



A qualitative study of the York-Seneca transfer experience

AUTHORS: HENRY DECOCK & KATHERINE JANZEN

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN STUDENT MOBILITY, SENECA COLLEGE

December 2016 | [Full Report](#) | [Executive Summary](#)

This qualitative research on the decision-making and transfer experiences of students who moved between Seneca College and York University (in both directions) affirms what previous studies have shown: Students recognize the perceived value of having a combination of college and university education.

However, the use of focus groups comprised of Seneca and York students elicited a more nuanced understanding than is typically possible with the results from open-ended surveys. The student discussions revealed that multiple factors influence their decision to transfer, the transfer experience itself, and their perceptions of the structural changes required to improve the transfer process.

METHOD

Six focus groups were created, comprised of graduates and early leavers randomly selected from a database of students transferring between Seneca and York. Separate focus group discussions were conducted for Seneca students attending York and York students attending Seneca.

RESULTS

Students transfer because they want to improve their economic prospects and recognize the perceived value of having both a university and college education, i.e., theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Participants affirmed the important role of formal transfer agreements and specific scholarships, but cited the need for structural improvements to make the experience of transfer easier.

Orientation sessions are considered to be a motivating factor because they help prospective transfers to understand what they will likely experience as an incoming student. However, a significant barrier remains, namely identifying a college/university staff member who can answer questions about transfer. Access to a staff person dedicated to the needs of transfer students was cited as a solution.

Participants emphasized that the eligibility criteria for transfer is too restrictive. They noted that high school and college performance is not the ideal or sole measure of student ability, that a student's family circumstances at the time, or poor academic fit, can mask true capacity.

Intangible measures, such as being highly motivated to pursue a chosen career, can strongly influence academic success.

Parental pressure to attend university, whether real or perceived, is a factor in transfer. Parents reportedly value a university education more so than a college one, manifesting in students' initial choice of destination, or as a rationale for transfer.

Feelings of confidence play a critical role in supporting transfer decisions, particularly among students who transfer from college to university. For those who did not succeed at their previous institution, college success builds confidence in their academic ability, especially if the initial program was perceived to have been a poor fit. Encouragement and recognition by faculty serve to increase student confidence. Increased confidence ultimately results in efforts to pursue other educational opportunities.

Funded by the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer