From Application and Beyond: Tracking Aspirations, Motivations, Experiences, and Outcomes of Ontario's Transfer Students

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Executive Summary

It has been well established that different segments of the population are more or less likely to aspire to and attend college or university. In particular, students with disabilities, low income students, first generation students, students from rural communities, Indigenous students, and male students are less likely to attend university. These disparities in access are primarily a university issue, in that these groups are not generally underrepresented in colleges relative to the population. Based on these findings, it has been suggested that enhancing the college-to-university pathway may be a vehicle to reduce inequities in university access (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine the profiles and pathways of college-to-university students in order to enhance our understanding of who is accessing this transfer pathway, and their unique needs and experiences. To do this, the motivations, experiences, and outcomes of four groups of Ontario students were examined: 1)   College applicants who aspired to complete a 4-year degree; 2) College applicants who did not aspire to complete a 4-year degree; 3) University applicants with a completed college credential; and, 4) University applicants with no previous PSE. This study also contributes to the literature by offering insights into the factors that may contribute to the persistence and success of transfer students.

The study had two phases. In phase one, Academica Group's University and College Applicant Study (UCAS™) database was utilized in order to compare college applicants who aspired to a degree to those who do not, and to compare university applicants who had a previous college credential to those who had no previous PSE experience. The results are based on a sample of over 125,000 Ontario college and university applicants who participated in the UCAS™ between 2010 and 2015. This included 70,813 survey respondents who had applied to Ontario universities, and 57,839 survey respondents who had applied to Ontario colleges.

In the second phase, an online survey instrument was designed to track the pathways of applicants following their application to postsecondary education. In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked about students' decision making process, application outcomes, motivations, postsecondary goals, use of support resources, and the transfer experience. 2,093 respondents completed the survey and were included in the analysis.

For analysis in both phase one and phase two, survey respondents were organized into four pathway groups:

- **Aspirants:** College applicant whose highest planned level of education is a 4-year degree program or graduate level university program (Master's, PhD etc.)
- **Non-Aspirants:** College applicant whose highest planned level of education is a college certificate, diploma or advanced diploma
- **College Transfer Students**: University applicants who completed a college credential or trades / vocational / technical school program
- **University Students With No Previous PSE:** University applicants whose highest level of education was a high school diploma

Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?
2. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?
3. What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?
4. How do the transition experiences compare between college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE?

Key findings related to each research question are summarized below, along with conclusions and next steps.

How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?

Ontario college applicants who aspired to complete a university degree differed from those who did not aspire to a degree on a number of characteristics. Rural students, those with dependents, first generation students, students with a disability, Indigenous students, Caucasian/White students, students born in Canada, and those who primarily spoke English at home made up a significantly larger proportion of the "do not aspire to a degree" group, compared to the "aspire to a degree" group. Conversely, South Asian, Chinese, and Black students, females, single students, and those under age 25 made up a larger proportion of the "aspire to a degree" group.

Interestingly, there was no difference between the two groups in the two socioeconomic indicators examined (use of government loans, and household income).

Academically, college applicants who aspired to a degree tended to have slightly higher high school GPAs than those who did not aspire to a degree, and a slightly greater percentage had taken university preparatory courses in high school.

There were also some notable differences in the decision-making profiles of the two groups. While the most commonly reported reason for applying to PSE among both college applicants with degree aspirations and those without was to prepare to enter their chosen career, a larger proportion of applicants with degree aspirations stated that pursuing further graduate or professional study, giving back to society, and becoming actively involved in student life were reasons for applying. Further, a larger proportion of aspirants reported using almost every information source in researching their PSE options.

How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?

The profiles of university applicants with a previous college credential and those with no previous PSE experience also differed significantly, with many of the traditionally under-represented groups in university making up a larger proportion of the population with a previous college credential. In particular, there was a larger percentage of first generation students, students with a disability, lower income students, Indigenous students, Black students, and rural students in the previous college credential group compared to the university applicant group with no previous PSE. These findings support previous research that suggested the college-to-university pathway may serve as a vehicle for under-represented students to access university (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010).

Academically, university applicants who had completed a college credential were much less likely to have taken university preparatory courses in high school than those with no previous PSE experience, and their average high school GPA was significantly lower. More applicants with a previous college credential reported that hybrid/blended learning was their preferred

course delivery format, though overall on-campus courses were preferred by the largest proportion of both groups.

Motivations for applying to PSE and information sources used differed between these two groups as well, though the most striking finding was that university applicants with a previous college credential showed a much greater certainty that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career and that their academic program was right for them.

What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?

Of the college applicants with degree aspirations who responded to the follow-up survey, about half still aspired to complete a degree, 13.4% had successfully transferred, and 39.4% no longer had aspirations for a degree. While just over one-third of those who no longer aspired reported that their interests had simply changed, an equal proportion stated that they no longer planned to attain a degree because they could not afford university.

Among college students who still aspired to complete a degree, approximately one-third did not know whether there was a formal transfer agreement in place between their college program and the university program they would apply to, and two-fifths did not know how much credit they expected to receive for their college education. Lack of guidance on application procedures, a lack of clarity between various credit granting processes, and finding/confirming requirements for transfer credits were the most frequently anticipated challenges. However, 42% said they did not expect to experience any challenges in transferring to university.

How do the transition experiences compare between college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE?

University students with a previous college credential were less satisfied than non-transfer students with all aspects of their university's application and transition process that were examined. Areas where the largest proportions of college-to-university transfer students felt their university needed improvement was in relation to academic orientation, providing information about the admissions process and requirements, providing information about required courses, and campus orientation.

In comparison to non-transfer students, college-to-university transfer students were more likely to participate in classroom discussion and engage in student–faculty interactions such as discussing assignments/grades, ideas, and career plans, but were less likely to engage in on-campus volunteer activities, student clubs, and cultural events.

In terms of on-campus resources, financial aid and personal counseling were accessed by a greater proportion of college-to-university transfer students than non-transfer students, but fewer accessed orientation programs and recreation and athletic facilities.

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm previous research showing that the college-to-university transfer student population has a relatively large proportion of traditionally under-represented groups compared to those who are entering university from high school, supporting the idea that the college-to-university pathway may serve as a vehicle for under-represented students to access university (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010). These students were shown to be highly engaged in their learning and academically confident, a finding also supported in previous research (Pendleton and Lambert-Maberly, 2006). However, the results also suggest that more work needs to be done to support both the admissions process and the university transition experience. Traditional university channels for information provision, such as viewbooks, brochures, open houses, and university fairs are not being heavily accessed by college-to-university transfer students. Rather these students seem to rely more on interpersonal contact for their individual circumstances, such as emails and phone calls with university staff, talking with a professor, and informal visits to campus. Similarly, university orientation programming is often geared primarily to the direct-entry student and transfer students are much less likely to participate. Orientation, particularly to the academic expectations of university, was a key area where transfer students felt their university needed to improve.

While college-to-university transfer students tend to be highly academically engaged, engagement outside of the classroom is also challenge. This is likely related in part to age differences, as college-to-university transfer students tend to have more outside responsibilities such as dependent children, as well as less financial support. Developing flexible ways to enrich the non-academic experience of college-to-university transfer students should be priority.

Overall, increasing the number of students utilizing the college-to-university transfer pathway should help to reduce inequities in overall university participation; however, the results also demonstrated that there are still inequities in the aspirations of college students that reproduce those seen in the college-university divide. These inequities require further attention.

Introduction

It has been well established that different segments of the population are more or less likely to aspire to and attend postsecondary education (PSE). In particular, students with disabilities, low income students, first generation students, students from rural communities, Indigenous students, and male students are less likely to attend university (Finnie et al, 2011). The underrepresentation of such groups is primarily a university issue, however, as they are not generally underrepresented in colleges relative to the general population. Therefore, it has been suggested that enhancing the college-to-university pathway may be a vehicle to reduce inequities in university access (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to profile and examine the pathways of college-to-university students in order to enhance our understanding of the needs and experiences of students who access this transfer pathway. To do this, the motivations, experiences and outcomes of four groups of Ontario students were examined:

1) College applicants who aspired to complete a 4-year degree;
2) College applicants who did not aspire to complete a 4-year degree;
3) University applicants with a completed college credential;
4) University applicants with no previous PSE.

This study also contributes to the existing literature by offering insight on the factors that impact the persistence and success of transfer students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario college applicants who aspire to university compare to those who do not?
2. How do the sociodemographic, academic, and decision-making profiles of Ontario university applicants who had previously completed a college credential compare to those with no previous PSE?

3. What are the outcomes and experiences of college applicants with degree aspirations?

4. How do the transition experiences compare between college-to-university transfer students and those with no previous PSE?

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, college-to-university transfer has become an important pathway for degree attainment for many Ontario students. As a result, research exploring issues and trends related to the experiences and outcomes of Ontario's transfer students has increased significantly (Smith et al., 2016; ONCAT, 2013).

Ten years ago, Decock (2006) found that there was an increasing number of college students who wished to attend university after graduation, rather than enter the workforce. The results of this study suggested that more and more students were entering college with the intent of transferring to university, leading to the conclusion that "… students are consciously enrolling in colleges for the purpose of transferring to university even though colleges and their programs were not established for this function." Research examining the different pathways between colleges and universities has consistently shown that college-to-university transfer students tend to belong to underrepresented groups such as those with disabilities, Aboriginal students, and first generation students (Kerr et al., 2010; Sidhu et al., 2016).

The question of *why* students aspire to transfer to degree programs has also been considered. According to a recent study (Gorman et al., 2012), many college students feel that their diploma provides them with limited career opportunities and view obtaining a degree as a way to enhance their career options. Indeed, research indicates that some of the most common reasons Ontario students transfer from college to university is because they want to prepare for future career opportunities, increase their earning potential, and/or upgrade their training and skill set (ONCAT, 2013; Smith et al., 2016).

Continued investigation into the characteristics and experiences of the college-to-university transfer pathway is needed, as those who aspire to transfer to obtain a degree do not necessarily reach their intended goals (Smith et al., 2016). Understanding why some achieve their goals while others do not may enable the creation of support to facilitate the college to university pathway, which can help to reduce access inequalities (Kerr et al., 2010).

Improvement to the transfer system alone, however, does not guarantee that the transfer process will take place. Students' perceptions of real and/or anticipated opportunities and challenges may be influenced by factors such as institutional structure, academic standards, accessibility, financial assistance, and the availability of student services.

Research Method

The first phase of this project utilized 2010-2015 data from Academica Group's University/College Applicant Study (UCAS™)[1] database in order to compare college applicants who aspired to a university credential to those who did not, as well as to compare university applicants with previous college credentials to those without previous postsecondary experience. Descriptions of each group and the corresponding sample size are provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

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[1] For more than a decade, Academica Group's UCAS™ study has been providing universities and colleges across Canada. Each year, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 applicants to Ontario colleges and universities participate in the online survey, undertaken in partnership with the Ontario Colleges Application Service (OCAS) and participating Ontario postsecondary institutions.

Table 1 Description of College Applicant UCAS™ Sample

	College Applicants		
	Aspire to a degree	**Do not aspire to a degree**	**Remainder of sample (excluded from analysis)**
n size	22,600	35,239	14,579
Description	Responses to the question "What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?", were degree or postgrad credential; did not have a degree already	Responses to the question "What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?" were 1, 2, or 3 year cert/ diploma; did not have a degree already	Response to the question "What is the highest level of education you plan to attain?" was "don't know" or indicated they already had a degree (separate question)

Table 2 Description of University Applicant UCAS™ Sample

	University Applicants		
	Previous College Credential	**No previous PSE**	**Remainder of sample (excluded from analysis)**
n size	2,759	68,054	7,249
Description	Applicants to an Ontario university whose highest level of education was a completed college or trades credential	Applicants to an Ontario university whose highest level of education was a high school diploma	University applicants with incomplete PSE, or university degrees

In the second phase, an online survey was conducted to track the pathways of applicants following their application to postsecondary education. Of the four groups examined in the Phase One data analysis, the survey followed up with the "aspire to a degree", "previous college credential", and "no previous PSE" groups. In addition to demographic questions, the survey asked about students' decision making processes, application outcomes, motivations, postsecondary goals, access to support resources, and the transfer experience.

The survey invitation was sent to 51,132 college and university applicants who had completed the UCAS™ between 2010 and 2015, met the study criteria, indicated they were interested in participating in further research, and had provided a valid email address. 3,007 individuals

responded to the survey. Of these, 914 were disqualified.[2] 2,093 respondents completed the

survey for a response rate of 6%. The survey was in field from November 1 to December 9,

2016.

Respondents were organized into four pathways based on their survey responses:

- "No longer aspire" respondents indicated that they had not attained a university credential
  and no longer planned to do so (n=185)
- "Still aspire" respondents indicated that they had not yet entered university but that they
  still planned to do so in the future (n=221)
- "Transferred" – respondents indicated that they had entered university after completing
  college (n=122)
- "No previous PSE" respondents indicated that they had entered university and did not
  have any previous PSE experience (n=1,551)

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[2] Respondents invited to the survey from the 'university applicant' pool were disqualified if they
indicated that they ended up attending a university outside of Ontario or did not attend university.
Respondents invited to the survey from the 'college applicant' pool were disqualified if they indicated
that they did not end up attending college.

Results

Phase One – Applicant Profiles

In this section, we present the phase one research results, which involved an analysis of 2010 to 2015 UCAS™ data comparing college applicants who aspired to a degree to those who did not, as well as comparing university applicants with a previous college credential to non-transfer students.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. Compared to non-aspirants, significantly more college applicants who aspired to complete a university degree were female, under age 25, Black, Chinese, South Asian, and single or never married. There was a significantly smaller proportion who were Caucasian/White, born in Canada, spoke English at home, lived in a rural community, had a disability, were first generation, and had dependents under age 15.

There were also several significant differences between university applicants who were college transfer students and those who had no previous PSE. Compared to those with no previous PSE, a significantly greater proportion of college transfer students were female, Caucasian/White, Indigenous, Black, and born in Canada. In addition, significantly more transfer students were from a rural area, identified as having a disability, were first generation students, supported dependents, had an income less than $60,000, and were using government loans to pay for their education. Compared to college transfer students, a greater proportion of university applicants with no previous PSE were less than age 25, Chinese, South Asian, and single.

Table 3 Sociodemographic Characteristics

	College Applicants		University Applicants	
	Aspire to a Degree	Do not Aspire to a Degree	Previous College Credential	No Previous PSE
% Female	59.1%	52.8%	57.3%	54.1%
% <25 years old	86.1%	81.8%	19.8%	99.7%
% Caucasian/White	56.2%	65.0%	60.7%	49.2%
% Indigenous	5.5%	6.5%	4.9%	2.0%
% Black	11.1%	8.6%	9.6%	6.6%
% Chinese	5.3%	3.9%	5.7%	16.3%
% South Asian	7.8%	4.3%	8.1%	15.3%
% Born in Canada	78.9%	86.4%	71.5%	67.6%
% English spoken at home	79.0%	86.3%	82.0%	71.8%
% International[3]	-	-	5.8%	6.1%
% Rural	23.2%	32.2%	20.3%	15.8%
% with a disability	10.5%	13.8%	9.3%	4.5%
% First generation	19.9%	25.0%	22.0%	10.6%
% Single, never married	83.8%	80.6%	82.9%	91.9%
% with dependents <15	7.2%	9.5%	8.4%	0.7%
% income <$60,000	35.9%	37.1%	40.9%	23.2%
% using gov't loans	24.6%	24.7%	24.0%	17.0%

Academic Characteristics

With respect to academic background, a significantly higher proportion of college applicants who aspired to a university degree indicated that they took mostly university preparatory courses while in high school (27.1%) than did non-aspirants (23.8%). Those who aspired to a degree were also significantly more likely to have obtained a high school GPA higher than 85% (Figure 1).

Significantly more university applicants who had no previous PSE indicated taking university preparatory courses (89.7%) while in high school compared to college transfer students (36.7%).

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[3] For Ontario colleges, international students do not apply through OCAS and therefore were not included in the survey results for college applicants.

Those with no previous PSE were also more likely to have a high school grade average greater than 85% (Figure 1).

Figure 1 High School Grades by Pathway
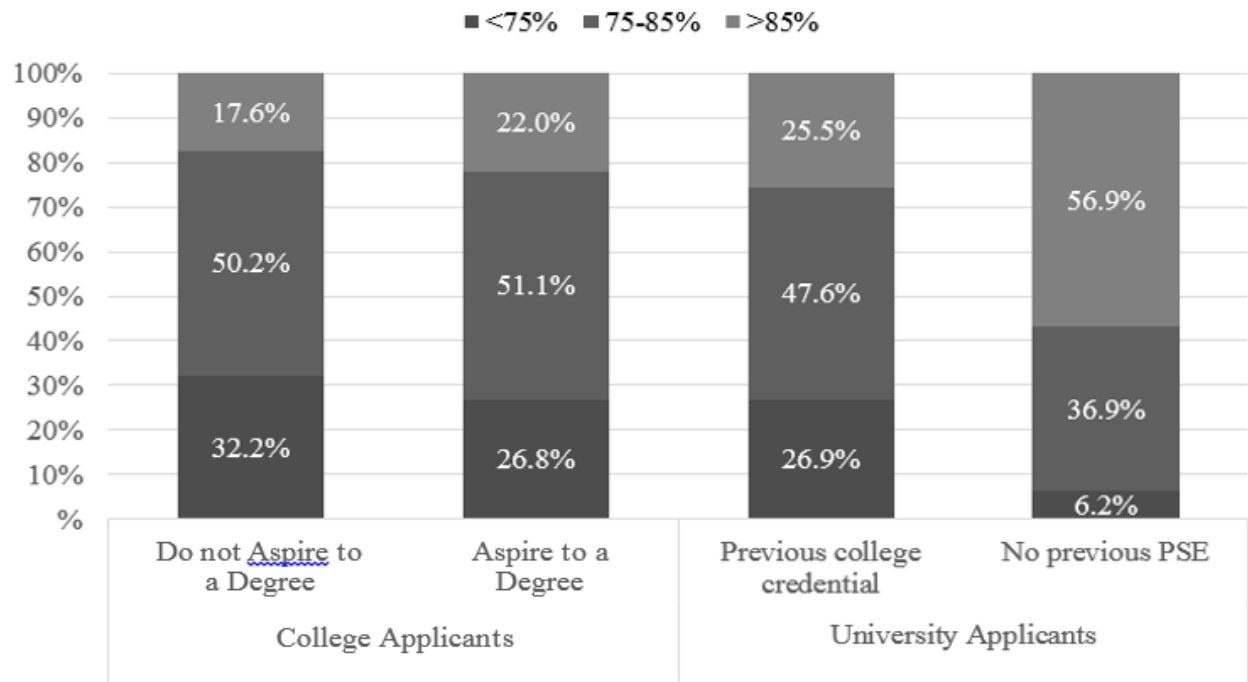
With regards to preferred type of program delivery, differences between college applicants who aspired to a university degree and those who did not were not particularly noteworthy. However, there were some important differences between college transfer students and those with no previous PSE. While in-class/on-campus courses were heavily favoured by both groups, college transfer students showed a greater preference for hybrid/blended and online/distance courses than those with no previous PSE (Table 4).

Table 4 Preferred Course Delivery Format

	College Applicants		University Applicants	
	Aspire to a Degree	**Do not Aspire to a Degree**	**Previous College Credential**	**No Previous PSE**
Online/distance	2.3%	2.7%	4.7%	1.8%
In-class/on-campus	75.3%	77.4%	65.9%	77.6%
Hybrid/blended	18.4%	15.8%	26.4%	15.3%
No preference	4.0%	4.0%	3.0%	5.2%

Decision-Making Process

Career preparation was the most important reason for applying to PSE for college applicants regardless of whether they aspired to a university degree (Figure 3). Not surprisingly, a significantly larger proportion of applicants with aspirations for a degree reported that completing courses necessary to transfer to a university was a reason for applying compared to those who did not aspire to a degree. There was also a much larger proportion of degree aspirants reporting that pursuing further graduate or professional study, giving back to society, and becoming actively involved in student life were reasons for applying.

Among university applicants, the most commonly selected reasons for pursing PSE were similar between college transfer students and those with no previous PSE; however, the no previous PSE group tended to have a larger proportion of respondents selecting each reason (Figure 3). When compared to those with no previous PSE, applicants with a college credential were significantly more likely to state that one of their reasons for applying to PSE was to advance in their current career, to complete courses necessary to transfer to a different college or university, or because they could not find a job. Applicants with no previous PSE were much more likely to state that they were pursing PSE to become actively involved in student life and campus activities, because their friends or teachers expected/encouraged them to go, and to meet new people.

Figure 2 Reasons for Applying to PSE

	College Applicants		University Applicants	
	Aspire to a Degree	**Do not Aspire to a Degree**	**Previous College Credential**	**No Previous PSE**
To prepare to enter my chosen career	81.5%	80.6%	68.7%	82.6%
To explore options for my future	66.5%	62.7%	64.0%	76.3%
For personal and intellectual growth	68.7%	60.6%	72.3%	79.3%
To increase my knowledge and understanding of an academic field	68.6%	59.9%	72.1%	80.0%
To increase my earning potential	61.4%	57.5%	64.9%	66.9%
To pursue future graduate or professional study	59.6%	39.2%	62.8%	69.8%
To meet new people	48.8%	45.2%	39.9%	65.0%
To enhance my self-confidence and self-esteem	42.0%	39.9%	40.4%	43.1%
My parents/friends/teachers expected or encouraged me to go	36.8%	33.3%	28.2%	52.3%
To improve my leadership skills	37.5%	31.7%	36.9%	48.1%
To enable me to "give back" to society	34.6%	26.0%	35.9%	39.4%
To become actively involved in student life and campus activities	29.6%	23.4%	24.6%	50.0%
To advance in my current career	22.9%	20.9%	37.4%	19.8%
To improve my social status	24.2%	20.7%	25.4%	27.5%
To complete the courses necessary to transfer to a (different) university	23.9%	7.2%	10.2%	4.9%
I could not find a job	4.6%	6.7%	7.5%	1.5%
To complete the courses necessary to transfer to a (different) college	6.7%	4.0%	4.5%	2.1%
I could not think of anything else to do after high school	4.1%	4.0%	2.4%	7.2%
None of the above	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%

In terms of information sources used when researching their PSE options, more college applicants who aspired to a university degree reported using almost every information source than those who did not aspire to a degree (Figure 2). The largest differences were in relation to the use of Maclean's rankings, university/college fairs, talking to a professor, and high school presentations/visits.

Among university applicants, those who were transferring from college were more likely to report talking to a professor or accessing an institutional calendar as sources of information. However, they were less likely to report accessing almost every other information source, with the exception of institutional websites.

Figure 3 Information Sources

	College Applicants		University Applicants	
	Aspire to a Degree	Do not Aspire to a Degree	Previous College Credential	No Previous PSE
Institution website	87.3%	82.6%	89.9%	90.9%
Viewbook	68.3%	59.9%	58.5%	87.1%
Education-related web-portals	78.9%	74.7%	63.7%	83.3%
Brochures	54.5%	45.7%	53.4%	76.6%
Current students/graduates	55.6%	47.3%	61.2%	72.7%
Emails after application	60.3%	55.8%	63.4%	69.9%
HS presentations/visits	42.8%	34.8%	24.5%	67.0%
Friends	50.6%	45.2%	56.3%	66.0%
Parents/family members	42.6%	37.1%	41.5%	64.8%
Guidance counsellor	45.3%	40.7%	20.5%	53.4%
Teacher	35.7%	29.7%	18.2%	53.1%
Mail received after application	43.7%	40.1%	45.7%	52.1%
University/college fair	28.8%	21.6%	21.7%	51.2%
Maclean's ranking	12.8%	5.9%	25.7%	48.9%
Open house	36.4%	36.3%	22.4%	44.4%
Formal tour	27.8%	25.0%	20.2%	44.2%
Calendar	35.7%	30.5%	47.7%	42.9%
Informal/unofficial visit	28.8%	24.5%	34.0%	38.5%
Facebook	29.6%	27.8%	24.0%	35.1%
Phone calls after application	33.5%	28.4%	32.3%	33.2%
Talking to a professor	27.8%	22.5%	39.1%	29.1%

When asked about their certainty that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career, the difference between college applicants who aspired to a university credential and those who did not was statistically significant but small and there was no difference in the level of certainty

that their academic program was right for them (Figure 4). Among university applicants, however, a much higher percentage of college transfer students indicated that they were very certain that their academic program would lead to a satisfying career, and that their academic program was right for them, when compared to those with no previous PSE (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Program Certainty
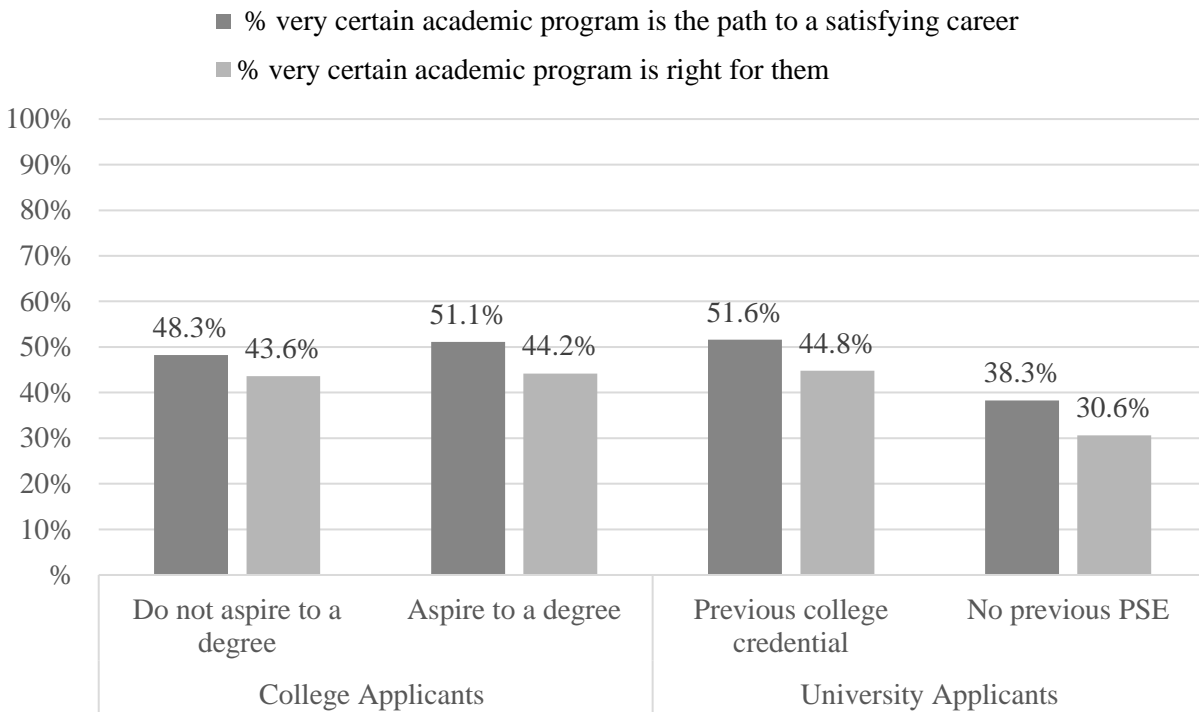
For all respondents, the single most important factor in their decision process when considering PSE options was program reputation (Figure 5). Overall academic reputation was slightly more important to college applicants who aspired to a degree than those who did not, while proximity of the institution to home was slightly more important to applicants who did not aspire to a degree.

Differences between university applicants with no previous PSE and college transfer students were more pronounced. When compared to university applicants with no previous PSE, a significantly greater percentage of transfer students indicated institutional proximity to their home as the single most important factor. In contrast, university students with no previous PSE

were significantly more likely to have made their decision based on factors such as academic reputation and campus experience.

Figure 5 Factors Contributing to PSE Options

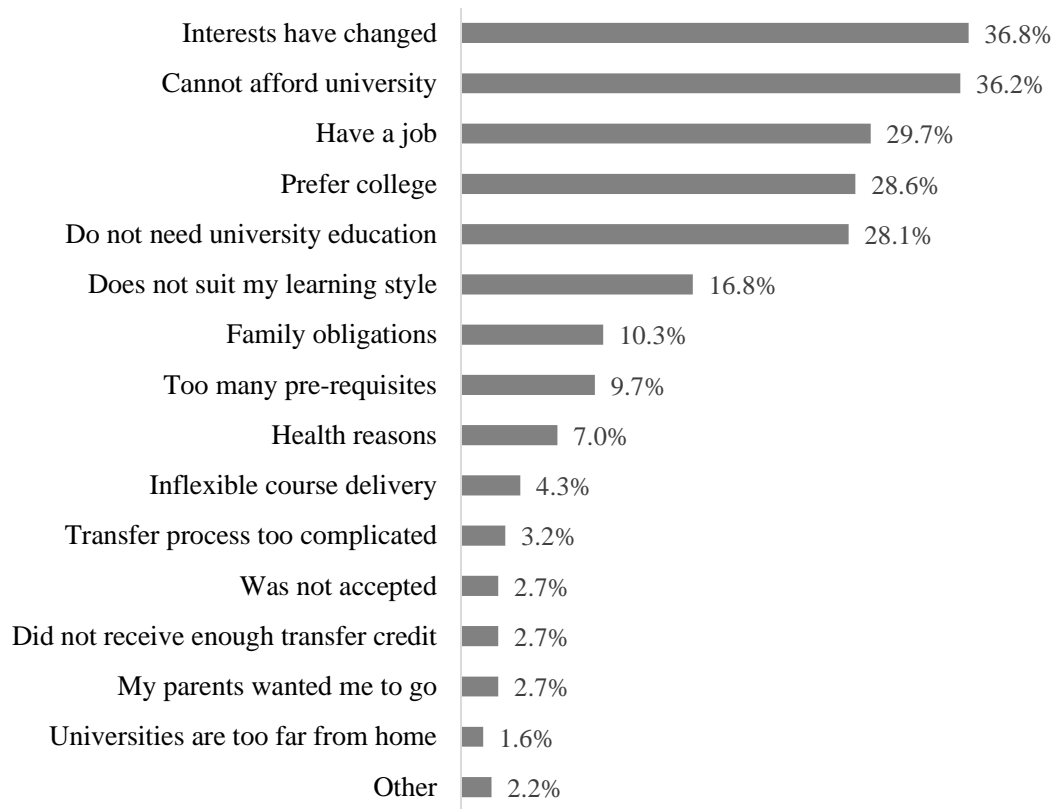|	College Applicants		University Applicants	
	Aspire to a Degree	Do not Aspire to a Degree	Previous College Credential	No Previous PSE
Strong reputation in my specific program of interest	36.3%	32.9%	36.1%	37.6%
Strong overall academic reputation	11.3%	7.9%	15.8%	21.1%
Institutions were close to home	17.1%	21.5%	17.8%	7.0%
Strong reputation for graduates having good careers	17.7%	19.3%	12.4%	15.6%
Financial reasons	5.3%	6.1%	5.1%	3.5%
Strong reputation for campus experience	2.8%	2.6%	1.7%	6.7%
Strong reputation for teaching	3.2%	2.7%	2.1%	2.5%
Where my friends are going	1.0%	1.3%	1.0%	0.6%
None of the above	5.4%	5.7%	8.1%	5.2%

Phase Two – Follow-up Survey Results

Results of the follow-up survey conducted with college applicants who aspired to a degree, university applicants with a previous college credential, and university applicants with no previous PSE are presented in this section.

College Students who Aspired to a Degree

Of the 469 college applicants surveyed who had originally aspired to complete a university degree, 13.4% indicated that they had transferred to a university, 47.1% indicated that they still aspired to a complete a university degree, and 39.4% no longer had aspirations for a degree. Differences in gender, age, and first generation student status were examined, but only gender was found to be significantly related to aspiration outcomes; 63.4% of women still aspired to a degree or had transferred to university compared to 52.9% of men.

Of those who no longer intended to pursue a university degree, the top two most commonly reported reasons were a change in their interests and an inability to afford university (Figure 6). Other reasons reported by at least one-quarter of respondents were that they had a job, preferred college, and felt they did not need a university education. Interestingly, reasons related to the transfer process itself, such as its complexity, pre-requisites, provision of transfer credit, or receiving an offer, were far down the list.

Figure 6 Reasons for No Longer Wanting to Attend University

Reason	Percentage
Interests have changed	36.8%
Cannot afford university	36.2%
Have a job	29.7%
Prefer college	28.6%
Do not need university education	28.1%
Does not suit my learning style	16.8%
Family obligations	10.3%
Too many pre-requisites	9.7%
Health reasons	7.0%
Inflexible course delivery	4.3%
Transfer process too complicated	3.2%
Was not accepted	2.7%
Did not receive enough transfer credit	2.7%
My parents wanted me to go	2.7%
Universities are too far from home	1.6%
Other	2.2%

Among those who still planned to pursue a university degree, most said that the university program they intended to take was related to their previous program (86.0%) and half were aware of a formal transfer agreement between their current/past college program and the university program they would apply to (50.7%). One third of respondents, however, did not know if there was a formal transfer agreement (33.9%). While respondents varied in how much credit they estimated they would receive, two-fifths reported that they did not know (Figure 7).

Figure 7 Estimated Transfer Credit Expect to Receive
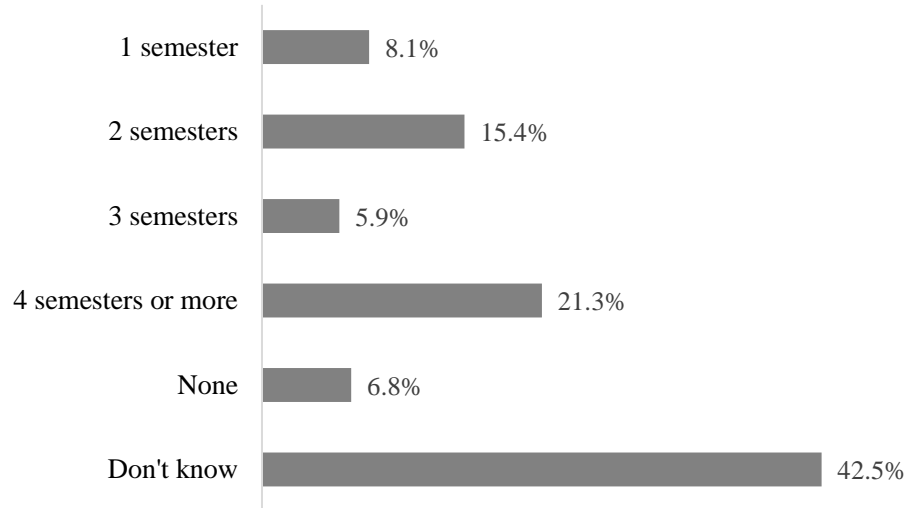
Over half of those who still aspired to a university degree said that they anticipated experiencing

challenges when transferring to a university program from college (57.9%). The most common

anticipated challenges associated with transferring were a lack of guidance on application

procedures, a lack of clarity between various credit granting processes, and finding/confirming

requirements for transfer credits (Figure 8). Only 24.4% indicated that they had met with an

academic advisor to discuss transferring to university.

Figure 8 Anticipated Challenges when Transferring to University

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of guidance on application procedures	29.0%
Lack of clarity between credit granting processes	27.1%
Finding/confirming requirements for transfer credit	25.3%
I won't receive the amount of credits I was expecting	21.3%
Application process will be too complicated	21.3%
Submitting applications	21.3%
Inconsistent/inadequate information from sources	17.2%
Access to transcripts	15.8%
The amount of time for a response will be too long	15.4%
Lack of clear documentation requirements	15.4%
Assistance with grade calculation(s)	11.8%
Adjusting to academic rigour of university	1.8%
Other	4.1%
No challenges anticipated	42.1%

Transfer Experience of College-to-University Transfer Students

University applicants who indicated they had previously completed a college credential were asked a series of questions about their transfer experience. These results are presented here.

Transfer Credits

College-to-university transfer students most commonly found out they were receiving credit when they received their offer of admission, or at/before registration, and most said that the timing was acceptable to them (Table 6). The actual amount of credit received varied, although the most common scenario was for students to have received credit for two semesters of their university program, followed by no credit (Table 6). Among those who applied for credit, almost half received the same amount of credit as they expected (48.4%), while one in three students indicated that they received less than expected (33.0%), and 11.0% received more than expected. Just under half of college-to-university transfer students stated that there was a formal transfer agreement between their past college program and the university program they enrolled in (45.9%).

Table 5 Approval Process, Amount of Credit, & Timing

		%
How much credit did you receive?	None	23.0%
	1 semester	15.6%
	2 semesters	23.8%
	3 semesters	6.6%
	4 semesters or more	18.9%
	Don't know	12.3%
When did you find out you were receiving credit?	With offer of admission	32.0%
	At or before registration	25.4%
	After registration	17.2%
	Have not heard yet	1.6%
	Have not applied for credit yet	2.5%
	Am not applying for credit	6.6%
	Don't know	14.8%
Was this timing acceptable to you?	Yes	87.1%
	No	12.9%

When asked to reflect back on how well they understood the transfer process before they applied to university, transfer students were four times more likely to indicate that they did not understand the process at all before applying (22.1%) than to say that they completely understood (5.7%) (Figure 9).
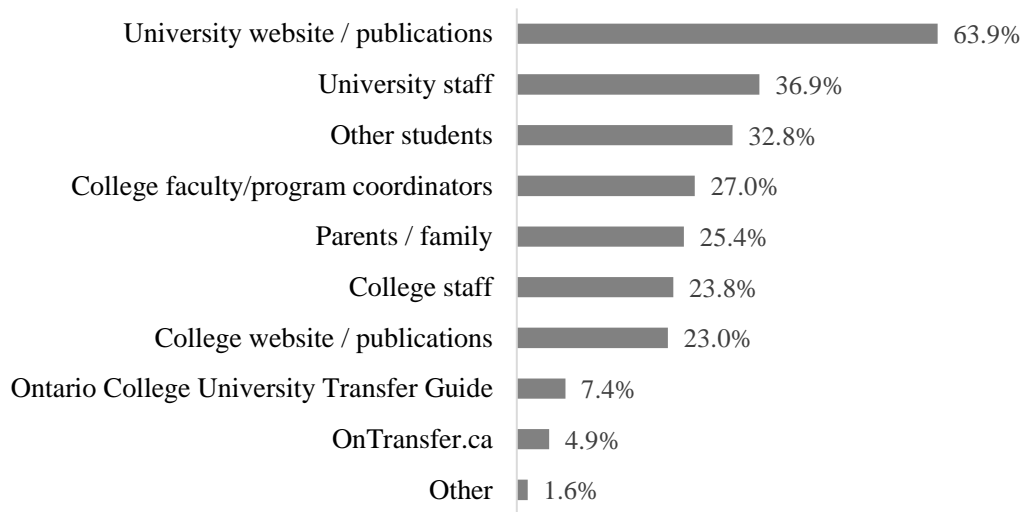
Figure 9 Understanding of Transfer Process Before Applying to University
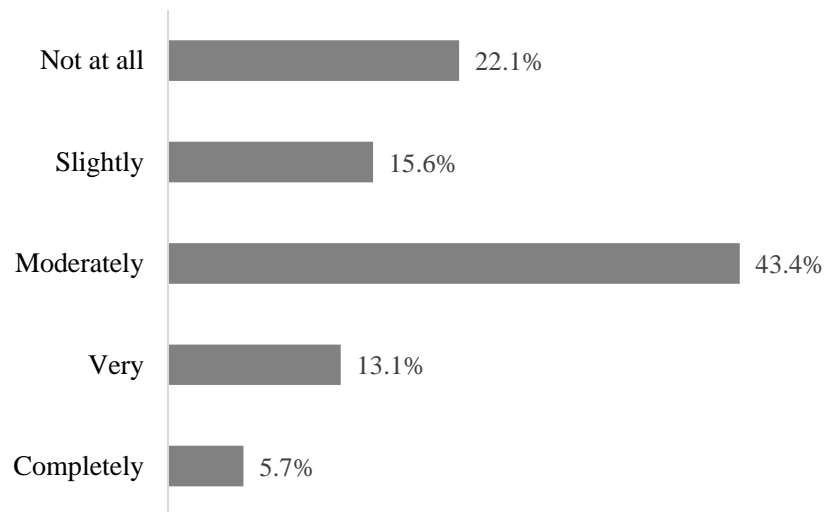
Resources

The top three most commonly used resources for information on transferring to university were a university website or publication, university staff, and other students (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Sources of Information Used Regarding Transferring to University

Source	Percentage
University website / publications	63.9%
University staff	36.9%
Other students	32.8%
College faculty/program coordinators	27.0%
Parents / family	25.4%
College staff	23.8%
College website / publications	23.0%
Ontario College University Transfer Guide	7.4%
OnTransfer.ca	4.9%
Other	1.6%

Student Services

Only 37.7% of college-to-university transfer students said that their college offered advising with respect to helping students transfer to university. Of these, about half used the services at their college (54.3%), and most found the services to be very or extremely helpful (72.0%).

With regard to the university that they transferred into, more than half stated the university offered student advising to help them with the transfer process (55.7%). Of these, 70.6% said they used this service and 66.7% rated the overall helpfulness of these services as either extremely or very helpful.

Satisfaction

Just over three-fifths of those who transferred said they were satisfied overall with the transition from college to their university program (60.7%). Only 12.8% said that they were dissatisfied.

Challenges

The most commonly experienced challenge that students experienced when transferring to university was a lack of guidance on application procedures (25.4%), followed by not receiving the amount of credit they were expecting (23.0%). 37.7% of transfer students reported no challenges when transferring to university.

Table 6

Challenges Experienced	%
Did not experience any challenges	37.7%
Lack of guidance on application procedures	25.4%
I didn't receive the amount of credits I was expecting	23.0%
Inconsistent or inadequate information from various sources	18.9%
Finding/confirming requirements for transfer credit	18.0%
Lack of clarity between various credit granting processes	16.4%
Submitting applications	14.8%
Lack of clear documentation requirements	13.9%
The amount of time it took to get a response was too long	11.5%
Access to transcripts; multiple transcript requests for course credits applied in different areas of same institution	11.5%
Assistance with grade calculation(s)	9.0%
The application process will be too complicated	4.1%
Other	1.6%

University Transition Experience of College Transfers vs. those with No Previous PSE

The Phase 1 results showed that university applicants with a previous college credential are a very different population than university applicants with no previous PSE. This section follows up with these applicants after their entrance to university to compare the transition experience of the two groups.

Satisfaction

When asked to rate their university with respect to various factors related to the application and transition process, university students with no previous PSE experience tended to rate their university more favourably than college transfer students (Table 8). For example, 36.8% of non-transfer students rated "special programs to orient you to campus and campus activities" as outstanding compared to 28.7% transfer students, and about one-quarter of transfer students felt

their university needed improvement in the area of providing information about the admission process and admission requirements (24.0%), compared to only 10.0% of university students with no previous PSE.

Table 7 Student Ratings of their University Application/Transition Process

	College Transfer			No Previous PSE		
	Needs improvement	Satisfactory	Outstanding	Needs improvement	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Special programs to orient you to campus and campus activities	22.8%	48.5%	28.7%	16.9%	46.3%	36.8%
Special programs to orient you to academics and academic expectations	35.5%	47.7%	16.8%	24.9%	51.2%	23.8%
Timeliness of application processing	12.4%	62.0%	25.6%	7.8%	52.8%	39.4%
Timeliness of notification of your acceptance	12.4%	57.0%	30.6%	8.3%	45.2%	46.5%
Providing information about the admission process and admission requirements for your chosen major	24.0%	48.8%	27.3%	10.0%	49.8%	40.1%
Providing information about the general education requirements for your chosen major	21.5%	53.7%	24.8%	13.7%	50.4%	35.9%
Providing information about the required courses for your chosen major	23.3%	53.3%	23.3%	17.6%	46.4%	36.1%

Academic Preparation

Looking back to when they began university, the majority of respondents from both groups tended to say that they felt they were moderately to completely prepared for university (Table 9). The only significant difference was that a larger proportion of college transfer students said they were 'moderately' prepared compared to those with no previous PSE.

Table 8 How Academically Prepared Do You Feel You Were for University?

	College Transfer Students	No Previous PSE
Completely	11.5%	12.4%
Very	23.8%	29.0%
Moderately	50.0%	38.6%
Slightly	10.7%	13.5%
Not at all	4.1%	6.4%

Engagement

Transfer students were more likely to participate in classroom discussion (59.8%) than non-transfer students (40.2%). They were also more likely to discuss their assignment and/or grades with instructors (31.1% vs. 21.9% non-transfer students), discuss ideas with a faculty member (38.5% vs. 26.5% non-transfer students), or discuss their career plans and ambitions with faculty (21.3% vs. 16.4% non-transfer students).

In contrast, university students with no previous PSE were more likely to participate in on-campus community service or volunteer activities (25.4% vs. 13.1% transfer students), engage in student clubs or special interest groups (32.6% vs. 12.3% transfer students), and/or attend campus cultural events (16.7% vs. 10.7% transfer students).

Resources

In terms of types of services used, university students with no previous PSE were significantly more likely than college transfer students to use recreation/athletic facilities and orientation

programs/activities. Transfer students were more likely to use financial aid services and personal counselling.

Figure 11 University Resources Used
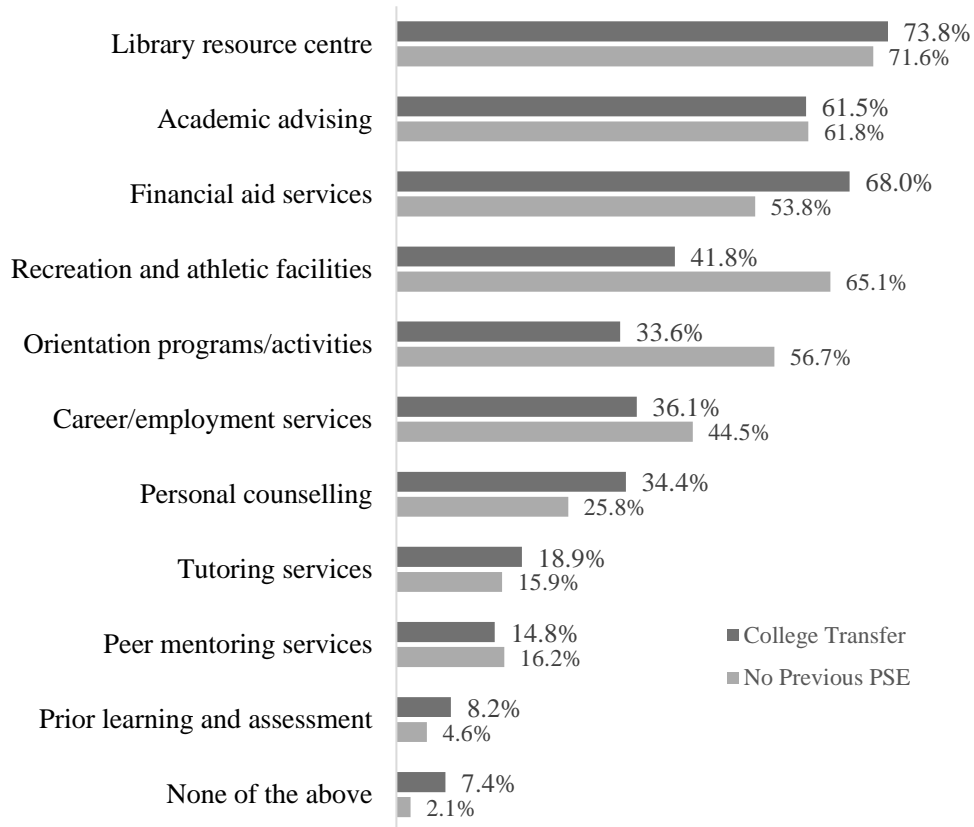
Conclusion

A growing body of literature has documented the motivations, experiences and challenges of Ontario postsecondary students who have transferred from college to university (e.g., Decock, 2006; ONCAT, 2013; Sidhu et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016). The present investigation contributes to this literature by examining the profiles and experiences of college-to-university transfer students and college students who aspire to complete a university degree in order to expand upon the current knowledge base.

The results of this study confirm previous research showing that the college-to-university transfer student population has a relatively large proportion of traditionally under-represented groups compared to those who are entering university from high school. This supports the idea

that the college-to-university pathway may serve as a vehicle for under-represented students to access university (Kerr, McCloy, Liu, 2010). These students were shown to be highly engaged in their learning and academically confident, a finding also supported in previous research (Pendleton and Lambert-Maberly, 2006). This is positive news for retention, as greater student-faculty interaction has been shown to be positively correlated with student persistence (Dwyer, 2015). However, the results also suggest that more work needs to be done to support both the admissions process and the university transition experience. Traditional university channels for information provision, such as viewbooks, brochures, open houses, and university fairs are not being heavily accessed by college-to-university transfer students. Rather these students seem to rely more on interpersonal contact for their individual circumstances, such as emails and phone calls with university staff, talking with a professor, and informal visits to campus. Similarly, university orientation programming is often geared primarily to the direct-entry student and transfer students are much less likely to participate. Orientation, particularly to the academic expectations of university, was a key area where transfer students felt their university needed to improve.

While college-to-university transfer students tend to be highly academically engaged, engagement outside of the classroom is also challenge. This is likely related in part to age differences, as college-to-university transfer students tend to have more outside responsibilities such as dependent children, as well as less financial support. Developing flexible ways to enrich the non-academic experience of college-to-university transfer students should be priority.

Overall, increasing the number of students utilizing the college-to-university transfer pathway should help to reduce inequities in overall university participation; however, the results also demonstrated that there are still inequities in the aspirations of college students that reproduce those seen in the college-university divide. These inequities require further attention.

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