EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ARUCC PCCAT TRANSCRIPT AND TRANSFER CREDIT NOMENCLATURE STUDY

An Examination of Current Practices at Canadian Postsecondary Organizations

ARUCC PCCAT TRANSCRIPT AND TRANSFER CREDIT NOMENCLATURE STUDY

AN EXAMINATION OF CURRENT PRACTICES AT CANADIAN POSTSECONDARY ORGANIZATIONS

Prepared for:

Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC)

Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT)

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Executive Summary

The Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) and the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT) have collaborated to lead an extensive study to understand current transcript and transfer credit nomenclature practices in Canada. These findings will ultimately inform a comprehensive update and expansion of the 2003 ARUCC National Transcript Guide and potentially result in a searchable database of transcript practices and Canadian transfer credit nomenclature. The ultimate goal is to enhance the clarity, consistency and transparency of the academic transcript and transfer credit resources that support student mobility. The specific deliverable for this phase was to identify and summarize Canadian transcript and transfer credit nomenclature practices, review four international jurisdictions as a means to highlight promising practices related to these two areas and, finally, to provide both an overview of systems and an initial examination of emergent perspectives and themes. The report purposefully avoids suggesting prescriptive solutions or outcomes; however, the findings from this study will provide a solid foundation from which to move forward the standards and terminology discourse in Canada. This report collates the findings from the supporting research conducted from January through to April 2014.

The report begins with an overview of background, context, scope, objectives and guiding principles for the project.

The research was focused on the following objectives:

- Articulating the enhancement requirements for the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide and testing its core principles and definitions;
- Identifying at a specific, operational level the current transcript and transfer credit terminology practices in use across Canada within postsecondary institutions and by associated organizations;
- Highlighting gaps and opportunities in current transcript and transfer credit nomenclature practices;
- Providing a beginning understanding of the emergent thinking surrounding transcript and transfer credit terminology standards;
- Conducting an initial jurisdictional review to identify promising practices in various jurisdictions (with a particular focus on Europe, the United Kingdom, United States and Australia);
- Informing a next phase of consultation, which will be tasked with deliberating and determining a transcript and transfer credit terminology standards guide(s).

The following core principles underpinned the research process and guided efforts executed by the Project Team, under the leadership of the ARUCC PCCAT Steering Committee:

- Supporting student mobility through enhanced clarity, transparency and consistency of transcript and transfer credit information as the primary underlying focus of the project;
- Broad and deep consultation and engagement of individual, institutional and organizational stakeholders;

- A focus on research, including being informed by previous research, collecting evidence of current practices, validating existing principles and illuminating emerging issues and trends;
- Respecting institutional autonomy and culture;
- Improving transparency and coherence;
- Enhancing knowledge through exchange of information and promising practices during the research process.

In keeping with the Guiding Principles, the research employed a variety of methods, which are described beginning on page 25 with additional details provided in Appendices D1 through D11. These methods included an online poll completed by 25 participants on the project's national advisory committee, regional workshops with 103 participants across the country, and 25 individual stakeholder interviews.

This input was used to guide development of a national survey targeted primarily to members of ARUCC and PCCAT. The survey was completed by 119 individuals, representing 105 institutions, for an organizational response rate of 57%. The project also received 145 samples of transcripts and transfer credit material from 44 postsecondary institutions and the XML data standards for electronic transcripts from the Canadian Post-Secondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) User Group.

In addition, jurisdictional reviews were conducted to explore the current transcript and transfer credit nomenclature practices, at both national and provincial/regional levels in Canada. The four international jurisdictions, Australia, Europe, UK and the US, grounded this research in a global context.

Research findings are presented beginning on page 27, with a focus on Canada. Provincial and regional jurisdictional overviews (Western Canada, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada) that informed the development of the Canadian report are included in Appendix E. The Canadian jurisdictional overview highlights the combined strength and capacity of provincial responsibility for postsecondary education. Particular attention to the work of provincial councils on articulations/admissions and transfer and related bodies[1] is examined together with national strategy leadership and coordination achieved through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), and sector-specific bodies such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Colleges and Institutes Canada (formerly the Association of Canadian Community Colleges) and the Conference Board of Canada, in addition to ARUCC and PCCAT.

Consistent themes related to transcript and transfer credit nomenclature standards that emerged from the Canadian jurisdictional research include the following:

- There is solid evidence of collaboration within jurisdictions to ensure quality of process, qualifications alignment, efficiencies and coordination and a growing research culture.
- The variability in regional, programmatic and linguistic nomenclature is evident across the country.

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[1] BCCAT, ACAT, Campus Manitoba, ONCAT, NBCAT, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and, for Quebec, the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de la Science (MESRS) and the Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire (BCI)

- There is emerging interest and work in the area of national electronic transcript exchange standards and practices, particularly as noted through the work of the member organizations of the Canadian Post-Secondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) User Group. It is important to note that while the scope of the research did not include data exchange protocols, this area was of significant interest among research participants. The project benefited from the cooperation of the Canadian PESC User Group, whose work is also profiled in the Canadian jurisdictional overview.
- The increasing implementation of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) structures (e.g., in Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Ontario) bring attention to the need for clear, transparent and appropriate transcription and transfer credit standards for credits achieved through PLAR.
- The growing adoption of online learning and blended learning models, and the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) present questions with respect to assessment and transcription of alternate delivery format courses.
- There is a growing focus on learning outcomes as a mechanism to improve and enhance pathway development and credentialing. Implications for transcripts and credit transfer must be considered.

The international jurisdictional findings begin on page 46. Each jurisdiction offers their own interesting credentialing approaches, and policies and practices related to transfer and mobility. Simply transposing an international approach on Canadian jurisdictions is neither suggested nor appropriate given the histories, cultures, and system norms with respect to institutional autonomy and local postsecondary frameworks. The research, however, provides an overview of common practices, new possibilities and collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries that may be helpful to national discussions. Highlights of key themes and promising practices derived from the international research include the following:

- Advantages to students and internationalization more generally when collaboration among and support for coordinating levers and organizations that enhance mobility are encouraged. This is evident whether it occurs within or across jurisdictional borders. Policy development and coherence in the areas of credentialing and transfer credit nomenclature are enhanced as a result. As one example, in some of the international jurisdictions studied and with the help of coordinating agencies, qualifications frameworks situate the level of student learning achieved and facilitate interpretation and comparison of equivalencies for credential types across regions.
- Providing an explanatory document with standard content to accompany the transcript and degree parchment or creating cross-jurisdictional standards to enhance clarity about the credential and its provider appears to be another typical outcome of collaboration. Examples include the Diploma Supplement (EU), the Higher Education Graduation Statement (Australia), the Higher Education Achievement Record (UK) and the Transcript Guide published by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). Each example is representative of best practice both nationally and internationally.

- Competency-based learning outcomes in these jurisdictions are increasingly being used to measure, assess, and compare student learning and are subsequently resulting in implications for transcription and transfer credit nomenclature.
- There is growing support for identifying and adopting standards for electronic data exchange and participating in international initiatives that support student mobility and data portability (e.g., the "Groningen Declaration").

Findings from the Canadian primary research are presented beginning on page 62 with the advisory poll, workshops, stakeholder interviews, and website and document sample review and on page 73 for the national survey results. Further details of primary research findings are provided in the appendices.

Findings from the transcript research are extensive, with the following summary of highlights:

- Respondents confirmed the currency of most of the transcript principles and definitions included in the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide. Awareness and usage of the Guide appears to be inconsistent. Numerous examples were provided of needs for enhancements to the Guide.
- There is continued evidence of ambiguity surrounding understandings of what constitutes an 'official' transcript and questions about related privacy and security considerations.
- There is substantial variability in definition and understanding of terms, as well as in practices of what should be included on the transcript. There is also considerable support for enhancing consistency and clarity of practice. Variability in definitions of credit and credit weight stands out as presenting an opportunity for developing common usage and/or understanding.

The transfer credit nomenclature and related policy research also revealed significant variability in approaches with respect to transfer credit guides and use of terminology at the strategic and operational levels for both pathway agreements and individual transcript assessment for transfer credit. Guides and glossaries produced by provincial councils on admissions/articulation and transfer (e.g., BCCAT, ACAT and ONCAT) were highlighted as promising resources. Respondents noted in particular the need to contemplate and potentially define standards for: transcripts and transfer credit assessment with specific reference to terminology for types of pathway agreements (e.g., articulation, degree completion, block transfer, and joint programs); alternative learning delivery such as online learning and experiential learning; competency-based education (e.g., learning outcomes); and equivalent learning (e.g., Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition - PLAR, challenge exams, etc.).

Additionally, respondents acknowledged the impact of regional, programmatic and linguistic nomenclature differences, which are often embedded in institutional policies and/or regulations. At the same time, actual data comparisons have revealed a number of common themes and practices, which are noted throughout the report.

Recommendations resulting from the research are presented beginning on Page 111 within *Implications and Concluding Remarks*. The findings achieved through this research demonstrate a high level of convergence among the themes derived from the advisory group, stakeholder interviews, jurisdictional research, and survey findings. Such results validate and confirm the reliability of the research. At a high level, important findings include the following:

- There is a tremendous will and engagement among ARUCC and PCCAT colleagues, as well as allied organizations to work towards refinements that will improve clarity, transparency, and mobility for students.
- While there is strong support for moving forward with transcript and transfer credit nomenclature standards, there is an equal assertion that institutional autonomy be respected and that any such standards become recommended, not required practice.
- Student mobility and the processes and structures that support it are subjects of increasing focus worldwide. There is significant opportunity to benchmark and learn from promising practices in regional, national, and international jurisdictions.

Six recommendations are offered to guide the next phase of the ARUCC PCCAT project:

1. Enhance the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide - The next phase of the ARUCC PCCAT project should further assess these findings, confirm that which is still current and relevant in the ARUCC Transcript Guide, and propose a series of potential content enhancements, changes and additions that should then be presented for consultation, review, refinement and endorsement by the community.
2. Determine where to house the new Guide - An analysis should be conducted in the next phase to explore how best to present the information and ensure its currency and final location.
3. Develop a national Transfer Credit Glossary - The feasibility of creating a single national glossary for transfer credit nomenclature should be explored, the specifics of which would be endorsed and supported by PCCAT, ARUCC, and the councils on admissions/articulation and transfer. The glossaries and terminology guides presented in this report, together with the frequently used terms identified through the survey will provide a helpful starting point for this work. Assuming the support and resources are available, it may be possible to implement the new glossary in the next phase.
4. Develop a sustainable and complementary communications plan – The guides and glossaries ultimately must be supported by a complementary communications plan to ensure regular awareness and usage of the tools.
5. Establish a national awards program to recognize and validate promising practices – The two associations should consider developing a national awards program, ideally adjudicated by both ARUCC and PCCAT that acknowledges potential promising practice in Canada and begins to bring external validation and visibility to models of interest throughout the country.
6. Support the development and adoption of electronic transcript exchange standards – the next phase of the ARUCC PCCAT project should continue to ensure that the Canadian PESC User Group member organizations are consulted and engaged in this process. Further, the ongoing project should be mindful of the opportunities presented by international opportunities such as the Groningen Declaration.

The report includes an extensive reference list. A comprehensive series of appendices provide further insights into the themes and recommendations derived for this report.