



Policy Paper

A Comprehensive Access Strategy: Reaching Out to Reach Higher

November 2010

Prepared by:

Kieran Slobodin, Academic Affairs Commissioner
The Alma Mater Society, Queen's University

With files from:

Paris Meilleur, former Vice President University Affairs
University Students' Council, University of Western Ontario

Morgan Campbell, former Research Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper addresses the significant need for a comprehensive, holistic access strategy to improve early outreach and access to higher education. Studies stress the need for an integrated approach to student access as opposed to the piecemeal, fragmented programs currently in place. For most students, the decision to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) is done at an early age. Therefore, OUSA recommends the provincial government take a leading role in creating and coordinating a comprehensive access strategy that enables all youth to participate in higher education. While all students benefit from early outreach and access programs, it is underrepresented¹ groups that stand the most to gain, and such programs can be vital to their enrolment and persistence in PSE. OUSA recognizes the following concerns regarding underrepresented groups:

- Students from underrepresented groups are often at risk of lower levels of academic achievement in elementary and secondary school, which creates barriers that hinder their enrolment in PSE.
- There is inadequate transitional support for students who wish to switch post-secondary destinations and compounding this issue is a lack of communication in areas of (a) educational pathways, (b) the cost of education, (c) existing financial assistance programs.
- Underrepresented students who do enrol in PSE experience barriers in accessing adequate social and academic supports to ensure program completion and success.

To address these concerns, OUSA recommends that the provincial government implement a coordinated early outreach and access strategy to encourage participation and persistence of underrepresented students at all levels of post-secondary education. Vital to this strategy are the following components:

- The provincial government providing sufficient support for existing early outreach programs and the development of new programs to meet outreach needs across Ontario.
- Funding to enable universities to invest in student support services to improve the persistence of all students, but underrepresented students in particular.
- Enhanced accessibility and mobility of post-secondary pathways, including on-line access, improved credit transfer between institutions and bridging programs.
- Greater information distribution and access to enrichment programs at the elementary and secondary school levels, to improve post-secondary pathway selection and understanding of the costs of PSE and financial resources available.
- A robust student financial assistance system that eliminates financial barriers to accessing post-secondary education.

In addition to the vital components listed above, OUSA believes the provincial government should recognize and commit to funding successful existing models of early outreach, such as Pathways to Education. Early outreach programs have shown to be most successful when embedded in the local community. However, funding and the overall strategy of these outreach programs should not follow a 'one-size-fits-all' model. Rather, the Ontario government should be committed to a strategy that is community-driven, which incorporates all facets of the community including municipalities, non-profits, PSE institutions, regional groups, and school boards.

Ontario can make real improvements in student access and persistence in PSE. The provincial government should recognize the benefits of an access strategy, including early outreach programs that facilitate access and funding programs that enable underrepresented groups to better participate in PSE. A comprehensive, holistic early outreach strategy can make Ontario a progressive leader in ensuring all students have the opportunity to benefit from higher education.

¹ Underrepresented students include: Aboriginal, rural and northern, low-income, and first generation (students whose parents did not attend post-secondary education).

Introduction

While Ontario has one of the highest post-secondary education (PSE) participation rates in the world, students from a number of identifiable groups remain underrepresented due to a variety of financial, social, academic, physical, geographic, motivational, and informational barriers. These groups traditionally include low-income students, Aboriginal students, first generation students, and rural and northern students, among others.

Within the next 10 years, it is estimated that 70% of jobs will require some form of PSE.² Consequently, access to PSE is a crucial issue, both from the perspective of increasing human capital to fulfill the needs of the economy, but also from the standpoint of creating a more equitable society where all youth have the opportunity to benefit from higher education. There are a number of indicators that suggest a university education pays considerable dividends for individuals and their communities. Based on the 2006 census, earnings for university graduates are between 40 and 50 per cent higher than high school graduates, and this advantage has been growing steadily.³ For society at large, there are few investments with a higher rate of return than post-secondary education. Canadians holding a university degree make up 22% of the population, yet pay 41% of the income tax, and receive only 14% of government spending.⁴ In addition, university graduates are more likely to volunteer in their communities, while having lower unemployment and crime rates.⁵

In recognition of the importance of improving access to PSE for underrepresented groups, the Ontario government has invested over \$100 million since 2007-08 through the Access to Opportunities Strategy (AOS). AOS focuses on increasing access for Aboriginal students, Francophone students, first-generation students, Crown Wards, and students with disabilities. The AOS funds bursaries for these targeted groups, e-learning centres, and a variety of one-off access and retention programs, but without an integrated plan or the full range of support that is required for effective outreach to all groups. As a result, even with unprecedented enrolment growth in Ontario universities and college, participation gaps for these and other underrepresented groups have not narrowed and, in some cases, have even widened.⁶

The challenge in closing these participation gaps stems from the complex set of barriers that many students from underrepresented groups face. For high school graduates that did not advance to PSE, the most frequently cited barrier is financial considerations, including a lack of sufficient funds, debt aversion, and the cost of moving away from home.⁷ Furthermore, Canadians tend to overestimate the cost and underestimate the financial benefits of a university education, and this perception is worse among low-income earners. High school students and their parents expect the availability of financial assistance to be greater and have a poor understanding of financial aid programs.⁸ Some of the issues discussed above are actually informational barriers, demonstrating that non-financial barriers are increasingly being identified as equally important obstacles to accessing PSE. Non-financial factors that influence PSE accessibility include academic preparation, student and parent aspirations, misconceptions and access to information about PSE and career pathways, and the availability of role models.⁹ To further complicate matters, financial and non-financial barriers frequently overlap, particularly among low-income, first-generation and Aboriginal

² Bob Rae, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*. (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2005).

³ Torben Drewes, *Postsecondary Education and the Labour Market in Ontario* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁴ Joseph Berger, Anne Motte, and Andrew Parkin, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009).

⁵ Statistics Canada "Impact of Education on Civic Engagement in Rural and Urban Canada" *The Daily*. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2006).

⁶ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Third Annual Review and Research Plan* (Toronto: HEQCO, 2010).

⁷ Joseph Berger and Anne Motte, "Mind the Access Gap: Breaking Down Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *Policy Options* (Montreal, 2007).

⁸ Richard Mueller, *Access and Persistence from Low-Income Backgrounds in Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Review of the Literature* (Toronto: A MESA Project Research Paper, 2007).

⁹ *Ibid.*

students.¹⁰ For example, Aboriginal youth are more likely to be both first generation students and from rural or northern communities, meaning these students consequently face multiple barriers in their ability to access PSE.¹¹

Since students from underrepresented groups face complex barriers in accessing PSE, an effective access strategy needs to make a coordinated effort to simultaneously address multiple barriers, including financial, informational, motivational and academic barriers. In order to be successful, an access strategy should begin at the elementary school level and should provide information on pathways available, followed by the appropriate supports at the high school and post-secondary levels to help students succeed in the pathway they choose. Early outreach is the active pursuit and engagement of youth in a dialogue about education, its purposes and its benefits, so that each student can make informed decisions about post-secondary education. The term 'early outreach' has often been used by policy designers and is derived from the awareness that most youth decide upon their educational pathways at an early age.

Early outreach is a community-driven concept. In addition to targeting students who are underrepresented, the aim of this paper is to address the different channels through which students obtain their information. Early outreach programs need to focus on reaching out to parents, families, school boards, and the wider community. The term 'community' has two different meanings. In relation to the student, 'community' refers to the support system surrounding students, from guidance counsellors to teachers and parents, that influence a student's decision making process regarding educational pathways. Alternatively, 'community' refers to the broader community including, but not limited to, not-for-profits, businesses (especially those that use skilled labour and attract apprentices to other associations), and community-driven programs. The most effective outreach strategies have been found to be those that start early, are based in the community, and combine a variety of outreach techniques.¹²

Considerable attention has been paid over the last decade to researching who is not attending post-secondary education, why they are not attending and, more recently, how to increase their participation. Students argue that it is now time for the Ontario government to devise a truly holistic access strategy and invest further in proven access and early outreach programs.

Any recommendations that this paper proposes are a starting point. A true access strategy must maintain an ongoing discussion around future pathways with students, their parents, schools, and communities. How a person chooses his or her future – and the elements that influence that decision – are complex and can likely never be fully understood. This paper is an attempt to identify some of the guiding principles that should influence the development of this access strategy, concerns with existing programs and the current mentality of early outreach, and a vision for what a comprehensive strategy should look like. This is not an implantation plan, but rather a series of values, possible program models and characteristics that should inform policy makers and hopefully enable more students to reach higher.

¹⁰ Joseph Berger and Anne Motte, "Mind the Access Gap: Breaking Down Barriers to Post-Secondary Education," *Policy Options* (Montreal, 2007).

¹¹ R. Finnie, *Underrepresented Groups in Post-Secondary Education in Ontario – Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*, (Toronto: HEQCO, forthcoming 2010).

¹² Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003).

Principles

The creation of a comprehensive and holistic access strategy in Ontario should be shaped by the following principles.

Principle One: All willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's system of post-secondary education.

While participation in post-secondary education has been increasing over the last decade, participation rates of groups that are traditionally underrepresented have not followed this trend.¹³ In fact, participation gaps in Ontario are greater than the national average,¹⁴ and participation gaps between the top income quartile and lowest income quartile in Ontario have been increasing since 2003.¹⁵ OUSA recognizes the individual and societal advantage of higher education from both an economic and social perspective. In economic terms, the oft-quoted statistic is that by 2020, 70% of jobs will require some form of post-secondary education or training.¹⁶ With a declining birth rate and the demographic pressures of an aging and retiring workforce, Canada will be hard pressed to maintain the current levels of knowledge-based labour supply.¹⁷ To ensure the workforce meets the needs of the economy, Ontario will need to increase participation in PSE among traditionally underrepresented groups. Aside from the notion that all students should have an equal opportunity to access higher education, the economic need to engage underrepresented groups in PSE is clear.¹⁸

From a social perspective, many students from underrepresented groups face barriers related to socio-economic status, systemic discrimination, and other obstacles that, without proper social interventions, will continue to grow and disadvantage already marginalized groups. The societal benefits of a highly educated population serve to relieve the poverty cycle, reduce crime rates, and increase civic participation and engagement with social affairs.¹⁹ Moreover, there is an increasing rate of return on an educated population: students whose parents attended PSE are twice as likely to attend university as students whose parents obtained a high school diploma or less.²⁰

Principle Two: A comprehensive strategy must be devised that addresses all barriers and ensures access to post-secondary education for all willing and qualified students.

The literature on access indicates that tailored, holistic outreach programs with multiple components of student support are most effective, as they address the specific needs of the community and the full combination of barriers that students from underrepresented groups face.²¹ In the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation's *Institutional Strategy and Practice 2008*,²² it is advised that post-secondary education be viewed as a continuum of learning: the natural extension of secondary school. Many studies show that informational programs regarding higher education that start early and are coordinated through both elementary and secondary school are the most effective.²³ This holistic view of education is more important for under-represented groups such as first-generation students who are raised in an environment that has not experienced higher education.

¹³ Andrea Rounce, *Access to post-secondary education: does class still matter?* (Saskatoon: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2004).

¹⁴ Ross Finnie, *Underrepresented Groups in Post-Secondary Education in Ontario – Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*, (Toronto: HEQCO, forthcoming 2010).

¹⁵ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Third Annual Review and Research Plan*. (Toronto: HEQCO, 2010).

¹⁶ Ontario Ministry of Finance, "Post-secondary Education," *2010 Ontario Budget* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010).

¹⁷ Thomas Courchene, *Citistates and the State of Cities: Political-Economy and Fiscal-Federalism Dimensions* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2005).

¹⁸ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Immigrant Study: Caribbean students least likely to pursue higher education* (Toronto, 2010).

¹⁹ TD Economics, *Investing in higher education delivers a stellar rate of return*, (Toronto: TD Economics, 2004).

²⁰ Ross Finnie, *Underrepresented Groups in Post-Secondary Education in Ontario – Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*, (Toronto: HEQCO, forthcoming 2010).

²¹ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003).

The authors of *Institutional Strategy and Practice 2008* are critical of the current fragmented approach to improving access to PSE. They argue that not only is such an approach limited, but it can result in conflicting agendas and be more difficult to evaluate effectiveness.²⁴ For instance, a robust financial assistance program is vital to overcoming financial barriers; however, it should be viewed as one piece of the larger access issue rather than a competing priority.

Principle Three: An access strategy should start during primary education, continue through the completion of post-secondary education, and address multiple barriers preventing equal participation, including, but not limited to financial, informational, motivational and academic factors.

Studies show that a significant number of students choose their post-secondary pathway by the age of nine, and by age 15 almost 75% of youth have decided on their post-secondary direction.²⁵ Given that decisions about PSE are made early, it is imperative that an access strategy start early as well. Many studies show that informational programs regarding higher education that start early and are coordinated through both elementary and secondary school are the most effective.²⁶ Additionally, information dissemination should address a wide range of barriers, including motivational, informational and academic barriers, in addition to providing information on financial aid. It is also important to recognize that barriers are not always mutually exclusive or separable, and that results are most likely to be seen if multiple barriers are tackled simultaneously.

Principle Four: An access strategy should support students in choosing the post-secondary pathway that best suits their competency, skills, and interests.

It is important to recognize that there are many pathways to higher education and that an implied 'hierarchy' of pathways could adversely affect a student's decision making process. Given that PSE has become an expectation for many, at least in the context of economic competitiveness, students should be given the resources, information and support to make decisions that make the most sense for them.

Ontario has a past history of favouring university over college and professional trades, a history that is being challenged and should continue to be questioned. It is imperative that a comprehensive access strategy provide neutral, fact-based information to illustrate possible career paths, and the benefits of various PSE pathways to university, college and the skilled trades. Across Canada there is a growing concern that the labour market will not be ready to accommodate for changes in demographics, especially in the areas of the skilled trades.²⁷ Consequently, it is important that students be provided with adequate, unbiased information on all post-secondary destinations.

Principle Five: The provincial government should play the leading role in creating and funding an access strategy and subsequent programs.

Addressing access to post-secondary education is the primary responsibility of the provincial government. In order to fully address access, the concept must be re-defined. Current discussions of access often revolve around student financial assistance at the post-secondary level. While financial aid is a critical component of an access strategy, this approach does not address the serious questions about access that start much earlier in a student's academic

²⁴ Alan Wright, Mariane Frenay, Marie-Jeanne Monette, Bihter Tomen, Louise Sauvé, Clayton Smith, Neil Gold, Don Houston, Jackie Robinson, Norman Rowen, Fran Anderson, Kenton Lewis, Brenda Pipitone, Geri Salinitri, and Bev Hamilton, *Institutional Strategy and Practice: Increasing the Odds of Access and Success at the Post-Secondary Level for Under-Represented Students*, (Montreal, Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2008).

²⁵ Council of Ontario Universities, *Applicant Survey Highlights*, (Toronto: COU, 2003).

²⁶ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003)

²⁷ Elgin Middlesex Oxford Local Training Board, *Trends, opportunity and priorities workforce development in Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford*, (Elgin, 2006).

career. In addition to student financial assistance at the post-secondary level, an access strategy must extend into elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary institutions and communities. Through the inclusion of multiple actors that address student's needs early on, an effective access strategy can tackle the many non-financial obstacles that might prevent underrepresented groups from enrolling in PSE including informational, motivational and academic barriers. The provincial government has the resources, community links, and mandate to deal with all components of access at an earlier stage.

Principle Six: To be successful, early outreach programs should be long-term, supported by various provincial government ministries, and coordinated strategically within the municipalities and local communities, with the inclusion of existing programs.

Research demonstrates that the more community support there is committed to early outreach projects and programs, the more effective they will be.²⁸ In developing solutions that address local concerns, it is important that an access model be flexible, so it can adjust to appropriately fit community needs. An example of such a program is the Pathways to Education program in Toronto's Regent Park, which has successfully integrated approaches that acknowledge the interconnectivity of poverty, health, and education. In working to develop such programs, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should look to engage the local school boards, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community & Social Services and the Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration through funding commitments and the leveraging of resources and community and ministerial links. In addition, long-term support for access programs provides stability and consistency for students, while enabling the program to grow and change in response to community input.

Concerns

Concern One: Students from underrepresented groups experience significant barriers in accessing post-secondary education.

There are a number of groups that experience barriers in access to post-secondary education. OUSA has identified six major groups with lower participation rates in PSE: Aboriginal, low-income, rural and northern, first-generation, students with dependants, and students with disabilities. Since the latter two groups face distinct barriers and require unique support, OUSA has developed individual policies addressing their specific access concerns.²⁹ As a result this policy paper primarily focuses on the remaining underrepresented groups and does not exhaustively address each group's specialized needs.

Aboriginal students:

Participation rates for Aboriginal students within Canada's post-secondary education system have increased since the early 1990s. However, Aboriginal students are still far less likely to move on to higher education when compared to non-Aboriginal students. The high school drop-out rate for Aboriginal students is double the national average, and non-Aboriginal Canadians are five-times more likely to hold a university degree than Aboriginal individuals.³⁰ The importance of accessibility and participation for these students will only grow in the next three to four years, when the Aboriginal 20 to 24 age group is expected to peak.³¹

²⁸ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, & Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003).

²⁹ For further information see OUSA's policy papers on students with disabilities and students with dependants, available at www.ousa.ca.

³⁰ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, *Post-Secondary Student Access and Retention Strategies: Literature Review*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, June 2009).

³¹ David Holmes, *Embracing Differences: Post-secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2005).

There are a number of factors that contribute to lower participation rates for Aboriginal students. In 2005, the median income of First Nations people (\$14,517)³² was lower than the annual cost of attending university away from home, which is estimated to be in excess of \$20,000.³³ At the same time, the availability of band-administered funding under the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' Post-Secondary Education Funding Program for First Nations has declined, and these funds are unavailable to Métis and non-status Aboriginal students.³⁴

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that inadequate financial resources and the need to work have been cited by Aboriginal students as the primary reasons for the inability to complete post-secondary studies, so much so that one in three Aboriginal Canadians cited financial difficulties as a reason for not completing their schooling.³⁵ Moreover, studies have shown that Aboriginal students have greater price sensitivity to increases in the costs of PSE, and are more adverse to entering debt to finance their education.³⁶

Aboriginal students also face a number of non-financial barriers in accessing and persisting through PSE. Family responsibilities were cited as another major reason for the inability to complete their post-secondary accreditation.³⁷ Aboriginal youth from remote and rural areas often must travel great distances to pursue post-secondary studies. Some studies have found that Aboriginal post-secondary students experience strong anxiety related to feeling out of place in the institutional culture of university, and also being torn between the university environment and their commitment to their families and home communities.³⁸ A lack of employment opportunities that require a post-secondary accreditation in home communities may also serve as a motivational disincentive for Aboriginal youth to pursue PSE. Aboriginal students who complete higher education may choose to remain in urban areas where their earning power is significantly enhanced, particularly if they have high levels of student debt. This migration presents a serious problem for communities that are struggling to stimulate economic development while maintaining the integrity of their culture, and speaks to the broader structural challenges that many Aboriginal communities face.

Increased post-secondary accreditation could prove to be a significant factor in the closing of the average income gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal earners. In 2001 the average household income was 51% higher where the primary income earner had a university degree when compared to households where the primary income earner had at most a high school diploma.³⁹ Furthermore, the average household income of Aboriginal families is 65% of the average Ontarian household.⁴⁰ There is a clear indication that successful completion of post-secondary education could help close the disparity in average income levels. Beyond strict economics, PSE could also play a role in reducing the social and political marginalization of Aboriginal communities.

Rural and northern students:

Students from rural and northern parts of the province are another group that is underrepresented in the post secondary education system. In Ontario, there are 20 universities, 16 of which are concentrated in Ontario's largely urban southern areas. For the Ontarians who live in rural or northern regions, there are additional challenges in

³² Linda Gionet, *First Nations people: Selected findings of the 2006 Census* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2009).

³³ Craig Alexander and Shahrzad Mobasher Fard, *The Future Cost of a University Degree* (Toronto: TD Bank Financial Group, 2009).

³⁴ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, *Post-Secondary Student Access and Retention Strategies: Literature Review*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, June 2009).

³⁵ Statistics Canada, "Commonly reported reasons for not completing post-secondary schooling by sex, Aboriginal identity non-reserve population aged 25 to 64, Canada, 2001." *Aboriginal Peoples Survey* (Ottawa, 2001).

³⁶ Boris Palameta and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *Willingness to Pay for Postsecondary Education among Underrepresented Groups*, (Toronto: Higher Education and Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer, *First Generation Postsecondary Education Students*, (Toronto, A MESA Project L-SLIS Research Brief, 2010).

³⁹ Statistics Canada "Household Income Groups (24) in Constant (2000) Dollars and Selected Demographic Educational, Cultural and Labour Force Characteristics of Primary Household Maintainer (87) for Private Households, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995," *2001 Census* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

pursuing higher level education. Average incomes in rural areas tend to be lower, yet students from rural and northern areas face increased costs associated with transportation and living away from home. A 2002 study found that students living in excess of 80 kilometres from a post-secondary institution were 58% less likely to enrol in PSE than students who live within 40 kilometres of an institution.⁴¹ Most of this gap is in university participation: only 28% of rural and northern youth enrol in university, compared with 43% of all youth.⁴²

In addition to the increased costs of attending higher education away from home, there are informational and motivational barriers facing youth from rural and northern communities. Students from rural and northern areas may have fewer informational resources on PSE available to them and have few peers pursuing higher education. Rural students are also more likely to be the first in their family to attend higher education and have less information about post-secondary pathways. Many rural and northern students can experience feelings of being out of place and familial isolation when attending universities in urban areas and, although extensive research on the subject has yet to occur, this can be a significant barrier when considering higher education.⁴³

In recognition of the challenges facing rural and northern youth in accessing PSE, many online resources have recently been targeted to these students. Contact North, founded in 1986 and serving about 8,000 learners each year, is primarily funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and University, and provides online resources to rural and northern students.⁴⁴ However, online resources and programs only address some of the challenges facing rural and northern students and are seen by many as an incomplete solution. Moreover, many small northern communities have less access to broadband internet and information technology resources.⁴⁵

There are degrees of barriers for rural and northern students. The student living in a rural community that is just outside an urban centre faces fewer barriers than the student living in a rural, northern and remote community. Given these differences, the access strategy for rural and northern students must be sensitive to differences in circumstances, in order to be responsive to differing needs.

Students from low-income backgrounds:

Often Aboriginal and rural and northern students are also challenged by the additional systemic barrier of being from low-income households. A Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario report found that 80% of students aged 20 to 24 from families earning over \$100,000 access higher education, whereas only 60% of students from families earning less than \$25,000 pursue a higher education.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the report found that this gap has been growing since 2003. Low income students tend to be more sensitive to price increases in PSE, and have greater anxiety about their ability to repay loans when they graduate.⁴⁷ A study from the Canadian Policy Research Networks concludes that while financial considerations play a role in determining access, parental education and expectations along with geography have a strong impact on decision-making related to educational pathways.⁴⁸ In an example of the overlap between financial and informational barriers, Canadians from low-income families are more likely to overestimate the cost of undergraduate university tuition and underestimate the salary benefits of a university degree.⁴⁹ To illustrate

⁴¹ Marc Frenette, *Too Far to Go On? Distance to School and University Participation*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2002).

⁴² Danielle Shaienks, Tomasz Gluszynski and Justin Bayard. *Postsecondary Education Participation and Dropping Out: Differences across University, College and Other Types of Postsecondary Institutions*, (Ottawa: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics, 2008).

⁴³ Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer, *First Generation Postsecondary Education Students*, (Toronto, A MESA Project L-SLIS Research Brief, 2010).

⁴⁴ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Improving Access to Education in the North", *Newsroom*, (Toronto, Government of Ontario, 2010).

⁴⁵ Grant Sciadas, "Unveiling the Digital Divide", *Connectedness Series* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2002).

⁴⁶ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Third Annual Review and Research Plan*, (Toronto: HEQCO, 2010).

⁴⁷ Boris Palameta and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *Willingness to Pay for Postsecondary Education among Underrepresented Groups*, (Toronto: Higher Education and Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁴⁸ Patrice De Broucker and Katherine Mortimer, *Getting There and Staying There: Low-income Students and Post-Secondary Education* (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, March 2005).

⁴⁹ Alex Usher, *A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing: How Perceptions of Costs and Benefits Affect Access to Education* (Toronto: Educational Policy Institute, July 2005).

this point, it has been noted that while the average annual income differential between high school and university graduates is \$27,191, Canadians in general underestimate the differential, with low-income Canadians having the greatest misconceptions, on average estimating the salary difference to be only \$4,885. Students from low-income backgrounds also tend to work more hours outside of school and perform more poorly on standardized tests, factors which can influence ability to access PSE.⁵⁰ According to Usher and Junor in the *Price of Knowledge*, “low-income students, on average, suffer from a family environment that is unsupportive of education – a by-product of economic insecurity.”⁵¹

First-generation students:

A fairly new term in higher education, first-generation students are generally understood as students whose parents' highest level of education is high school or less.⁵² Parental education, when controlling for other factors, has a very strong impact on university and college participation. Forty-one per cent of students whose parents went to university attended university. In contrast, 20% of students whose parents have only a high school education went to university.⁵³ Family background and level of educational attainment of parents continue to affect students' decision to attend post-secondary education, even among students who appear to be equally qualified and motivated.⁵⁴ Studies show that first generation students tend to have less knowledge about application processes and financial aid, be less prepared academically, have less familial guidance, and require more financial assistance.⁵⁵ It should be noted that the 'first-generation' effect is a university phenomenon and, in fact, the participation of first-generation students at college outpaces non-first-generational students.⁵⁶

Concern Two: Students from underrepresented groups are often at risk of lower levels of academic achievement in primary and secondary school.
--

While more research needs to be conducted on the impact of systemic barriers and academic achievement, existing studies suggest that low-income youth have lower measured achievement during high school, evidenced by lower overall grade averages and poorer scores on standardized reading, mathematics and sciences tests.⁵⁷ Several factors unrelated to innate ability contribute to these results, including motivational barriers, such as friends who do not intend to pursue higher education and parents who do not expect their children to attend PSE, and structural barriers, like attending lower quality schools.⁵⁸ Parental attitudes towards PSE may be the most salient barrier for first generation students, as these parents have limited experience with PSE that may contribute to a lack of support in the home environment for strong academic achievement.

Lower levels of academic achievement often lead students to self-select themselves out of the academic credits needed to continue on the pathway to university or college.⁵⁹ Indeed, there is a concern that guidance counsellors

⁵⁰ Richard E. Mueller, “Access and Persistence of Students from Low-Income Backgrounds in Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Review of the Literature”, *A MESA Project Research Paper*, (Toronto: Educational Policy Institute, 2008).

⁵¹ Alex Usher and Sean Junor, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004).

⁵² Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003), pp. 23.

⁵³ Mylene Lamber, Klarka Zeman, Mary Allen and Patrick Bussiere, *Who pursues post-secondary education, who leaves and why: Results from the Youth in Transition Survey* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2004).

⁵⁴ Finnie, Ross, Lascelles, Eric & Arthur Sweetman, *Who goes? The direct and indirect effect of family background on access to post-secondary education* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2004).

⁵⁵ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, *Access to Opportunity First Generation Initiative: Evaluation of Selected Projects*, (Toronto, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, September 2009).

⁵⁶ Ross Finnie, *Underrepresented Groups in Post-Secondary Education in Ontario – Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*, (Toronto: HEQCO, forthcoming 2010).

⁵⁷ Marc Frenette, *Why Are Youth from Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences, and Financial Constraints*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

⁵⁸ Marc Frenette, *Why Are Youth from Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences, and Financial Constraints*, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

⁵⁹ Alex Usher and Sean Junor, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004).

and academic advisors may reinforce this self-selection, steering low-income students away from the more rigorous courses required for university admittance. Further contributing to lower academic achievement is the fact that many students from lower income families are required to take on part-time employment while they are in high school in order to help support their families. Research indicates that working more than 20 hours per week in the last year of high school reduces university participation, likely due to a corresponding reduction in study time.⁶⁰

Concern Three: The approach to increasing access for underrepresented groups has thus far been unstable, piecemeal, and fragmented, consisting of multiple uncoordinated strategies.

While the Ontario government has made efforts to improve access to PSE through investment in the Access to Opportunities Strategy (AOS), including targeted bursaries, online learning centres, and other programs, the government's approach to access has been fragmented and has not adequately addressed the multiple barriers facing underrepresented students in accessing PSE and persisting in their studies.

As the appendix at the end of this paper shows, there are a variety of university, college, community, and governmental outreach programs already in place in Ontario. These programs embody different types of outreach, from recruitment and transition programs to long-term mentoring partnerships, and have distinct goals, objectives, and target demographics. Reports highlight the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to outreach: an approach that is capable of addressing multiple barriers to PSE simultaneously. Moreover, outreach programs that involve long-term engagement of youth, and therefore require long-term funding commitments, are most successful in increasing PSE participation rates among underrepresented groups.⁶¹ The impact of our current piecemeal approach is limited, revealing a need to work more effectively at primary and secondary levels.⁶²

Concern Four: There is inadequate guidance available to students in secondary school, and some guidance counsellors may be inadvertently affecting the perceptions of students regarding the accessibility and attainability of post-secondary pathways.

Evidence suggests that guidance counsellors are not having a positive impact and potentially no impact at all on students seeking higher education. A report by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation found that only a minority of participants actually interacted with their guidance counsellor.⁶³ The study concluded that, despite the presence of guidance counsellors, many high school students felt anxious and unprepared to make decisions regarding their post-secondary options.⁶⁴ This problem is compounded by the fact that students and counsellors have very different concepts of 'preparedness.' A study conducted by the McGraw-Hill Foundation indicated that while counsellors consider college eligibility as a measure of student success, students were more concerned with the ability to meet the academic standards of college once they arrived.⁶⁵

Additionally, there have been concerns raised that high schools have been guiding students into preconceived paths of best-fit as opposed to individually appropriate pathways. Concerns indicate that some guidance programs may be streaming students away from the more rigorous high school courses, whereas others have felt that some high schools are guiding more students towards university.

⁶⁰ Richard E. Mueller, "Access and Persistence of Students from Low-Income Backgrounds in Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Review of the Literature", *A MESA Project Research Paper*, (Toronto: Educational Policy Institute, 2008).

⁶¹ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*, (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, "Fear of the unknown Due to a lack of information, many Canadian youth have anxieties about post-secondary education", *CAP Journal*, (Montreal: CMSF, 2009).

⁶⁴ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, "Fear of the unknown Due to a lack of information, many Canadian youth have anxieties about post-secondary education", *CAP Journal*, (Montreal: CMSF, 2009).

⁶⁵ McGraw-Hill Education, "McGraw-Hill Survey Provides Insight Into U.S. College and Career Readiness Issues," *PR Newswire*.

Finally, it has been suggested that ineffective counselling on post-secondary education matters may be a result of counsellors spending the majority of their time helping students with more immediate and personal issues regarding drugs, gangs, health, and safety, especially in areas where youth face a wider array of personal challenges.

Concern Five: There is insufficient information available to students, families and communities about education pathways, the costs and benefits of higher education, and available student financial aid.

As noted above, many students and families overestimate the cost and underestimate the benefit of attending university. Additionally, career and pathway planning can be overwhelming for youth when making decisions on which high school courses and post-secondary credentials to pursue. This can be particularly challenging for those without familial support and understanding.

Furthermore, the Canadian student financial assistance system is exceedingly complex composed of government loans from the federal and provincial governments, tax credits, institutional scholarships, government grants and savings incentives. The Canadian Student Survey illustrated that over 70% of students do not have sufficient knowledge about financial aid⁶⁶. While most students cited family and friends as their primary sources on financial aid information, it was found that students who indicated guidance counsellors as their information source performed no better on the survey than students that did not. A lack of understanding of the financial aid system and an impression that the availability of financial resources is lacking creates perceived financial barriers, particularly among low-income students.

Concern Six: Students are not adequately supported during transition periods, and individuals who wish to transition to university from the workplace or another post-secondary institution often face unnecessary barriers to entry.

A significant number of Ontario students switch pathways at some point during their education or careers.⁶⁷ Without fully developed transfer mechanisms, many qualified students are unable to access their pathway of choice because they do not have the required prerequisites. This is particularly problematic in light of the fact that many underrepresented groups have college participation rates comparable to the population at large, but lag behind in accessing university. Without improved transfer pathways between college and university, and vice-versa, these students will be unable to take full advantage of Ontario's PSE system. Current credit transfer in Ontario functions largely on an ad-hoc basis, with little consistency or predictability.

In addition, bridging programs can be an important means of giving students who lack the prerequisites to enter university or college an opportunity to qualify for entry, and provide them with a foundational experience involving coursework in a university or college environment. However, Ontario lags behind many jurisdictions in the implementation of bridging programs for under-qualified students or individuals looking to transfer from the workplace to an educational institution.

Concern Seven: Some programs that identify themselves as early outreach programs do not adequately address access barriers for underrepresented students, but instead are a mix of recruitment and institutional initiatives.

There is a place in the post-secondary education sector for programs that center on recruitment and institutional initiatives such as day camps and campus tours. However, without a holistic and system-wide approach to early outreach that promotes access, the funding intended for early outreach has, in the past, been misappropriated for general recruitment initiatives. A holistic strategy is needed in order to ensure proper funding allocation and proper

⁶⁶ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, *What Students Want: Results of the Ontario Student Survey*, (Toronto: OUSA, 2010).

⁶⁷ Ross Finnie, *Moving Through, Moving On* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2009).

support for access programs. Essentially, individual institutions have tailored their programs to drive their recruitment agenda, rather than provide outreach targeting the students that need it most. Without a system-wide vision equipped with program success indicators and measurable figures, program quality will continue to be inconsistent.

Concern Eight: Students from underrepresented groups often experience barriers to accessing appropriate social and academic supports once they do attend post-secondary institutions.

The transition from high school to university is a significant change for all students. For students from underrepresented groups, the transition to social and academic life at university can be even more challenging. The barriers faced by many underrepresented students when in elementary and high school do not disappear upon entering PSE, and often intensify when surroundings and support systems have altered or disappeared altogether.

While some support programs do exist, they are often not adequately funded to support the level of student need. For example, the University of Western Ontario provides personal counselling services for students to address personal concerns and to help facilitate the transition from high school to university and other social needs.⁶⁸ Despite the provision of these services, adequate funding is not available, which has meant up to three-month waiting times for students to meet with a counsellor.⁶⁹

Concern Nine: Research on early outreach program success is limited and access strategies could be improved with adequate research and follow-through of the recommendations provided in the research.

It is important that adequate research is conducted on early outreach strategies and programs. While the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario in 2005 created a significant increase in research into Ontario PSE and the issue of access for underrepresented groups, further research is still needed.

In addition, government programs geared at increasing underrepresented groups' access to higher education could benefit from a more structured post-implementation review. Despite the hiring of an additional 1,600 teachers in 2006 to supplement student success teams in high schools, an annual report by People for Education found that current counselling does not properly prepare students for educational pathways.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in spring 2010, the Ontario government ceased funding dozens of first-generation access programs, in favour of a call out for improved retention strategies, in part due to an external evaluation of the programs which found there was not enough research to measure the programs' success.⁷¹ However, a recent study has found that first-generation students are at no greater risk at leaving post-secondary education than non-first-generation students, reducing the need for retention strategies.⁷² This suggests that there is still a great need for further research into post-secondary education issues, and research into best practices should inform the implementation of a comprehensive, holistic access strategy.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: The provincial government must implement a comprehensive access strategy to foster increased participation of underrepresented groups in all types of post-secondary education.

⁶⁸ Personal Counselling, Student Development Centre website, accessed online at <http://www.uwo.ca/sdc>.

⁶⁹ Cigdem Ilhan, "Stressful shortage – students face long wait for counselling services," *The Gazette*, (Montreal: October 2006).

⁷⁰ People for Education, *The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools* (Toronto: People for Education, 2006).

⁷¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Final Report: Access to Opportunity First Generation Initiative Evaluation of Selected Projects* (Toronto: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2009).

⁷² Ross Finnie, Stephen Childs and Andrew Wismer, "First Generation Post-Secondary Education Students," *A MESA Project L-SLIS Research Brief*. (Toronto: Canadian Education Project, 2010).

There is a clear need for a holistic access strategy that starts early in a student's life and continues on through their elementary, secondary, and finally, post-secondary academic life. If the government expects to reach its goal of at least 70% participation in higher education, it must actively assist students from underrepresented groups in overcoming financial, informational, motivational, geographic, physical, social, structural and academic barriers. These initiatives must be multi-faceted and multi-focused, and can be delivered through a variety of approaches. Packaging initiatives so that programs address multiple barriers simultaneously is the most effective way of increasing PSE participation.⁷³

A comprehensive outreach strategy needs to stem from the government, in conjunction with communities, institutions, non-profits, and other stakeholders. A degree of freedom should be afforded to individual communities and institutions when it comes to designing outreach programs. Community organizations have firsthand knowledge of the challenges their youth face and how best to overcome them. Institutions are well positioned to find and address the barriers underrepresented groups face when attending their institution. The provincial government's role should be in coordinating, funding, and evaluating these programs.

A comprehensive access strategy should include the following components:

1. Early Outreach Programs

Community- and school-based early outreach initiatives have shown recent success in increasing participation rates among many of these underrepresented groups. Early outreach programs vary in scope, but they tend to take a holistic approach, often providing a combination of academic support, pathways counselling and financial aid, through the creation of long-term relationships. OUSA believes the Ontario government must adequately fund and support community-based early outreach initiatives across the province, which can provide assistance and resources to students, families, and communities in their preparation and pursuit of higher education.

2. Primary and Secondary School Support

i. Counselling and Student Success Teams

A more effective guidance counsellor and student success network is needed within Ontario high schools. It is important that student success teams – guidance counsellors, teachers, and principals – are equipped with correct financial aid information and sufficient institution-specific information to adequately guide every student. Within the guidance program, the provincial government must ensure that no biases or omissions of information systemically influence students' decisions regarding PSE.

Given that youth in some areas face greater challenges and place higher demand on guidance programs, it is recommended that guidance counsellors be allocated to schools through a needs-based approach, rather than solely based on the number of students. In addition, the provincial government should work in cooperation with local school boards to develop an appropriate strategy to disseminate accurate information to parents, including details about financial aid and the different pathways to PSE available to students.

ii. Curriculum to improve pathway planning and financial aid literacy

For a system-wide access strategy to work, it is important that accurate information is made available to youth and other groups that influence students' PSE decisions, including parents and guidance counsellors. Through the Ministry of Education, curriculum should be introduced at the high-school level that provides training on personal financial management, the benefits of university, college, and the skilled trades, and specific details on the financial

⁷³ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond, and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2003)

aid available to students pursuing each of these PSE pathways. Secondary schools in British Columbia have piloted one such project that included an interactive CD and training programs, and it has shown preliminary results at improving students' knowledge of financial aid and post-secondary options.⁷⁴ Additionally, the high school curriculum should also be altered to integrate relevant information about various career choices and opportunities into all courses.

iii. Enrichment programs for underrepresented groups

In addition to equipping underrepresented youth with the information they need to perceive PSE as a beneficial and achievable pathway, it is important to provide students with enrichment programs. These programs can help students succeed in PSE by providing them with exposure to post secondary institutions and different career paths from a young age. Early credit and dual credit opportunities offer university or college level courses to high school students. The objective is to reduce the perceived barriers among underrepresented groups. By taking a post-secondary class at an early age, students gain familiarity with the campus setting and an awareness that they can succeed within the academic standards of post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, students who participate in early and/or dual credit programs often report that they are more motivated than their peers to achieve the academic requirements necessary for post-secondary entry.⁷⁵ Similar to early credit and dual credit programs, high school co-op programs enable a student to test out the skills they learn in school in a real work environment. Co-op programs show students that a career path is obtainable and motivate students to pursue PSE pathways that suit their long-term career interests.

3. Pathway Mobility

For an access strategy to truly serve students, it is imperative that there is fluid mobility between different pathways, including between work, training, college and university. This is important because students from many underrepresented groups in PSE enrol in college at similar rates as their peers, but lag behind in accessing university. Consequently, if pathway mobility between college and university for qualified students were improved, this mechanism could be of critical importance in raising university participation rates in underrepresented groups. Improved pathway mobility between university and college could be achieved through credit transfer programs and a standardized recognition of academic merits across institutions.

Another way pathway mobility can be improved is through bridging programs. Bridging programs are designed for students who do not meet the requirements for entry into college or university. These programs differ in design, but they typically involve advanced academic support, reduced tuition, and often a chance to automatically enrol in the host institution upon completion of the program.

4. Online Access

For students who cannot easily attend PSE because of a variety of reasons like distance or a demanding work schedule, online education is an alternative way to improve access. Online learning holds great potential to reduce financial, social, physical and geographical barriers to access. Ontario already has a number of online learning consortia and Ontario's post-secondary institutions offer many online courses. However, the availability of full degrees is limited, and methods of expanding online learning opportunities, including through the recently announced Ontario Online Institute, should be examined.⁷⁶ In addition, it is important that Ontario's plan for online learning include full student support services for online learners, so these students have the assistance they need to succeed as students.

⁷⁴ Academica Group Inc., *Perspectives: Getting an Inside look at post-secondary education* (Toronto: British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2006).

⁷⁵ Jamie Harrison, "Stepping Up," *U of T Magazine*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, Winter 2006).

⁷⁶ OUSA has prepared a detailed submission *The Ontario Online Institute: Students' Vision for Opening Ontario's Classrooms* available at www.ousa.ca.

5. Student Financial Assistance

Cost aversion is still a major inhibitor for many first-generation and low-income students.⁷⁷ In a recent report by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, it is suggested that higher levels of targeted grants could encourage both low-income and first-generation students to participate in post-secondary education.⁷⁸ Some financial assistance in Ontario is targeted to students from underrepresented groups, including the bursaries for first-generation students and the Ontario Access Grant. However, Ontario continues to rank near the bottom of provinces on the percentage of financial assistance that is targeted and needs-based, and surveys have shown that students are generally unprepared to navigate the financial assistance system. Greater availability of loans and up-front, non-repayable grants would help to eliminate real and perceived barriers to accessing education.

6. Post-Secondary Student Supports

A comprehensive access strategy would not be complete if students merely entered post-secondary education and did not persist and succeed. Social and academic supports within post-secondary institutions are vital to student success and have been found to be positively correlated with retention and academic success.⁷⁹ The key pieces to the student support network that maximizes student success are diverse and wide ranging: academic advising, personal counselling, health services, orientation and transition programming, tutoring and writing assistance, career advising, and student mentorship are all vital.

Recommendation Two: Early outreach programs must be tailored to the unique needs of a community and coordinated to ensure that community plans effectively support the programs.

While the provincial government has the obligation to fund and provide the broad infrastructure for early outreach programs, higher success rates have been demonstrated by programs supported and administered through the local community.⁸⁰ Post-secondary education institutions, not-for-profit groups and school boards all have a vested interest in supporting improved higher educational outcomes for their youth.⁸¹ Working in a coordinated way with various Ministries – Ministry of Training, Colleges, and University, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services – at the local level will allow the programs to address many community needs at the same time.

However, it must also be recognized that different communities have varied capacity to create and support programs of this nature. The provincial government, through its Ministries, has an obligation to build and nourish capacity where it does not exist and create the infrastructure necessary to ensure the success of early outreach programs.

Recommendation Three: The government should look to the successful Pathways to Education model when exploring community-driven outreach programs and how its framework can be adapted to other areas in Ontario.

There has been success shown in programs that offer a combination of academic and informational support services, financial incentives, parental involvement activities, mentoring, and personal and social enrichment activities.⁸² All of

⁷⁷ Boris Palameta and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *Willingness to Pay for Postsecondary Education Among Underrepresented Groups*, (Toronto: Higher Education and Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁷⁸ Boris Palameta and Jean-Pierre Voyer, *Willingness to Pay for Postsecondary Education Among Underrepresented Groups*, (Toronto: Higher Education and Quality Council of Ontario, 2010).

⁷⁹ Kuh, George D., Jillian Kinzie, Jennifer A. Buckley, Brian K. Bridges, and John C. Hayek. "Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions and Recommendations." ASHE Higher Education Report 32.5 (2007).

⁸⁰ Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. 2003. *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States*. Montreal.

⁸¹ University of Toronto, "Appendix D: Access and Outreach Programs at the University of Toronto", in *The Choice for a Generation: Investing in Higher Education and Ontario's Future* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004).

⁸² Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond & Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003).

these methods are valid and programs should be designed with the purpose of combining some or many of these elements tailored in response to the specific needs of the target community.

The Pathways to Education model is based on four pillars including tutoring, mentoring, counselling, and financing. Participants receive immediate financing in the form of bus tickets and meal vouchers to encourage students to stay in school. In addition, students who advance through the program earn funds that can be put towards their post-secondary schooling.

The Pathways to Education location in Regent Park, Toronto, has experienced the most success, with a 65% reduction in absenteeism, a 75% decrease in dropout rates, and a 98% retention rate for participants.⁸³ The successes of Pathways to Education have been well noted by both the provincial and federal governments. OUSA commends the provincial government for its support of the Pathways program through its \$19 million commitment over the past four years.⁸⁴ Indeed, there is significant evidence that Pathways is a sound investment on the part of the government. In its 2007 assessment of the program, the Boston Consulting Group estimated the long-term benefit to society for every dollar invested in Pathways was \$12, and the cumulative lifetime benefit to society of a student enrolled in Pathways is \$400,000.⁸⁵

As a result of the considerable success of the Pathways program, OUSA recommends that the provincial government look to expand the program across Ontario and use its model as an outline when developing a holistic approach to early outreach.

Recommendation Four: Early outreach programs need to combine social and academic supports through a blend of mentoring, tutoring and other engagement activities to ensure academic success of students in early outreach programs.

Both social and academic supports are important in improving the success of underrepresented groups in accessing the PSE system. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, including through the support of peer mentors and the mentoring of post-secondary students and graduates. Oftentimes, lack of confidence, as a result of a number of life circumstances, can have an impact on students and their tendencies to “self-select” themselves out of post-secondary. Personal enrichment activities can help to build confidence and identify passions, interests and skills, thus helping to determine educational pathways.⁸⁶ For example, the Women in Skilled Trades & Technology Day at Humber College connects younger students to mentors who can serve as both informational resources and guides through various education pathways.⁸⁷ To help address concerns around lower levels of academic achievement for underrepresented groups, early outreach programs should also provide tutoring programs to support students. In particular, higher education institutions and local school boards have the ability to coordinate the development of programs to support students academically.

⁸³ Pathways to Education, *Pathways to Education Program Status Report* January 2009.

⁸⁴ Office of the Premier, *McGuinty Government Joins With United Way To Expand Successful Pathways To Education Program To More Communities*, (Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, November 2007).

⁸⁵ The Boston Consulting Group, *BCG Assessment of Pathways to Education Executive Summary*, 2007.

⁸⁶ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond and Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003).

⁸⁷ Humber School of Applied Technology, “Women in Skilled Trades & Technology Day” (Toronto: Humber College, 2005).

Recommendation Five: Primary and secondary schools must provide information and resources to students, families, and communities to assist in making better informed decisions about educational pathways. These resources include, but are not limited to, improved guidance counselling, parental involvement activities, and curriculum changes.

The Canadian Student Survey found that, in addition to guidance counsellors, friends, families, and communities contribute to the decisions of students, and provide information students use to make PSE decisions.⁸⁸ Therefore, it is important that when developing a strategy of early outreach that students are offered assistance through their various support networks, and that the information that is disseminated is accurate, relevant, and non-biased.

Vital to this strategy is the incorporation of financial aid literacy in secondary school curriculum, and a revision of the career studies curriculum to emphasize the importance of pathway selection and provide the necessary resources for students to make educated decisions. Enhancing pathway resource centers in high school is another feasible method of improving the PSE resources available to students. The first step in addressing pathway resources is a critical review of high school Student Success Teams. It has been suggested that the number of guidance counsellors available in schools is insufficient to meet both the academic and social needs of students. Furthermore, there is evidence that the counselling that does exist does not properly prepare students for educational pathways.⁸⁹

Furthermore, parents have a tremendous influence on their child's decision to attend higher education. In a 2009 study, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation ranked parental education as one of the top factors influencing a youth's decision to attend higher education, ahead of financial resources.⁹⁰ The Ontario government must work with the school boards to develop strategies to educate and engage parents to ensure students are receiving correct information and are considering all options. One possibility is to include information about financial aid and post-secondary pathways with all high school report cards. This is a simple and inexpensive way to tackle basic informational barriers.

Recommendation Six: The current numbers based guidance counsellor allocation model is flawed and the provincial government should invest in a needs based system that encompasses regional training.

OUSA recognizes that the role of guidance counsellors is complex and multi-faceted. In order to properly address students' needs, the provincial government should move away from a numbers based allocative formula in favour of a formula that evaluates regional needs. To accompany this system, the government should build in assessment metrics so students are receiving appropriate social, mental, and academic support from their guidance counsellors and student success teams.

Student Success Teams should be given the tools to function more effectively and they should be an instrumental means of disseminating PSE information to students and parents. Furthermore, training should be provided to guidance counsellors in areas that demonstrate need for specialized counselling skills so that the dissemination of PSE information is not left behind or ignored.

Recommendation Seven: Dual credit programs in high schools must be funded and expanded within Ontario colleges and should be introduced, monitored and evaluated at the university level.

In this context, "dual credit" refers to programs that are specifically geared toward students at risk of not entering post-secondary education, which enable them to take college or university level courses for credit, while also receiving credit at the high school level. Dual credit programs introduce students to the more rigorous expectations of higher education while they are still able to take advantage of the more personal and individually tailored academic

⁸⁸ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, *What Students Want: Results of the Ontario Student Survey*, (Toronto: OUSA, 2010)

⁸⁹ People for Education, *The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools* (Toronto: People for Education, 2006).

⁹⁰ Joseph Berger, Anne Motte, and Andrew Parkin, *The Price of Knowledge* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2009).

supports of secondary school. There are currently several such programs in Ontario, where students can take up to four credits that count at both the high school and college level. Within the next year 10,000 students are expected to participate in the program and every indication is that that number is will continue to rise.

Evidence demonstrates that dual credit programs can improve access to post-secondary education for students at risk of not graduating high school, students from groups underrepresented in higher education, and students with medium to low academic achievement.⁹¹ A 2007 study by the Knowledge Works Foundation and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education declared that, “Allowing [high school] students to earn early college credit is an innovative policy to expand a state’s role in ensuring postsecondary access for more students.”⁹² The experience of taking a class at the university or college level can prove to some students that they have the ability to succeed at the post-secondary level.⁹³ This experience can also provide other valuable information regarding the type of educational pathways that are open to students.

Dual credit programs can also enhance student engagement by providing a greater variety of courses, and courses geared towards students’ specific career interests. These experiences are invaluable for at-risk students who might self select out of PSE.⁹⁴ Finally, a survey of American dual credit programs found that at-risk students who participated in dual credit programs performed better than their peers in their first year of college.⁹⁵ Dual credit programs, both improve the likelihood that students from underrepresented groups will graduate from high school, and also the odds that these students will succeed in their chosen post-secondary pathway.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities should continue to develop, fund and expand dual credit programs with Ontario’s colleges. As of now, students can only enrol if their high school is a participating member and the credit partnerships are at a limited number of institutions. In addition, the Ministry should look to expand dual credit programs to include opportunities for underrepresented youth to earn dual credit in the university environment. The primary function of all dual credit programs should be to motivate students, especially at-risk and underrepresented students, to pursue higher education, and they should not be used as recruitment tools for post-secondary education institutions.

Recommendation Eight: The Ministry of Education must continue to develop enrichment programs such as co-op credits and high skills major programs that are designed to increase motivation and retention of at-risk students.

Many underrepresented students, especially first-generation students, underestimate the benefits of higher education.⁹⁶ Therefore, ‘reach ahead’ experiences that give students insight into experiencing fields of work that they may be interested in are important ways of improving student engagement with the education system. In addition to providing students with a chance to experience an occupational field, co-op and enrichment programs enable students to develop long-term relationships with people in their field. Such mentorships have been shown to be highly effective in improving enrolment rates in PSE.⁹⁷ Furthermore, co-op credits and high skills major programs at the high school level help students focus on their post-secondary goals, appreciate the value of graduation, and educates students about the possibilities available in their sector when pursuing PSE pathway options.

⁹¹ Elisabeth Barnett and Llesa Stamm, *Dual Enrollment: A strategy for Educational Advancement of All Students*. (Toronto: Blackboard Institute, July 2010).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ministry of Education, *Dual Credit Programs* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2010).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Elisabeth Barnett and Llesa Stamm, *Dual Enrollment: A strategy for Educational Advancement of All Students*. (Toronto: Blackboard Institute, July 2010).

⁹⁶ Joseph Berger and Anne Motte, “Mind the Access Gap: Breaking Down Barriers to Post-Secondary Education,” *Policy Options* (Montreal, 2007).

⁹⁷ Alisa Cunningham, Christina Redmond & Jamie Merisotis, *Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected U.S. States* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, February 2003).

Recommendation Nine: Bridging programs must be encouraged by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, and should be funded and evaluated by the Ministry in order to help students with insufficient credits or inadequate entrance averages enter post-secondary education.

Bridging programs give students a chance to further their post-secondary education in an environment that allows them optimal support for their academic success. Designed for students who do not meet the requirements and entrance averages of colleges or universities, bridging programs typically include advanced academic support, reduced tuition, and a chance to apply to the host institution upon graduation.⁹⁸

Bridging programs are already in use on a small scale at institutions across Ontario. The University of Guelph, for example, offers the Open Learning Program that allows students open access to the university and guaranteed admission to degree programs once they have completed a number of prerequisites.⁹⁹ Additionally, the Bridges to Ryerson program offers preparation courses to mature students who lack the traditional entrance qualifications. The provincial government should expand the number of bridging programs as well as their availability to underrepresented students. Bridging programs facilitate the closing of participation gaps for students who have suffered academically at the secondary level, but have post-secondary aspirations.

Recommendation Ten: As part of a comprehensive access strategy, the provincial government must continue to support online education programs. However, support for online programs should act as a supplement, not a replacement, for person-to-person outreach.

In an effort to reach out to northern students, programs such as Contact North should continue to be funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. The expansion of Contact North to remote and rural students through elearnnetwork.ca is an excellent example of how online programs can be far-reaching. In addition to increasing the variety of courses offered online, it is important to offer full information technology services to students, and ensure that online programs are also provided with the proper IT support. For specific concerns and recommendations, see OUSA's policy on online education.¹⁰⁰

In addition to online initiatives, it is important to recognize that online services are not a substitute for in-person resources and outreach. Rural and northern communities should be designated areas in high need of guidance counsellors and student success teams in a needs-based allocation system. In addition, as many online students as possible should have the option of visiting a satellite learning centre, where students can use computer facilities, receive face-to-face counselling, sit final examinations, and gain a sense of community.

Recommendation Eleven: As part of a comprehensive access strategy, the government must continue to strengthen the student financial assistance system so all students can access post-secondary education.

OUSA recognizes and commends the provincial government for its improvements to the Ontario Student Assistance Program and its continued work to make loans and grants more accessible. However, with tuition in Ontario rising 5% every year and the highest average tuition in the country, it is more important than ever that Ontario's student financial assistance system is strengthened so that all students can access post-secondary education.¹⁰¹ In recognition of the complex and extensive nature of the student financial aid assistance system it is advised that, for specific concerns and recommendations, one should see OUSA's policy paper on student financial assistance.

⁹⁸ Ryerson University. (2009). *Bridges to Ryerson helps adults start over*. http://www.ryerson.ca/news/news/General_Public/20090828_BridgesToRy.html.

⁹⁹ University of Guelph. (2010). *Open Learning Program*. <http://www.open.uoguelph.ca/prospective/open-learning/>.

¹⁰⁰ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, *Ontario Online Institute: Students' Vision for Opening Ontario's Classrooms*, (Toronto: OUSA, August 2010).

¹⁰¹ Statistics Canada, *University Tuition Fees*, (Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2010).

Recommendation Twelve: In order to improve retention and success of underrepresented groups, the provincial government must strengthen and fund student support and early warning systems within post-secondary institutions.

Achieving admission to university or college is already a challenge for students from underrepresented groups. To ensure that these students persist in their education, support mechanisms must be in place to help students from these groups succeed once they do attend a post secondary institution. Institutions must take on a leadership role in providing student supports, in conjunction with adequate funding resources from the provincial government. If post-secondary institutions and government are genuinely interested in improving student access, the approach to student support and retention must be holistic. Comprehensive support and retention services for underrepresented and other students will provide “counselling, tutoring, academic support, career planning and placement services, as well as work to improve the social and racial climate on campus and the cultural competency skills of academic advisors and faculty members”¹⁰²

For example, the College Student Journal has outlined methods proposed by researchers to attract and retain underrepresented individuals. They recommend increasing the role of the academic advisor, faculty mentor or university representative as this is often the only link the student has with an institution. As the writers note, “contact with a significant person within an institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student’s decision to remain in college.”¹⁰³ One handbook on outreach observes “the process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has also been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process.”¹⁰⁴ Peer relations, role models, and mentors all significantly impact the well-being of an underrepresented student in university, as well as his or her success.

In addition to mentoring programs, there is potential benefit from the continuation of student support programs from the secondary level to the post-secondary level, including student success tracking, intervention, and credit recovery options. Institutions have long recognized the need to strengthen student support and early warning systems. In their submission to the Rae Review, the University of Toronto describes their view of such support services.

If the goal is to provide access to students who might not otherwise have been able to come to the University, it is likely that to some extent their needs will not be met by current curriculum, pedagogy, services and supports ... Thus our outreach initiatives need to be connected to discussions about the student experience at the University of Toronto from the perspective of the students for whom we are providing access and outreach. It is important to note that just as these students enrich the university in terms of university and life experience, any "accommodations" we make to support and enhance their educational experience will contribute positively to the experiences of all students. It is also important to note that there will be costs (in terms of both financial aid and people providing necessary support and accommodation) associated with these students.¹⁰⁵

It is important to note that both access and retention are critical components of an early outreach strategy. While it is important to help underrepresented students achieve admission to post-secondary education, it is equally important to strengthen supports that will enable them to achieve success while attending. A comprehensive access strategy

¹⁰² Dumas-Hines as cited by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, *Minority Student Recruitment, Retention and Career Transition Practices: A Review of the Literature* (Maryland: ASHA, 2007); accessed online at <http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/multicultural/recruit/litreview.htm>.

¹⁰³ Dana L. Heissere and Phil Parette, “Advising at-risk students in college and university settings,” *College Student Journal* (March 2002); accessed online at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FCR/is_1_36/ai_85007770.

¹⁰⁴ Watson Scott Swail, Kenneth E. Redd, and Laura W. Perna, “Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success”, *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 30 no.2 (2003): vii-ix.

¹⁰⁵ University of Toronto, “Appendix D: Access and Outreach Programs at the University of Toronto”, in *The Choice for a Generation: Investing in Higher Education and Ontario’s Future* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004).

cannot have one without the other. See OUSA's *Student Success* policy for additional recommendations on student supports.

Recommendation Thirteen: As part of the implementation of an access strategy, the provincial government should include evaluative procedures to measure the success of access programs and provide data to inform future policy making. This should include, but not be limited to, the implementation of the Ontario Education Number through to post-secondary education.

The challenges of evaluating program success are not cause to abandon attempts to quantitatively and qualitatively assess access strategy programs. For the provincial government to make informed policy decisions, there must be a number of success indicators and measurable figures that evaluate both program participation/graduation rate, as well as academic benchmarks. There is a clear need to establish measures of quality in early outreach and baseline data to compare and contrast different programs. The Ontario Education number would allow greater data collection as students move through the education system and therefore provide the greater ability to do longitudinal analysis. The continuation of the Ontario Education Number through to a student's post-secondary years would also help in tracking how students from underrepresented groups benefit from various outreach programs and progress through the post-secondary system.

Conclusion

It is time for the provincial government to take the lead in introducing a comprehensive approach to improve accessibility of higher education, especially if Ontario is to achieve its goal of 70% participation in PSE. A one-size-fit all model for all communities and underrepresented groups is not sufficient, nor does it adequately address the numerous barriers that prevent students from underrepresented groups from pursuing higher education. Ontario has the potential to become a leader in Canada and the world in the area of PSE access, and in doing so increasing participation rates of underrepresented groups including Aboriginal, low-income, rural and northern and first-generation students.

There are a number of principles that should guide the implementation of an access strategy. These include the funding and implementation of community based early outreach programs, the improvement of elementary and secondary supports and enrichment for students, strategies for encouraging parent and student knowledge of PSE pathways and financial aid, adequate student support services at post secondary institutions, and online education options. By working with communities, students, non-profits, school boards, and other stakeholders to implement a comprehensive, holistic access strategy, the Ontario government can reduce the barriers that prevent students from entering PSE and make higher education an option for all Ontarians.

Access Strategy Policy Statement

WHEREAS all willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's system of post-secondary education.

WHEREAS a comprehensive strategy must be devised that addresses all barriers and ensure access to post-secondary education for all willing and qualified students.

WHEREAS an access strategy should start early in a child's education, continue through their completion of post-secondary education, and address multiple barriers preventing equal participation, including financial, informational, motivational and academic factors.

WHEREAS an access strategy should assist students to choose the post-secondary pathway that best suits their skills and interests.

WHEREAS the provincial government should play the leading role in creating and funding an access strategy and subsequent programs.

WHEREAS to be successful, early outreach programs should be long-term, supported by various provincial government ministries, and coordinated strategically at the local level with the inclusion of existing programs.

WHEREAS students from underrepresented groups experience significant barriers in accessing post-secondary education.

WHEREAS students from underrepresented groups are often at risk of lower levels of academic achievement in primary and secondary school.

WHEREAS the approach to increasing access for underrepresented groups has thus far been unstable, piecemeal, and fragmented, consisting of multiple uncoordinated strategies.

WHEREAS there is inadequate guidance available to students in secondary school, and some guidance counsellors may be inadvertently affecting the perceptions of students regarding the accessibility and attainability of post-secondary pathways.

WHEREAS there is insufficient information available to students, families and communities about education pathways, the cost of education, and available student financial aid.

WHEREAS students are not adequately supported during transition periods, and those who wish to transition to university from the workplace or another post-secondary institution often face unnecessary barriers to entry.

WHEREAS some programs that identify themselves as early outreach programs do not adequately address access barriers for underrepresented students, but instead are a mix of recruitment and enrichment initiatives.

WHEREAS students from underrepresented groups often experience barriers to accessing appropriate social and academic supports once they do attend post-secondary institutions.

WHEREAS research on early outreach program success is limited and access strategies could be improved with adequate research and follow-through of the recommendations provided in the research.

BIFRT the provincial government must implement a comprehensive access strategy to foster increased participation of underrepresented groups in all types of post-secondary education.

BIFRT early outreach programs must be tailored to the unique needs of a community and coordinated to ensure that community plans effectively support the programs.

BIFRT the government should base their community-driven outreach programs on the successful Pathways to Education model and should explore how best to adapt said model to other areas of Ontario.

BIFRT early outreach programs need to combine social and academic supports through a blend of mentoring, tutoring and other engagement activities to ensure academic success of students in early outreach programs.

BIFRT primary and secondary schools must provide information and resources to students, families, and communities to assist in making better informed decisions about educational pathways, including, but not limited to, improved guidance counselling, parental involvement activities, and curriculum changes.

BIFRT that the current numbers based guidance counsellor allocation model is flawed, and the provincial government should invest in a needs based system that encompasses regional training.

BIFRT dual credit programs in high schools must be funded and expanded within Ontario colleges and should be introduced, monitored and evaluated at the university level.

BIFRT the Ministry of Education should continue to develop enrichment programs designed to increase motivation and retention of at-risk students, such as co-op credits and high skills major programs.

BIFRT bridging programs must be established, funded, and evaluated by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities to help students with insufficient credits or inadequate entrance averages to enter post-secondary education.

BIFRT as part of a comprehensive access strategy, the provincial government must continue to support online education programs. However, online support should not act as a replacement for person-to-person outreach.

BIFRT as part of a comprehensive access strategy, the government must continue to strengthen the student financial assistance system so all students can access post-secondary education.

BIFRT the provincial government should provide adequate funding to strengthen student support and early warning systems within post-secondary institutions for, but not limited to, improving retention and success of underrepresented groups.

BIFRT as part of the implementation of an access strategy, the provincial government should include evaluative procedures to measure the success of access programs and provide data to inform future policy making. This should include, but not be limited to, the implementation of the Ontario Education Number through to post-secondary education.

APPENDIX: Early Outreach Programs in Ontario

Institutional/University Administered Programs

Brock University – First Generation Program

Target: Enrolled first generation students.

Program Approach: Improved retention and student success.

Program Design: The program offers a variety of academic and extracurricular activities including workshops, one-on-one academic counselling, and a Drop-In Centre for additional help with coursework. Extracurricular activities include volunteer opportunities, group discounts for classes/workshops, first generation events, and organized trips. The First Generation Program also runs a newsletter called *First Generation Voice*.

Funding: Expired First Generation project funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Lakehead University – SAGE Science and Arts Gateway to Education

Target: (1) Mature students, transfer students, or students missing a required math or science course; (2) 'cusp' students who have just graduated from grade 12, but are missing a course or fall just below the required admissions average of 70%; and (3) admitted Aboriginal students.

Program Approach: Improved transition and student success.

Program Design: Courses in study and success skills, tutor-assisted group study sessions, and academic advising are run through the learning assistance and math assistance centres.

Funding: The program began in 2007 through \$400,000 of First Generation project funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to enhance current transitional courses and services.

OCAD University

Target: High school students with an interest in art and design.

Program Approach: Motivation, counselling, pathway education.

Program Design:

- (1) *OCAD on the Road:* representatives from OCAD are sent on the road to educate first generation and newcomer populations about the possibilities of design education and to conduct hands-on art workshops.
- (2) *Explore Your Potential:* program works with community partners and certain high schools, targeting low-income and first generation students to encourage interest in post secondary education and educate students about how to finance their education.
- (3) *First-Nations Community Outreach:* an OCAD First Nations Community Outreach officer conducts small group, one-on-one and community based outreach with aboriginal communities in Central & Northern Ontario about education and careers in art/design.

Funding: OCAD received \$134,000 from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for their first generation initiatives between 2008 and 2010. This funding has since expired.

Queen's University- University Experience Program

Target: First generation high school students and their families.

Program Approach: Recruitment and information.

Program Design: Events are planned year round, with the emphasis on a single day University Experience Program event for students, parents, teachers, and counsellors from Southeast Ontario. The UEP events are free of charge, and include transportation and food. Other initiatives include a first generation website, print publications, mini-UEP days, University 101 presentation to Grade10 career classes with a high population of first generation students, workshops for parents, and some Crown Ward initiatives. Since 2006, 800 students and 40 schools have attended UEP days. All programs combined, in 2009-10. an estimated 2400 students were reached.

Funding: Coordinated by a full-time staff member in charge of First Generation initiatives (hired in 2009 with First Generation project funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities).

Ryerson University – First Generation Project

Target: First generation students in high school.

Program Approach: Mentoring, increasing motivation to pursue PSE.

Program Design: The program uses volunteer current Ryerson first generation students to appeal to first generation youth. Initiatives include: On-campus tours, “A Day in the Life [of University]” events, informational workshops, one-on-one pathways advising, joint ethno-cultural celebrations, and related on-campus events. Mentoring runs from September to March.

Ryerson University – Spanning the Gaps to PSE

Target: High school students, youth, and adults without the necessary university qualifications.

Program Approach: “To change the culture of expectation, and then help them achieve academic goals”: mentoring, motivation.

Program Design: Spanning the Gaps offers several related programs depending on students’ needs. These include Bridges to Ryerson, Alternative Bridges, and Road to Ryerson for high school graduates or drop-outs who need help qualifying for admission. Ryerson University Now is an early credit option for high school youth that began in 2007. RUN Involves university students to serve as TA’s and mentors while students pursue a credit. The program began in 2007 in Regent Park through a partnership with Pathways. The Second Chance program serves adults who didn’t attempt or complete post secondary education to gain the credentials necessary for university or college admission.

“Road to Ryerson”- partners with the Toronto District School Board and Pathways to Education, provides tutoring and mentoring for youth whose HS marks are not high enough to get in to university

Program Administration: Coordinated by Ryerson’s Outreach and Access Advisor.

Seneca College – SCOrE (Seneca Centre for Outreach Education)

Target: Youth aged 19-24 who did not complete high school or attain GED, or prospective students who applied but did not reach the entrance requirements.

Program Approach: Bridging program.

Program Design: SCOrE offers a one-year general arts certificate program combined with financial aid, mentoring, personal and academic support. After completion, students are eligible to enrol in a college program at Seneca or a university degree at York, provided they achieve additional credits and achieve a B average. Seneca Aboriginal Services offers some services specifically for Aboriginal participants in SCOrE. They also assist students in accessing financial aid and scholarships.

University of Toronto – LAWS (Law in Action within Schools)

Target: LAWS is active in 3 Toronto high schools: Central Technical School, Harbord Collegiate Institute, and Monarch Park Collegiate. LAWS reaches approximately 300 students per year, taking some students from grades 10-12 from each member school.

Program Approach: A 3-year academic and extracurricular program for legal themed learning and mentor relationships.

Program Design: The LAWS program recruits U of T Law students to run weekly after-school tutoring, mentoring and motivation for participating high school students. LAWS helps facilitate paid summer placements for participants, provides exposure to the university environment through on campus events and information dissemination, and interactive learning opportunities including conferences, mock trials, debates and court house visits. LAWS also publishes an electronic newsletter.

Program Administration: LAWS is a partnership between the University of Toronto Faculty of Law and the Toronto District School Board. LAWS is administered through volunteer U of T Law students, alumni, professors and members of the legal community.

Funding: LAWS is supported by a grant from The Law Foundation of Ontario and Citizenship Immigration Canada.

History: LAWS began in 2005 as the initiative of the former law school dean. The program is modeled after two successful programs run out of New York City.

University of Toronto – Summer Mentorship Program

Target: Students from marginalized backgrounds who are not reaching their full academic potential.

Program Approach: Academic support, mentorship, advanced credit opportunity, motivation, reduction of perceived barriers.

Program Design: A six week university exposure experience where students gain mentoring from a variety of professionals, explore programs and opportunities, and earn two co-op credits toward high school graduation.

Program Administration: A collaborative partnership between U of T, Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the York Region District School Board, and the York Region District Catholic School Board.

Results: Program cofounder reports that almost all go on to university. Many participants had reported feeling intimidated to apply to university. The mentorship program aims to reduce concerns and inspire self-confidence. These students report a desire to return to their communities as mentors.

University of Toronto – Steps to University

Target: Steps is offered to over 200 students a year through eight Toronto schools (including Lester B. Pearson and a program in Regent Park) and also through Pathways to Education. Students are recommended to the program by their teachers and guidance counsellors.

Program Approach: Advanced credit, motivation, and academic support.

Program Design: Steps was established in 1992 to identify high school students who were likely to succeed in university but who were, for a variety of reasons, unlikely to apply. Participants take a U of T Sociology course in grade 11 or 12 and the credit is transferable to any Canadian university, as well as counting toward their high school completion.

Results: More than 150 students have gone through the program and on to U of T. Dozens more have gone to other post-secondary institutions.

Funding: U of T, Toronto District School Board, and corporate sponsor HSBC. HSBC first supported the Steps program in 2002 with a \$150,000 gift, and in the fall of 2006 renewed their commitment with a \$240,000 pledge over three years.

University of Toronto – “Young, Gifted and Black” Annual Conference

Target: Black youth in Toronto schools.

Program Approach: Motivation and information.

Program Design: Brought in 650 black students from 30 Toronto schools for a 1-day conference of inspiration and motivation to pursue university. At the 2006 conference Kardinal Offishall attended for a short concert and motivational speech.

Results: Conference orchestrators heard strong response of students reluctant to take on large loans and responded by advertising the many scholarships available, particularly for black students. Many attendees came away with more information about the real possibilities of accessing post-secondary education. Application processes, requirements, and expectations were demystified, helping to remove perceived barriers.

Program Administration: U of T and U of T's Black Students' Association

History: Been running since 1994.

University of Toronto Mississauga – University Preparation for Parents (StepUPP)

Target: Parents of first generation students, specifically parents who did not attend post secondary or parents who attended abroad in a different educational system.

Program Approach: Information and motivation.

Program Design: The program offers a series of workshops, seminars, and mentoring sessions for parents and children to help better understand the value of a post-secondary education, how to finance and apply, and what it takes to be a good student.

Program Oversight and Administration: Expired First Generation project funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

University of Toronto Scarborough – Imani Mentorship Program

Target: Students from West Hill Collegiate, Pope John Paul II, Cedarbrae Collegiate and St. Margaret's Middle School.

Program Approach: Mentorship

Program Design: Local high school and middle schools students are matched with university student mentors from UofT Scarborough. Mentees are driven to the university once a week for 2- 3 hours for a mix of academic support, workshops and learning activities.

Program Oversight/Administration: Funding provided for five years in May 2007 from the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers.

University of Waterloo – UW Unlimited

Target: High school students in grades 10-12, counsellors, and parents. Open to “exceptional” students nationwide.

Program Approach: Academic enrichment and motivation.

Program Design: UW Unlimited attracts students for an interdisciplinary enrichment program to expose students to many university faculties. Students pay to stay at the university for a session during the school year. The cost is between \$380 for a 3-day program and \$700 for the week-long program. Bursary support is available. UW Unlimited is also engaged in establishing mechanisms to identify first generation students in high school in order to recruit them for outreach initiatives and also to track their end destinations.

Program Administration: UW Unlimited works to find counsellors and teacher champions within the high schools. Additionally, the program has begun collaborations with Pathways to Education in Kitchener.

University of Western Ontario – Choose Your Own Adventure

Target: High achieving local students in Grade 8.

Program Design: Choose Your Own Adventure is a one-day conference to expose and encourage students to pursue PSE, and to connect them to the necessary resources and information. Bursaries are provided to attract students from underrepresented groups including Aboriginal, low-income and first generation students.

Program Administration and Funding: Run through the University Students' Council of the UWO.

Collaboration/University-Community Partnerships

Pathways to College – Partnership between Pathways and George Brown College

Target: Pathways students pursuing a degree at George Brown.

Program Approach: Transition, orientation, guidance and support.

History: Started in May 2005. Pathways approached GBC to help transition incoming Pathways students. Since then, support has become more formal, including a designated contact person at GB for Pathways students, assistance in registration and financial assistance processes and bookstore purchases and a special orientation.

Results: Application rates have increased from 7 in first year to 70 students in third year.

University of Windsor and Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board Partnerships:

i) **LEAD: Leadership Experience for Academic Directions**

Target: At-risk students entering secondary school. In 2006, LEAD reached 16 elementary schools and 6 secondary schools, and approximately 1100 students and staff.

Program Approach: Mentoring and motivation.

Program Design: Teacher candidates from the faculties of Education and Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor are mentored by the Windsor Catholic District School Board Student Success Teacher and a discipline specific Associate Teacher. Teacher candidates then take part in a Muskoka Woods Outdoor Education and Leadership Program where they mentor elementary and high school youth. Following the Muskoka trip, mentors continue with monthly professional development activities and the same group of students. There are two main theoretical tenets to the program: the Strengths Perspective emphasizes the importance of building all interactions, particularly when working with marginalized students, on the recognition of a person's strengths, not weaknesses, and to focus on eliminating barriers to realizing strengths, real or perceived. The second theoretical approach assumes that individuals operate within the realm of what they believe is possible, and hence the Duality of Structure approach aims to widen students' perceptions of how they see their possibilities.

History: The Muskoka trip has been running for over a decade through the Catholic District School Board. Windsor began to contribute mentors in 2005. In 2007, the LEAD program was formalized.

Funding: The cost of the program is charged to students although some participating schools help to offset the cost for their students. Cost per student ranges from \$50 to \$375.

ii) **Windsor M²: Mediation and Mentoring Program**

Target: High school and grade 7 students.

Program Approach: Mentoring and mediation.

Program Design: University of Windsor Law students, trained in mediation, provide training in conflict resolution skills as part of the high school curriculum. These secondary students in turn provide training and mentoring to grade seven students. The goal is to promote mentoring and instil constructive social behaviour.

iii) **Windsor Multi-Year Agreement (MYA) on Aboriginal Students**

Target: Aboriginal students.

Program Approach: Information

Program Design: The Windsor accountability agreement emphasized their efforts in designing better student services for Aboriginal students. One aspect involved creating an Aboriginal Student Identification system through collaborative efforts of the Aboriginal Education Centre and the Cashier's Office, utilizing home addresses of students and band funding information. Student services and programs for Aboriginal students are run through the University's Turtle Island Aboriginal Centre. The Centre also liaises with funding bodies on behalf of students, and offers an Aboriginal Education Counsellor. This Counsellor has also been able to influence programming decisions, for instance the development a minor in aboriginal studies, and in

facilitating interdisciplinary research projects in local aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Education Centre works closely with educational coordinators from First Nations' groups and attends career and regional education fairs for Aboriginal students.

York University – Advanced Credit Experience

Target: Grade 11 students from Emery and Westview Centennial High School.

Program Approach: Motivation, mentoring, and information.

Program Design: Participants in their first semester work with teacher candidates from York University on writing and research skills. In the second semester, students take a first year college level arts course, attending lectures and completing assignments alongside university students. On non-class days, the students complete their high school coop credits with jobs around campus. The program seeks to overcome systemic barriers, build confidence, and motivate students to get the requirements they need to apply to university in their 4th year. Students who complete the program often act as mentors to their peers in their last year of high school.

Funding: Funding comes from the York faculty association, the Toronto District School Board and a private donor. Annual budget: \$40,000 covers tuition, books and bus tickets. The York Faculty Association recently began offering scholarships of up to \$5,000 for ACE grads who go on to university.

York University – Promoting Excellence Program

Target: At-risk youth in the Jane & Finch area of Toronto. Grades are not considered.

Program Approach: Mentoring, tutoring, financial assistance, and motivation.

Program Design: The program design was inspired by the Pathways to Education program. York offers a 6 week summer program to prepare students entering grade 9 for the expectations of high school. The program offers mentoring, academic tutoring and financial assistance. In the mornings, students work with 4 Toronto teachers on core academics and learning strategies. In the afternoons, staff of Toronto's parks and recreation department organize outdoor sports and run workshops on social skills. Field trips are included in the curriculum and students are driven to the university for on campus initiatives. The program also works to connect students, parents, and support organizations with the high school. The program is free and attendance is voluntary. Participants receive a half-credit toward their grade 9 requirements. A dozen senior Westview students are hired as mentors, with the hope that mentors will continue to provide support throughout the mentees' grade 9 experiences.

Program Administration: Run through Jane-Finch Caring Village (non-profit group of community agencies, service providers and areas residents) in conjunction with York University and the Toronto District School Board. The Promoting Excellence Program is also serving as a pilot project for a broader initiative for all students at Westview Centennial Secondary School.

History: The program established in 1992 between the university and 2 dozen schools in Jane-Finch area.

Funding: Community groups, York University, school board, private corporations and Ontario government.

York University – Westview Partnership

Target: Students at partner schools from kindergarten to beyond grade 12. Currently, Westview projects involve 23 schools and reached 1440 first generation learners in the Jane and Finch community in 2009-2010.

Program Approach: To deliver knowledge about PSE, confidence & motivation. Additionally, some programs provide specific preparation and training to pursue and succeed in post secondary education.

Program Design: The Westview Partnership encompasses 14 programs, including both academic and sports summer camps, an art festival, high school mentoring, an advanced credit program for high school students, and math, reading and science focused initiatives.

Program Administration: Founding Partners: Toronto DSB, Westview family of schools & York U Faculty of Education. Additional Partners: Seneca College, Toronto Catholic DSB, Ontario MTCU, and private donors. Run mainly by university student volunteers. The program is currently evaluating the program's success by tracking students from Grade 8 to determine eventual destination.

Funding: The Westview Project is primarily funded by MTCU and the York Faculty of Education. Some initiatives are funded more heavily by the community.

Community Based Programs

Pathways to Education

Target: Pathways to Education identifies participants by region. Program locations are established in low-income neighbourhoods. These communities tend to have a large percentage of minorities, first generation and otherwise marginalized youth.

Program Approach: Comprehensive (mentoring, motivation, financial support, tutoring, counselling).

Program Design: The Pathways program adopts a comprehensive and community-based approach. The program is structured around four pillars: academic support, social support, advocacy, and financial aid. Pathways seeks to create myriad partnerships with community organizations, schools, universities, government services, and private organizations to provide opportunities to Pathways students with 200 volunteer tutors and 75 volunteer mentors. Student-parent support workers act as a “bridge” and liaise on behalf of the student between schools and helps in overcoming language/cultural barriers.

Program Administration: Pathways to Education programs are run through established community centers. The program emphasizes partnerships with secondary schools, local universities and colleges, school boards, community organizations, parents and private corporations.

Funding: Pathways funding comes from a balance of private, provincial and federal sources.

History: Started in 2001 as an initiative of the Regent Park Community Health Centre. Currently involves more than 90% of eligible students in Regent Park location.

Results: Regent Park location reduced absenteeism 65, reduced academically at risk students by 2/3 for each cohort/grade, and reduced dropout rates by 75%. Pathways also cites a retention rate of 98% for participants.