



# Which College Students Transfer to University? The Role of Parental Education and Neighbourhood Income

**AUTHORS: MITCHELL STEFFLER, URSULA MCLOY & HENRY DECOCK**

**CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN STUDENT MOBILITY, SENECA COLLEGE**

January 2018 | [Full Report](#) | [Executive Summary](#)

It is well understood that access to university varies considerably by parental education and neighbourhood income, whereas college tends to be accessed more equitably. One option proposed to reduce this imbalance is the college to university transfer pathway. This study compares college students' university aspirations at entry, graduation rates, and transfer outcomes across socioeconomic status (SES) groups. SES groups were created by combining categories of parental education (university educated vs first generation) and neighbourhood income. The analysis combines administrative and survey data at Seneca College from 2007 to 2014, to track 36,054 college entrants from high school until six months after college graduation. Research questions include the following:

1. How do background characteristics in the college sample differ by income and parental education and what is the role of these factors in influencing a student's aspirations for transfer to university?
2. What is the role of parental education and neighbourhood income in influencing transfer to university?
3. For those who do transfer to university, do transfer information sources differ across first generation and income groups?

Of these college entrants, 44% aspire to go to university and 14% of those who graduate transfer to university within six months. Aspirations at entry and transfer after graduation vary considerably by SES group, as do academic preparation, language ability, and program of entry. Overall, 49% of college entrants with university-educated parents planned to attend university after college compared to 43% of students without university-educated parents. However, students from higher income neighbourhoods proved no more likely than their peers to aspire to transfer. Students who were low income but with university educated parents were the most likely to have plans for university.

Transfer to university was 3% points higher for college graduates who had a parent with a degree than those who did not, an affect that held when controlling for demographic factors and

grades. In contrast to parents' education, this study showed that rates of transfer did not differ by income. When combined categories of income and education were compared, graduates who were both low income, but had at least one parent with a degree, were 4% points more likely to transfer than students who were low income and did not have a university-educated parent. The graduates with the highest grades who aspired to go to university are the most likely students to transfer. Other factors such as program of study are also important in explaining transfer propensity.

Although previous research has shown that the initial decision to attend college or university is influenced by parental education and income, university transfers differ only slightly from their college peers by these socioeconomic characteristics. Within the college population, college performance and aspirations for transfer are more important than sociodemographic factors on transfer rates, indicating this pathway may be more merit- and motivation-based. As well, the preliminary finding that transfer students who are lower income or do not have a university educated parent rely less on their parents and family and rely more on college advising services for information, underscores the role institutions can play. This suggests that facilitating and encouraging college to university transfer, as well as supporting students academically to ensure they qualify, may be a vehicle to reduce the socioeconomic inequity in university attendance in Ontario.