence. In other words, students would receive transfer credit for a specific course at the receiving institution.

Transferable courses are initially developed as part of a sending institution's program, but have sufficient similarity to other institutions' courses that transfer is sought. Specific course equivalence of the course may be given if the course is deemed equivalent to a particular course at the receiving institution. The granting of unspecified course equivalence indicates that a course fulfills general discipline and level requirements but not requirements of a specific course. For example – a 2nd year psychology course that does not have a direct equivalent at the receiving institution may receive credit for PSYC 2xxx and be used to satisfy degree requirements at that institution. Specific course equivalence is generally more advantageous to the student as it will fill specific program requirements. Unspecified credit only fills more general program requirements.

Transcripting of transfer and transferable courses should follow the National Transcript Guide developed by the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

It was noted above that senior level support is a prerequisite to the establishment of a best practice. In terms of the Alberta credit transfer system, this leadership is needed at both the jurisdiction and institution level. Although the study of leadership at these levels is outside the scope of this review, there were a number of significant observations about system leadership offered consistently by those in our Review. Given that those we interviewed represent a broad cross section of participants in the post-secondary transfer credit system, a number of the more important observations are worth noting.

While member institutions in the Alberta post-secondary credit transfer system participate on a voluntary basis, the province resources the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer to coordinate the transfer system.[3] This coordination role has both a leadership and an operational function, both of which are key to the success of the system.

Best Practice #1 – Central Leadership

Best practices develop most effectively when several forms of support by senior leadership are provided. The needs for these supports and their relative presence in the Alberta system is reviewed below:

Focus – Virtually every participant cited the benefits to students as the primary reason for participating in the transfer system. Such a consistent focus across a broad system indicates that the centralized leadership role of ACAT has been successful in bringing focus to the transfer agreement system.

Resourcing – While the bulk of the expense involved in maintaining the transfer system lies with participating institutions, the central leadership and the tools for participating institutions are provided through ACAT. In the course of the review a number of suggestions for administrative improvements were noted, which will require on-going investment in development projects at ACAT. Beyond the administrative improvements, there is a general lack of information about how well the system works and where improvement efforts should be targeted. It will be difficult to guide future development of the system without increased longitudinal research, particularly into transfer students' rationale for their program path, their experience of the system, and the individual and systemic outcomes of the provincial transfer system.

Championing – When problems arise within the transfer agreement system, central leadership provides a neutral voice in resolving differences between interests and keeping the participants focused on the principles to which member institutions have committed. While some institutions suggested that this aspect of central leadership could be

[3] See Appendix #2 for a review of transfer models and the hybrid model developed in Alberta.

bolstered, particularly in advocating for 2+2 agreements, there has been little utilization of existing mediation processes. Given that there is broad subscription to transfer by diverse, autonomous institutions the general concept of transfer within the province seems to have been well championed. Nonetheless, the profile of the mediation option may need to be raised among institutions as a constructive alternative.

Recognizing & Rewarding – Within an organization senior leadership normally has control of the resources required to recognize and reward those within the organization that have committed to and developed best practices. Despite having very limited resources, ACAT does recognize the work of member institutions. There is general awareness throughout Canada that the Alberta system is a model and leader for the post-secondary community across the country. This review is another example of seeking to recognize the contribution of those who strive to continually improve the transfer agreement system.

Best Practice #2 – Central Tools

ACAT provides the tools to both develop credit transfer agreements and to communicate these agreements to students. The heart of the system is a web-based workflow management system known as the Contact Persons Website (CPW). Through the CPW, institutions launch and respond to transfer agreement proposals. Notification of program and course changes are made to trading partners and impacted transfer agreements are also reviewed through the CPW.

This same tool feeds the database that forms the backbone of the on-line Transfer Guide used to communicate transfer agreements to the general public.

Interview surveys consistently cited the training and troubleshooting support received from ACAT as being crucial to the success of the system. This support was consistently cited as being timely, accurate and done with laudable patience. As well, the tool itself is generally highly regarded, although issues arise with the short time-out setting on the provincial portal through which the site is accessed.

CONTACT PERSONS

As noted previously, the efficient and effective establishment and maintenance of Alberta PSI transfer credit agreements has required that central leadership facilitate the development of both a supportive culture and central tools. Principle conduits of this culture and stewards of the tools at the institutional level are the ACAT Contact Persons (CP). The CPs are responsible for institutional adherence to the ACAT guiding principles, institutional use of the CPW, and managing the internal processing of transfer agreements.

Most CPs also have an assistant (CPA) who attends to many of the day-to-day operational matters for which the CP is responsible.

Best Practice #3 – Well Selected & Resourced Contact Person

Due to the central role the CP plays in the transfer system, institutions need to allocate an appropriate level of responsibility to this position. The role of CP requires sufficient stature to influence senior and mid-level academic administrators on the development of, and adherence to, transfer related policy. As well, the CP and/or CPA need sufficient time and tools to manage the transfer agreements. They should also have natural connections with key, transfer information users. Specifically, the following practices were common at institutions identified with best practices:

Role in Committees – The CP should have a voice on Academic Council/GFC or on a relevant sub-committee. It is within these bodies that transfer issues often arise, in some cases indirectly. The CP can provide proper perspective on questions and issues that may be overlooked during discussions that do not seem directly related to transfer.

Role in Business Processes – The CP should also be in the communication chain for program/course approval. This will be discussed in more detail in Best Practice #7. In general, Best Practice institutions involve the CP in a formal way as early in the program and course development process as possible, particularly when a course or program is not specifically modeled after those at a receiving institution.

Role in Personnel Orientation – CPs at best practice institutions are included in the orientation of new academic administrators. This is particularly important when the outgoing administrator will no longer be on staff to mentor the new administrator.

Role and Resourcing of Contact Person Assistant - CPAs need time and tools to learn and manage transfer agreements. They play an important role in quality control and in ensuring that the process is efficient. Assistants need a strong connection, either through organizational structure or formal communication channels, with key transfer information users such as the CP, calendar editors, as well as admission and program advisors. Communication between these users needs to be two-way so as to ensure that all parties have the information they need to facilitate the transfer process. For example, admission advisors may note that there are a high number of incoming students presenting a particular course for transfer, and may suggest launching a transfer agreement proposal. Conversely, a CPA offering timely notice of a new or pending transfer agreement may positively impact a student advising session.

Best Practice # 4 – CP Role of Quality Control

The Alberta transfer system works because it is good for students and efficient for institutions. However, efficiency is at risk when trading partners spend needless time communicating back and forth in order to seek clarification on information that should have been included in transfer agreement proposals and responses. The main guardian for maintaining the quality of this communication is the CP. The CP ensures that proposals are complete, responses are clear and that the system is not being inundated with low value proposals, i.e., proposals which no, or very few, students are likely to use.

Best Practice # 5 – CP Role of Transfer Expert

Within best practice institutions the CP and the CPA are provided with the resources to become the institutional expert in transfer. They are recognized as having this expertise and relied upon for guidance in transfer consideration in areas such as: program development, transfer proposal assessments, and transfer negotiations. Most new CP's reported that both the annual and custom ACAT training were beneficial, as was the support they received from CPs at other institutions. A number of participants recommended that new CPs establish a formal mentor relationship with a more experienced CP from within their sector to act as a resource, particularly concerning internal processing issues.

Best Practice # 6 – CP Role of Communication Quarterback

Best practice institutions funnel most inter-institutional transfer communication through the CP. The CP at these institutions thus acts as a:

- ***filter***, screening out questions or concerns that are common to the system
- ***translator***, putting questions into common language for the trading partner
- ***guide***, sending the query through the appropriate channels – normally the trading partner CP.

SENDING A PROPOSAL

This section deals with establishing a transfer agreement proposal for a new course or program. Establishing transfer agreement proposals for existing courses and programs is covered in the section on New Institutions.

Before a transfer agreement proposal is launched for a new course or program, it goes through some or all of three vetting processes. Internally, most institutions have two processes for evaluating a transfer agreement proposal: one that assesses the viability of the proposal and the other that provides an academic review. As well, for programs which an institution wishes the province to recognize there is an external vetting process through the Department of Advanced Education. Some institutions seek provincial approval after establishing viability; others seek approval after completing the full internal approval process. [4] The province strongly prefers the latter process.

Best Practice # 7 – Program/Course Approval include Transfer Consideration

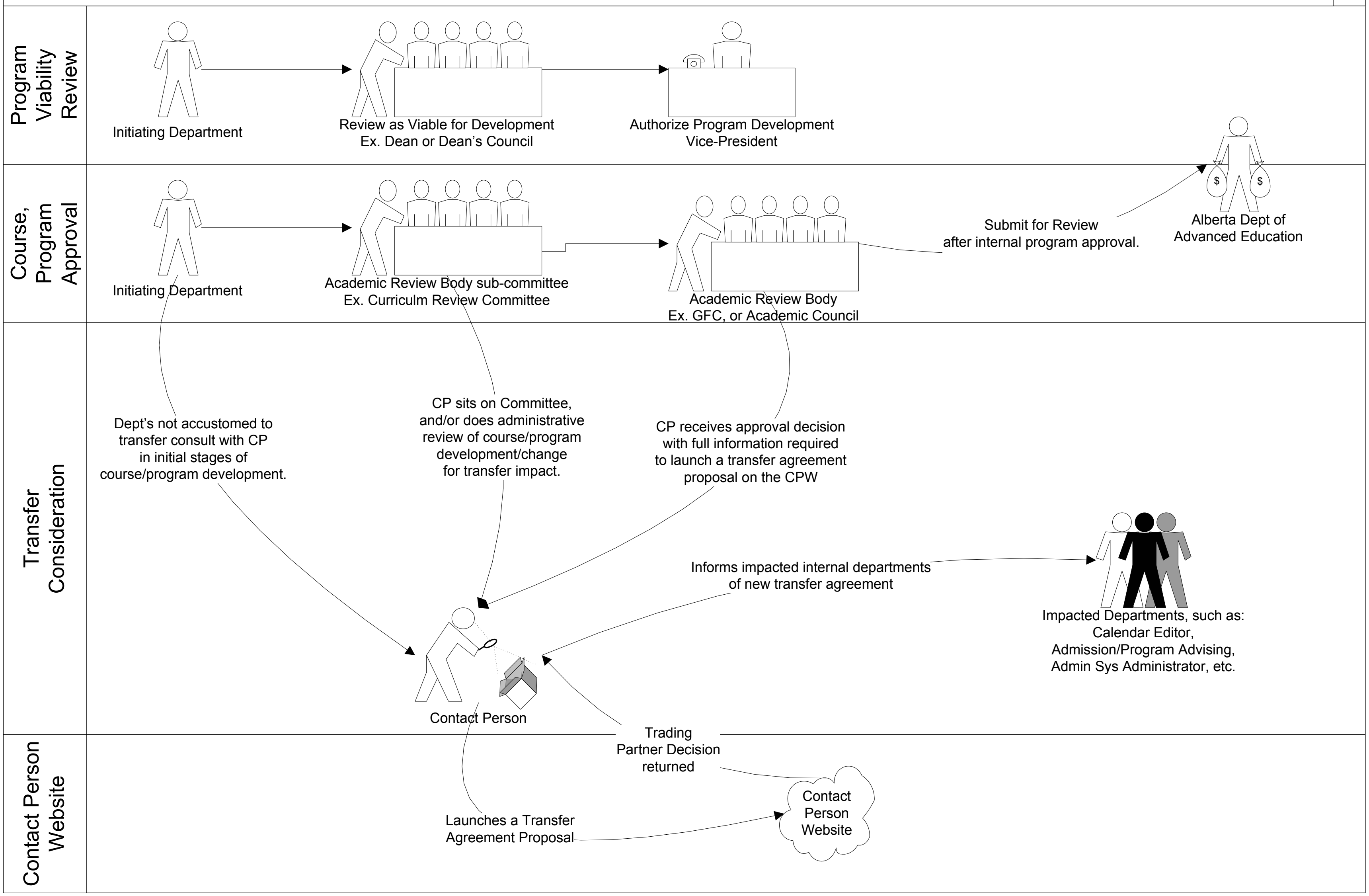
As programs and courses are developed, any information needed to assess their potential for transfer should be gathered as early in the approval process as possible. Considering transfer potential after a program has been approved can disadvantage students and create institutional inefficiency.

<u>*Students Disadvantaged*</u> - Students are disadvantaged when they do not receive optimum transfer credit for courses they have successfully completed. For example, minor rearrangement of course content or changes in course structure (such as a 3 hour lab instead of a 2 hour lab) can result in a course being accepted for specific course transfer instead of unassigned or block transfer. As noted above, specific transfer is generally of more advantage to the student. If transfer is considered at the outset of program and course development these transfer considerations can be discussed and possibly addressed by those involved.

[4] See Exhibit #1 for an overview of a common course/program development processing flow.

Exhibit # 1 - Program/Course Development:

Within the program development processes a program proposal is typically vetted first for viability and then vetted through a program approval process. It is also submitted to the province if ministerial credit is desired. Transfer credit consideration should be early in the process either through formal administrative consultation with the Contact Person, or Contact Person inclusion on appropriate committees.



Institutional Inefficiencies – When program or course information is presented to the CP or CPA to launch a transfer agreement proposal after having gone through the program/course approval process, the CP must frequently search for missing information, such as instructor level qualifications, course outlines, prerequisite courses, desired transfer, etc. This delays the process, and causes increased workload and frustration. If an institution intends to launch a transfer agreement proposal, those involved should ensure that all relevant information is included prior to program/course approval.

Best Practice institutions use one or (preferably both of) two means to ensure transfer consideration is integral to the program development and approval process.

> *Committee Processes* – CP or CPA involvement in the program/course approval committee structure is one means of ensuring transfer consideration is part of the review criteria. However, if transfer consideration is dependent upon the CP being present at a committee it can lead to the perception that it is a single individual's issue. Including consideration of transfer in formal committee reviews reinforces that transfer is an institutional priority. Best Practice institutions include transfer consideration as required information in the standard program/course development documents. For example, it is standard practice in RDC's course & program development processes that committees are restricted from reviewing course & program proposals without explicit indication of whether or not transfer is being considered. Further, if transfer is to be considered, the proposal must include all information the CPA will require for a transfer agreement proposal as well as an indication that there has been prior contact with the trading partner regarding the potential agreement.[5]
>
> *Administrative Processes* – CP or CPA involvement in program/course approval via an administrative consultation is another means of ensuring transfer consideration. The academic departments of best practice institutions get confirmation from service departments such as the Library, Student Services, etc. indicating that they can accommodate the program's requirements. If the CP is part of this consultation it encourages transfer consideration early in the development process.

Form Design – Most institutions require the use of standard forms as part of the program/course development approval process information package. Inclusion of transfer consideration on these forms encourages thoughtful consideration of transfer.[6]

Work Flow Management Tools – While most institutions manage the information flow of the program approval process through procedure documents, forms and committees, some institutions have digitized the process. Use of electronic forms that have built in messaging and process features increases efficiency and can ensure that transfer is considered during program development.[7] NAIT has developed a tool, Merlin, that goes well beyond a workflow tool and incorporates a very thoughtfully developed, robust system, which assists in curriculum design, delivery and evaluation.

[5] See Appendix # 3.
[6] See Appendix # 3.
[7] Contact Mount Royal College or SAIT for more information on these tools.

Best Practice # 8 – Proposal Content

The documentation and training that CPs receive from ACAT concerning launching a proposal is reported to be quite helpful. A number of Best Practices on transfer proposal content, which Receiving Institutions stress for expedited consideration, include:

Quality Control – The CP should ensure that full information is provided, specifying as clearly as possible both the desired transfer and instructor level qualifications.[8] CPs, particularly those in larger institutions, can experience difficulty determining to which department a proposal should be sent. If the proposal indicates the desired transfer as TBA, the potential for missends or having to call for clarification is increased. Given the volume of agreements going through the system every year, inefficiency is greatly increased by incomplete proposals. As well, simply sending out carbon copy proposals to multiple receiving institutions without researching to which of their courses transfer is desired, signals to the receiving institution that these are probably low value transfer agreements with little expectation that students will actually use the agreement. Again, these bog down the system and contribute to reduced levels of commitment.

Intellectual Property – It is common within the Alberta transfer system for University Transfer programs to model their courses after those at their main trading partner. However, it is considered an infringement on intellectual property to copy course outlines without prior authorization. Some institutions report doing transfer agreement proposal reviews and finding the course outline to be their own with only the institution name having been changed. It is the Contact Person's responsibility to educate their faculty and academic administrators on the illegality of this form of intellectual property infringement.

Retain Course Outlines – some institutions only retain current academic year course outlines. This creates problems when trying to create transfer agreements that are retroactive. If the sending institution has not retained the course outlines from previous years, retroactive agreements are not possible. This disadvantages sending institution alumni who could have benefited from the agreement.

[8] Athabasca University differs from other receiving institutions in that it does not require that specific course equivalence be stated in the transfer agreement proposal.

RECEIVING A TRANSFER AGREEMENT PROPOSAL

Once a transfer agreement proposal is launched on the CPW it arrives in the trading partner's Work-in-Progress in-basket. At that point the Contact Person at the receiving institution assumes responsibility for facilitating the review of the proposal. The CP typically has the proposal assessed by a faculty member who is the Subject Matter Expert (SME) in the discipline under consideration. The internal process of managing the movement between the CP and the SME varies, particularly depending on the size and sector of the institution. There is considerable difference in effectiveness and efficiency of the institutional processes within different institutions.[9]

The goal of the process is to have a good decision within a reasonable time frame with minimum effort. The following Best Practices contribute to those goals.

Best Practice # 9 – Decision Criteria Communicated

Since not all SMEs are familiar with the guiding principles under which the Alberta transfer system operate it is the CP's responsibility to ensure that these principles are employed in the decision-making. Communicating this prior to the decision being rendered saves poor decisions having to be reconsidered. A two-tiered communication approach is recommended.

When sending a transfer agreement proposal to a SME for consideration the CP should attach a template cover page with a summary paragraph which indicates what the faculty member is being asked to do, process instructions, factors used in decision consideration and decision options. Also, should the faculty member wish more background information or guidance there should be a reference to a source for further information. Some institutions have an amplified version of the cover page instructions on their intranet and refer faculty to this site and/or to the ACAT website where they can read the guiding principles. As well, an invitation to seek further information from the CP should be included.[10]

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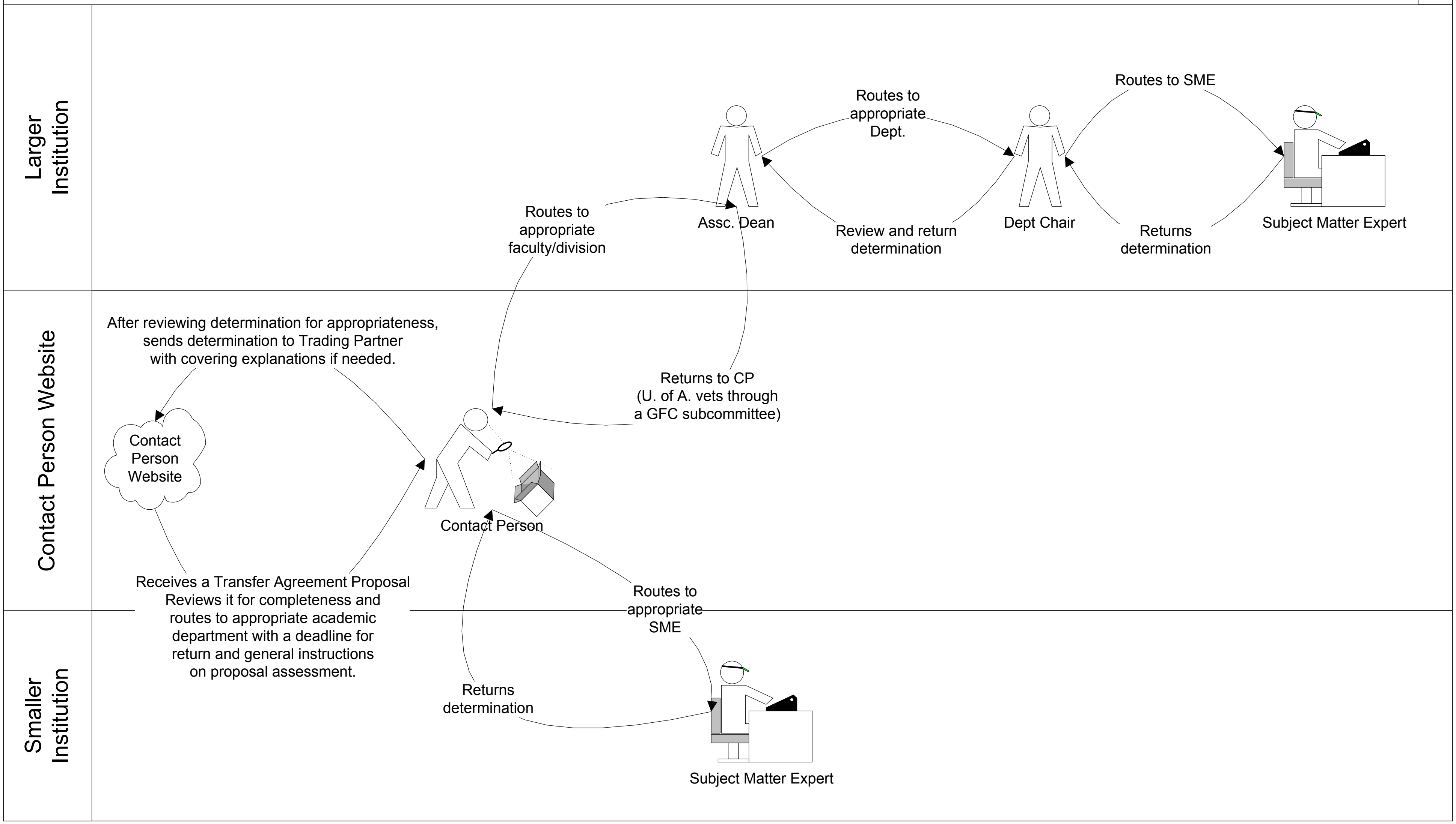
[9] See Exhibit # 2 for the different routings of a transfer agreement proposal.
[10] See Appendix # 4 for an example of a cover letter.

Exhibit #2 – Received Transfer Proposal Routing:

The referral chain in larger institutions varies but all have at least two stages, some have three as depicted here. CP monitoring of a proposal's status only goes one stage deep at all institutions. No institutions use work flow management software to monitor performance of the system. Best Practice institutions monitor time a proposal has been in the system and follow-up with those that are out of tolerance.



Best Practice # 10 – Timeframe Expectations Stated

One of the major irritants in the Alberta transfer system is the lack of timely decision making. Some agreement proposals are not processed by receiving institutions for years. The institutions consistently ranked as doing well in this regard have two things in common: clear timeframe expectations for decision making are stated in communications to SME's, and adherence to these expectations is monitored and reinforced. The latter is dealt with below.

As noted in the introductory section on Best Practices, performance targets need to be clearly articulated to those involved in the process. Only one Alberta institution actually states in a policy document the performance expectations regarding proposal assessment turn-around time. Such a statement demonstrates a clear institutional commitment to timely decisions and provides the CP with the authority to hold members of the institution accountable to this performance standard. This not only places a managerial responsibility upon the CP to ensure these standards are being met; it also places a resourcing responsibility upon the institution to ensure the standards can be met.

Many CPs who lack an institutional policy will still push for institutional commitment to moving transfer agreements through the system in a timely manner. Their usual course of action is to state the turnaround expectations on a covering memo/e-mail when sending out the proposal to an SME for assessment. Best Practice smaller institutions looked for a turnaround of two weeks, while larger institutions allow two to four weeks where the determination was administrative and four to eight-weeks where a committee structure was involved.

Best Practice # 11 – Process Tracked

As noted above, Best Practice institutions formally state the performance standards expected for the transfer agreement proposal review process. The CP is responsible for that performance standard to be met. Maintaining expected performance standards requires a formal system for tracking a proposal and for acting on those proposals that are not meeting expectations. Best practice institutions track when a proposal was sent from the CP to a department and run weekly reports on proposals that are out of tolerance. Graduated intervention is employed until the proposal is received. For example, a faculty member will be sent one or two email reminders and then a phone call. Reminders noting the history of the proposal ("sent to you on April xx with reminders on May xx and yy) and the institution's turn-around time expectations are reported to work well. Best Practice institutions report rarely having to intervene beyond a friendly reminder or two, although even at the larger institutions CP's report having made an occasional in-person visit to obtain an agreement required for a particular student's transfer assessment.

It should be noted that no institution currently tracks this process through more than one stage. That is, a CP knows when a proposal was sent out to a Faculty or department, but does not know what happens to the proposal until they receive it back.

There are currently no institutions that employ a central workflow tool that would enable all those involved in the process to access information regarding proposal content and the stage at which a given proposal is currently held. While this is not required at smaller institutions in which proposals go directly to the SME, this would be helpful in mid-sized to larger institutions where there is at least a two-stage process. Several institutions indicated that it is common to have to re-issue proposals due to the original proposal being lost. Use of a central tracking tool would reduce the number of copies being made of proposals and would allow monitoring of a proposal's location in the process. Several institutions suggested that the current CPW be revamped to include this feature. In the mean time, each CP is left to develop a tracking system that works for their institution.[11]

Best Practice # 12 – Sender Follow-up

While ideally a proposal will be processed in a timely fashion there are instances in which it may not. Major receiving institutions advise sending institutions to follow-up on the status of proposals via e-mail to the receiving CP. Some receiving CPs indicated that internal follow-up is only done when sending institutions query the status of particular proposals. A Best Practice is to have the sending institution's CP communicate with the receiving institution CP rather than from various people within the sending institution.

Best Practice # 13 – Decision Rationale Communicated

When rendering a proposal decision other than what the sending institution had requested, it is important that clear rationale be given for the decision. It is the CP's responsibility to obtain this information if it is not contained in the documentation received from the SME. Making this expectation clear on the cover page/form encourages the submission of this information from the SME.

Best Practice # 14 – Alternate Decisions Sought

Part of the quality control function of the CP is to ensure that all opportunities for establishing a transfer agreement are explored. When a transfer proposal is rejected, particularly on the basis of program relevance, the receiving CP should consider whether there is another department to which the transfer is applicable. If so, a second routing of the proposal may be necessary. This is often the case when different institutions divide the responsibility for subject matter differently, such as in the case of Management Information Systems programs. In some institutions MIS is delivered in Computing Science, while in others it is taught in the Business faculty. Even thought it is the responsibility of the sending institution to research these nuances before launching a proposal, differences between institutions may not be obvious. In such cases it is helpful for the receiving CP to note the difference in their response to the sending institution.

[11] Those looking to develop such a system should contact Athabasca University, which uses an Access database system that was developed for use at that institution.

Maintaining Transfer Agreements

The transfer agreement system is predictive in nature. Agreements are struck based on a prediction that a student's learning at a sending institution will be substantially equivalent to that at a receiving institution. One test of the prediction's validity is whether transferring students are successful in further study for which the transferred credit was prerequisite. One reason a transfer agreement may be invalid is that it has not been maintained.

Maintenance of transfer agreements is required since the agreements are based on a point-in-time comparison between trading partners' curriculum. However, post-secondary curriculum is not static, so transfer agreement validity may weaken as trading partners change their courses and programs.

There are three main vehicles for monitoring the validity of an agreement: change notification, systematic review and tracking student success. All three are currently used to varying degrees within the province. Change notification is facilitated through the CPW while systematic review and student success tracking are initiated and managed by individual institutions in cooperation with their trading partners.

Change Notification – This entails each trading partner notifying the other when changes to a course or program are being made. Trading partners assess whether changes substantially affect the agreement. Reliance on change notification requires trading partners to trust that changes which could impact their agreement will be announced to each other. One danger of relying exclusively on the change notification system to maintain transfer agreement validity is that incremental changes may be made at each institution which, by themselves, are not substantive and would therefore not impact the transfer agreement. However, the cumulative effect of several nonsubstantive changes can invalidate agreements. This "curriculum creep" would not necessarily be detected in the current change notification system.

Systematic Review – This entails performing an audit of existing transfer agreements to ensure they are current. Typically, this requires personnel to examine both trading partners' current calendar descriptions of programs/courses for which agreements exist. If discrepancies appear for a particular course then more information is gathered. Systematic review serves as a back-up system to the change notification system. It is a time consuming exercise and some institutions engaging in systematic reviews question the cost-benefit of the practice since issues with current transfer agreements are seldom identified through this process. One Best Practice institution, which also engages their trading partners in this review, reported that it is helpful as a means to open communicate with trading partners regarding anticipated changes to programs. This functions as an "early warning system" of program changes and allows the sending institution to appropriately advise students on future transfer. This function can be achieved through other more efficient means, which are discussed in the communication section.

One efficient alternative to a wholesale systematic review of transfer agreement maintenance is SAIT's practice of maintaining a "review by" date field in their internal transfer agreement database. Programs and courses with curriculum that need to be updated regularly are slated for more frequent reviews, while those that are more stable receive reviews at longer intervals.

Student Success Review – This entails performing an audit of student performance patterns. These reviews seek a correlation between success levels and the transfer agreement under which students transferred prerequisite credit. Where a significant negative correlation exists the transfer agreements may come under review. Within the Alberta transfer system monitoring transfer agreement validity through student success is performed on an *ad hoc* manual basis at most receiving institutions. For the most part, institutions rely either on faculty members reporting poor performance of transfer students or on students to self-report lack of preparation for a higher-level course, often after commencing the higher-level course. One institution does systematic review of student performance at a transfer agreement level, while several do systematic reviews of performance at a sending institution level. Most institutions reported that they had the ability to do targeted reviews at a transfer agreement level, but would only initiate such a review based on faculty or student reports of inadequate preparation. Given that the transfer system exists largely to assist in student success, use of transfer student reviews should be more broadly used in the system. As well, feedback on transfer student success should be provided to sending institutions to facilitate program development and delivery improvement.

The one institution that reported using systematic review of student performance also reported placing less reliance on rigorous predictive assessments of transfer agreements. This meant greater dependence on the sending institution's assessment of potential student success. Essentially, reduced rigor at the "front-end" required greater rigor at the "back-end." Although this approach reduces the number of false negatives (i.e. transfer agreements declined which would have worked well for students), it may increase the number of false positives (i.e. transfer agreements accepted which should have been declined). This institution reported detecting no such false positives in its student-at-risk system. This system detects struggling students very early in their first semester, and plugs them into a remediation process. Such an early warning system, either electronic through a comprehensive grade capture system or manual through faculty reporting, would be necessary for institutions relying heavily on a back-end oriented transfer agreement approach.

Best Practice # 15 – Full and Timely Change Notification

Full Disclosure - Some sending institutions reported a hesitation to fully disclose what they consider non-substantive changes. Hesitation was in part due to the added workload for both themselves and their trading partners. There was also some concern regarding the risk of having the transfer agreement cancelled. Receiving institutions clearly indicated that they preferred sending institutions to err on the side of sending too many non-substantive change notifications. This helps prevent the "curriculum creep" noted above, but more importantly it maintains the trust between trading partners which is foundational to the system, and helps to ensure the viability of the transfer agreement system.

Advance notification - Conversely, sending institutions require timely notification of curriculum change that will impact transfer agreements. If the sending institution wishes to modify their programming to mirror the changes at the receiving institution, they need considerable advance notice to initiate program development. As well, sending institution student advisors need to begin counseling their students on course selection to accommodate the anticipated change.[12]

[12] See for example the section of the U. of A. website that indicates status of proposed program changes. This website also provides advance notice on proposed changes before they are approved.

Grandfathering – Typically, institutions making program changes give public notice of this via their institutional calendar. Program changes that impact admission standards are given the longest lead-time possible, with a typical minimum notice period being one issuance of the institutional calendar. Non-admission related program changes might be initiated with a shorter notice period.

Students enrolled under old program requirements have entered into a contract with the institution for the delivery of that program. Normally, these students are "grandfathered" in terms of which program requirements they must fulfill for graduation, and are given time certain periods and conditions for completion under the original program requirements. As a Best Practice, this same grandfathering should be extended to transfer students who undertook a program of study at a sending institution, as they will have made course selection based on the program criteria published at the time of admission.

Best Practice # 16 - Substantive vs Non-substantive changes

Institutions use the CPW to notify their trading partners of changes to courses and programs via the Notification of Change screens. The screens give users two general options. One indicates to trading partners that a substantive curricular change is being made and that the agreement may need to be reviewed. The other indicates that a non-substantive change is being made which should not impact an existing transfer agreement.

Some institutions expressed uncertainty regarding what types of changes constitute a substantive change. If any of the following items are being changed, an institution should note the change as substantive:

- Instructor Level Qualifications
- Course Prerequisites
- Content Change of sufficient magnitude to change the calendar description. This assumes that institutions change calendar descriptions when course content is changed. There was some concern expressed among receiving institutions that calendar descriptions may vary in content from what is on a current course outline, and in turn may vary from what is actually delivered in the course. Since post-secondary protocol in these matters is not regulated the system has depended upon an unwritten common understanding of what constitutes a substantive change to course content. SAIT has addressed this issue by quantifying what they consider a substantive change and applying this when determining which course change approval process to adopt. SAIT uses a 5% rule, which coincides with the standard that the province uses when determining whether a program change warrants a review of a program's credit standing. Institutions wishing to provide a quantified guideline on what constitutes a substantive change for transfer agreement purposes may also want to adopt the 5% (content or hours) guideline. The underlying assumption is that the 5% change is not to content which is considered core to the discipline's canon.

Best Practice # 17 – Transfer Consideration in Curriculum Change Process

It is important that transfer consideration be built into the internal business processes associated with making changes to courses and programs. Similar to course and program development (see Best Practice # 7), transfer consideration should be built into the standard forms, the administrative consultation processes and the committee approval processes. Also similar to the course and program approval process, having the CP involved throughout the program and course change process helps to ensure that proposed changes are properly vetted for transfer implications.

Best Practice # 18 – Contact Person Monitoring Change Notifications

The Notification of Change screen on the CPW is not highly visible, and notification of change does not produce any form of “tickler notice” to trading partners that are potentially affected by the changes. This requires that Contact Persons manually check the Notification of Change screen. It is recommended that this be monitored weekly so that agreements can be kept as current as possible.

TRANSFER AGREEMENT COMMUNICATION

Best Practice # 19 – Non-standard Communication

The existing CPW is essentially a tool to expedite communication of highly standardized information. Standardization makes the system efficient for the bulk of transfer agreement information. However, like all standardized systems users can become frustrated when they try to use nonstandard information or processes within the system. This would include information such as seeking clarification of proposal decisions where a dialogue would be helpful, or when there are questions about the context of a proposal. For these and other non-standard situations, e-mail and telephone contact is recommended.

Best Practice # 20 – Communicate via the Contact Person

Most institutions expressed a strong wish that transfer agreement related information and queries be conveyed through the Contact Person rather than trying to deal directly with SME's or Academic Administrators – particularly for initial contact on an issue. In many cases the Contact Person may be able to respond to the issue directly. If they cannot, they will know best how to refer the query; saving time and preventing confusion from mixed messages for both parties.

Best Practice # 21 – Program Area Communications

In situations in which there are well-established patterns of student transfer it is helpful to have regular, at least annual, meetings between trading partner faculty. Those institutions and programs currently participating in these annual meetings report very positive outcomes including: building strong, trusting relationships and communicating possible program changes and provincial level program enrichment opportunities early in the process. For example, the U. of A. Faculty of Education and its feeder institutions form a College Liaison Committee, which includes the Dean, Registrar and senior advisors, faculty and ACAT representatives. The broad representation on the committee ensures that all parties work in a unified fashion to facilitate student success in transfer. This is one area where the province may need to play an increased resourcing role in order to facilitate this type of enhanced communication.

NEW PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Institutions and programs that are new to the ACAT system may be somewhat at a loss in terms of where to begin in seeking transfer agreements. Some institutions simply launch proposals and "wait for bites." This works best when seeking direct course based transfer. However, when seeking laddering opportunities (i.e., 1 + 1's or 2 + 2's), or when an institution is unknown to a desired trading partner, it is recommended that institutions follow a process that includes researching and then introducing themselves to trading partners.

Best Practice # 22 – Trading Partner Research

Institutions entering the ACAT system are generally sending institutions seeking opportunities for their alumni and students to ladder their course credits or credentials for further study. These opportunities are often being sought for specific programs. To this end, new institutions should research likely transfer opportunities by seeking answers to such questions as: "Where have previous alumni transferred?" "Where would students naturally transfer?", and "Which programs have a natural curricular linkage?" New sending institutions' alumni will often already have sought and received individually assessed transfer credit from institutions within the province. These receiving institutions are often the best places to seek initial transfer since these institutions tend to be geographically proximate or have strong programmatic relevance. If a sending institution is unaware of alumni having received transfer credit they may wish to approach likely receiving institutions for such information. Receiving institutions will probably be able to provide historical information on the numbers of student transfers received. Since it is in the interest of both institutions to establish transfer agreements when there is a pattern of transfer, the receiving institution should be willing to provide this information.

Best Practice # 23 – Introduction & Fostering Trading Partner Relations

Introductions can be arranged between the respective academic departments once high potential trading partners have been identified. As noted in the communication section most institutions prefer that initial contact is made through the Contact Persons. They will be able to provide direction on who should be contacted within the academic departments. A Contact Person referral to an academic department is not an indication that the department is necessarily receptive to a transfer agreement. Indeed, institutions may well have to go through this process at several institutions until a receptive trading partner is found.

Once a potentially receptive trading partner is found, a meeting is often arranged to discuss transfer potential in principle. Transfer agreements are then worked out over the course of weeks and months. The time period for negotiations of program articulation can be expected to run in the 6 to 12 month range. Timelines for course transfer negotiations are generally much shorter. Some institutions will draft a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at this point, and then have their CP launch a transfer agreement proposal. Most trading partners forego the MOU and document the transfer agreement through ACAT's CPW. The initiating institution, generally the Sending Institution, should notify the Contact Person at the Receiving Institution of the background and personnel involved in the negotiations, which led to the proposal.

After an initial transfer agreement is established with one institution, similar agreements can then be initiated at other receiving institutions. Again, new sending institutions are discouraged from setting up multiple transfer agreements for the sake of trying to enhance the appearance of legitimacy to the public. Rather, sending institutions are encouraged to focus on establishing agreements that will be of use to current students and alumni.

STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

While communication with students is outside the scope of this review, there was consensus among those interviewed that unless there is clear and accessible information available to students then all of the business processes discussed in this report are for naught. With that in mind the following communication Best Practices are presented.

Best Practice # 24 – Calendar Links

With Alberta having one of the first Canadian post-secondary institutions to make its electronic calendar the calendar-of-record, the province is at the forefront of the move to "webification." To accompany this movement, including transfer information on institutional web calendars is increasingly becoming the norm. The inclusion of a hyperlink from institutional calendar course descriptions to relevant transfer agreements on the on-line Alberta Transfer Guide is a relatively simple process and one that will soon become standard practice.[13]

Best Practice # 25 – Print Calendar Transfer Information

To facilitate transfer planning, Best Practice institutions have adopted transfer codes within calendar descriptions to indicate to students which institutions accept a particular course for transfer. Although this is not as dynamic or robust as live calendar links, it does give students a point-of-reference and directs them to the Alberta Transfer Guide with the knowledge that there is some description of transfer available.[14]

Best Practice # 26 – Student Advising

To assist those who are advising transfer students on admission and program planning, there needs to be a well developed communication system from CPs to advisors. Some institutions accomplish this by counting on informal communication to take its course among groups in the same organizational unit and in close physical proximity. Others implement a more formal system of communication that brings people together on an annual basis, and is often tied to the production of the institutional calendar. This approach results in advisors not necessarily having relevant information for students at the time it is needed. Best Practice institutions build timely internal notification for relevant departments into the final steps of transfer agreement processing. Once a transfer agreement is in place notification is sent to advisors.

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[13] For a demonstration of this, visit The King's University College web calendar, or the eCampus Alberta site.
[14] For an example of this coding, see Grande Prairie Regional College's calendar. Cf GPRC's introduction to course descriptions for a good explanation of transfer to students.

CONCLUSION

There was consensus among Review participants that in general the Alberta transfer system is a highly efficient and effective system. Along with there being strong institutional support for transfer at most post-secondary institutions in the province, there is also effective central leadership that maintains a high level of support and stability to the transfer agreement system throughout Alberta. The system also provides an invaluable toolset for developing and communicating transfer agreements that will continue to expand and develop as needs are defined and more resources are made available.

There was also agreement that if the transfer agreement system in Alberta is to continue being a world class, state of the art system, all participants in the system must continue to ask how their system can ensure the most efficient and effective implementation of transfer agreements throughout the province. Findings from the Best Practices in Transfer Agreements Review suggest that it is essential that the transfer agreement system in Alberta continue to adapt effectively to the rapidly changing post secondary educational landscape in Alberta and beyond. This will mean careful and ongoing assessment of new technologies, regular review and implementation of best practices, and provision of central resourcing in order to research transfer, and to develop and promote leaders and tools that provide students in Alberta's post-secondary institutions with a transfer agreement system that is second to none in the world.

APPENDIX # 1 - REFERENCE MATERIAL

Transfer Agreements

For further information on transfer agreements, the principles of transfer, transfer statistics, research and reports see the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) website at www.acat.gov.ab.ca or the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) website at www.bccat.bc.ca. The Alberta site is very practically oriented with an emphasis upon the needs of immediate users. The BC site has a broader repository of research and reports that are available on-line.

Best Practices

For further information on developing Best Practices see the following:

Pascale, Richard Tanner and Sternin, Jerry "Your Company's Secret Change Agents" *Harvard Business Review* pp 72 – 81 May 2005 Vol 83 #5
This article points out the major flaws of Best Practice implementations and presents a community of practice model for improvement initiatives which fits well with the culture of cooperation and trust which exists within ACAT.

Liston, Colleen *Managing Quality and Standards* Philadelphia: Open University Press 1999
This book contains a very detailed chapter on establishing best practices in institutions of higher education.

www.just4kids.org/bestpractice is the website for the National Center for Educational Accountability. The NCEA has developed a very helpful framework for assessing educational best practices. While the particular content is geared to the K-12 sector, the framework and methodology is applicable to the post-secondary level.

www.menet.ca is the Alberta Municipalities Excellence site. This is a collection of self-identified best practices and is a very efficient tool for communicating successful administrative practices to peers. It provides a very useful model for institutions, jurisdictions or associations wanting to establish best practice communication tools.

Alstete, Jeffrey W. *Benchmarking in Higher Education*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 5 Washinghton D.C.: The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development, 1995
This report provides a very good introduction to this important aspect of developing best practices. It also provides practical examples of how it can be applied to the administration of higher education.

Gates, Susan M. *et al, Ensuring Quality and Productivity in Higher Education* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report: Vol 29 No. 1 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002
The most helpful aspect of this report is the section on the relative merits and weaknesses of different approaches to quality assessment.

Chaffee, Ellen Earle and Sherr, Lawrence A., *Quality: Transforming Postsecondary Education* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 3 Washington D.C.: The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development, 1992
Although this report is now somewhat dated, it provides a good introduction to some standard quality improvement tools that continue to be used in higher education.

http://www.ncci-cu.org The National Center for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education. This site is a spin-off of NACUBO. Although the site is thin on resources it does provide links to conferences that may be of interest to those initiating quality improvement programs within the administrative services side of their institution.

www.aqip.org The Academic Quality Improvement Program, developed by the Higher Learning Commission, provides a tool for institutions to initiate a quality assessment and improvement process. It is institutional in focus, not just on the academic side of the house.

For further information from Internet sources, search engine terms could include: Total Quality Management (TQM), Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), W. Edwards Deming, Benchmarking, Best Practices, Sigma Six, and ISO to name a select few.

APPENDIX # 2 – MODELS FOR TRANSFER

A number of models exist that facilitate credit transfer, with varying degrees of efficiency and success for students.

Centralized Curriculum and Administration – In this model, academic programming is coordinated and standardized at the jurisdictional level. This central control provides for a high level of transfer, but with little ability to provide nuanced programming to serve local needs or build on particular departmental strengths. The University of Wisconsin's 14-campus system provides a model of highly centralized coordination of curriculum, although it does not force a rigid standardization.

Individual Transcript Assessment – At the other end of the transfer continuum is a fully autonomous system in which individual institutions assess each student's transcript for credit transfer. This provides institutional freedom in program development and tailors each student transfer assessment to ensure applicability to the receiving program. However, it is very labor intensive for institutions and does not have a high level of transfer predictability for students.

Articulated Transfer Agreements – many jurisdictions have gone to a centrally coordinated system of voluntary transfer agreements between post-secondary institutions. Although these systems have traditionally articulated transfer between universities, and between college to university transfer programs, increasing there are more that are including program articulation. While ACAT remains a leader in this model, Kentucky's Course Applicability System (CAS) and California's ASSIST program are two American systems equivalent to the ACAT and BCCAT on-line Transfer Guide.

Voluntary articulation systems are highly dependent on inter-institutional trust and a general acceptance of the principles of transfer. While there are clearly self-interest aspects to institutional participation in transfer (e.g. recruitment, institutional efficiency, public image), service to students is generally cited as the primary benefit of the system.

APPENDIX # 3 – PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND FORMS

Red Deer College

Standard Practice

TITLE: **NEW COURSE DEVELOPMENT/TRANSFER OF COURSES AND PROGRAMS**
Relates to EL-8: Curriculum and Instruction)

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 15, 1987

PRACTICE:

PROCEDURE:

Development of Courses Not to be Considered for Transfer

1. The development of new or modified courses that are not to be considered for transfer to an external institution shall be initiated by, or done in consultation with, the appropriate Program Chairperson who will, if appropriate, discuss this proposal with the members of his/her program.

2. The Chairperson will discuss the proposal with his/her Dean.

3. The course proposal shall also be sent to Academic Council for information/approval.

4. The final proposal will be sent by the Dean to the Vice President Academic for final approval.

5. The Registrar's Office shall be notified by the Vice President Academic of the status of the approved course.

Development of Courses to be Considered for Transfer

1. The development of new or modified courses shall be initiated by, or done in consultation with, the appropriate Program Chairperson, who will, if appropriate, discuss this proposal with the members of his/her department. The proposal for transfer shall be developed in consultation with the appropriate Dean and approved by the Vice President Academic.

2. The Program Chairperson (or his/her designate) shall consult with the appropriate department at the potential receiving institution regarding transfer credit, and informal agreement shall be obtained at this stage. Without this

agreement, no further pursuit of transfer credit for the proposed course is possible.

3. The requested transfer arrangements are to be recorded on the appropriate Transfer for Credit form (attached) and submitted to the Registrar by the Vice President Academic.

4. The course proposal shall also be submitted to Academic Council for information/approval.

5. The Registrar shall submit the course proposal to the potential receiving institution for credit recognition and to the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer for information.

6. The final negotiated arrangements shall be communicated by the Registrar to the Council on Admissions and Transfer for listing of the course in the Transfer Guide.

Program Transfer

1. If all or part of a program is to be considered for transfer to another institution, the Program Chairperson and his/her Dean shall examine the related program at the other institution and assess the feasibility of transfer arrangements.

2. The Dean, or his/her designate, shall initiate informal discussions with the appropriate department at the potential receiving institution regarding the feasibility of a program transfer. A detailed examination of programs and courses at both institutions will be made to assess virtual equivalence of course competencies and to determine any necessary course or program modifications required by the sending institutions.

3. The requested transfer arrangements are to be recorded on the appropriate Transfer for Credit form (attached) and submitted to the Registrar by the Vice President Academic.

4. The Program Transfer proposal shall also be submitted to Academic Council for information/approval.

5. The Registrar shall submit the program proposal to the potential receiving institution for credit recognition and to the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer for information.

6. The final negotiated arrangements shall be communicated by the Registrar to the Council on Admissions and Transfer for listing of the program in the Transfer Guide.

Return to: Saundra Bendfeld, Room 1103

RED DEER COLLEGE - Revised
TRANSFER FOR CREDIT APPLICATION - FORM “A” (Transfer Course)

(For a course offered at Red Deer College that is virtually identical to a course offered at the Receiving Institution.)

1. Receiving Institution: ______________________________

2. Liaison Information: ______________________________
(Name and Position of RDC Personnel)

has discussed this proposal with, and has received informal support from:

____
(Name and Position of Personnel at Receiving Institution)

3. Information on Proposed Red Deer College Course:

*3.1 Credential Course Offered in ______________________________

*3.2 Course Category (most appropriate discipline) ______________________________

*3.3 Course Name (Title) ______________________________

*3.4 Course Other Descriptors ______________________________

*3.5 Course Code & Number or Program ______________________________

3.6 Course Credit Weight: 3 credits _____ 6 credits _____ Other (specify) _____

3.7 Hours of Instruction: Lecture ______ Lab ______ Tutorial ______ Seminar ______ Other ______ TOTAL ______

3.8 Pre/Corequisites ______________________________

3.9 Level of Instructor Qualifications ______________________________

*3.10 Date Course First Offered in This Format ______________________________

*3.11 Name of Institution Course is Modelled After (if any) ______________________________

3.12 Name of Course This Course is Modelled After (if any) ______________________________

Please attach a detailed Course Outline (including grading practice, weighting of course content) to this form.

Core Reading List and/or Other Resource Material:

____

____

4. Course of Receiving Institution For Which Transfer Credit is Being Sought:

____

5. Internal Approval:

______________________________ (Chairperson)

______________________________ (Registrar)

IF THIS IS A NEW COURSE, OR IF IT IS A MAJOR CHANGE TO AN EXISTING COURSE, HAS IT BEEN APPROVED BY ACADEMIC COUNCIL?

(over)

EXPLANATORY NOTES

3.1 **CREDENTIAL -** This is the level of the program under which the course is taught at the Sending Institution (i.e. certificate, diploma, University Transfer, applied degree, degree, etc.)

3.2 **COURSE CATEGORY -** This is the subject area or discipline under which the Sending Institution's course will be placed in the Alberta Transfer Guide hard copy. Check the Guide to determine under which category similar Sending Institution's courses are currently listed.

3.3 **COURSE NAME -** This is the title of the course NOT the course code & number or program description.

3.4 **OTHER DESCRIPTORS -** This field may be used for additional course descriptions and details that may not be covered by the other fields. Such comments may include information about library resources, laboratory facilities, etc.

3.5 **COURSE CODE & NUMBER -** The Sending Institution's course code and number is to be entered for a By Course agreement. (e.g. BADM 110)

3.10 **DATE COURSE FIRST OFFERED -** The Sending Institution is encouraged to complete this field as the Receiving Institution may back-date the effective date of an agreement to when the Sending Institution's course was first offered in the current form. This way students who took exactly the same course at the Sending Institution before it was approved for transfer credit, can also benefit by receiving transfer credit when they apply to transfer.

3.11 **COURSE IS MODELLED AFTER -** Often Sending Institution courses are modelled after courses at another institution.

Return to: Saundra Bendfeld, Room 1103

RED DEER COLLEGE - Revised
TRANSFER FOR CREDIT APPLICATION - FORM "B" (Transferable Course)

(For a course offered at Red Deer College that is not identical to a course offered at the Receiving Institution, but is <u>comparable to</u> a course in this institution or else is <u>of equivalent academic worth</u> to other courses in a program at this institution).

1. Receiving Institution: ____________________

2. Liaison Information: ____________________
(Name and Position of RDC Personnel)

has discussed this proposal with, and has received informal support from:

____
(Name and Position of Personnel at Receiving Institution)

3. Information on Proposed Red Deer College Course:

*3.1 Credential Course Offered in ____________________

*3.2 Course Category (most appropriate discipline) ____________________

*3.3 Course Name (Title) ____________________

*3.4 Course Other Descriptors ____________________

*3.5 Course Code & Number or Program ____________________

3.6 Course Credit Weight: 3 credits _____ 6 credits _____ Other (specify) _____

3.7 Hours of Instruction: Lecture ______ Lab ______ Tutorial ______ Seminar ______ Other ______ TOTAL ______

3.8 Pre/Corequisites ____________________

3.9 Level of Instructor Qualifications ____________________

*3.10 Date Course First Offered in This Format ____________________

*3.11 Name of Institution Course is Modelled After (if any) ____________________

3.12 Name of Course This Course is Modelled After (if any) ____________________

Please attach a detailed Course Outline (including grading practice, weighting of course content) to this form.

Core Reading List and/or Other Resource Material:

____

____

4. Course of Receiving Institution For Which Transfer Credit is Being Sought:

____

5. Internal Approval:

____________________ (Chairperson)   ____________________ (Registrar)

IF THIS IS A NEW COURSE, OR IF IT IS A MAJOR CHANGE TO AN EXISTING COURSE, HAS IT BEEN APPROVED BY ACADEMIC COUNCIL?

(over)

Explanatory Notes

3.1 **CREDENTIAL -** This is the level of the program under which the course is taught at the Sending Institution (i.e. certificate, diploma, University Transfer, applied degree, degree, etc.)

3.2 **COURSE CATEGORY -** This is the subject area or discipline under which the Sending Institution's course will be placed in the Alberta Transfer Guide hard copy. Check the Guide to determine under which category similar Sending Institution's courses are currently listed.

3.3 **COURSE NAME -** This is the title of the course NOT the course code & number or program description.

3.4 **OTHER DESCRIPTORS -** This field may be used for additional course descriptions and details that may not be covered by the other fields. Such comments may include information about library resources, laboratory facilities, etc.

3.5 **COURSE CODE & NUMBER -** The Sending Institutuion's course code and number is to be entered for a By Course agreement. (e.g. BADM 110)

3.10 **DATE COURSE FIRST OFFERED -** The Sending Institution is encouraged to complete this field as the Receiving Institution may back-date the effective date of an agreement to when the Sending Institution's course was first offered in the current form. This way students who took exactly the same course at the Sending Institution before it was approved for transfer credit, can also benefit by receiving transfer credit when they apply to transfer.

3.11 **COURSE IS MODELLED AFTER -** Often Sending Institution courses are modelled after courses at another institution.

APPENDIX # 4 – SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Registrar's Office
Memo

CONCORDIA
University College of Alberta
GOOD FOR LIFE.

TO:

FROM: Judy Kruse, Registrar

DATE:

RE: **Receiving Transfer Credit** from Another University or College

Please take a moment to review the attached course description/outline and assess the following course for transfer credit to Concordia. The course in question is:

Course Code	Credits	Jr or Sr Level	Institution

Please consider the course carefully, **indicate your decision below** under one of the three options, and **sign and date** your decision:

1. **Exact equivalent** to a Concordia course (eg. HIS 386 [3] = HIS 260 [3])

2. **University-level credit, but not equivalent** to a Concordia course: 1xx = junior level, 2xx = senior level, 3xx= more senior level (eg. HIS 386 [3] = HIS 2xx [3])

3. **Not approved** for transfer credit and the **reason** it is not.

Signature	Date

Please return all of the attached documents to me by the date to the right.

Date Required

Should you require more information, don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time.

Judy Kruse   Extension 253   Email: judy.kruse@concordia.ab.ca

G:\acat & transfer credit\faculty memos\receiving credit personalized memos\judy memo.wpd

GLOSSARY OF TRANSFER TERMS

Academic Year - usually 12 months running from September 1 of one year to August 31 of the following year.

Articulation – generically the term is used for the development of a transfer agreement. It is also sometimes used to indicate a specific type of transfer, i.e., a laddering agreement such as a 1+1 or a 2+2 agreement in which there is not necessarily a transfer of credit, but an agreement to admit students from a sending program and have a specific program completion requirement for those students.

Course equivalent - a course for which credit is given by the receiving institution. Wherever possible, a specific course equivalent will be assigned by the receiving institution (e.g. English 123 = English 456)

Credit - The numeric value assigned to a course and indicates a "weight" or measure of learning.

Elective - see Option.

Letter of Permission - a Letter of Permission from your home institution is your guarantee that, if you successfully complete a course at another institution, your home institution will allow it to count towards your degree or diploma program. Contact the Registrar's Office or the director of your program at your home institution for further information regarding this type of letter.

Option - When used in relation to a particular program of study, "option" refers to courses in that program, which are not prescribed by the Faculty and in which the student is allowed a choice. This choice may either be confined to a particular discipline (e.g. History) or unrestricted from among all offerings ("open" option). The level of study for the "option" is designated in various ways: Junior, Senior; 1xx, 2xx, 3xx, 4xx; or 1xxx, 2xxx, 3xxx, 4xxx reflecting the receiving institution's practice.

Receiving Institution - any post-secondary institution to which students are transferring.

Residency Requirement - number of credits you must complete at an institution in order to graduate from that program.

Sending Institution - any post-secondary institution from which students are transferring.

Subject Matter Expert – a Faculty member with particular expertise in a discipline and will be able to determine the appropriateness of a proposed transfer agreement.

Trading Partner – an institution with which you have established a transfer agreement.

Transfer Agreement - An agreement between two institutions (a sender and a receiver) that specifies how the sending institution's course or program will be accepted for credit at the receiving institution.

Unassigned or Unspecified - see Option.

For further transfer related terms see the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials terminology guide at www.cicic.ca/pubs/guide/guideEN_en.php or the Association of Registrar's of Universities and Colleges of Canada's transcripting guide at www.arucc.ryerson.ca/arucc/transe.pdf