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Where did my credits go? : The rhetorical analysis of research and the solution

“When going through the transfer process, the biggest barrier or challenge cited was the difficulty transferring credits (17%)” (“Students’ Lived Experiences” 2) according to a 2022 survey conducted by the partnership between UPCEA and StraighterLine. The transfer process for students usually involves an institution not accepting credits. This occurs because the receiving institution doesn’t recognize a course from the source institution as an adequate course substitute. This causes many students to retake classes that are similar in merit or content, and subsequently a loss of money due to several classes becoming irrelevant to the current degree path. As a transfer student, I would like to share my own transfer experiences at Virginia Tech, however, I will dive into the transfer issue as a whole for higher education. I will be analyzing the peer-reviewed journal “Smoothing the Path for Transfer: Implementing Interstate Passport at Community Colleges.” written by Heather McKay, Renée Edwards, and Daniel Douglas. This journal describes a case study that implements a solution to transfer called the Interstate Passport. The study was conducted in a rural community at Laramie County Community College in Wyoming, where students could choose to be involved in the (LCCC) Interstate Passport when transferring to neighboring 4-year institutions. The Interstate Passport worked by easing credit transfer through a student learning outcome lens which would allow students participating in the study to transfer credits easily. The goal of this study was to record the effects easing transfer credits would have on students. The study yielded positive results and was recorded in the journal: “Findings from that quasi-experimental study show that students who transferred among Network institutions were enrolled more continuously, earned more credits, and had a slightly higher grade point average (GPA) than similar students who transferred into Network institutions from non-member institutions” (McKay, Heather A., et al. 77). Findings from the study also included saving time and money due to the omission of general education resources and, interestingly, changed the perception of transfer as a process. We can identify the negative effects of credit loss by analyzing the benefits created by this experimental study which removed credit loss. These losses are important representations of what I experienced at Virginia Tech, losing several of my George Mason University classes to transfer credit loss. The loss of transfer credits causes lower graduation rates, and monetary loss, and lowers the appeal for the transfer process these problems can be solved by implementing a more flexible credit acceptance system for transfer students at Virginia Tech.

The research journal uses ethos to sustain credibility when relaying and conducting the outcomes and the experiment. As experiments are for testing causation, it is important to conduct the test properly to not introduce any bias. The authors McKay et al. utilize ethos and authority to speak through their biographies. Specifically for McKay, we can see her credibility through her biography “Heather McKay is the Director of the Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey” (McKay, Heather A. 79). We also see authors, Renée Edwards and Daniel Douglas’ biographies stating that they are both senior researchers at the Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers. To establish this credibility early, the authors show their academic affiliations and correspondences at the beginning of the research article. This is to give the readers a quick background of the authors before reading. This also allows readers to trust what is claimed in the research article as genuine facts that can relate to the causation of the benefits the students receive.

We see an abundance of logos used in the research article in the form of metrics and statistics, where these statistics are then used to justify claims stated in the article. One such example is when outlining the variance of data: “Monaghan and Attewell (2015) examined first-time 2-year students and found significant variance in terms of credit loss. Among the study’s sample, 14% of students lost 90% or more of their credits, 58% of students transferred 90% or more, and the rest of the students (28%) lost anywhere between 10% and 89% of their previously earned credits. As noted above, these wide variances in credit loss likely relate to articulation policies and processes in place among different institutions;” (McKay, Heather A., et al. 73). This statistic was used later to help justify how credit transfer will be evaluated and where to target the solution. Stating that credit loss should be viewed from the institution's perspective to maintain degree standards. The use of logos in this context gives readers trust in the author’s ability to approach this topic in an unbiased way conduct their research thoroughly and not jump to conclusions about any recorded statistic.

Lastly, and importantly, we see the restraint of pathos. We see several forms used in the explanation of the problem for students at the beginning of the research article: “These students typically lost about 13 credits (43% of their college credits) or one semester of full-time coursework upon transfer. This same study found that credit loss varied greatly depending on the sending and receiving institutions. Students pursuing vertical transfer—from public 2-year to 4-year colleges— lost just 22% of their credits. In comparison, students who moved between public 2-year colleges lost an average of 69% of their credits.” (McKay, Heather A., et al. 72). To keep claims isolated in fact, the authors are careful not to invoke an abundance of sentiment or anger. Restraint in pathos shows professionalism but also shows an unbiased approach to experimentation. The emotion shown in the research article is not dwelled upon for too long, however, it is subtly included to convey the severity of the problem. By using metrics to promote sentiment, the authors are retaining professionalism while also having the ability to display the problem’s effects to encourage the readers to agree. In Figure 1, we can view the abundant numerical metrics as a method of both logos and pathos to help us agree and make our own predictions as readers.A cartoon of a person and a child

Description automatically generated A white background with black dots

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**Figure 1** shows lead researcher Heather McKay using numerical metrics as logos and pathos to make readers feel like researchers themselves. Source image: <https://www.irasutoya.com/2019/08/blog-post_13.html>

## いらすとや：職業体験のイラスト（看護師・男の子）

The rhetoric utilized by McKay, Heather A., et al. has a strong effect in solidifying and quantifying the problem of credit transfer to the specific audience. The audience being both students and teachers is able to see the full picture of credit transfer and trust the research article through the use of Ethos to gain trust, Logos to justify the issues, and the restraint of Pathos to remain unbiased and neutral while preserving formality. The rhetoric also helps build a foundation for the research outcomes from the Interstate Passport. The figures and metrics gathered from the solution can be used to accurately assess and address the problems generated by all higher-level education transfers.

Virginia Tech is not immune to transfer credit loss. As a student of Virginia Tech who transferred from George Mason University, I’ve recorded a couple of courses that were unable to transfer. These courses, with their respective credit weight in George Mason University, include Solid Mechanics [3], English [3], Communications [3], Statistics [3], Thermodynamics [3], and Practicum in Engineering [2]. This is a total credit loss of 17 credits or equivalent to a heavy-weighted semester. Due to these classes not being accepted by Virginia Tech, I was required to take them again which included extra redundant costs. The effects of losing these classes due to transfer include loss of time including a later graduation date, loss of money due to redundancy, loss in indirect cost due to housing, etc.

A way to mitigate these issues would include taking steps to incorporate a more flexible credit acceptance system into the transfer process. Similar to the research experiment conducted by McKay, Heather A., et al. this solution would operate similarly and have similar benefits. Several crucial steps are needed to enact this solution. First, the Virginia Tech administration would need to research the learning outcomes of similar courses offered at Tech and common transfer sources. These class outcomes can be researched and recorded by the individual departments and applied to degree plans as transfer class groups assigned to each class Virginia Tech offers. Essentially these groups would show what classes have similar learning outcomes. The next step would be to merge these results including the student Self Evaluation Transfer Credits form (SETC) from each student into a cohesive format. This would mean correlating classes on the degree plan to both the SETC form and the new learning outcome research from each department. If any classes do not exist on the database, the class could be sent for review to the Virginia Tech subject departments or reviewed with the student. This would allow certain accommodations to students who partially cover the requirements with alternate solutions to mitigate the need to retake the whole course, for example taking a module course to fill in the missing gap. Lastly, all recorded data from incoming students can be used to assess new transfers. This allows Virginia Tech to adapt through time and be able to better assess merit and learning outcomes from transfer sources. This solution would produce a system that more accurately judges transfer credit acceptance by the use of qualitative data instead of exclusively on quantitative data such as credit amount, credit hours, grade, etc.

As this solution is a live solution, it will adapt to new situations as the higher education system evolves. Similar to the benefits provided by the research article, the solution will reduce the amount of redundancy when transferring, the amount of money spent on retaking courses, and the amount of time needed to progress through the degree plan. Additionally, like the effects seen in the survey by UPCEA and StraighterLine, we will see a heightened view of transfer as a process by the students and greater graduation rates over transfer students. These effects are justified by the benefits the solution provides as students are spending less time and money reaching their degree and reducing stress for new transfer students. This solution can also benefit students who are unable to apply for some credits from the transfer that are inapplicable to their degree plan. This solution allows these students to apply learning outcomes to gain accommodations in courses not related to their degree plan which helps them get through core learning classes or skip them if their academic merit allows. This includes some courses that may be chosen later such as electives that can be accommodated by courses that were not applied earlier on. Now from the student’s perspective, this would be a great solution to mitigate the common problems of credit transfer, however according to the research done by Matt Giani on vertical transfer and credit loss from institutions, there is another perspective on the matter from the administrative side, “From the institutional perspective, transfer and articulation agreements serve two goals: to facilitate the transfer and applicability of credits, and to maintain the integrity of degree plans. While excess credit loss may negatively impact transfer students’ chances of persistence and attainment, the absence of credit loss entirely could also be a negative outcome to the extent it reflects institutions’ blanket acceptance of any and all credits for meeting degree requirements.” (Giani, Matt S. 1118) The implementation of credit acceptance flexibility does go against the concept of retaining degree integrity, however, my solution can satisfy these requirements because it judges classwork based on merit and learning outcomes. This allows colleges to rank class transfer compatibility while allowing students to retain their credit utility.

As a whole, the loss of transfer credits causes lower graduation rates, and monetary loss, and lowers the appeal for the transfer process at Virginia Tech. By implementing a more flexible credit acceptance system based on merit and learning outcomes, we can mitigate these issues for all transfer students in any higher education system. We’ve seen a real solution proposed by Heather McKay, Renée Edwards, and Daniel Douglas using the Interstate Passport and its real benefits and effects it has on transfer students. I’ve also proposed a solution for the credit transfer issue at Virginia Tech as a step-by-step process to produce an adaptive credit transfer evaluation system. As we continue to see the effects of transfer credit loss persist over the past 20 years there is a great need to implement a system that is capable of adapting to the ever-changing education system. By the removal/mitigation of credit transfer loss, students will be more inclined to develop skills in more comfortable 2-year colleges and then transfer over to 4-year colleges to complete a bachelor’s degree. Students will have less debt and less stress after college. Lastly, students will have the freedom to adjust their degree plans without losing a large amount of time and money. I believe that this solution will make higher education a place for students to feel comfortable exploring and will encourage more people to attend college and be able to apply the skills they have developed to ensure their success.

**Works Cited**

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