



Pathways from Seneca's Liberal Arts Transfer program: From college entrance to university graduation

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Studies on college-to-university transfer typically focus on a discrete aspect of the pathway such as who aspires to transfer, who transfers and why, or outcomes after transfer to university. In contrast, this paper focuses on the entire pathway, using the Liberal Arts Transfer (LAT) program at Seneca College as a case study.

METHOD

The analysis sample included 3,622 entrants who began the LAT program at Seneca in 2005–2012, and 1,268 LAT students/graduates who transferred to York University's degree program in 2002–2012. The study used a comprehensive, student-level dataset to examine the progression to graduation from LAT, propensity to transfer, and post-transfer outcomes at York. Regression models (OLS) were run to control for the independent effects of a range of sociodemographic and academic variables.

RESULTS

Progression to graduation from LAT: Higher grades in high school (particularly in university preparatory courses) and college-level English at entry were important influencers. More than three-quarters of LAT entrants had a high school average below the minimum required for university entry, and nearly half did not place in college-level English. Many of them continued to struggle academically when they entered college. Over one-half left Seneca without a Seneca credential or without transferring to York.

Propensity to transfer to York University: A Seneca GPA above 3.0 increased the likelihood of transfer to York by over 40 percentage points, the largest influence of all variables. Parental education, first language, and status in Canada differed little across pathways. Previous university, gender, age, and year of entry had little or no effect. However, aspiration for university upon entry was higher for both graduates and non-graduates who transferred to York.

Post-transfer outcomes at York: Those who graduated from LAT before transferring had more transfer credit and were stronger academically at York. Graduates of the articulated LAT stream

were the most likely to graduate from York (76%), had the highest grades, took less time to complete, and were more likely to complete a four-year than a three-year degree program. High school grades, first language, and English-language placement at college entry were unrelated to academic success at York. There was a clear relationship between grades at Seneca and performance at York, irrespective of graduation or articulation status at Seneca.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Under LAT's current admission standards, entrants require only an Ontario high school diploma and Grade 12 English. More than three-quarters of LAT entrants have a high school average below 70% and nearly half do not place in college-level English at entry. Yet some rise to meet the challenge, and successfully transfer to York and graduate. Any review of admission standards will need to ensure that students with poor performance in high school or in previous post-secondary, have a viable pathway to university.