

10-11-2024

An exploratory review of transfer policies for certified private pilots in collegiate flight programs

Gail Avendaño
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Kenneth J. Wilkins
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Research problem: Universities often admit students who have already completed a portion of their flight training outside the collegiate environment and who want to transfer in their previous flight experience in fulfillment of a flight degree. There is no widely published standard by which to evaluate or successfully integrate transfer flight students into a collegiate flight training curriculum. This research aims to learn how common it is for students to enroll in a flight program with a Private Pilot Certificate, how university flight programs are evaluating and integrating these students into their existing curriculum, and whether or not there are any differences between ab-initio and transfer students in terms of graduation rates or other measures of success. Research questions: (1) What are common ways that flight programs award credit for private pilot certificates earned outside of the university? (2) What, if any, supplemental instruction or evaluation actions are transfer students required to complete before they start post-private training? (3) If supplemental instruction or evaluation actions are being completed, are those actions working as intended? (4) When considering two suggested measures of success, are universities finding any differences between ab-initio flight students and transfer flight students? Summary: This study explores why students may want to complete Private Pilot training before entering a collegiate program, shares how some collegiate flight programs are managing the flight transfer process, reports how successful these transfer processes are, and identifies additional areas of needed research in order to identify best practices.

Recommended Citation:

Avendaño, G. & Wilkins, K. J. (2024). An exploratory review of transfer policies for certified private pilots in collegiate flight programs. *Collegiate Aviation Review International*, 42(2), 131-147. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.okstate.edu/osu/index.php/CARI/article/view/9973/8818>

Introduction

The typical university flight curriculum requires the completion of multiple Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certificates and ratings. These certificates and ratings most often include Private Pilot, Instrument Airplane, Commercial Pilot, Multi-engine, and sometimes Flight Instructor (CFI). These certifications are commonly completed along with academic coursework to fulfill degree requirements.

While not all universities allow students to complete a flight degree if they have completed some or all of their flight training elsewhere, many do, particularly if only the private pilot certificate has been completed. Despite a number of universities allowing for this type of transfer, there is no standardized method by which to evaluate the quality of a student's previous flight training or to ensure students will transition well into a university flight training environment.

This article discusses the factors that influence students' decisions to begin flight training prior to entering a university program and shares the findings of a survey that was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. What are common ways that flight programs award credit for private pilot certificates earned outside of the university?
2. What, if any, supplemental instruction or evaluation actions are transfer students required to complete before they start post-private training?
3. If supplemental instruction or evaluation actions are being completed, are those actions working as intended?
4. When considering two suggested measures of success, are universities finding any differences between ab-initio flight students and transfer flight students?

The theoretical framework of this exploratory review is based on the value of research-informed teaching and the belief there is a need for practitioners "to produce research that is more relevant to practice" (Sjolund, 2022). The findings of this research, then, are intended to inform educational practices among collegiate aviation educators by inviting flight department managers to consider how to more effectively integrate private pilot students into their own university's flight training curriculum.

Background and Literature Review

Understanding Aviation Degree Requirements

Universities offer a variety of aviation degrees, and not all include flight training. To get a sense of the different types of aviation programs at various universities, it is helpful to look at the classifications used by the Aviation Accreditation Board International (AABI), the only

programmatically accrediting organization for aviation that is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2024).

AABI categorizes non-flying program offerings as Aviation Management, Aviation Maintenance, Aviation Electronics, Aviation Studies, Aviation Safety Science, Air Traffic Control, and Unmanned Aircraft Systems. The program category that *does* require flight training is referred to as “Flight Education,” which AABI suggests includes degree offerings such as “Aircraft Systems Management, Flight Operations, Career Pilot, Professional Pilot, or Aeronautical Science.” (AABI, 2024, p. 37- 44). The programs examined in this research include those that require flight training, which AABI categorizes as “Flight Education.”

AABI clearly specifies that, for the Flight Education programs to be accredited, program goals “MUST lead to appropriate national certification,” referring to FAA licensure and certifications for programs that operate in the United States (AABI, 2024, p. 40).

In the case of associate degree programs, the flight degree must include the Private Pilot certificate and the Commercial Pilot certificate with an instrument rating. In the case of Baccalaureate degree programs, the degree must also include either the multi-engine land rating or flight instructor certificate, in addition to the Commercial Pilot certificate with an instrument rating (AABI, 2024, p. 40).

Even if a flight program is not AABI-accredited, the logical purpose of any flight degree is to prepare graduates for employment in flying careers, all of which require some minimal level of certification. FAA regulations clearly outline the minimum experience and task requirements applicants must meet before certifications are issued; these standards are listed in the FAA Airmen Certification Standards (FAA, 2024a) and in Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations §61(Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors and Ground Instructors, 2024). The FAA does not, however, dictate that flight training must take place at a university or college. That means there is a wide range of flight training options available to anyone who wants to learn how to fly, whether the goal is to fly recreationally or professionally.

Value of a College Degree

Sam Weigel, a professional airline pilot and author, explores the benefits of earning a four-year degree in an article published in a popular aviation magazine. He points out that even though a degree is currently no longer required for most major air carriers, a degree continues to be preferred due to the value of the academic curriculum that a student completes while earning the degree, and an aviation degree may allow graduates to qualify for hire at a regional airline with fewer hours of total flight time. Beyond these reasons, he also warns that, in times when airlines pause their hiring due to economic downturns or other reasons, “the majors will go right back to requiring (or strongly preferring) pilots with a 4-year degree when they start hiring again.” He also notes that airline/university partnerships can be valuable benefits available to students who attend a university-affiliated aviation program (Weigel, 2022).

Costs Associated with Flight Training

In the same article, Weigel goes on to suggest that college attendance is an especially good idea for someone in the position to “get your PPL and a year’s worth of college credits done in high school [so] you can decrease both the cost and time requirement of a degree.” Saving money is a particularly compelling reason why someone might want to complete at least a portion of flight training before enrolling in a university curriculum. He reports, “...four years of tuition, flight fees, and room and board at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is now more than \$260,000...and even smaller collegiate programs are pushing \$200,000.” He further notes that non-university training providers can provide flight training through MEI (Multi-engine instructor) for \$90,000 (Weigel, 2022).

In validation of Weigel’s assertions, anyone associated with aviation education is all too aware of the high costs of flight training. While it is difficult to make direct comparisons between university flight training costs and those found at a fixed-base operator (FBO), students can often save money by obtaining flight training at a non-collegiate provider. Two collegiate flight providers and their respective nearby FBOs are included here as generalized illustrations.

In one example, Southern Illinois University currently lists \$16,603 as the minimum cost to obtain a private pilot certificate (Southern Illinois University, 2023). Enhanced Aero, an FBO located at the same airport, advertises an estimated private pilot training cost of \$12,170. This represents savings of over \$4000 (Enhanced Aero, n.d.).

In a second example, the University of North Dakota currently lists \$19,778 as the cost to obtain a private pilot certificate (University of North Dakota, 2024). Comparable flight training at GFK Wings, LLC, a flight training provider that is located at the same training airport, could potentially save a student over \$5000 if one calculates the listed hourly aircraft rates, instructor fees, and exam fees based on publicly available information on their website (GFK Wings, LLC, 2023). See Table 1 for details.

Table 1

Rough estimate cost to obtain a private pilot certificate at GFK Wings, LLC

GFK Wings	Cost	Qty	Totals
Cessna 172 (wet)	\$135.00	63	\$8,505.00
Instructor hourly	\$56.00	100	\$5,600.00
Written exam	\$175.00	1	\$175.00
			\$ 14,280.00

Additional Factors and Considerations

Cost may be a driving factor for some students, but for others, a strong interest might be the primary motivation to learn how to fly as soon as they can. If they have the financial means and convenient access to a flight instructor and airplane, the goal of learning how to fly is much more attainable and doesn’t require immediate enrollment in a collegiate program.

Whatever a student's motivation and ability to begin flight training before college, there are some important considerations they should be aware of before making a potentially consequential decision.

Age Considerations

While there are no restrictions on how old a person needs to be to start training, age restrictions on certain milestones do exist. Student pilots, for example, are permitted to solo an airplane if they are at least 16 years of age and complete the practical check ride for a private pilot certificate if they are at least 17. FAA regulations, however, require that commercial pilots be at least 18 years of age. These age restrictions make earning a private pilot certificate an attainable goal for those with the resources and opportunity while they are still in high school but may keep them from advancing further, depending on their age (Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors, and Ground Instructors, 2024).

R-ATP Qualifications

In addition to age restrictions, students should be aware that to receive a Restricted Airline Transport (R-ATP) certificate at a reduced hour requirement, they must complete their instrument and commercial training in an FAA-approved part 141 program. These approved training programs allow students to complete the R-ATP in as few as 1000 flight hours of total flight time compared to 1500 hours (FAA 2024c).

As of July 2024, 104 collegiate flight programs were authorized by the FAA to certify their graduates as eligible to apply for a restricted privileges ATP certificate with reduced hour requirements (FAA, 2024b). Because the R-ATP has reduced hour flight time requirements compared to the unrestricted ATP certificate, completing a flight education at an approved program can save graduates a significant amount of money.

An Airline Transport Pilot certificate (ATP) or Restricted Airline Transport Pilot certificate is required before taking a pilot job at an air carrier certified under 14 CFR §121, such as commercial passenger air carriers or many cargo companies. While some students decide to complete all, or the majority, of their flight training outside a university environment, FAA regulations governing the eligibility of a reduced-hour R-ATP certificate give them compelling reasons to complete subsequent training beyond the private pilot certificate at an approved university instead of with an unapproved flight training provider such as an FBO (Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors and Ground Instructors, 2021).

To qualify for an ATP, 1500 hours of total flight time and 500 hours of cross-country flight time are required. The different experience requirements for R-ATP options are illustrated in Table 2 (Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors, and Ground Instructors, 2024).

Table 2
Required Experience to Apply for a R-ATP Certificate

Training required	Military	Bachelor's part 141	Associates part 141	No degree
Total Time	750	1000	1250	1500
Cross country time	200	200	200	200

Significance of Research

This research suggests that anywhere from 10 to 50% of students are entering college with previous flight experience, yet there is no standardized method for how to effectively evaluate and integrate these students into flight programs. Learning more about how universities manage incoming students who complete flight training outside of the collegiate environment allows flight programs to improve their integration strategies and determine how to best support all students.

Methodology

To help answer the stated research questions, a thirteen-question survey was designed using Survey Monkey. The survey link was sent via email by the University Aviation Association (UAA) on April 11, 2024, to all 130 UAA member schools. Instructions asked that respondents be the university or college’s Chief Flight Instructor or their designee. The survey remained open for three weeks.

Fifteen institutional representatives completed the survey, but one was not part of a collegiate aviation program, so their survey responses were removed from the data set. That meant that 14 usable surveys were returned, representing 10.7% of all possible respondents. A summary of the survey responses follows.

Survey Results

Respondents' Titles

Six respondents indicated they were the Chief Flight Instructor of their institution. Other titles reported were “Chair,” “Director,” “Manager,” or “Administrator” (5); “Assistant Chief” (1); and “Assistant or Associate Professor” (2).

Universities and Colleges Represented

Twelve respondents shared the name of their university or college. One responded, “State University,” and one responded, “University.” These answers confirmed that respondents represented a variety of public versus private institutions and represented institutions with both two-year and four-year flight education degrees. Several geographic locations within the United States were also represented. In terms of program sizes, three programs reported having over 500

students, five programs reported having 201-400 students, and six programs reported having 200 or fewer students.

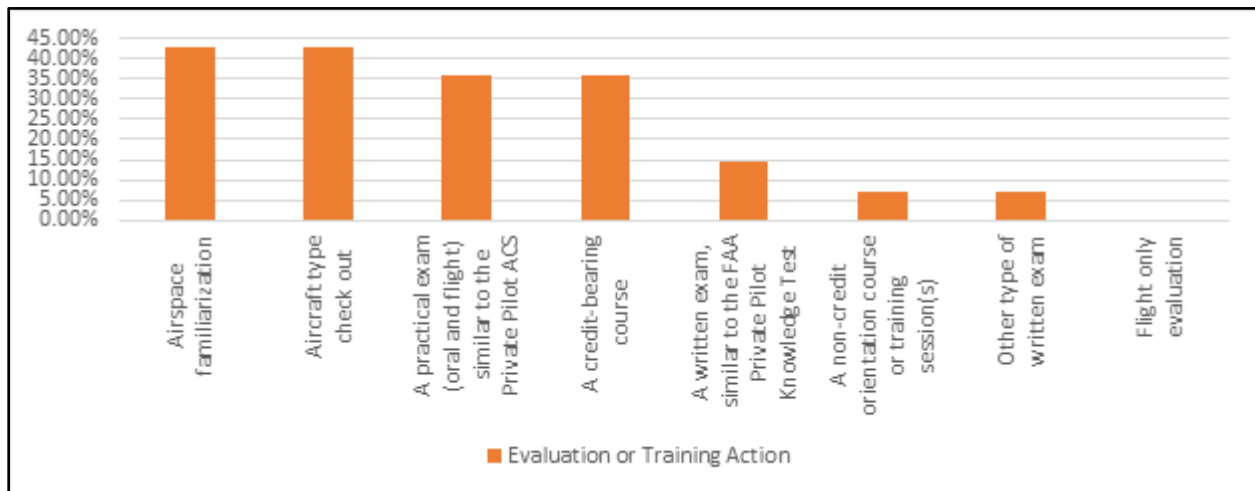
Acceptance of Outside Flight Training

All fourteen respondents reported that they allow students to begin post-private flight training and potentially complete a flight degree if they have completed the Private Pilot Certificate elsewhere. This article refers to these students as “transfer flight students.” On the low end, three programs reported that an estimated 10-20% of their flight students are transfer flight students. On the high end, one program reported that as many as 40-50% of their flight students are transfer flight students. This information validated the assumption that learning more about transfer flight policies and sharing the findings could provide widespread benefits.

Evaluation and Integration

Despite all survey respondents reporting that their programs accept transfer flight students, there are many ways that programs evaluate and integrate them into their programs. Ten of the respondents (over 71%) say the transfer students receive additional evaluation or training prior to pursuing a post-private certificate, while four (almost 29%) said the transfer students are admitted into the flight training program without receiving additional evaluation or training before flying. The additional evaluation or training actions are detailed in Figure 1. Respondents were invited to select multiple responses if needed.

Figure 1
Additional Evaluation or Training Actions % of survey respondents



One respondent selected the “other” option but then went on to explain that they have transfer students take a credit-bearing course. To more accurately reflect their intended response, their response is included in the “credit-bearing course” category. Another respondent indicated they administer a written exam to transfer students for credit but did not say if it was modeled after the FAA Private Pilot knowledge exam. In this case, their response is included in an “other type of written exam” option.

An optional survey question asked respondents to describe their additional evaluation or training actions in more detail. These seven comments were submitted that further clarify and explain the initial responses.

- *“Students must complete a course in the [airplane type] to demonstrate Private Pilot skill in that airplane.”* This comment supplements the “credit-bearing course” option.
- *“We find Part 61 PPLs have a lack of knowledge in several areas. We require them to take our PPL Ground I to ensure they have the base of knowledge for our program.”* This comment supplements the “credit-bearing course,” “airspace familiarization,” and “aircraft type check out” options.
- *“Students with a PPL qualify to complete a written exam that, if passed, will grant them credit for our PPL lecture course. This course is normally taken by students who are working on their PPL with us. If the student passes, they receive credit and move on. If the student does not pass, they will be required to take the lecture course even though they already have a PPL.”* This comment supplements the “written exam for course credit” option.
- *“They are given a written exam that is modeled after the FAA written. If a score of 80% or higher is achieved, they enter the next course. If a score of less than 80% is achieved, they are given 10 hours of remedial ground training on all areas of private pilot knowledge. All individuals are then given an evaluation ride; it is lesson 1 in the instrument syllabus (assuming they came to us with a PPL). That is conducted to ACS standards by a flight instructor.”* This comment supplements the “written exam, modeled after the FAA Private Pilot Knowledge Test” option.
- *“Individual CFIs evaluate that students are up to Private ACS standards while putting those training sessions towards the instrument and commercial training requirements as appropriate. They are not allowed to go solo until the evaluation is complete.”* This comment supplements the “Airspace familiarization,” “Aircraft type check out,” and “credit-bearing course” options.
- *“Student handbook, Safety Handbook, Make and Model, Airspace, Tracking software, enrollment certificate, and acknowledgment of risk.”* This comment supplements the “Practical exam (oral and flight) adapted from or modeled after the Private Pilot ACS,” “Airspace familiarization,” and “Aircraft type check out” options.
- *“Students who come to [name of university] with their private pilot certificate obtained are required to go through a transitional course. This short course is a few flights and a few ground sessions to help students become familiar with airspace, aircraft, SOPs (ground and flight), etc.”* This comment supplements the “Airspace familiarization,” “Aircraft type check out,” and “a non-credit-orientation course or training session(s)” options.

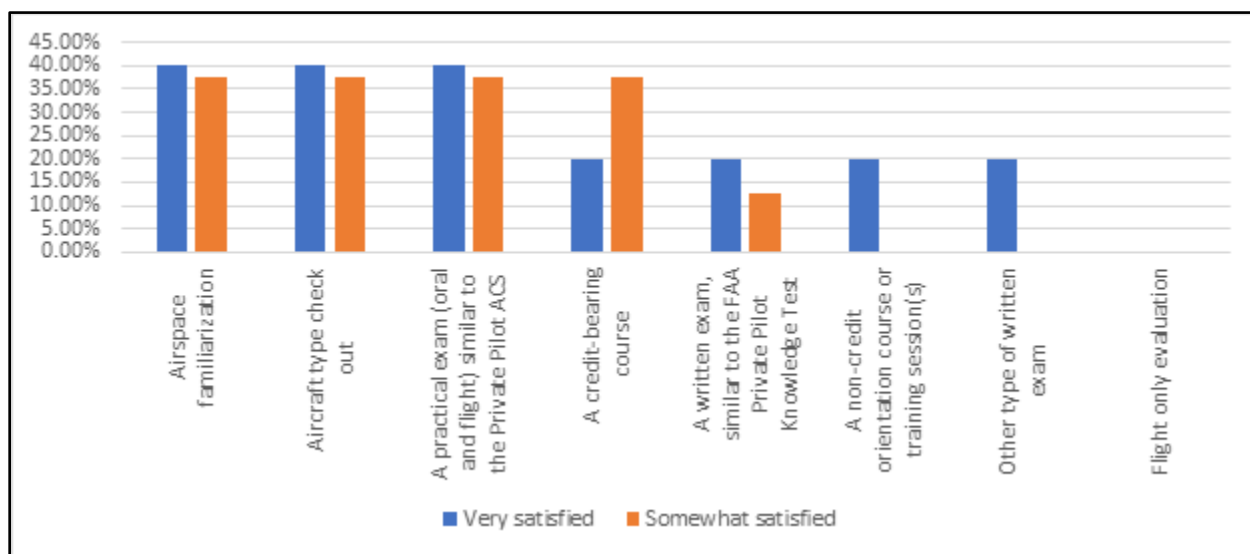
While there is no single method of incorporating students with Private Pilot certificates into collegiate flight programs, survey responses showed that the most common methods are airspace familiarization and aircraft checkouts. Practical exams modeled after the Private Pilot ACS and credit-bearing courses were each indicated by 36% of respondents. A written evaluation of some kind was indicated by 21% of respondents. One school indicated the use of a non-credit-bearing course to integrate flight students into their flight program.

Level of Satisfaction with the Evaluation and Training System

When respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the current system being used to evaluate and train transfer flight students, five (over 35%) selected the option “Very satisfied. Things are working as intended.” Eight (over 57%) selected the option “Somewhat satisfied. Some minor changes in how we do things might be warranted, but overall, things are going well.” No respondents chose options that indicated a neutral opinion or negative opinion. One respondent selected “prefer not to answer.”

These responses provided an opportunity to determine what common elements the collegiate flight programs shared. Are the programs that report a high level of satisfaction in how they are evaluating and integrating transfer flight students into their programs doing anything different from the programs that report a lower level of satisfaction? Figure 2 shows what each of these two groups is doing to evaluate and integrate transfer flight students into their programs.

Figure 2
Comparing the “Very Satisfied” vs “Somewhat Satisfied” Respondents



Of the five respondents who indicated they were very satisfied with their school’s system of integrating flight students effectively into their program, four (80%) require additional training or assessment for their transfer students. The one respondent who indicated being very satisfied with their transfer policy that does not use a formal assessment tool stated that “Students go

directly into Instrument Rating training. They receive a "CR" (credit) on the transcript for Private Ground and Flight.”

Out of the ten respondents who indicated they require additional training or evaluation for transfer students, four indicated they were very satisfied with the system used to integrate them successfully. Examining the four “Very satisfied” respondents, two respondents indicated using a practical exam modeled after the Private Pilot ACS; two indicated some sort of written exam.

In addition to identifying the many ways that transfer flight students are evaluated and integrated into collegiate programs, the survey included questions to determine if there were any discernible differences in terms of student success measures between ab-initio and transfer flight students. Survey question number 11 explained that for the purposes of this research, “ab-initio” was being defined as, “students who have done all of their flight training with your program from the beginning.”

Program Completion

Program completion rates were identified as one important measure of student success, and survey respondents were asked to compare estimated program completion rates between ab-initio and transfer flight students. Six of the respondents (about 43%) said “there’s little to no difference between the two groups.” Three respondents (about 21%) indicated that “the ab-initio students are more likely to successfully complete their program,” and one respondent (about 7%) said “the transfer students are more likely to successfully complete the program.” Three respondents (about 21%) said, “I’m not sure which group is more likely to successfully complete the program.” One respondent chose “prefer not to answer.”

Interestingly, all three respondents who answered “I’m not sure” reported not using FAA-style knowledge tests and ACS-style practical exams when evaluating transfer flight students. Those respondents who reported using an ACS-style practical exam or an FAA-style knowledge test when evaluating transfer students reported program completion rates with more confidence.

Quality of Graduates

When asked to compare the overall quality of ab-initio and transfer students, at the time of graduation, the responses were nearly identical to those asking about graduation rates. Six (almost 43%) said, “there is little to no difference between the two groups; two (about 14%) said, “the ab-initio students are more likely to become flight instructors for us and do well in the industry;” and five (almost 36%) said, “I’m not sure which group would be considered generally more successful in terms of these measures.” One respondent chose, “prefer not to answer.”

Additional Comments

Two optional comments were offered by respondents at the end of the survey.

- “...Student retention is higher compared to incoming students without a PPL. We have significant retention problems among students at PPL. We actually encourage incoming student[s] to have a PPL before enrolling. The retention rate is much better after PPL.”
- “When choosing our cohorts for each year, we consider non-PPLs in different groups.”

Limitations of the study

Low Response Rate

While the survey’s 10.7% response rate provided helpful foundational information in answering the research questions, a higher response rate would have improved the validity of this study. The resulting inability to fully assess nonresponsive error is acknowledged as a limitation. As suggested in an article by researchers in the information systems field, improving response rates might occur with email, letter, or telephone call reminders, and monetary incentives such as gift cards or opportunities to win a prize drawing. These researchers also point out that federally funded research requires an 80% response rate, and in other types of research, such as marketing and human resource management, response rates average around 50%. The average response rate in most of the information systems journals they reviewed averaged below 40% (Sivo, S. et al. 2006).

Low survey response rates in any type of research are unfortunate and might not be measurably improved with the efforts suggested. In the case of this survey, at least one reminder email about the survey might have prompted more responses, and perhaps other communication channels should have been included. Funding was not available to offer monetary or prize incentives.

Unexpected 100% Acceptance Response

Unexpectedly, 100% of all respondents indicated they accept transfer-flight students. That means either *all* collegiate aviation programs accept transfer flight students (unlikely), or the survey was designed in such a way to inadvertently discourage those who do not accept transfer students from completing the survey. The introductory message that accompanied the survey should be reviewed with this potential inadvertent messaging in mind if the survey is replicated in the future.

Despite not being able to learn more about collegiate aviation programs that do not accept transfer flight students, that was not a focus of this research, and the survey results still allowed us to address the intended research questions.

Survey Option Redundancy

Another potential survey design limitation relates to the multiple-choice options listed for the question asking about additional evaluation or training actions taken with transfer flight students. The options “airspace familiarization” and “aircraft checkout” were both chosen by the

same respondents, indicating (logically) that an aircraft checkout flight would also include airspace familiarization.

Lack of Information about Areas of Needed Remediation

Finally, in terms of study limitations, this survey lacked questions that adequately explored the most common areas where transfer flight students struggle the most. Should this research be replicated or continued, more information should be collected to find out what areas of remediation, if any, are commonly needed to adequately integrate transfer flight students into collegiate aviation programs.

Discussion

Despite the limitations of this study, it answered the intended research questions and worked well as a foundational review of the ways colleges and universities are bringing transfer flight students into their flight programs. Knowing that, in some cases, nearly half of a program's flight students have completed their Private Pilot Certificate before coming to the university, this research shows that collegiate flight programs are managing transfer flight students with different levels of confidence and approaches.

Research Question 1

The first research question of this study asked about the common ways flight programs award credit for private pilot certificates earned outside of the university. Survey results showed that, in at least one case, academic course credit is awarded based on having the Private Pilot Certificate alone, with no evaluation or other actions required. Other survey responses described awarding credit to transfer flight students after they complete a course, successfully pass written and/or oral exams, or complete a flight checkout before academic credit is awarded. One survey respondent reported that their transfer flight students are required to take the Private Pilot Ground School in order "to ensure they have the base of knowledge for our program," even if they already hold the Private Pilot Certificate.

No two respondents described the same process whereby academic credit is awarded for previous flight experience, so there is no one "common" way this happens.

Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was designed to find out what if any, supplemental actions programs might take in terms of remediation or ensuring the readiness of transfer flight students to continue flying in subsequent courses.

Noteworthy is the finding that half of the respondents who said they were "very satisfied" with their procedures for evaluating and incorporating transfer flight students into their programs have in common the use of a written exam to initially evaluate the incoming student's Private Pilot knowledge that may or may not lead to remedial learning requirements either by having to

take the Private Pilot “lecture course,” or by having to complete ten hours of “remedial ground training on all areas of the private pilot knowledge.”

Despite the small sample size, this approach may work well for other programs that want a relatively easy way to implement a structured process of evaluation in order to identify which students would benefit from supplemental instruction and then provide that supplemental instruction in either an existing course or a specified number of ground sessions, as needed.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to find out how well additional evaluation or training measures are working for flight programs that choose to use them. Although it would have been nice to be able to identify the best method for integrating transfer students, the survey data yielded no clear consensus. Surprisingly, all the respondents who elected to answer this question (all but one) reported they were either very satisfied or mostly satisfied with their transfer process, even though there are several different processes being used.

Here, it is important to note the challenges of using a term like “satisfaction” in a survey. It measures the subjective feelings of the individual respondent, but it does not identify why the respondent feels satisfied or unsatisfied without the use of follow-up questions, which this survey did not include.

Definitions for satisfaction are likely heavily influenced by the respondent's personal viewpoint and by the values of the institution of higher learning and the individual program. Examples of satisfaction metrics, for example, might include things like economic outcomes for the institution, economic outcomes for the student, the effort required on the part of the student or the part of the institution, the student's perceived satisfaction, the impact of transfer policies on recruitment, how transfer policies impact resource availability, student success rates and student retention, and more.

Finally, despite the high level of satisfaction expressed, most respondents indicated there was room for improvement with their transfer practices. Without knowing exactly why they are not entirely satisfied, however, prevents clear recommendations from being suggested based on these survey results.

Research Question 4

An important goal of this study was to find out if collegiate flight programs saw differences in terms of student success outcomes between ab-initio and transfer flight students. “Student success” is defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this study, two characteristics were selected: 1) Program completion rates and 2) “Becoming a flight instructor for the program and/or doing well in the industry.”

“Becoming a flight instructor for the program” was chosen as a measure because flight programs that hire flight instructors will presumably hire the best candidates and can be

somewhat discerning when making hiring decisions. “Doing well in the industry” was selected as it allows survey respondents to answer quickly without requiring them to access data.

The primary finding related to this research question is that few programs closely track how well their ab-initio students are doing when compared to the transfer flight students. Some report that the ab-initio students do better, while others report the transfer students do better. A substantial number simply do not know.

A less clear but helpful finding is that those who reported using an ACS-style practical exam at least had an opinion about the difference in graduation rates between the two groups, saying there is little to no difference between them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Students have compelling reasons to want to begin flight training outside the university environment related to cost and motivation; however, the impacts on universities in allowing students to begin flight training outside of the university are less clear. Do universities benefit from allowing students to transfer in with a private pilot certificate, or do they not? The answer to this question is not clear.

If these survey results are generalizable to the larger collegiate aviation community, ab-initio students are more likely to become flight instructors for their university’s flight program and be successful in the industry, while transfer students are not. At least one university manager reports that they actively encourage students to complete their Private Pilot training before enrolling at the university, based on the belief that they are more likely to be retained as students and complete the program. Data from this research, however, indicates that other university flight programs aren’t finding those same results.

As universities and students alike seek to make higher education more affordable, it is in everyone’s best interest to allow incoming students to complete Private Pilot training before flying at the college or university. Maintaining high training standards, however, is critical, and collegiate flight programs should be compelled to examine their own transfer policies and determine how to easily and efficiently bring transfer flight students into their programs.

Collegiate flight programs should also begin collecting data to measure program completion rates and other success measures between ab-initio and transfer flight students if they are not already doing so. Based on this survey’s results, a significant number of aviation programs are generally not aware of how well their efforts to evaluate and integrate transfer students into their flight program are working. Overall, programs that do make an effort to evaluate and integrate transfer students into their flight program report feeling more satisfied with the results than the programs that do not, but this research failed to clearly identify which efforts on the part of the flight program yield the best results.

More feedback is needed from additional collegiate aviation programs if we are to identify best practices related to supporting transfer flight students in our flight programs and setting them up for long-term success as flight instructors and professional pilots in the industry;

if those are two measures we define as “success.” Another research gap is related to identifying the most common areas of deficiencies among transfer flight students. If collegiate aviation programs consistently see common areas of needed remediation, structured courses or training plans could be more easily built.

Finally, research that includes the perspectives of transfer flight students would also be valuable in terms of learning more about their decisions to begin flight training outside the university environment and whether they think their transfer experience into the collegiate flight education setting was well managed.

References

- Aviation Accreditation Board International, *Accreditation Criteria Manual*. (2024, February 23). <https://www.aabi.aero/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AABI-201-Accreditation-Criteria-Manual-Rev.-2-23-24.pdf>
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *Directory of CHEA Recognized Accrediting Organizations*. (2024, July 23). <https://www.chea.org/directory-chea-recognized-accrediting-organizations-pdf>
- Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors, and Ground Instructors, 14 C.F.R. § 61 (2024). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-14/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-61>
- Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors and Ground Instructors, 14 C.F.R. § 61.160 (2021, Nov 9). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-14/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-61/subpart-G/section-61.160>
- Enhance Aero. (n.d.). Flight Training. Retrieved from Enhanced Aero: <https://www.enhancedaero.com/flight-training>
- Federal Aviation Administration (2024a, July). *Airmen Certification Standards*. https://www.faa.gov/training_testing/testing/acs
- Federal Aviation Administration (2024b, July 31). *Authority List*. https://www.faa.gov/pilots/training/atp/media/Institutional_Authority_List.pdf
- Federal Aviation Administration (2024c, May 30). *Pilot Training*. <https://www.faa.gov/pilots/training/atp>
- GFK Wings, LLC. (2023, October 1). GFK Wings, LLC. Flight School and Aircraft Rental <https://www.gfk Wings.com/>
- Godlewski, M. (2022, December 28). PSI Fee Change Goes into Effect on January 1. Flying. <https://www.flyingmag.com/psi-fee-change-goes-into-effect-on-january-1/>
- Pilot, Flight Instructor, Ground Instructor, and Pilot School Certification Rules, 62 F.R. 16220 (published April 4, 1997) (to be codified at 14 C.F.R § 1, 61, 141, and 143) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/1997/04/04/97-7450/pilot-flight-instructor-ground-instructor-and-pilot-school-certification-rules>
- Sivo, S., Saunders, C., Chang, Q., & Jiang, J. (2006, June). How low should you go? Low response rates and the validity of inference in IS questionnaire research. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 7(6), 351-414.

- Sjölund, S., Lindvall, J., Larsson, M., & Ryve, A. (2022). Using research to inform practice through research-practice partnerships: A systematic literature review. *Review of Education*, 10, e3337. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3337>
- Southern Illinois University. (2023, September 8). Flight Fees. Retrieved from Southern Illinois University: <https://academics.siu.edu/aviation-and-automotive/aviation-flight/flight-fees.php>
- University of North Dakota. (2024, July 11). Individual Course Training Costs. Retrieved from University of North Dakota: <https://aero.und.edu/aviation/student-info/individual-course-training-costs.html>
- Weigel, S. (2022, June 3). If you want to be an airline pilot, do you need a college degree? Flying. <https://www.flyingmag.com/if-you-want-to-be-an-airline-pilot-do-you-need-a-college-degree/>