If there’s a problem with Seneca College’s four-semester liberal arts diploma program that serves as the pathway to a bachelor’s degree it’s this: “People think it’s too good to be true.”

That observation comes from Peter Meehan, chair of the school of liberal arts. “When you talk to parents of students with university aspirations, they don’t think about college programs,” he says. “For many, college is a finishing school — post-grad certificates are very popular ... They don’t think of us as the first place to stop and shop if they want to get into an undergraduate arts program.”

Grads have transferred to a number of universities in Canada and the U.S., including York University, University of Toronto and Ryerson University, where they’ve earned bachelor’s degrees in various disciplines. The program allows high school grads and mature students to make a fresh start. “They gave up on university as a possibility and we’re here to tell them that it’s still possible if that’s what they want,” says Meehan.

“Those interested in taking advantage of the program understand that we don’t care what they did before; it’s about what they’re doing now ... We get a lot of really bright students who just need a taste of success to gain the confidence so they know they can achieve. That’s something we do really well.”

Through transfer agreements, students who meet academic requirements can apply to enrol in one of the university partnership programs. Otherwise they can continue in the standard liberal arts program. While the program attracts many students who wouldn’t otherwise qualify for university, others see it as an opportunity to develop valuable skills. Nicolas Esper went to McGill University in Montreal, Que., after high school but eventually decided to opt out and work. “I felt like I didn’t have the maturity to get the full university experience.” Esper says.

When he decided to return to university, he found the Seneca program appealing because it offered a unique approach that included small classes and opportunities to get to know his professors. “I felt like I could get the experience I was looking for.” After completing the two-year program, Esper entered the third year at U of T, where he serves as president of the liberal arts club. He will graduate this year. “The skills I learned at Seneca were invaluable for my success at U of T,” he says.

“One of the best things about the Seneca program is that it focuses explicitly on the skills to do well in humanities.”

Among other things, he learned how to properly research and write an essay. “Having that skill will allow you to do better at school and enjoy it more because you’re able to perform it at a high level.”

More and more, pathways between post-secondary institutions allow students to open doors that were once closed and to pursue new career and/or educational goals without the need to start from scratch. Here are some examples:

**Credit transfer:** The most common form of credit transfer is from a college diploma or advanced diploma program to a degree in a college or university. These usually involve a block of transfer credit into a specific point of a degree program and sometime require the completion of bridge courses. (Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer; www.ocutg.on.ca)

**Certificate to diploma:** Colleges are developing transfer pathways from certificate-to-diploma programs and from diploma-to-advanced diploma programs. www.ocutg.on.ca

**Degree to diploma:** Many colleges offer accelerated curriculum for some diploma and advanced diploma programs which provide transfer credits for graduates of university degree programs. www.ocutg.on.ca

**Apprentices:** Some colleges offer transfer pathways for certified apprentices into diploma and advanced diploma programs. www.ocutg.on.ca

**Collaborative and joint degree programs:** Collaborative programs offer the combination of hands-on learning colleges are known for with the more theoretical approach of university studies. Students may earn either one or two credentials: one from the college and/or one from the university. www.ontariocolleges.ca

**Post-graduate certificates:** Building on knowledge and experience gained through previous post-secondary study, graduate certificates require a university degree or a college certificate or diploma for admission. www.ontariocolleges.ca

**Education options:**

Diploma to degree

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