

Subsection 3.6: Operational Transfer Credit Nomenclature Usage

Considerations:

There is a tremendous variety of transfer credit terminology used in Canada to describe the particulars of transfer credit, blocks or clusters of courses, the nature of the credit assigned for past studies as it relates to the program to which the student is seeking access, whether or not it directly applies to a particular discipline (such as a major), and so forth. Phase 1 findings indicate this variety is having an impact on administrators, policy developers, and students. We encourage you to read the 2014 study by Christine Helen Arnold, *Transfer Literacy: Assessing Informational Symmetries and Asymmetries*, which provides another lens on the challenge.¹

Principles which appear to drive the choice of a term or phrase appear to vary. For example, we learned in the first phase from institutional feedback that attempts were routinely made to simplify language and enhance transparency for students when choosing a particular term. Others indicated a desire to find or create terms that conveyed the core purpose of a particular action in an effort to simplify and clarify the nomenclature. And still others indicated a desire to ensure the chosen nomenclature sufficiently categorized an array of mutual exclusivity between opposite actions (e.g., specified and unspecified). Most of the terms in use derive in some fashion from the expectation that the item in question is a course shaped by credit hours or relates in some fashion to a course credit framework. When not explicitly about a course shaped by credit hours, some institutions appear to be attempting to translate the knowledge gained in prior studies or experience into the credit hour framework. This is similar to the methodology employed by the ECTS credit system in Europe.

The research from Phase 1 highlighted common and successful practices that are worth considering. However, the bigger challenge appears to be identifying best practice and, further, encouraging adoption. This section is intended to address these areas.

Online Survey and Workshop Questions:

1. How might adoption of new best practices or promising practices for transfer credit nomenclature be encouraged and realized across Canada?
2. Are there any transfer credit terms missing from your local context that you have noticed in other jurisdictions and that you would recommend be adopted as a standard in light of the changing Canadian postsecondary environment?
3. What principles should inform good practice when implementing transfer credit nomenclature?

Background:

In addition to the aforementioned tables, Figure 3 provides a high level overview of some of the program and course specific findings from Phase 1. Additional research of Canadian glossaries and institutional policies indicate that any one of these words is defined differently by different organizations. In some instances, there are four different definitions evident across Canada for the same term (and sometimes more). An example is “advanced standing.” Table 5 provides sample definitions for select unique items some of which demonstrate the array of approaches.

¹ http://www.oncat.ca/files_docs/content/pdf/en/oncat_research_reports/2012-2_ChristineArnold-Transfer-literacy-assessing-informational-symmetries-and-asymmetries.pdf

Some widely used words such as *equivalency* also encourage additional reflection. For example, this word suggests equal value, function, meaning, etc. Its use, although wide, is open to challenge. For example, is it a truly sufficient term to identify what usually amounts to overlap but not sameness? What might be an alternate term? And what about its opposite? There seem to be many derivations of the latter. The variety of words and definitions creates some confusion.

It is also worth stating that very few of the examples provided spoke to other forms of learning beyond course work. The exceptions would be forms of prior learning assessment and assessment approaches such as a “challenge test”; however, it is not clear from the first phase findings that institutions routinely award transfer credit for non-course based learning. The researchers did find examples of institutions that award credit for PLAR; however, it would appear this is not common across Canada. Further, the approach to transcribing varies as there is no standard for PLAR.

Figure 1: Degree of Usage - Terms of Relevance to Transfer Credit

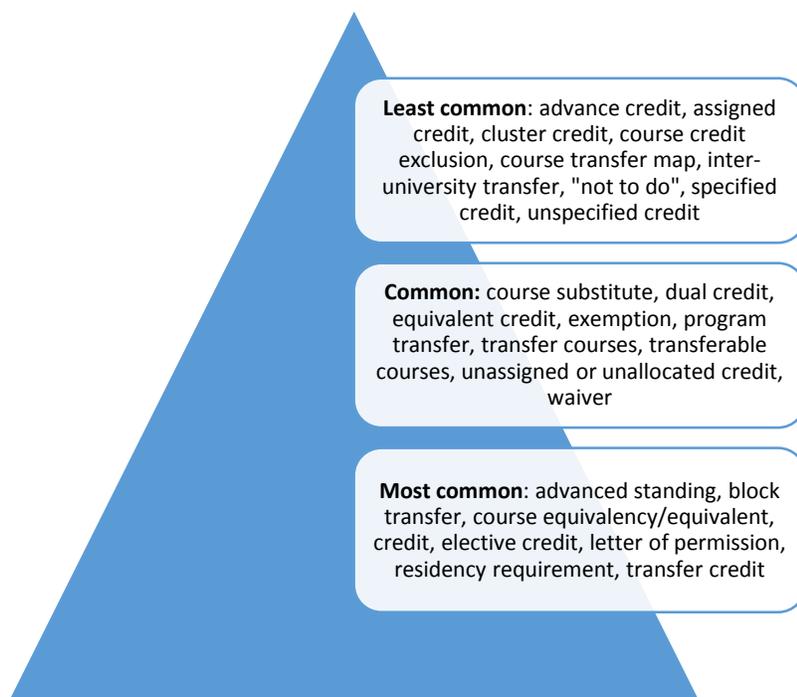


Table 1: Sample Definitions

| Term | Definition |
|--|--|
| Cluster Credit | The credit awarded when two or more courses must be combined, at either the sending or the receiving institution, in order to obtain credit for a single equivalent course at the receiving institution. |
| Equivalency (similar terms: Equivalent Credit, | A relationship of parity between one system, jurisdiction, or institution and another with respect to the value and significance of courses, diplomas, certificates, licences, and/or degrees. Recognition of the equivalent value of courses, programs, sections of programs, degrees, or training. Applies to assessments provided, for example, by regulatory bodies to determine eligibility to practice. |

| Term | Definition |
|---|--|
| Course Credit Equivalency) | <p>Equivalent means “equal in value, amount, function, [or] meaning.” A course submitted for evaluation for articulation purposes will likely never be completely identical to the corresponding course at the receiving institution. The assessment of equivalence involves identifying the degree to which the courses match in content or outcomes.</p> <p>The degree of similarity between the courses should be close enough so that students receiving transfer credit will have the necessary knowledge and background to be successful in more advanced courses. Conditions and restrictions on transfer (such as requiring a minimum grade in the course for credit to be transferable) should not be included unless those same restrictions apply to the equivalent course at the receiving institution, or unless there are clear and defensible reasons for doing so.</p> |
| | <p>Transfer of course credit from one postsecondary institution to another where courses are considered equal in content or academic value.</p> |
| Assigned Credit (similar term: Level Credit) | <p>The credit value that is ‘assigned’ to a course at a sending institution when it is assessed as being equivalent to a course at a receiving institution.</p> |
| | <p>If a course at a receiving institution is determined to be equivalent to the course for which transfer credit is being requested, the transfer credit request form is filled in with the name, code and number of credits of the matching course and, if applicable, the effective start date. This is referred to as assigned credit.</p> |
| Assigned Disciplinary Credit (similar terms: Assigned Credit, Level Credit) | <p>Placement at a certain level of study when entering a program or course, based on assessment of previous [academic] work, or on achievement in a placement test.</p> |
| Unassigned Credit (similar term: Level Credit) | <p>Credit given when a course is considered worthy of credit but does not have a direct equivalent. It may be recorded as credit within a particular discipline or as general unassigned credit.</p> |
| | <p>A form of transfer credit that can be awarded when a course is assessed as not being equivalent to a specific course at a receiving institution. Unassigned credit is usually specified as applying toward the requirements of a particular discipline or program, e.g., BUS 1xx (3). May be called level credit at some Institutions.</p> |
| | <p>If a transfer credit request involves a course which is appropriate for credit in the discipline, but which does not closely match the topic, structure, content, or format of the courses in the department at the receiving institution, then unassigned discipline-specific transfer credit can be awarded. This type of credit verifies that the course is taught at the expected level and standard for the program it is being awarded credit in; that it conforms to the norms of the discipline; and that it is suitable for meeting elective credit requirements within a degree program. However, the course does not transfer with direct credit for a course at the receiving institution.</p> |
| | <p>Recognition of learning where the course doesn't have a specific equivalent at the receiving institution.</p> |