

## Environmental Scan Series.9

# Student Transitions

Transitions, in this context, describes the process and pattern of the movement of students across grades K-12 to public post-secondary institutions. Recognizing trends in this movement can help the institutional planning process.<sup>2</sup>

This article will discuss trends in the transition of students from high school to BC public post-secondary institutions by initially looking at a national snapshot of high school to post-secondary enrolment trends and subsequently detailed transition patterns in BC and at Thompson Rivers University (TRU). The provincial and local trends will be guided by the valuable BC Student Transitions Project (STP) dataset, which will be described in more detail later in this scan.

### Student Transitions in Canada

According to Statistics Canada, in 2015/16 about 344,000 students graduated from public high schools across the country.<sup>6</sup> This number has remained relatively static over the past five years, with a slight decrease since 2014/15.<sup>6</sup> The decrease however, was not from fewer students completing high school, as the vast majority (86%) of Canadians aged 25 to 64 have completed a high school diploma or equivalency as of the 2016 census,<sup>6</sup> but from a marked decrease in domestic school aged population growth (see [Regional Demographics and Population Trends](#)).

In 2016/17, there were over 2 million students enrolled in Canadian universities and colleges, with a steady increase in enrollments per year from 2012/13.<sup>1</sup> This increase in high school to post-secondary transitions is supported by the 2016 census that reports Canada having the highest proportion of college and university graduates of all the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>2,4</sup> That is, more than half (54%) of Canadians aged 25 to 64 had either college or university qualifications, up from 48% in 2006.<sup>4</sup> The article goes on to explain that Canada's diverse college system is responsible for the elevated number of high school students enrolling and completing post-secondary education.<sup>4</sup> This is because the unique-to-Canada system provides diversification of options and opportunity to students coming directly from high school or taking time off after high school before going on to further studies.<sup>4</sup>

### BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions by Institution Type

#### BC Colleges

- Camosun College
- College of New Caledonia
- College of the Rockies
- Douglas College
- Langara College
- North Island College
- Northern Lights College
- Coast Mountain College
- Okanagan College
- Selkirk College
- Vancouver Community College

#### Institutes

- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- Justice Institute of British Columbia
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology

#### Teaching-Intensive Universities

- Capilano University
- Emily Carr University of Art + Design
- Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Royal Roads University
- Thompson Rivers University
- Vancouver Island University
- University of the Fraser Valley

#### Research-Intensive Universities

- Simon Fraser University
- University of British Columbia (including UBCO)
- University of Northern British Columbia
- University of Victoria

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### Student Transitions in BC

Through employing the STP dataset, some distinctive insights into the nature of British Columbia high school student transition patterns can be made.<sup>13</sup>

The 2015/16 immediate-entry transition rate (or those students who go directly to a BC Post-Secondary Institution (BC PSI) after grade 12 graduation) was 52%.<sup>11,14</sup> This rate has been relatively consistent over the last 10 years, remaining above 50% for the duration, ranging from a low of 51% for 2005/06 grade 12 graduates to a high of 54% for 2008/09 graduates.<sup>11,14</sup> The STP has traditionally equated student transition rates as a measure of student success.<sup>8</sup> The consistent nature of the proportion of grade 12 graduates who enroll in a BC PSI demonstrates stable and continued student success in BC.<sup>8</sup>

Those high school graduates who do not transition directly to a BC PSI after graduation are referred to as “delayed-entry”.<sup>11,14</sup> When looking at the 2007/08 graduating cohort over the last decade, the cumulative proportion of students that eventually transitioned to a BC PSI is just over three quarters (78%).<sup>8</sup> This means that while half of high school graduates transitioned directly to a BC PSI, an additional quarter of this cohort transitioned at varying times over the next 10 years.<sup>8</sup>

2001/02 was the STP’s first cohort of grade 12 students.<sup>11,14</sup> The cumulative 15-year (2001/02 to 2016/17) transition rate for this cohort is 80%, indicating only a very marginal increase in rate of enrollment over and above the 10-year period discussed in the previous paragraph (78%).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, when looking at the cumulative enrollment trend of this group, it becomes evident that there are very few significant

increases in enrolment five years after graduation.<sup>11,14</sup> This indicates that if a grade 12 graduate does not enroll in a PSI within the first five years after graduation, there is a very small chance they will do so within the next 10 years.<sup>11,14</sup> This trend is consistent with subsequent grade 12 graduation cohorts for which the STP has collected 14 or fewer years of data.<sup>11,14</sup>

During the same 15-year period, there has been an increase in the total number of immediate-entry students, with fewer students delaying PSI enrollment.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the numbers from a program perspective, there has been an increase across almost all 2-digit Classification of Instructional Programs Codes (CIP), from a 7% increase in immediate-entry Trades programs to 165% in Human and Social Services.<sup>8,9</sup> Two program areas that have historically admitted a large proportion of immediate-entry students, Arts and Developmental, have seen declines of -21% and -34% respectively. There are also some inherent differences in the program choices of those who delay one or two years before entering a PSI.<sup>8,9</sup>

With the immediate transition rate of students to a BC PSI being a primary indicator of student success, another indicator of equal importance is the first-year retention rate in post-secondary education.<sup>14</sup> This is the proportion of students who re-enroll in any BC public post-secondary institution in the year following their first transition to post-secondary education. The STP was able to establish that a considerable proportion (85%) of immediate-entry students were retained in the BC system the following school year.<sup>14</sup> Those who delayed entry by one

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or two years exhibited a lower rate of retention (69%).<sup>8</sup>

The great majority (88%) of immediate-entry students who enrolled in post-secondary education in 2015/16 did so in the same region of the province where they graduated from high school.<sup>14</sup> The highly populated Mainland/Southwest economic region had the greatest proportion (91%) of immediate-entry students enroll in the same region they graduated, likely due in large part to the fact that 11 of BC's 25 public post-secondary institutions are located in the area, giving credence to the notion that student PSI destinations are also largely affected by the location of the institutions.<sup>8,14</sup>

### Student Transitions Locally

Similar analysis and insight can be made at the regional level by digging deeper into student transitions from School District 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) (SD 73) and School District 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) (SD 27).<sup>15</sup>

The graduating class of 2016/17 for SD 73 was just over 1,000 students. Slightly under half (45%) transitioned to a BC PSI within the next year (2017/18).<sup>7</sup> This number is consistent with immediate-transition rates from the district over the past decade, an average of 46% per year. When looking at the cumulative transition rate of the 2008/09 cohort (1,000 students) over a 10-year period, it is similar to the BC average, with an eventual three quarters of the cohort transitioning to higher education.<sup>7</sup> If this trend remains stable, it can be expected that from the 2016/17 graduating class an additional 300 students will enter a BC PSI over the next 10 years.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to the provincial average that indicates the majority of students attend an institution in

the same region they graduate from, 86% of students who graduate in SD 73 and immediately transfer to a BC PSI do so to TRU.<sup>7</sup> Those students who immediately transfer and do not attend TRU are predominantly attending Research Intensive Universities, (i.e. UBC Vancouver and UVIC).<sup>7,10</sup> When students in SD 73 delay higher education transition a year or more, three quarters still go to TRU, but those who do not, predominantly enroll in Colleges (e.g. Okanagan College) and Institutes (e.g. BCIT) more often than research intensive universities.<sup>7,10</sup>

The 2016/17 graduating class from SD 27 numbered about 300.<sup>15</sup> Over the last decade the number of graduating students in the district has been consistently decreasing, experiencing a -14% loss over this period.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the rate at which graduating students immediately transition to a BC PSI has been steadily decreasing as well, from 42% in 2008/09 to 37% in 2017/18.<sup>15</sup> A closer look at the causes of these decreases will be undertaken in a subsequent briefing note on Williams Lake.

About 6 in 10 graduates of SD 27 who immediately transition to a BC PSI transition to TRU.<sup>7</sup> Dissimilar to SD73, those students who immediately transition and do not attend TRU are predominantly attending UNBC and UBCO.<sup>7,10</sup> About half of those students who delayed transition to higher education a year or more still choose to attend TRU, with the rest enrolling in Colleges and Institutes.<sup>7,10</sup>

### About the STP

The Student Transitions Project is British Columbia's collaborative research project that measures student success from the K-12 to post-secondary systems. The effective system-wide partnership, involving BC's education and

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advanced education ministries and public post-secondary institutions, is tracking student success by reporting on student transition rates to post-secondary institutions, and post-secondary completion and retention rates. STP is managed by a steering committee with representation from the two education ministries, public institutions and the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). For more information please visit the [STP website](#).<sup>13,14</sup>

### ***Next in the Series***

The next report in the Envision TRU Environmental Scan series will focus on the Gig Economy and the Future of Work.

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### Sources

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