

PRIOR LEARNING: RECOGNITION AND VISIBILITY

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Background

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is “a process through which eligibility for the award of credit is assessed, through assessment of formal, informal and non-formal learning” (Australian Government, 2019). RPL simply means that the subject taken in one programme is considered as meeting the learning outcomes of the subject in the other programme; thus, the student does not need to take this subject as part of his/her degree, because the credits taken can be transferred. In other words, RPL can reduce the number of credits taken, and the length of study. This is one of the reasons for establishing sub-degree programmes (i.e., higher diplomas and associate degrees). Also, this is the alternative pathway to degree studies, with the credits taken in sub-degree programmes transferred to university degree programmes.

Ideally, students can complete a two-year sub-degree programme and then, with adequate RPL, they will complete the two-year university study to obtain a bachelor degree. These students are generally referred to as transfer students (Archambault, 2015; Mehr and Daltry, 2016), or senior year admission (SYA) students in Hong Kong. Studies have found that students with more credit transfers can have better university learning experiences (Blaylock & Bresciani, 2011; Lewis, 2013).

However, our survey results have shown that SYA students had heavier study workloads than those admitted through Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) from secondary schools (Cheung et al., 2019). In our focus group interviews, the SYA students also stated that some subjects taken in sub-degree studies were not well recognized. They were even not aware of what subjects could be considered for credit transfer before they commenced their sub-degree studies.

Thus, there is a need to establish an online credit transfer platform for potential SYA students. The platform can increase the visibility of the subject credit transfer from sub-degree to degree programmes. This visibility can facilitate secondary school and sub-degree students to prepare for their further studies.

Online Credit Transfer Platforms

Online credit transfer platforms with credit transfer guidelines and information can be found in the United States (Figure 1) and Canada (Figure 2).

Figure 1. The official transfer and articulation system for California’s public colleges and universities (Assist.org, 2019)

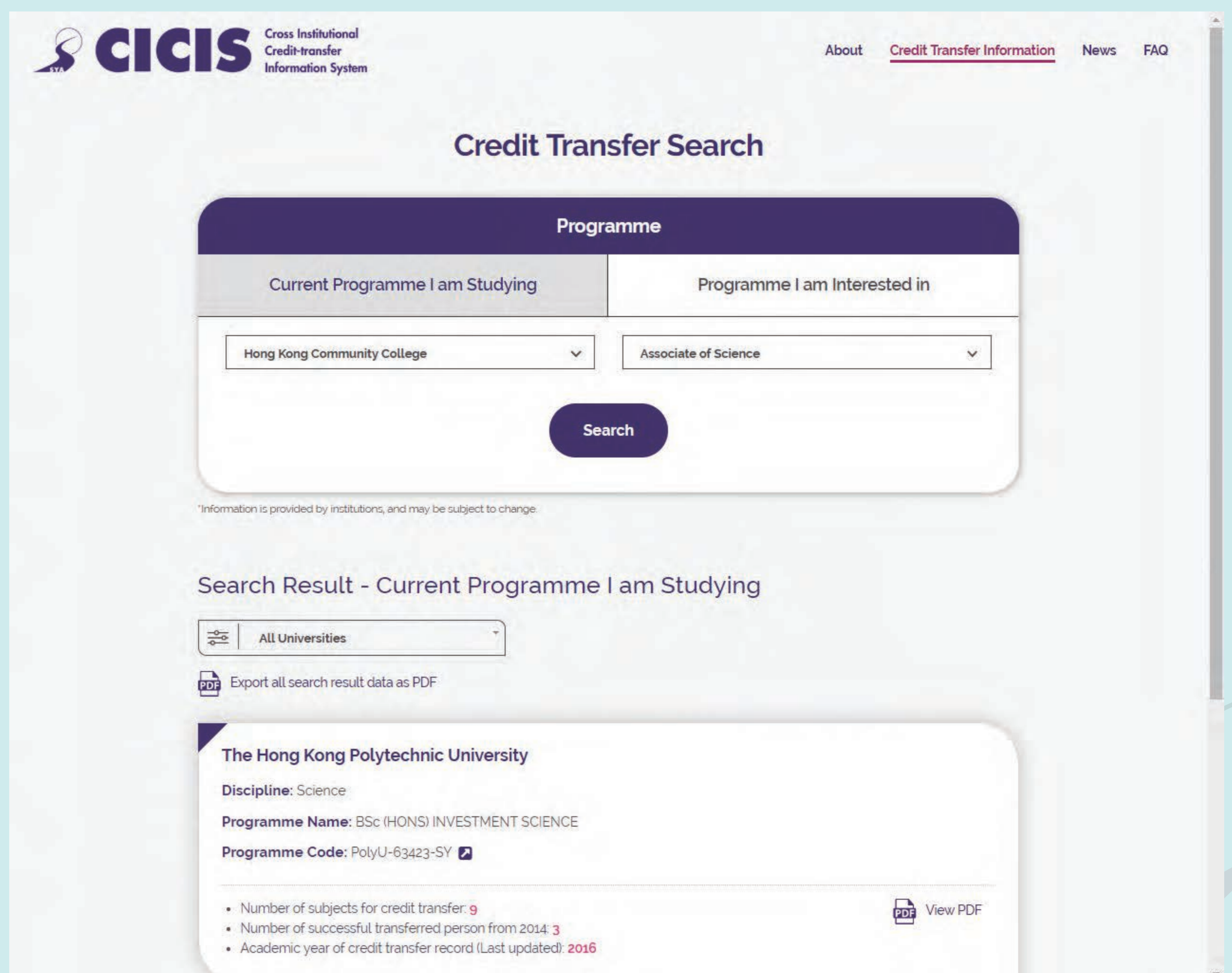


Figure 2. Credit Transfer between Colleges and Universities in Ontario (ontransfer.ca, 2019)

Development of the Online Credit Transfer Platform in Hong Kong

In view of the SYA students’ needs, our project “Enriching Senior Year Places Students’ Learning Experience through Curricular and Co-curricular Activities in Hong Kong’s Universities” was funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 2017. Our project involves four universities, PolyU, CityU, HKBU and CUHK. We have designed the platform (Figure 3) based on the feedback from different stakeholders including students.

Figure 3. Credit Transfer between Sub-degree to Degree Programmes in Hong Kong



Challenges and Conclusions

In the process of developing the platform, we have found that different universities use different terms for subjects and courses. Even within the same university, there are different ways to consider credit transfer, such as block transfer, or subject-based credit transfer. The most challenging part is to obtain the credit transfer information from department and university levels. There is a need to have a paradigm shift from competition to collaboration among departments and universities to facilitate the transparency of the subject alignment for credit transfers from sub-degree to degree programmes. This visibility will further enhance the review of the alignment, with the ultimate goal of improving the number of subjects considered for credit transfers.

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