

# TRENDS

## IN MARITIME HIGHER EDUCATION

Volume 10, Number 1

January 2013

### PORTABLE LEARNING: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS GRANTED CREDIT FOR PRIOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

#### Introduction

Despite a growing interest in facilitating the mobility of students between Canadian post-secondary education (PSE) institutions, little is known about the current extent of credit transfers within and among jurisdictions.<sup>1,2</sup> By recognizing equivalent learning that has already been accomplished, through the granting of transfer credits, efficiencies in time and money may be gained by students, government and the system as a whole. Establishing benchmarks for the number of transfer students and credits granted in Maritime universities will allow the tracking of trends over time.

University students can be granted credits for courses taken elsewhere, including international baccalaureate courses in high school, and courses at other PSE institutions prior to enrolling at the receiving institution, or during an exchange or through a letter of permission while enrolled at the receiving institution. In order to establish benchmarks that are comparable to figures in other Canadian jurisdictions, this study only includes students enrolling at a Maritime university for the first time who have been granted credits for prior post-secondary education.<sup>3</sup> In the future, the Commission intends to explore other types of credit transfer.

Credit transfer data collected through the MPHEC Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) are available for 10 out of 15 Maritime universities for the 2006 to 2009 cohorts. This paper focusses on these 10 universities which admit approximately 9500 to 10,000 new full-time bachelor students each year (Table 1), representing 75% of the entering class in Maritime universities.

**Table 1: Number of new bachelor students enrolled full-time in 10 Maritime universities and percentage of transfer students.**

	cohort year			
	2006	2007	2008	2009
Received no transfer credit	7707	7903	8174	8143
Transfer student	1762	1675	1694	1816
<b>Total new students</b>	<b>9469</b>	<b>9578</b>	<b>9868</b>	<b>9959</b>
<b>Percent transfer students</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>

#### Highlights & Findings

In this paper we report, for the first time, the extent of transfer credits granted to new bachelor students enrolling in Maritime universities by addressing the following questions:

- ⇒ **How many students currently receive transfer credits for previous post-secondary studies when they enrol in Maritime universities?**
- ⇒ **Where do the credits come from?**
- ⇒ **How many credits are students being granted when they first enrol?**

- One in five new students are granted transfer credits for courses completed at another college or university.
- Students transfer from over 200 colleges and universities across Canada, and PSE institutions in 76 countries.
- Half of transfer students receive the equivalent of at least one year of transfer credits, and 16% receive two years.
- A quarter of students transferring from colleges enter into the third year of a university program. Advanced standing of students transferring from colleges appears to be linked to formal transfer agreements between institutions.
- Students transferring into Commerce and Administration degrees are granted a higher number of credits, likely due to the compatibility of programs between institutions.
- The benchmarks established in this study will allow the Commission to track the number of transfer students, sending institutions, and the number of transfer credits, over time, and to compare these numbers to other Canadian jurisdictions.

Additional tables with detailed breakdowns of demographic data for the 2006 to 2009 cohorts included in this study can be downloaded from: <http://www.mphec.ca/research/trendsmaritimehighereducation.aspx>

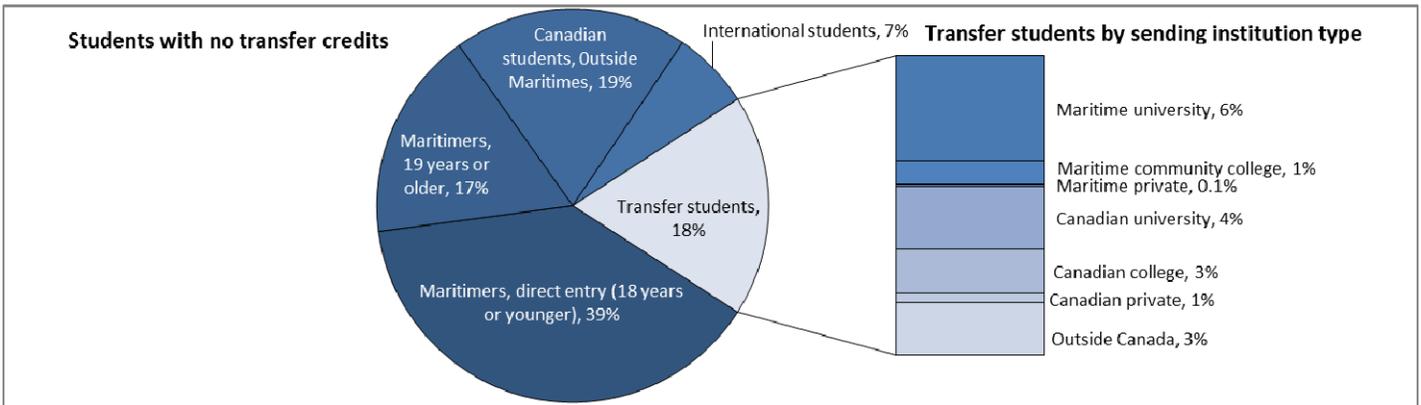


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**Transfer students represent one in five new bachelor students enrolling in Maritime universities.** Following a steep decline in the number of new students from the Maritimes enrolling in the region's universities from 2002 to 2006, the number has remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2009.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, 39% of new students enrolled directly from Maritime high schools, 17% were Maritimers who delayed their entry into post-secondary education, and 26% were students from outside the Maritimes with no transfer credits (Fig. 1).

Close to 18% of new bachelor students receive credits for courses taken at another post-secondary institution prior to enrolling (Table 1). Data available from eight Maritime universities from 2002 to 2009 indicate that the proportion of transfer students has remained stable over these eight years (data not shown). New students from outside the region tend to be slightly older than Maritimers when they first enrol and are more likely to receive transfer credits. Fourteen percent of Maritimers receive transfer credits, compared to a third of international students, and 20% of Canadian students from outside the Maritimes when they transfer.

Figure 1: Origin of new full-time bachelor students in 10 Maritime universities, 2009 cohort (n = 9937 students)



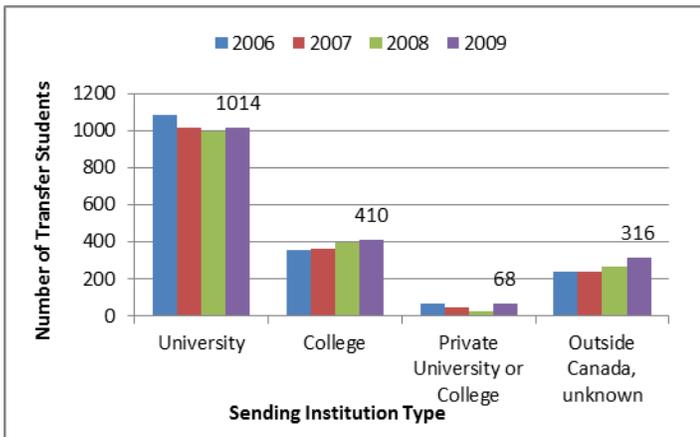
**Students transfer from over 200 post-secondary institutions across Canada and 76 countries.** In 2009, 43% of transfer students received credits from another Maritime post-secondary institution (university or college), down from 47% in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Students who transfer from a Canadian institution outside the Maritimes (39% of transfers) are more likely to transfer from an Ontario institution (15% of all transfers). The number of new transfer students from outside Canada made up 17% of all transfer students in 2009, up from 14% in 2006.

**Half of transfer students are from another Canadian university.** Just over 1000 students transferred from a Canadian university in 2009 (Fig. 2) representing 56% of transfers in 2009,

410 students transferred from a college (representing 23% of transfers), and 68 students transferred from private Canadian institution (around 2 to 4% of all transfers).

If we focus on students transferring from another Maritime institution, 635 or 80% of within Maritime transfers were from a university in 2009, and 141 (18%) from a community college. In other jurisdictions, where the ratio of college to university enrolment is higher than in the Maritimes, the number of students transferring from college to university is higher than the proportion transferring between universities. In Ontario universities, intra-provincial transfer students are one and half times more likely to transfer from a college than a university.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2: Number of transfer students by type of Canadian sending institution enrolling at 10 Maritime universities, 2006 to 2009 cohorts. The sample size of the 2009 cohort is shown.



**More than half of transfer students receive 30 or more credits (equivalent to one year of university).** Between 2006 and 2009, around 16% (range 14% to 17%) of transfer students were granted at least two years' worth of credits (60 credits or more). Students transferring from a Canadian university are granted fewer credits than students transferring from other types of post-secondary institutions. About half (range 48 to 51%) of new students transferring from a Canadian university were awarded less than the equivalent of one year of university (fewer than 30 credits) and less than 10 % were granted 60 credits or more (Fig. 3). This may be partly explained by the fact that transfer students from Canadian universities are younger than students transferring from a Canadian college or an institution outside Canada, and likely have fewer credits to transfer.

In contrast, more than 60% of students transferring from other types of institutions received at least 30 credits. In 2009, 25% of students transferring from a Canadian college, and 23% of students from a PSE institution outside Canada were granted at least 60 credits (Fig. 3). The number of new students transferring from a private PSE institution is small (68 in 2009), but more than a third received at least 60 credits.

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Definitions

**Cohort:** New student, enrolled full-time in the fall term in a program leading to a bachelor’s degree. Includes engineering diploma programs at associated institutions in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, which represent the first two years of a Bachelor of Engineering. Excludes bachelor programs that require a bachelor’s for admission (e.g. a post-baccalaureate B. Ed.)

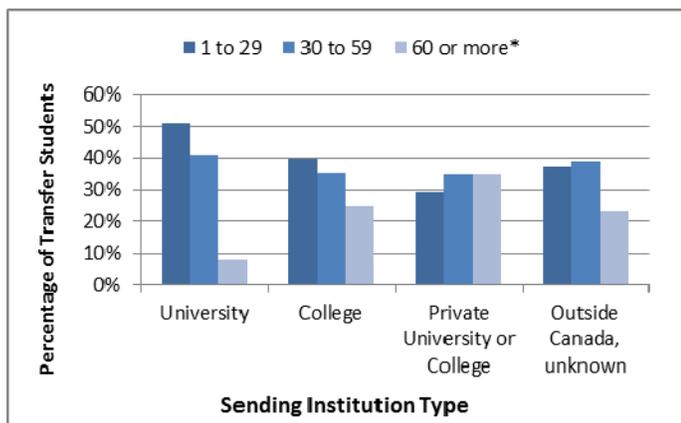
**New student:** Student enrolling for the first time at the institution

**Transfer student:** Student who was granted credits for courses taken at another postsecondary (PSE) institution prior to enrolling at the receiving institution. Excludes students that received credits granted through prior learning assessment recognition (PLAR), international baccalaureate, or advanced placement. Also excludes students who completed previous PSE but were not granted transfer credits.

**Receiving institution:** University that has granted credits for courses taken at a previous PSE institution

**Sending institution:** Post-secondary institution attended prior to enrolling at the receiving institution. If a student attended more than one PSE institution, the institution from which the most credits were granted is selected.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 3: Distribution of the number of credits granted at 10 Maritime receiving universities, by Canadian sending institution type, 2009 cohort



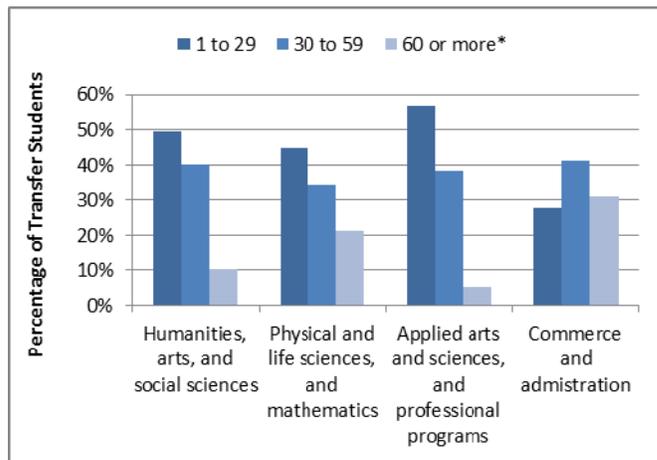
*The number of credits granted to college students is linked to block transfer agreements between institutions.* If we focus on students who were granted at least two years of university credits, many transferred into a program with a transfer agreement in place. Formal credit transfer agreements between colleges or private PSE institutions and Maritime universities could be found for most of the programs where students were granted at least 60 credits. More than half of transfers from a Maritime community college where students were granted 60 credits had a transfer agreement in place.<sup>7</sup>

This study only includes students admitted to a Maritime university for the first time as a transfer student and may not account for all students being granted advanced standing in a program. Maritime universities have agreements in place where a student can transfer between universities and enter into the upper years of a bachelor program without a transfer of credits being recorded.<sup>8</sup>

*Students transferring into Commerce and Administration degree programs are granted a higher number of credits.* The number of credits awarded varies by discipline at the receiving institution (Fig. 4). Students transferring into Commerce and Administration programs (e.g. BBA, Bachelor of Commerce) received more credits than any other discipline. In 2009, 41% of Commerce students were granted between 30 to 59 credits, and 31% granted at least 60 credits. College business diploma graduates appear to be taking advantage of block credit transfer agreements.<sup>7</sup> Eighty percent of college students transferring into a Commerce or Administration program are granted at least one year of university credits. The compatibility of Commerce programs between institutions likely facilitates the development of credit transfer agreements.

The majority of students transfer into Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences programs. About half of these students receive fewer than 30 credits (Fig. 4). In 2009, 57% of students transferring into Applied or professional programs also received fewer than 30 credits. Applied Arts and Sciences and Professional programs include Engineering, Education, Health professions, Computer Sciences, and Social Work.

Figure 4: Distribution of the number of credits granted at 10 Maritime receiving universities, by Discipline Cluster, 2009 cohort



\* Most Maritime universities have a policy in place where the maximum number of transferred credits can not exceed 50% of the credits required for the degree at the receiving institution (60 transfer credits for a 120 credit program). There are a few exceptions, where up to 75 credits (three years) can be applied towards specific degrees.

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### Summary and Implications

Students enrolling in Maritime universities transfer from a variety of post-secondary institutions across Canada and abroad. The benchmarks established in this study will allow the Commission to track changes over time in the number of students transferring into Maritime universities, the sending institutions, and the number of transfer credits granted, and to compare the figures to other Canadian jurisdictions.

In the Maritimes, the number of transfer agreements between colleges and universities is increasing<sup>7</sup>. The aim of these agreements is to create mobility opportunities for students and avoid duplication of learning by recognizing equivalent course work, either through a course-by-course or block transfer of credits. Credit transfer agreements appear to create new pathways for college diploma graduates. In 2009, one in four students transferring from a college was granted at least two years of university credits. Similarly, transfer agreements between Maritime universities and private Canadian institutions or institutions outside Canada appear to be linked to higher number of credits granted to students from these sending institutions.

The educational background of new students entering Maritime universities is one of the building blocks for exploring student pathways towards degree completion. This paper only includes students enrolling in Maritime universities for the first time who were granted credits for previous post-secondary education. Future studies will address other types of credit transfer, for example, international baccalaureate credits from high school or courses taken at another institution while already enrolled at the receiving institution.

The credits transferred to the receiving institution depend on the compatibility between the programs at the sending and receiving institutions. It is important to note that the courses for which credits are granted may not all be applicable towards the program at the receiving institution. A student may need to complete additional credits to fulfill all the degree requirements. Similarly, students who have completed previous PSE studies, but were not granted transfer credits are not accounted for in this study. The Commission is currently working on linking student records across Maritime universities to identify factors that impact upon student progression and degree completion. This work will allow the Commission to explore the factors linked to graduation rates, credit transfer efficiency between institutions and time to degree completion for students in the region, including transfer students.

### NOTES

1. While transfer data is not readily available for most jurisdictions in Canada, there are exceptions. Alberta has monitored patterns in credit transfer among institutions for over a decade. *Alberta Transfer Patterns Reports* from 2001 to 2011 are available from the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT): [http://www.acat.gov.ab.ca/new\\_format\\_include/new\\_publications.asp](http://www.acat.gov.ab.ca/new_format_include/new_publications.asp). A pan Canadian survey of inter-provincial transfers was undertaken for the first time in 2011. The survey focussed on Canadian student mobility between jurisdictions and did not include intra-provincial transfers. *Student Mobility in Canada across Canadian Jurisdictions 2007/08 to 2009/10*. Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admission and Transfer (PCCAT), April 2012. <http://www.uwindsor.ca/pccat/>
2. Intra-provincial transfers in Ontario universities were also surveyed for the first time as part of PCCAT's inter-provincial mobility survey *Student Mobility within the Province of Ontario Supplement to the Report on the Pan-Canadian Survey of Student Mobility 2007/08 to 2009/10*. PCCAT, April 2012.
3. Normally, when students apply to a university, they do not apply for credit, rather their application and transcripts from previously attended institutions are reviewed. The student is notified of their acceptance in the program and the number of transfer credits awarded and applicable to the program.
4. The number of new students from outside the Maritimes increased by more than 500 students between 2006 and 2009, changing the composition of the entering class. The proportion of new Maritimers without transfer credits decreased from 60% to 56% over the four cohort.
5. In other provinces the number of intra-provincial transfers outnumbers inter-provincial transfers. In Alberta, for example, in 2009 within-province transfers represented 69% of the number of transfers while into-province transfers constituted 33% of transfers. *Alberta Transfer Pattern Report 2009*. ACAT, 2009.
6. In 2009, 14% of transfer students received credits for courses taken at more than one post-secondary institution prior to enrolling in the receiving institution, and 1% of transfer students received credits for courses taken at three or more institutions.
7. A list of current transfer agreements between Maritime community colleges and universities is available from the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium website : <http://www.apccc.ca/agreements/agreements.html>; In the APCCC 2012 Guide to Block Transfer Agreements about 40% of the agreements listed are related to Commerce and Administration degree programs. In 2010, The New Brunswick Council on Articulation and Transfers (NBCAT) was established in New Brunswick to ensure smooth inter-institutional transitions and effective transferability of courses and programs. <http://nbcats.ca/>
8. For example, a Diploma in Engineering at an associated university is a condition of admission to the upper years of a Bachelor of Engineering at Dalhousie University. Similarly, students who enrol in an articulated program between a Maritime university and Community College and begin their program at the university would not be recorded at a transfer students.

**Data source:** The MPHEC Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) database.

### Additional Resources

Additional tables with detailed breakdowns of demographic data and transfer data for the 2006 to 2009 cohorts for the 10 Maritime universities included in this study can be downloaded from: <http://www.mphec.ca/research/trendsmaritimehighereducation.aspx>

- A. New full-time bachelor students by province of study and institution
- B. Profile of the entering class and percent transfer students
- C. Full-time transfer students by province of sending institution and type of sending institution
- D. Full-time transfer students by discipline cluster at the receiving institution
- E. Percentage of full-time transfer students by immigration status, province of permanent residence and location of sending institution
- F. Distribution of new full-time transfer students by number of credits granted

An electronic copy of this report can be downloaded from [http://www.mphec.ca/resources/TrendsV10N1\\_2013.pdf](http://www.mphec.ca/resources/TrendsV10N1_2013.pdf)