ALBERTA TRANSFER SYSTEM
MEMBER INSTITUTION CONTACT PERSONS

TRANSFER BEST PRACTICES

(Spring 2013)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2005, a consultative review was undertaken by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) Secretariat to review the internal business processes used by Alberta's Transfer System post-secondary member institutions in the administration of credit transfer agreements on the Transfer Agreements and Archive Retrieval System (TAARS). The *Best Practices in Transfer Review* document was produced as a result of this extensive process.

The *Best Practices in Transfer* document is a compilation of current business processes to be followed and adhered to by all Alberta Transfer System member institutions when formalizing credit transfer agreements on TAARS. The two primary purposes for undertaking this project were to review the existing transfer agreement business processes, and to recommend a set of common Best Practices reflecting these business processes. The document assists both new personnel as well as those requiring clarification to ensure they adhere to established business processes for processing credit transfer agreements.

In Summer 2010, the ACAT Secretariat determined that the *Best Practices in Transfer* document should be reviewed to ensure it is both current and relevant, and that it be revised to include any new business practices that may have evolved, as well as capture those practices that had undergone change since 2005. As a result, the Transfer Best Practices Committee was created, including the ACAT Secretariat and a number of volunteer Contact Persons from a cross-section of institutions. The committee (facilitated by the ACAT Secretariat) was tasked with reviewing the context of the current transfer system, performing a gap analysis and preparing the revised *Transfer Best Practices*. See Exhibit 1 for a list of committee members.

The committee reviewed the current 2005 *Best Practices in Transfer* document, and made revisions where necessary to ensure it includes the current business processes so that it better meets the current admission and transfer needs of all Alberta Transfer System member institutions. In its review, the committee also reviewed the block/career laddering best practices identified in the February 2010 *Environics Report.* The revised *Transfer Best Practices* document is a compilation of information drafted by the committee for use by all Alberta Transfer System member institutions.

Included within the best practices are the following important institution considerations:

- ❖ Admission and Transfer are critical business processes that need to be maintained within all Alberta Transfer System member institutions.
- ❖ It is critical that the Contact Person at each institution be included in the institutional business processes involving admission and transfer.
- ❖ Institutions need to ensure that the trust and efficiency upon which the transfer system is based is maintained throughout the entire transfer process.

- ❖ Institutions need to continue to improve the systematization and monitoring of their transfer processes.
- ❖ The transfer agreement system requires continued central leadership and support as well as increased research and investment in order to be effective and to advance to meet future needs of students.

INTRODUCTION - PURPOSE OF THE REVISED TRANSFER BEST PRACTICES DOCUMENT

Background

Historically, the majority of students admitted to post-secondary studies remained within their original program and institution until graduation. Over time, however, there has been a significant increase in student mobility between programs and institutions. To meet these increased needs, Alberta continues to encourage even greater student mobility by participating in projects and initiatives to further the vision of Campus Alberta. For this to work efficiently, however, it requires general acceptance in principle that students should not have to repeat successful learning experiences. The *Transfer Best Practices* document assists by setting out established best practices by which all Alberta Transfer System member institutions are to follow and adhere to, which will create greater work efficiencies when working with admission and transfer. This will in turn create increased credit transfer mobility opportunities for students.

The agreements on TAARS define what courses and programs are transferable between institutions. The existence of these agreements allows a student to transfer earned credit between institutions with predictability and to use credits earned at one institution to fulfill program requirements at another, eliminating the need to repeat learning experiences.

Current Situation

As with any system, there is normal attrition of personnel every year, so there may be individuals who may be unfamiliar with critical processes that keep the system viable. As such, the *Transfer Best Practices document* serves as a valuable reference tool, containing important system working processes, internal business processes, as well as essential best practices.

In 2010 the ACAT Secretariat identified the need to have it updated so as to address current business processes and to include supporting best practices. Some best practices depend on business processes internal to the post-secondary institutions, and many processes differ from institution to institution with varying degrees of efficiency and effectiveness. Post-secondary institutions have requested that the revised document include best practices that would assist

them in developing efficient and effective business processes regarding the establishment and maintenance of transfer agreements.

SCOPE OF TRANSFER BEST PRACTICES DOCUMENT REVIEW

The administration of the Alberta Transfer System is dependent upon:

- ❖ system-wide knowledge and commitment to the best practices and principles of transfer,
- ❖ efficient and effective administration of TAARS, the system that supports the processing of transfer agreements and communicates these transfer agreements to students,
- ❖ sustainable institutional business processes that support efficient and effective processing of transfer agreements within and between post-secondary institutions.

It is the responsibility of the ACAT Secretariat to oversee the first two areas. Member institutions commit to stated transfer principles upon entering the transfer system. The ACAT Secretariat monitors the commitment to transfer principles through its work with the post-secondary institutions, mainly with their administrators (Contact Persons) who process the transfer agreements.

The ACAT Secretariat maintains TAARS via the web-based Contact Persons' website and the Transfer Alberta website, which is the online tool used by students to search for transfer agreement data. It is through the Contact Persons' website that post-secondary institutions initiate, review, set and maintain transfer agreements. The details of these agreements are held within the transfer agreement database (TAARS), which is the source for data that populates the information found using the online search tools. This data provides students with detailed information on how courses and programs transfer between its member institutions within the provinces of Alberta, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia and Yukon.

As the coordinating body for credit transfer, the ACAT Secretariat maintains the Transfer Best Practices document because it is an important reference document for the post-secondary institutions as it is used to develop their own business processes. This is the purpose and scope of the Transfer Best Practices document review. Consequently, the revised document will:

- ❖ document the key intra-institutional business processes involved in establishing credit transfer agreements,
- ❖ identify recommended best practices associated with transfer agreement business processes.

The Transfer Best Practices review was initiated and facilitated by the ACAT Secretariat. The ACAT Secretariat utilized the institution Contact Persons as they are the key personnel involved in processing transfer agreements. The Transfer Best Practices Committee was formed in August 2010 and a Chair was selected, who maintained the project and its workflow. The institution Contact Persons that participated on the committee are primary sources of information necessary for the review process. After numerous meetings and discussions, the Transfer Best Practices Committee compiled a Draft *Transfer Best Practices* document for further review by all institution Contact Persons.

PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

The context of Best Practice hinges on improving organizational processes through identification and acceptance of optimum methods, efficiencies and performances for attaining desired outcomes.

Support from Senior Levels

Support of senior administration within the Alberta Transfer System, at the provincial and institutional levels, is vital to the development and continued progression of best practices. A great deal of inter-institutional coordination and cooperation occurs at the provincial level via the ACAT Secretariat. Institutional level support is crucial to maintain the system as the processes are primarily resourced at that level. Full participation and cooperation between sending institutions and receiving institutions is necessary for the establishment and maintenance of transfer agreements. The progress and success of the Alberta Transfer System is enhanced when the principles of best practice are highly valued at all levels.

A Culture of Quality and Improvement

A commitment to quality and improvement in the transfer process is vital for each institution so that the ACAT Secretariat can ensure the system meets the needs of all its users. Best practices are largely developed and maintained by key individuals working within the organization, primarily:

- development of courses and programs by faculty and academic administrators;
- transfer credit assessments by subject matter experts;
- management of pertinent internal processes by Contact Persons (CPs) and Contact Person Assistants (CPAs).

Developmental Metrics

Best practices can be measured by the degree to which they support achievement and advancement of a clearly defined performance target or goal. The goal within the Alberta Transfer System is for the appropriate and consistent recognition of successfully completed learning outcomes. The purpose of establishing transfer agreements via a central system is to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in achieving that goal.

SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Best practices develop most effectively when several forms of support by leadership, including the ACAT Secretariat and institutional support, are provided:

Central Leadership (the ACAT Secretariat)

Focus
- benefits to students as the primary reason for investment in the Alberta Transfer System,
- the ACAT Secretariat provides a centralized facilitation role toward a consistent focus across a broad system consisting of diverse institutions,
- central guidance and facilitation is necessary to:
  - provide a neutral voice in resolving differences,
  - keep the participants focused on the principles to which member institutions have committed,
  - assists users so they maintain quality performance when using system tools,
  - use system tools to monitor institutional performance.

Resourcing/Research
- ongoing investment in development projects at the ACAT Secretariat for administrative improvements is needed,
- increased research is needed in order to guide future development of the system,
  - longitudinal research on transfer students' program paths,
  - data on transfer students' experience of the system to identify necessary improvements.

Recognizing & Rewarding
- the ACAT Secretariat provides support and guidance to member institutions to follow the Best Practices,
- the ACAT Secretariat recognizes those member institutions that have committed to and developed best practices,

- ACAT's Principles, Policies and Procedures (PPP) specifies that to ensure the best interests of students are served they will,
  - assist in resolving complaints or disputes concerning transfer arrangements and mediate on behalf of students.

Central Tools

The ACAT Secretariat provides, maintains and enhances the transfer system tools used to both develop credit transfer agreements and to communicate these agreements to students.

- the TAARS system is a web-based workflow management system, known by its users as the Contact Persons' Website (CPW), through which institutions submit and respond to transfer agreement proposals,

- the CPW also includes a mechanism by which the notification of program and course changes are made to transfer partners,

- the CPW feeds the database that forms the backbone of the *Alberta Transfer Guide* used to communicate transfer agreements to the general public,

- training and troubleshooting support provided by the ACAT Secretariat is crucial to the success of the system.

Institutional Leadership

Focus
- benefits to students as the primary reason for commitment to participation in the transfer system.

Resourcing
- resourcing involved in maintaining the transfer system and fulfilling the expectations under the ACAT framework Policy, Principles and Procedures, lies with participating institutions.

STUDENT COMMUNICATION

Educating students, parents and advisors about the terminology and how transfer credit works is absolutely essential to the success of the system. It is also important for them to understand that there are legitimate reasons why courses do <u>not</u> transfer. This is outlined on the Transfer Alberta website, but it needs to be reinforced at the institutions as well. Public education is integral to the success of the transfer system.

Best Practice #1 – Institutional Calendars and Websites

References and links to Transfer Alberta, transfer terminology/process, etc. should be made in institutional print documents and websites.

To assist those who are advising transfer students on admission and program planning, there needs to be a well-developed communication system between the CPs and institution advisors (and vice-versa).

Some institutions accomplish this by counting on informal communication to take its course among groups in the same organizational unit and in close physical proximity. Others implement a more formal system of communication that brings people together on an annual basis, and is often tied to the production of the institutional calendar. Some institutions have built timely internal notification for relevant departments into the final steps of transfer agreement processing. Once a transfer agreement is in place, notification is sent to advisors.

Advisors can be the missing link for transfer students. Advisors often work one-on-one with students to explain the transfer process and educate students on transferability, requirements, and program changes. Networking and communication between the various departments and institutions are vital to the success of the system. Program planning guides developed and updated with partner institutions and available to students are an excellent resource.

CONTACT PERSONS (CPs)

As noted previously, the efficient and effective establishment and maintenance of Alberta post-secondary transfer credit agreements has required that central leadership facilitate the development of both a supportive culture and centralized tools. Principle conduits of this culture and stewards of these tools at the institutional level are the CPs. The CPs are responsible for institutional adherence to the ACAT guiding principles, institutional use of the CPW, and managing the internal processing of transfer agreements. Each institution determines the roles and responsibilities of their CPs, which may include:

- maintaining and providing, on request, a list of institutional contacts to facilitate preliminary transfer discussions and a description of internal procedures for the development and/or the evaluation of transfer proposals,

- ensuring transfer proposals are complete and responses are clear,

- coordinating the negotiation of transfer agreements and ensuring that established procedures are followed,

- awareness and monitoring of curriculum or program changes to assess the impact on existing transfer agreements,

- maintaining awareness of all procedures and arrangements at their institution for the transferring of students from other post-secondary institutions,

- contributing to the development and maintenance of agreements to ensure the accuracy of the transfer data in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*,

- assisting in the ongoing development and implementation of Transfer Best Practices,

- participating on ACAT and the ACAT Secretariat sub-committees as required,

- reviewing and providing feedback on transfer system issues vetted through the CP community by the ACAT Secretariat,

- participation at the annual Contact Persons' meeting.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OF CP AND CPA ROLES

CP

Due to the central role the CP plays in the transfer system, institutions need to:

- allocate an appropriate level of responsibility to this position,

- ensure sufficient stature to liaise with academic administrators on the development of, and adherence to, transfer related policy,

- provide for sufficient time, tools, training, and institutional support to manage the functional aspects of the transfer system where required,

- have internal access to key transfer information users.

Internal Committees

Generally the CP is within the Registrar's Office and may be the level of Registrar, Associate Registrar or Assistant Registrar. As such, the CP should be at a position that can provide proper perspective on questions and issues that are related to transfer that may be overlooked.

CPA

Generally, the CPA is within the Registrar's Office and works closely with the CP.

- CPAs need sufficient time, tools, training, and institutional support to learn and manage the functional nature of the transfer system;
  - They play an important role in quality control and efficiency.
  - They need a strong connection (either through organizational structure or formal communication channels) with key transfer information users within the institution.

- Communication between these users needs to be two-way so as to ensure that all parties have the information they need to facilitate the transfer process;

- For example, admission advisors may note that there are a high number of students presenting a particular course for transfer and may suggest pursuing a transfer agreement.
- Conversely, a CPA offering timely notice of a new or pending transfer agreement may positively impact a student advising session.

Note, throughout the remainder of this document, reference to CPs also includes CPAs except where noted otherwise.

Best Practice #3 – CP Role as Transfer Facilitator

CPs need to be provided with the resources to fulfill the institutional role for transfer;

- they are relied upon for guidance in transfer consideration in areas such as:
  - program/course development,
  - transfer proposal assessments,
  - transfer negotiations.
- annual and customized ACAT Secretariat training is necessary as is the support received from CPs at other institutions,
- recommended that new CPs establish a formal mentor relationship with a more experienced CP from within their sector to act as a resource,
- due to the important role and steep learning curve involved in transfer credit, institutions need to consider internal succession planning/cross-training.

Best Practice #4 – CP Role as Communication Facilitator

Institutions funnel most inter-institutional transfer communication through th*e* CP. The CP at these institutions act as a:

- ❖ *filter* - screening questions or concerns that are common to the system,
- ❖ *translator* - putting questions into common language,
- ❖ *guide* - sending the query through the appropriate channels.

Best Practice #5 – Non-standard Communication

The existing CPW is essentially a tool to expedite communication of standardized systematic information:

- standardization makes the system efficient for the bulk of transfer information:
  - when there is non-standard information required, such as seeking clarification of proposal decisions, or when there are questions about the context of a proposal, a dialogue may be required between transfer partners,
  - e-mail and telephone contact is recommended for non-standard situations.

In most cases transfer proposal/agreement related information and queries are conveyed through the CP rather than dealing directly with institution's Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) or Academic Administrators – particularly for initial contact on a transfer matter.

- the CP may be able to respond to the issue directly
  o they will know best how to refer the query,

- communications will encompass any information necessary to complete the transfer agreement,

- CPs will not be expected to make decisions on the validity of the transfer agreement, set precedent, or for any item they feel is out of their purview
  o The CP will refer such decisions to the appropriate person within their institution,

- The CP's role is to keep the process moving along by vetting agreements for appropriate information and updating the CPW.

Best Practice #7 – Program Area Communications

Faculty should be in contact with one another before a proposal is sent in order to build awareness. In situations where there are well-established patterns of student transfer it is helpful to have regular, at least annual, meetings between transfer partner faculty.

- institutions participating in the annual meetings report very positive outcomes including:
  o building strong, trusting relationships and communicating program changes and provincial level program enrichment opportunities early in the process (ACAT's articulation committees are prime examples).

SENDING A PROPOSAL

This section deals with establishing a transfer agreement proposal for a new course or program.

Before a transfer agreement proposal is submitted for a new course or program, it goes through internal institution processes (see Exhibits 2 and 3):

- one that assesses the viability of the proposal,

- one that provides an academic review.
  o For programs which an institution wishes the province to recognize there is an external vetting process through Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education (AEAE). They ask that the full internal approval process be completed before seeking external approval through AEAE.

(See Exhibits 4 and 5 for an overview of the common course/program transfer proposal development process flow).

Best Practice #8 – Program/Course Approval include Transfer Consideration

As programs and courses are developed, any information needed to assess their potential for transfer should be gathered as early in the approval process as possible.

Advantages

- students are better positioned when they receive optimum transfer credit for courses they have successfully completed,
- specific transfer is of more advantage to the student.

Institutional Internal Practices

When program or course information is presented to the CP to submit a transfer proposal, after having gone through the program/course approval process, the CP must:

- ensure that information that is required for the proposal is provided, such as: instructor qualifications, course outlines, prerequisite courses, desired transfer, etc.,
- ideally, it is advantageous if the above relevant information is considered prior to program/course approval.

Committee Processes

CP involvement in the program/course approval committee structure is one means of ensuring transfer consideration is part of the review criteria.

- CP should be part of a committee rather than seen as acting independently;
  - o Reinforces that transfer is an institutional priority.
- Institutions may include transfer consideration information in the standard program/course development documents
  - o the program/course proposal should include all information the CP will require for a transfer agreement proposal as well as an indication of whether there has been prior contact with a transfer partner regarding potential transferability

Administrative Processes

CP involvement in program/course approval via an administrative consultation is another means of ensuring transfer consideration.

- The CP's inclusion in consultation encourages transfer consideration early in the development process.

Form Design

Most institutions require the use of standard forms as part of the program/course development approval process information package.

- Inclusion of transfer consideration on these forms encourages thoughtful consideration of transfer.

Work Flow Management Tools

While most institutions manage the information flow of the program approval process through procedure documents, forms and committees, some institutions have digitized the process.

- Use of electronic forms that have built in messaging and process features increases efficiency and can ensure that transfer is considered during program development.

Best Practice #9 – Proposal Content

Transfer proposal content, must be complete for expedited consideration, and consider the following:

Quality Control

The CP should ensure that full information is provided, including the desired transfer credit and the instructor qualifications, and ensure that a detailed current course outline is attached. See Exhibit 7 for a checklist of course outline content.

- CPs can experience difficulty determining to which department a proposal should be sent or having to follow-up with the institution to provide missing information, resulting in delays in the review process.
- Given the volume, the submission of detailed and complete information increases efficiency in the process.
- Sending out the same proposals to multiple receiving institutions without researching to which of their courses transfer is not encouraged. Researching proposals before sending out to multiple receiving institutions may increase efficiency.

Intellectual Property

Institutions may model their courses after those of a transfer partner, however,

- it is considered an infringement on intellectual property to copy course outlines without prior authorization,
- the onus is on the sending institution's faculty to ensure the integrity of one another's intellectual property by establishing appropriate approvals from the onset
  - CPs may not be aware that this is occurring until it is brought to their attention. At that point they will need to follow-up with their department regarding protocols.

RECEIVING A TRANSFER AGREEMENT PROPOSAL

Once a proposal is submitted on the CPW it is displayed in the transfer partner's Work-in-Progress (WIP). At that point the CP at the receiving institution assumes responsibility for facilitating the review of the proposal. The CP typically has the proposal assessed by a faculty member who is the SME in the discipline under consideration. The internal process of managing the movement between the CP and the SME varies, particularly depending on the size and sector of the institution. (See Exhibits 4 and 5 for an overview of the processes of a typical transfer proposal – for Proposals initiated by Sender as well as Proposals initiated by Receiver).

The goal of the process is to have a decision within a reasonable time frame. The following Best Practices contribute to those goals:

Best Practice #10 – Decision Criteria Communicated

Since not all SMEs are familiar with the guiding principles under which the Alberta Transfer System operates it is the CP's responsibility to ensure that these principles are employed in the decision-making by:

- Communicating this prior to the decision being rendered saves having to clarify the decision or the rationale for the decision:
  - o a two-tiered communication approach is recommended.

- When sending a proposal to a SME for consideration the CP should include:
  - o a template cover page with a summary paragraph which indicates what the faculty member is being asked to do, process instructions, factors used in decision consideration and decision options (See Exhibit 6 for a sample transfer credit cover letter template),
  - o expectations regarding assessment should be outlined including rationale for the decision. This is especially important where the decision arrived is other than the 'desired offering' of the sending institution,
  - o contact information should the faculty member need more information or guidance.

Best Practice #11 – Timeframe Expectations

Institutions successful in managing their transfer proposal review process provide clear direction and timeframe expectations for decision making to SME's, and adherence to these expectations is monitored and reinforced. The latter is dealt with below:

- Timelines and expectations need to be clearly articulated to those involved in the process
  - o such a statement demonstrates a clear institutional commitment to timely decisions and provides the CP to hold members accountable.

- the CPs will request and monitor institutional commitment to moving transfer agreement proposals through the system in a timely manner
  - usual course of action is to state the turnaround expectations on a covering memo/e-mail when sending out the proposal to an SME for assessment.

MAINTAINING TRANSFER AGREEMENTS

The transfer agreement system is predictive in nature. Agreements are struck based on a prediction that a student's learning at a sending institution will be substantially equivalent to that at a receiving institution. One reason a transfer agreement may be invalid is that it has not been maintained.

Maintenance of transfer agreements is required since the agreements are based on a point-in-time comparison between transfer partners' curriculum. However, post-secondary curriculum is not static, so transfer agreement validity may weaken as transfer partners change their courses and programs.

There are two main vehicles for monitoring the validity of an agreement: change notification and systematic review. Both are used to varying degrees by post-secondary institutions. Change notification is facilitated through the CPW while systematic review is managed by individual institutions in cooperation with their transfer partners.

Change Notification

This entails each transfer partner notifying the other when changes to a course or program are being made.

- transfer partners must notify each other when there are any changes to a course, including non-substantive as well as substantive changes as it is the receiving institution who must assess whether changes substantially affect existing transfer agreements,

- a revised outline must be attached with each notification,

- reliance on change notification requires transfer partners to trust that changes which could impact their agreement will be announced to each other
  - the cumulative effect of several non-substantive changes can invalidate agreements,
  - "curriculum creep" would not necessarily be detected in the current change notification system.

Systematic Review

Systematic review is an audit of existing transfer agreements to ensure they are current, and

- serves as a back-up system to the change notification system,

- beneficial to engaging transfer partners by providing a means to open communication regarding anticipated changes to course or programs
  - This may function as an "early warning system" of program changes by allowing the sending institution to appropriately advise students.

Student Success Review

This is suggested to predict the success of transfer students in courses for which the transfer credit was a prerequisite.

- monitoring transfer agreement validity through student success may be performed on an *ad hoc* basis at receiving institutions.
  - institutions rely either on faculty members reporting poor performance of transfer students, often after commencing the higher-level course,
  - at the discretion of the institutions and potential for sharing of results with the transfer partners.

Best Practice #12 – Full and Timely Change Notification

It is important that transfer consideration be taken into account when making changes to courses and programs at both the sending and receiving institutions as changes may affect block or laddering possibilities.

- CPs should communicate throughout the process to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

Full Disclosure

Full disclosure of all changes is the only way to ensure an existing agreement is still valid.

- accepting students into a certain level/program that they are unprepared for could happen as a result of the receiving institution not being aware of important changes,

- decision for continuation of the transfer agreement rests with the receiving institution,

- sending institution is not aware of how that decision is derived and therefore any change could affect the agreement,

- maintains the trust between transfer partners which is foundational to the system,

- helps to ensure the viability of the transfer agreement system.

Timely Notification of Program Changes

All institutions require timely notification of curriculum changes that will impact transfer agreements.

- If the sending institution wishes to modify their programming to mirror the changes at the receiving institution, they need to receive considerable advance notice that a change may be forthcoming (program structure is changing).

- Notification from the receiving institutions as soon as a change is approved is paramount so that sending institution student advisors can begin counseling their students on course selection to accommodate the anticipated change.

Timely Notification of Course Changes

All course changes should be submitted to the receiving institutions as soon as the change has been approved.

- Untimely notification of course changes can negatively impact transfer students and the integrity of transfer agreements
  - Examples – institutions making course renumbering change,
  - Discontinued courses continuing to appear in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.

Grandfathering

Students enter into a contract with an institution for the delivery of that program.

- these students are "grandfathered" in terms of which program requirements they must fulfill for graduation, and are given certain time periods and conditions for completion,

- grandfathering should be extended to transfer students who undertook a program of study at a sending institution
  - they will have made course selection based on the program criteria published at the time of admission,
  - in some cases transfer credit may change if the prerequisites for the program changed significantly enough.

- see "Timely Notification of Program Changes" information noted above.

Best Practice #13 – Substantial and Non-substantial Changes

Course changes are interpreted differently by sending and receiving institutions as either substantive or non-substantive depending on the institution's own business practices (see Exhibit 8).

- Institutions use the CPW to notify their transfer partners of changes to courses and programs via the Change Notification screens.

- screens give users two general options
  - One indicates to transfer partners that a substantial change is being made and that the agreement needs to be reassessed (the date first offered (DFO) is changed and the agreement is terminated).
  - The other indicates that a non-substantial change has been made which may not impact the transfer agreement (the DFO is not changed); however, the agreement may still undergo a review by the receiving institution to ensure viability.
- It is often the non-substantial changes that are interpreted differently by the two transfer partners
  - This is a "grey" area as changes are not always "black and white".

If any of the following items are being changed, an institution should note the change as substantial:

- instructor level qualifications
- content change

If any of the following items are being changed, an institution should note the change as non-substantial:

- course code (e.g. changing WMST to WGST)
- course title

If any of the following items are being changed, an institution may note the change as either non-substantial or substantial, depending on their institution's interpretation of the change.

- pre/co-requisites
- course number/level
- units of course weight
- calendar description
- total instruction hours
- textbooks
- course requirements (assignments and evaluation method)
- course objectives

It is essential that each change is explained in detail so that the transfer partner can properly determine, from their perspective, if it is substantial or not. A revised outline should be attached to the new course version. (See Exhibit 8 for a list of examples of substantial and non-substantial changes).

Best Practice #14 –Monitoring Change Notifications

The CP is to check the Notification of Change screen on a regular basis so that agreements can be kept as current as possible.

NEGOTIATING PROGRAM AGREEMENTS

Institutions seeking program agreements/block opportunities are encouraged to follow a process that includes researching and then introducing them to transfer partners.

Best Practice #15 – Transfer Partner Research

Institutions new to the Alberta Transfer System are generally sending institutions seeking opportunities for their alumni and students to ladder their credentials for further study. These institutions should research potential program transfer opportunities by asking questions such as:

- Where have previous alumni transferred?
- Where would students naturally transfer?
- Which programs have a natural curricular linkage?

Other methodologies in partner research may take the form of:

- Ascertaining what credit for courses has already been assessed through transfer credit to potential partners.
  - If transfer credit has been granted, then the granting institution is a likely partner.
  - May require the input of a potential partner to supply relevant information regarding transfer students.

Best Practice #16 – Introduction and Fostering Transfer Partner

Initial contact between institutions should be made through the CP.

- Facilitates one central point of contact between institutions,
- Allows the CP of the receiving institution to make contact with relevant departments to ascertain interest and potential transfer,
- Introductions between the respective academic departments can be arranged by the CPs once potential transfer partners have been identified.

Once a transfer partner is identified the following should take place:

- Details of the transfer agreement are worked out.
  - Takes time to complete review.
  - May take the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- Once the details are established the transfer block proposal is submitted to the receiving institution by the sending institution, on the CPW.

After an initial program transfer agreement is established with one receiving institution, the sending institution may initiate similar agreements with other receiving institutions. Sending institutions are encouraged to focus on establishing agreements that will be of use to current students and alumni.

CONCLUSION

There was consensus among the Transfer Best Practices Committee that significant changes occurred since the Best Practices Transfer Review document was completed in 2005, and that a revised document was needed. The committee was vital in providing the necessary information and support needed by the ACAT Secretariat to compile current and relevant information for the revised *Transfer Best Practices* document, which will better serve Alberta's Transfer System. The revised document sets out prescribed processes necessary to achieve effective understanding and support for admission and transfer. It also assists in achieving common understanding and building a strong institutional support for transfer. The CPW provides the necessary tools for developing and communicating transfer agreements, and will continue to expand and develop as needs are identified and as resources are made available.

The ACAT Secretariat and Alberta's Transfer System member institutions must be committed to work together to ensure the most efficient and effective processes are established so as to implement the necessary transfer agreements for students to achieve optimum mobility. It is essential that the Alberta Transfer System continue to adapt effectively to the rapidly changing post-secondary educational landscape in Alberta and beyond. This will require ongoing review and assessment of its technology, as well as regular review and implementation of its best practices to ensure that the necessary tools and processes are in place.

REFERENCES

- *Best Practices in Transfer Review* (2005)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- *Please refer to the Glossary of Terms and Definitions document.*

RESOURCES

- **Pan-Canadian Protocol on Transferability of University Credits** - A statement describing transferability between universities across Canada. See website http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/198/Pan-Canadian-Protocol-Transferability-University-Credits.pdf.

For further transfer related terms, see the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials terminology guide at http://www.cicic.ca/410/guide-to-terminology-usage-in-the-%20field-of-credentials-recognition-in-canada.canada

EXHIBIT 1 – Transfer Best Practice Committee

Chair:

- Anna Foshay (NAIT)

Members:

- Lena Lapatack (Blue Quills First Nations College)
- Andrea Kennedy (Bow Valley College)
- Larry Murrin (Canadian University College)
- Shawnna McClelland (Grande Prairie Regional College)
- Tony Norrad (Grant MacEwan University)
- Darla Devnich (Grant MacEwan University)
- Charlene Bonnar (Lakeland College)
- Craig Wood (Medicine Hat College)
- Karen McDaniel (SAIT)
- Deborah Gougeon (University of Alberta)
- Helen Frossard (University of Alberta)
- Franceen Dubreuil (University of Calgary)
- Alice Miller (University of Lethbridge)
- Cathy Newman (University of Lethbridge)
- Eric Dohei (the ACAT Secretariat)
- Wendy Richer (the ACAT Secretariat)

EXHIBIT   - Course/Program Development

Within the program development processes a program proposal is typically vetted first for viability and then vetted through a program approval process. It is also submitted to the province if ministerial credit is desired. Transfer credit consideration should be early in the process either through formal administrative consultation with the Contact Person, or Contact Person inclusion on appropriate committees.

Progra Viability Review

Initiating Department

Review as Viable for Development
Ex. Dean or Dean's Council

Authorize Program Development
Vice-President

Course/ Program Approval

Initiating Department

Academic Review Body sub-committee
Ex. Curriculm Review Committee

Academic Review Body
Ex. GFC, or Academic Council

Submit for review after
internal program approval

Alberta Enterprise and
Advanced Education

Transfer Consideration

Dept's not accustomed to
transfer consult with CP
in initial stages of
course/program development.

CP sits on Committee,
and/or does administrative
review of course/program
development/change
for transfer impact.

CP receives approval decision
with full information required
to launch a transfer agreement
proposal on the CPW

Informs impacted internal departments
of new transfer agreement

Impacted Departments, such as:
Calendar Editor,
Admission/Program Advising,
Admin Sys Administrator, etc.

Contact Person

Trading
Partner Decision
returned

Contact Person Website

Launches a Transfer
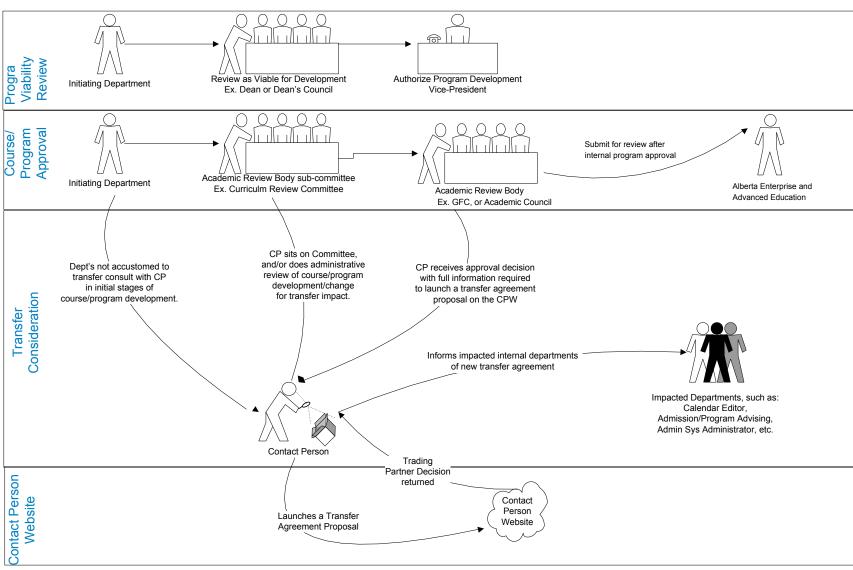Agreement Proposal

Contact
Person
Website

EXHIBIT   - Institution Transfer Proposal Routing

The referral chain in larger institutions varies but all have at least two stages, some have three as depicted here. CP monitoring of a proposal's status only goes one stage deep at all institutions. No institutions use work flow management software to monitor performance of the system. Best Practice institutions monitor time a proposal has been in the system and follow-up with those that are out of tolerance.

Larger Institution

Routes to appropriate Dept.

Routes to SME

Assc. Dean

Review and return determination

Dept Chair

Returns determination

Subject Matter Expert

Routes to appropriate faculty/division

Contact Person Website

After reviewing determination for appropriateness, sends determination to Trading Partner with covering explanations if needed.

Contact Person Website

Returns to CP (U of A vets through a GFC subcommittee)

Contact Person

Smaller Institution

Receives a Transfer Agreement Proposal Reviews it for completeness and routes to appropriate academic department with a deadline for return and general instructions on proposal assessment.

Routes to appropriate SME

Returns determination

Subject Matter Expert

EXHIBIT 4 - Developing a Transfer Agreement (by Sender)

Quick Overview

Sender creates an offering (course or program), OR uses an existing offering (course of program) with correct lock status.

↓

Proposal is created by Sender and displays the Status "NEW AS SENDER". Then once Authorized by Sender Contact Person, its Status is set to "AUTHORIZED BY SENDER".

↓

Receiver reviews the Sender initiated Proposal and begins their internal review process.

↓

Receiver inserts their offering data, an Effective Date and any necessary footnotes. Once it has been Authorized, Receiver Contact Person sets ts Status to "AUTHORIZED BY RECEIVER" and inserts their DECISION (see below).

APPROVED	APPROVED SUBJECT TO	NOT APPROVED
Receiver approves the Proposal and Receiver Contact Person sets DECISION as "APPROVED".	Receiver approves the Proposal with conditions and Receiver Contact Person sets DECISION as "APPROVED SUBJECT TO" and indicates the conditions.	If Receiver does NOT approve the Proposal, Receiver Contact Person sets DECISION to "NOT APPROVED" and includes rationale for decision.

Sender reviews Proposal and Sender Contact Person Contact CONFIRMS Proposal and sets Status to "DECISION BY SENDER" and sets DECISION to "CONFIRMED" OR "NOT CONFIRMED".

"CONFIRMED"

"NOT CONFIRMED" Rationale is to be indicated.

Sender reviews Receiver's rationale and Sender Contact Person sets Status to "DECISION BY SENDER" and selects "CONFIRMED", which confirms their acknowledgement of the Receiver's decision.

ACAT reviews Proposal for accuracy. If OK, sets Status to "VERIFIED by ACAT". If anomalies found, contacts institutions and resolves, making any necessary changes and sets Status to "VERIFIED by ACAT".

ACAT sets status to "ACTIVE".

ACAT sets Status to "ARCHIVED". Proposal will NOT display in *Alberta Transfer Guide*, but is retained on the ACAT system for information and future reference by Sender and Receiver.

Transfer Agreement is now Active and viewable on ACAT's public website using Online Search Tools for the academic year corresponding to the Agreement's Effective Date.

EXHIBIT 5 - Developing a Transfer Agreement (by Receiver)

Quick Overview

Receiver creates an offering (course or program), OR uses an existing offering (course of program) with correct lock status.

↓

Proposal is created by Receiver and displays the Status "NEW AS RECEIVER". Then once it has been Authorized by Receiver Contact Person, its Status is set to "READY FOR SENDER REVIEW".

↓

Sender reviews the Receiver initiated Proposal and begins their internal review process.

↓

Sender inserts their offering data in the Proposal and Sender Contact Person sets Status to "AUTHORIZED BY SENDER".

↓

Receiver reviews the Proposal (updating their offering if necessary), inserts an Effective Date and any necessary footnotes, and sets Status to "AUTHORIZED BY RECEIVER" and inserts DECISION (see below).

APPROVED	APPROVED SUBJECT TO	NOT APPROVED
Receiver approves the Proposal and Receiver Contact Person sets Status to "AUTHORIZED BY RECEIVER" and sets Decision as "APPROVED".	Receiver approves the Proposal with conditions and Receiver Contact Person sets Status to "AUTHORIZED BY RECEIVER" and sets Decision as "APPROVED SUBJECT TO" indicating the conditions.	If Receiver does not approve the Proposal, Receiver Contact Person sets Status to "AUTHORIZED BY RECEIVER" and sets Decision to "NOT APPROVED", including rationale for decision.

Sender reviews Proposal and Sender Contact Person sets Status to "DECISION BY SENDER" and sets Decision to "CONFIRMED" OR "NOT CONFIRMED".

"CONFIRMED"   "NOT CONFIRMED"

Sender reviews Receiver's rationale and Sender Contact Person sets Status to "DECISION BY SENDER" and selects "CONFIRMED", which confirms their acknowledgement of the Receiver's decision.

ACAT reviews Proposal for accuracy. If OK, sets Status to "VERIFIED by ACAT". If anomalies found, contacts institutions and resolves, making any necessary changes and sets Status to "VERIFIED by ACAT".

↓

ACAT sets status to "ACTIVE".

↓

Transfer Agreement is now Active and viewable on ACAT's public website using Online Search Tools for the academic year corresponding to the Agreement's effective date.

ACAT sets Status to "ARCHIVED". Proposal will NOT display in *Alberta Transfer Guide*, but is retained on the ACAT system for information and future reference by Sender and Receiver.

EXHIBIT 6 – Sample Transfer Credit Cover Letter

Registrar's Office
Memo

TO:

FROM:

DATE:

RE: Receiving Transfer Credit Proposal

Please take a moment to review the attached course description/outline and assess the following course for transfer credit. The course in question is:

Course Code	Credits	Jr or Sr Level	Institution

Please consider the course carefully, recommend one of the following three options, and sign and date your recommendation.

1. **Approved as direct equivalent**:
2. **Approved as unspecified credit (provide level and subject area, for example ENGL 1xx, 2xx, 3xx, 4xx). Provide rationale for unspecified credit if the DRO (desired receiving offering) has not been granted**:
3. **Not approved** for transfer credit and the **reason** it is not:

Signature:	Date:

Please return all of the attached documents to me by the date to the right.	Date Required:

Should you require more information, don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time.

EXHIBIT 7 – Course Outline Content Checklist

Course Outline Elements/Requirements:

- Institution
- Code/title
- Course level
- Course contact person
- Course term/date
- Faculty/department
- Credit hour breakdown
- Academic calendar description
- Learning outcomes and detailed content, including course objectives
- Grading system/ratings – final exam worth (identify pass/fail regardless of grade or percentage)
- Group/individual work to be identified (group project work is different than practicum)
- Schedule of lectures and topics covered
- Schedule of laboratories and topics covered
- Textbooks/course materials
- Pre-requisite/Co-requisite information
- Instructor qualifications (minimum mandatory)
- Name of instructor (not always able to identify/may change frequently)
- Accreditation/accrediting bodies (if any)

Exhibit 8 - Examples of Non-substantial/Substantial Changes

Course Change	Non-substantial	Substantial	Explanation/Example
Content		Yes	*Any ch*ange to the course content is considered a substantial course change which would require termination of the existing agreement and the resubmission of a proposal. In addition, a new Date First Offered (DFO) is required for the course.
Course Number/Level	Yes	Yes	A course renumbering can be either a non-substantial change or a substantial change. For example if a course is renumbered to a lower or higher level (e.g.: MATH 100 to 200), this is a substantial change. If the course is renumbered at the same level (e.g. Math 100 to 129) this is considered a non substantial renumbering.
Course Code	Yes		A course code change is a non-substantial change. For example: Recently an Institution recoded their Women's Studies courses from WMST to WGST.
Course Title	Yes		A course title change only, is considered a non-substantial change.
Credit (Value)	Yes	Yes	Depending on the change in credit value, the change may be non-substantial (e.g.: 4 to 3) or substantial (6 to 3 or 1.5 to 3). An institute changed the weight of their Business courses from 4 to 3 the reason given was: "The course weights have changed from 4 credits to 3 credits to be consistent with degree programming and the existing norm at other post-secondary institutions." This change was considered non substantial. However, another Institution changed the weight of their PAC courses from 1.5 to 3 credits, increasing the total instruction hours for the course. This is obviously a substantial course change.

Course Change	Non-substantial	Substantial	Explanation/Example
Course Calendar Description	Yes	Yes	A change to the course description can be either non-substantial or substantial depending on whether or not the wording change is a result of course content/curriculum changes or if the wording change is an editorial change which does not alter the course content.
Pre/Co-requisites	Yes	Yes	A prerequisite change may or may not be a substantial change. The addition and/or removal of course prerequisites would have to be compared to the existing prerequisite structure at the receiving institution to determine if the change is substantial or not.
Instructor Qualification – Degree Level		Yes	A change in level, (for example: PhD to Masters, Bachelors to Masters, Masters to PhD etc.) is a substantial course change.
Instructor Qualification - Degree Discipline	Yes	Yes	A change to the PhD or Masters degree discipline may or may not be a substantial change. If the Sending Institution is not sure if the degree discipline is appropriate for the course being taught, they should contact the receiving institution for clarification.
Total Instruction Hours	Yes	Yes	Changes to the total hours of instruction may be either substantial changes (e.g. deletion or addition of lab component) or non-substantial changes (e.g. adding a 1 hour per week tutorial).
Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes		Yes	Normally changes to the course objectives (learning outcomes) are considered substantial changes.
Textbooks	Yes	Yes	A change to the course textbooks can be either non-substantial (e.g.: revised the textbook to the most current edition with the same authors) or substantial (e.g. different textbook or the removal or addition of a textbook).

Course Change	Non-substantial	Substantial	Explanation/Example
Course Requirements – Assignments and Evaluation Method	Yes	Yes	An increase or decrease in the number of assignments to complete the course is considered a substantial change. In addition if the percentage weighting of the evaluation method is significantly altered it may or may not impact the transfer agreement. For example a Phys Ed course decreases the skills component and increases the participation component.