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ENHANCING EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Educated Solutions: Enhancing Equity in Education

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Table of Contents

<i>Foreword</i> The Honourable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities	2
<i>Editor's Note</i> Malika Dhanani (she/her)	3
<i>President's Note</i> Eunice Oladejo (she/her)	4
<i>Connection and Representation: Creating the Conditions for Equity-Seeking Students to Thrive</i> Dr. Ivan Joseph (he/him), Vice-President Student Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University	5
<i>Equity in Education for 2SLGBTQ+ Students Begins with Student Advocacy</i> Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah (she/her), Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity	9
<i>Pathways to Prosperity: Enhancing the International Student Experience</i> Sam Titus (he/him/il), Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)	13
<i>The Kids Aren't Alright</i> Stephanie Ye-Mowe (she/they), Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA)	17
<i>From High School Through Post-secondary and Into the Labour Market: Understanding the Needs and Experiences of Ontario Students with Disabilities</i> Ken Chatoor (he/him) and Victoria Barclay (she/her), Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)	21
<i>The Future of Learning</i> Robert Luke (he/him), CEO, eCampusOntario	25
<i>What Will Micro-Credentials Mean for Equity?</i> Sue Wurtele (she/her), President, Ontario Confederation University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)	29
<i>From Theory to Praxis: Empowering Marginalized Students with Evidence-Based Action</i> Nathan R. G. Barnett (he/him), Trent Durham Student Association (TDSA)	34
<i>Fostering Inclusive Communities at Ontario's Universities</i> Steve Orsini (he/him), President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities (COU)	37
<i>Refocusing and Recommitting to Students of Colour: Why Institutions Must Do Better</i> Eunice Oladejo (she/her), Western's University Students' Council (USC)	42

Land Acknowledgment

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance's home office is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River, and is covered by Treaty 13 of the Upper Canada Treaties.

With a commitment to learning about Indigenous traditions, cultures, and practices as well as past injustices, we'd like to explore the specific history of this territory.

The name *Toronto* comes from the Mohawk word *Tkaronto*, which means, "the place in the water where the trees are standing," symbolizing the wooden stakes that acted as fishing weirs in the river.¹ Tkaronto was a place for hunting, fishing, growing food, and gathering. The mouth of the Humber River was an intersection of two routes, one that ran along the shoreline of Lake Ontario and the other was a footpath known as the "Carrying Place Trail"; these routes were used by Indigenous Peoples to travel across the Land and sustained their communities and livelihoods. Upon the city's establishment, Lieutenant General John Graves Simcoe refused to name it after a Mohawk word which is why Tkaronto was anglicized to Toronto, effectively removing the significance and meaning behind the term.² Additionally, Treaty 13 (known as the Toronto Purchase Treaty) was an agreement made between the British and the Mississauga chiefs. It was later discovered that the deed of sale was blank and contained no information about the conditions of the agreement, rendering it invalid – the Land rightfully belonged to the Mississauga Nation.³ Over the next 18 years, the British weakened the Mississaugas by spreading disease and causing

trade disputes before initiating a new treaty with a new generation of chiefs that gave them far more land than previously agreed on: 250,000 acres for 10 shillings (equalling \$40 today).⁴

OUSA recognizes that as settlers working on this Land, we benefit from the long-standing and ongoing harm against Indigenous Peoples. Working within the post-secondary sector, we know the colonial foundations that these institutions are built upon and how teaching and research practices, along with campus climate, continue to perpetuate colonial narratives and symbols that oppress Indigenous Peoples. To dismantle the effects of colonialism, OUSA is internally engaging in initiatives to decolonize our methodologies and centre Indigenous voices. This includes increased representation and collaboration with Indigenous students, more decision-making autonomy for Indigenous students in our policy processes, and incorporating traditional ways of learning and working in the development of our materials.

We implore all settlers across Turtle Island to critically engage with the specific histories of the Land you occupy. Learn about the injustices that occurred (or still occur) where you are, and get to know the Indigenous communities near you – engage in dialogue, learn about what you can do to support these specific communities, and commit to tangible action. We encourage everyone to deeply reflect on their relationship to the Land, how the effects of colonialism permeate into the work you do, and your intentions to disrupt these effects.

Resources

Whose Land: <https://www.whose.land/en/>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports: <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education: <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontline-workers/chapter/decolonization-and-indigenization/>

"Our Stories: First Peoples in Canada": <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/>

1 Selena Mills and Sara Roque, "Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto," *Local Love*, accessed August 23, 2021, <https://locallove.ca/issues/land-acknowledgements-uncovering-an-oral-history-of-tkaronto/#.YSOh1NNKhQI>.

2 "Awakenings — We Were Always Here — Acknowledgment (A film by Jonathan Elliott, 2020)," YouTube video, 11:16, posted by "Toronto History Museums," December 14, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X4MYbjvLUI&t=4s>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Foreword

The Honourable Jill Dunlop
Minister of Colleges and Universities

As Ontario's Minister of Colleges and Universities, I am passionate about building connections between educators, employers and their local communities, all of which are vital to Ontario's success and our road to economic recovery. Our government knows that an innovative, prosperous economy is built on a diverse and committed workforce – and this begins with access to education.

Since 2018, our government continues to remove barriers to accessing post-secondary education. One of the ways we are doing this is by investing more than \$70 million to expand access to high-quality, globally competitive virtual learning, which will greatly support underserved learners, particularly in Ontario's small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities. Ontario is also implementing its first-ever micro-credentials strategy, offering a faster pathway to employment through rapid training or job upskilling programs – with more than a thousand programs now eligible for OSAP.

These strides we have taken will foster long-term improvements in our post-secondary education system. We want to empower Ontarians from all backgrounds to have the opportunity to succeed in rewarding careers while strengthening the province's position as a global leader in education.



Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities



Jill Dunlop has been the Member of Provincial Parliament for Simcoe North since 2018. Born and raised in the Town of Coldwater in Simcoe North, Jill witnessed the importance of community and small local businesses early on, as her grandparents owned and operated the still thriving local Dunlop Plumbing, and her parents were actively engaged community members. Jill was also exposed to politics early on by both of her parents. Her mother, Jane Dunlop is a current Councillor and the Deputy Mayor of the Township of Severn. Her father is the former MPP and a predecessor representative of Simcoe North.

Prior to being elected, Jill attended Western University, and later joined the faculty of Georgian College. She is also the mother of three post-secondary aged daughters, all giving her unique insights into the world of post-secondary education. In 2019, Jill was appointed as the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues in the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services. Most recently, in 2021 Jill was appointed as the new Minister of Colleges and Universities and has spent the summer meeting and touring the province visiting Ontario's world-class post-secondary institutions.

Editor's Note

Malika Dhanani (she/her)

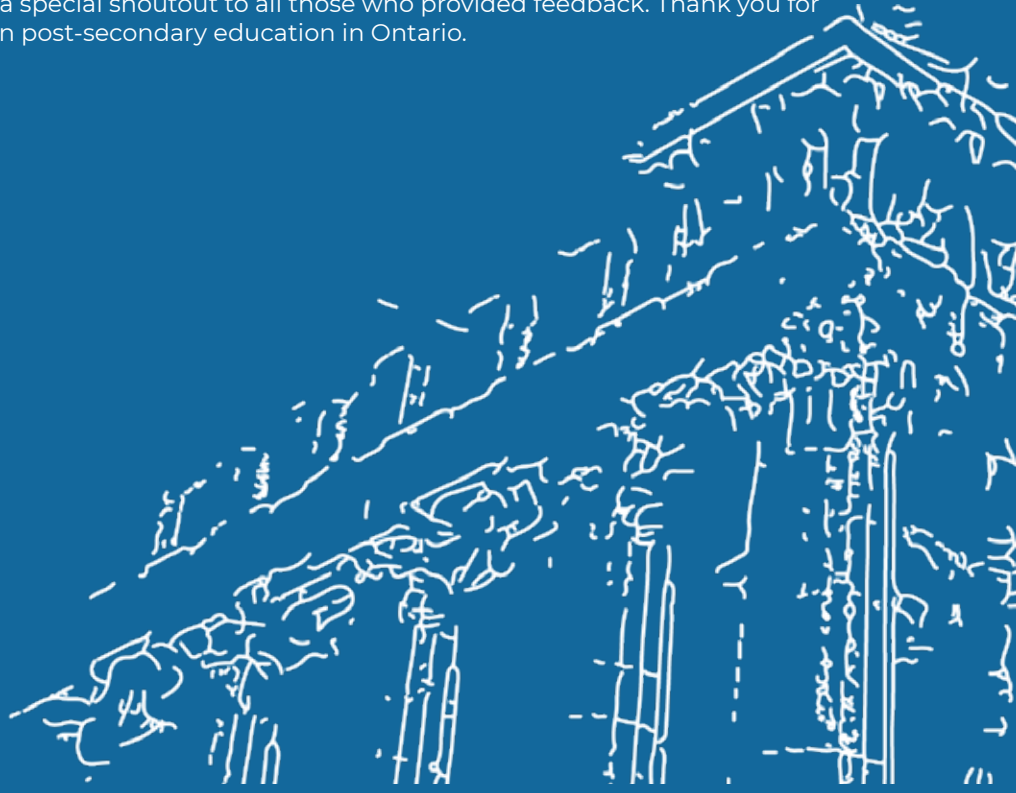


Conversations about equity have garnered massive attention over the past 18 months. From the COVID-19 pandemic exposing pre-existing societal inequities, to the outcries for social justice relating to Black Lives Matter and Indigenous rights, a focus on addressing equity is particularly important.

Unsurprisingly, these events have sparked conversation about equity on our post-secondary campuses. Notably, these issues have been spoken about long before they captivated global attention – student activists and faculty have already brought attention to the implicit and explicit ways discrimination exists on campuses. But increased pressure from global and local communities has forced governments, stakeholders, institutions, staff, administrators, and students themselves to take a hard look at the impacts of these inequities and implications of this on student success within and beyond post-secondary education.

That's what this 15th edition of *Educated Solutions* focuses on: enhancing equity in education. Our articles this year touch on a range of equity-related issues from marginalized students and faculty, to research and educational tools. Our authors take a critical look at where these inequities lie and how they can be improved to provide a safe, validating, and affirming post-secondary experience for all. Using a combination of statistical evidence and lived experiences, our contributors – who include stakeholders, faculty, and student leaders – provide valuable insights into what equity in education means. All students deserve to have a post-secondary experience that is enjoyable and accessible to them in a way that meets their needs – embedding equity in every facet of education is the first step towards achieving this.

Our immense gratitude goes out to all our authors this year, who have written exceptionally thought-provoking and informative pieces, and a special shoutout to all those who provided feedback. Thank you for all you do to support and strengthen post-secondary education in Ontario.



President's Note

Eunice Oladejo (she/her)



This time last year I would not have guessed that, a whole year later, we would still be in a pandemic. Yet, here we are. 2020 and 2021 have been two of the most unexpected and unpredictable years. The COVID-19 pandemic brought us to a time that many would have never imagined. It made us uncomfortable, fearful, hopeful, and grateful. It challenged us in the most unimaginable way possible. Most importantly, it allowed us to reflect, rethink, and re-evaluate. For me, the past year has been filled with many necessary and, at times, uncomfortable conversations with family, friends, and others around me. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted issues that could no longer be ignored. From racial and religious discrimination to inadequate accessibility measures, inequities were exacerbated and made it clear that major societal shifts were needed.

It is this transformation that I want to remember as we move forward. When it comes to post-secondary education, being a fourth year student during the height of the pandemic showed me a number of weaknesses within our education system. To be clear, these are not just issues that arose as a result of COVID-19 but, rather, have been around for years and not adequately addressed. From my discussions with a number of students, the same theme stood out to me: more could have been done and more should be done to support equity-seeking groups in the post-secondary sector.

This publication addresses a number of these crucial topics, from the international student experience to the equity implications of micro-credentials. As you read each piece, I urge you to think about the inequities around you, how they affect vulnerable populations, and what you can do to make a change. The drive towards affordable, accountable, and high-quality education requires us all to do what we can to transform these systems and promote inclusivity. I strongly believe that this can be achieved when we critically listen and learn from each other, commit to tangible action, and cultivate a post-secondary environment that meets the needs of all.



Connection and Representation: Creating the Conditions for Equity-Seeking Students to Thrive

Dr. Ivan Joseph (he/him)
Vice-President Student Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University

When I think about the post-secondary experience of students from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, two concepts come to mind: connection and representation.

To illustrate why that is the case – and add my voice in a meaningful way to the OUSA dialogue about advocacy priorities related to students who face inequities – I'd like to share some interrelated insights from my personal experiences as someone who identifies as a Black male and from my academic and professional background.

As a student development theorist and practitioner, a central question in my work is “How do we create the conditions for students to persist and thrive?” In striving to answer this question, one of the theoretical frameworks I rely on was developed by a Mexican-born American education researcher named Raymond Padilla.

Padilla's thinking and research are innovative because rather than exploring what led students facing inequities to falter in a post-secondary context, he explored what led them to succeed. Through this lens, Padilla developed what is known as the *Expertise Model of Student Success*. In essence, it posits that to overcome the barriers they face in a post-secondary environment, students from equity-seeking groups must develop what he calls “heuristic knowledge” – an understanding of how the system works.

He writes,

Students must acquire a certain amount of heuristic or practice knowledge that is necessary ... to function competently on campus. For example, knowing when to drop a course rather than fail it is an important bit of heuristic knowledge.

Similarly, knowing when to change majors may make the difference between earning a degree and not persisting to graduation. Or, in the case of financial aid, monitoring key deadlines by marking dates on a calendar is important knowledge for obtaining the funds to continue in college.¹

Padilla explains that heuristic knowledge is most important – and mainly acquired – in the early stages of a student's post-secondary experience. When students are from what Padilla calls the “majority” population, they tend to either have this heuristic knowledge when they arrive – from their parents or high school – or they have a built-in system for acquiring it from older students, staff, and faculty members with similar backgrounds to their own.

On the other hand, Padilla explains, equity-seeking students, particularly those who are first in their family to attend a post-secondary institution, often struggle in the early stages of their post-secondary career specifically because they don't have heuristic knowledge and don't have an easy way to acquire it. He writes that students from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups “perceive little cultural continuity between home and school ... few or no members of their families attended college before them to help them know what to expect, few role models of the same ethnicity are present within their college environment, and fewer resources were invested in their pre-college training.”²

I don't have to think too hard to give you an example of this effect, because it is exactly what

¹ Raymond V. Padilla et al., *The Unfolding Matrix: A Dialogical Technique for Qualitative Data Acquisition and Analysis*, April 1996, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED397130>.

² Ibid.

happened to me as a first-year student.

I grew up in an immigrant family. My parents left for Canada from our native Guyana soon after my birth, and my older sister and I followed when I was five. Initially, we lived in the Jane-Finch neighborhood in Toronto and then on a farm in King Township where my father was a hired hand. Systemic barriers meant it was the only work he could get, even though he was a professional soil scientist with fifteen years of experience in Guyana and had been educated at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and McGill University.

Growing up, there was never any conversation about university. My parents were too busy coping with the various challenges immigrants often face when they are trying to get established in a new country. When it came time for me to apply to university, I did so entirely on my own. I didn't even know there was such a thing as a university fair or that guidance counsellors could help you. And my parents didn't even know that I was applying. We just never talked about it.

After arriving at Laurentian University to study Phys. Ed., I came face to face with what happens when a kid raised in the strict rules and parameters of a Caribbean home suddenly has unlimited freedom. My lack of maturity and readiness propelled me toward academic probation at the end of my first year.

To try and recoup one of my credits and get back on track, I enrolled in a summer course, only to discover that I could not afford it (I was paying my own way) and couldn't balance the course schedule with the requirements of my summer job. So, I decided to not take the course, didn't pay my fees, and never showed up to a single class.

What I didn't know was that I remained registered in the course. I'd never heard of an official withdrawal form. It didn't even occur to me. When the summer semester ended, I received an F, which meant I had violated the terms of my probation and would have to sit out a year. The shame I felt at this result was so profound, I didn't tell my parents what happened until I was 39!

The main reason I faltered was a lack of connection on campus. I wasn't engaged, mainly because at many Ontario universities in the late 1980s, there was a significant lack of representation in student-facing roles, from student af-

fairs to academic advising, housing, coaches, leaders, staff, professors, and TAs. There were no role models, no natural communities for me to connect to, no one I could reach out to – or who could reach out to me – to help me build heuristic knowledge. Those informal systems students rely on, where parents, older siblings, older students, staff, or faculty pass down knowledge about how the system works just weren't there.



One of the utmost advocacy priorities for Ontario universities is to move toward adequate representation at all levels so that students from equity-seeking groups have someone they can reach out to.

Through his research and framework, Padilla explains that for students facing inequities to succeed, they must be well integrated academically and socially into campus. In particular, he points out that a primary driver of student persistence and retention is students creating a “supportive ‘family’ on campus” by “seeking out nurturing persons.”³

This is where connection on campus and representation come together.

From my perspective, one of the utmost advocacy priorities for Ontario universities is to move toward adequate representation at all levels so that students from equity-seeking groups have someone they can reach out to.

Here's why.

When I was hired as Athletic Director at Ryerson University, then Provost Alan Sheppard, now the President of Western University, was a champion of my candidacy. As an openly gay man, Alan implicitly understood the importance of representation and foresaw that having a Black person in a senior leadership role could have impact far beyond whatever value I would add to the Athletics and Recreation programming.

³ Ibid.

After I had been at Ryerson for a few years, Alan's foresight began to be realized. Racialized students of all kinds, not just student athletes, began coming to see me to "get the straight." They'd drop by for a visit, come for breakfast or coffee, or just walk up to me on campus. Almost always, what they were seeking was a form of heuristic knowledge – advice and insights about how to navigate the system from someone they perceived as having figured it out.

Since that time, as I have gone on to more senior roles within student affairs, I have tried to keep those early lessons at the forefront of my mind. I try to consistently advocate for proactive efforts to increase representation because of the

some candidates.

Here's a simple example.

Early on in my time at Ryerson, we needed to hire a new Head Coach for the men's basketball program. At the time, human resources had a strict policy that candidates for a job at that level needed to have experience working in a university setting.

The first batch of resumes contained entirely white candidates, which was consistent with the makeup of just about every coaching staff across the country at that time. Highly-qualified racialized candidates didn't tend to have experience at the university level. It just wasn't how



positive impact it will have on retention and persistence of historically marginalized and under-represented students.

Whether a scholarship program, pathway program, academic scaffolding, support program, or partnership aimed at student success, I am attentive to ways in which we are providing these students with people they can reach out to for the inside track on how things work.

That's the point where conversations about retention and student success intersect with conversations about systemic discrimination. You can only increase representation among student leaders, staff, and faculty if you are intentional and proactive about breaking down barriers to the advancement of individuals from equity-seeking groups. In particular, you have to be deliberate about assessing prevailing requirements and standards related to hiring to determine if they are unfairly biased against

they were coming up through the system.

Based on my past experiences, I knew how important it was to have adequate representation among the coaching staff – particularly in a sport like basketball as compared to say, hockey. So I fought the good fight and got HR to modify the criteria.

In the end, of the four people we interviewed, three were racialized candidates. Since then, of the two racialized candidates who didn't get the job, one went on to a senior role with Canada Basketball and the other became a Head Coach at another U-Sports school.

The one we hired was Roy Rana, the first Indo-Canadian Head Coach in U-Sports history. Roy went on to have an 82-21 record as a coach at Ryerson, lead the Rams to play in the national championships, and coached Canada's men's national team to victory at the 2017 U19 World

Cup. What's more, Roy became an assistant coach with the Sacramento Kings in the NBA. Along the way, he has been a champion, inspiration, mentor, and role model for all of the racialized players he has worked with – none of which would have been possible without stepping back to rethink hiring strategies.

The narrative about why students who face inequities tend to flunk out is that they're not academically prepared. That's the wrong emphasis. If they struggle to persist, especially in the early going, it's often because they don't know how to navigate the system. We can help by creating the conditions for them to establish the "family" Padilla describes – a network of people from similar backgrounds who can lend a hand as they learn how things work.

This view of persistence and retention for students facing inequity is part of my overall view that student success relies on creating a sense of belonging for all students. They need to know that they matter. When they have that foundation, they can strike the balance between support and challenge that ensures they grow and develop. And that all begins with being intentional about the makeup of the community we are welcoming them into in the first place.

Dr. Ivan Joseph is the Vice-President Student Affairs at Wilfrid Laurier University.



Equity in Education for 2SLGBTQ+ Students Begins with Student Advocacy

Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah (she/her)

Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

Conversations around equity in education for 2SLGBTQ+ students have been part of the student movement for decades. The student movement in Canada has deep roots in 2SLGBTQ+ social activism and community building as far back as the 1960s (based on what is on record). Student-run organizations, like the University of Toronto Homophile Association or the Waterloo Universities' Gay Liberation Movement, were based on the following principles: to give 2SLGBTQ+ students a safe space to socialize, provide peer support, and lead protests.

Since the 2SLGBTQ+ student organizing of the 1960s, we have seen queer students continue to play essential roles in the fight for equity in post-secondary education. From the fight for free tuition to the fight against rape culture to the fight for gender-neutral bathrooms, 2SLGBTQ+ student advocacy has been bridging the gap between the ivory tower and community activism to make campuses safer for all.

Without safe learning environments for 2SLGBTQ+ students, there is no equity in education. It is a message that continues to live on.

To quote one of my favourite writers on student organizing, Nora Loreto, "the student movement has a responsibility to challenge the narratives that seek to dehumanize and justify the violence and segregations."¹ I resonate with this sentiment deeply as I look back on my days as a Black queer student activist. Queer and trans students cannot separate our lived experiences outside of school from our experiences within it. 2SLGBTQ+ students are experts in their lived

experience and it is why their voices within the student movement matter to create system changes in post-secondary institutions (PSIs). Our thoughts and suggestions should always be sought out for the sake of equity. When campuses tailor resources to the needs of marginalized students, everyone benefits – students and the broader community. When inequities occur through policies, programs, and practices, educational performance suffers as well. Inclusive campuses for 2SLGBTQ+ students can promote their positive well-being. Finding out how and where to start isn't as hard as you think. It requires listening to those students' voices who have been leading the fight this whole time.

As KC Hoard from *Xtra Magazine* put it, "Guaranteeing the basic safety of their most vulnerable students should be the number one priority of university administrations. Shifting the dial toward those students can be accomplished by listening to, affirming and taking material actions based upon their activism."² I couldn't agree more. Student activism is full of teachable moments for those who hold power in education. Improving equity requires resourcing 2SLGBTQ+ student activism, transforming campus culture, and building affirming curricula. If there is a starting point on where to begin, start with queer and trans student advocates.

The State of 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion on Campuses

Being a queer and/or trans student had everything to do with my education and possible advancement. It did not mean that real-world is-

¹ Nora Loreto, "Why Getting into Student Politics Can Be Selfish," *Huffington Post* (blog), September 26, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/nora-loreto/student-politics_b_1711347.html.

² KC Hoard, "What gets ignored in campus debates over 'free speech'," *Xtra Magazine*, April 27, 2021, <https://xtramagazine.com/power/activism/campus-debates-free-speech-safety-199489>.

sues suddenly disappeared because we entered a post-secondary institution (PSI). We still face high levels of homophobia and transphobia on top of the other challenges post-secondary life put in front of us.

Equity in education for 2SLGBTQ+ students is linked to our safety within schools.

Since 2017, my organization, the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD), has been working on studies with researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University and McGill University examining the experiences, academic development, health, and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ+ post-secondary students in Canada. Findings from the study, "Querying Canadian Higher Education" have shown that 2SLGBTQ+ post-secondary students faced higher levels of physical

Equity in education enhances social cohesion and trust. When these are absent, 2SLGBTQ+ students deal with stressors that impact their well-being and academic engagement.

and sexual violence compared to their cis and heterosexual counterparts, and fewer 2SLGBTQ+ students felt they were part of the school community.³ Additionally, 2SLGBTQ+ students reported their academic performance was negatively impacted due to the physical/sexual violence and discrimination experienced. These findings were also similar to the 2019 study by Statistics Canada which stated that 2SLGBTQ+ students commonly experienced discrimination that impacted their emotional and mental health.⁴

3 Dr. Michael Woodford, Dr. Simon Coulombe, Nicholas Schwabe, and the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, LGBTQ2 Health Policy: Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ2 Post-Secondary Students, May 2, 2019, <https://lgbtq2sthrivingoncampus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/LGBTQ2-Health-Policy-2019.pdf>.

4 Marta Burczycka, Students' experiences of discrimination based on gender, gender identity or sexual orientation at post-secondary schools in the Canadian provinces, 2019. Catalogue number 85-005-X in Statistics Canada. September 15, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-005-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.pdf?st=PAzyY8dg>.

The 2015 needs survey by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) offers perspectives from 2SLGBTQ+ post-secondary students on what is needed for campuses to truly be affirming.⁵ Suggestions included affirming materials and curricula outside of gender studies, inclusive language use by professors, the need for more resources to support 2SLGBTQ+ friendly groups, and the need for education around sexual and gender diversity.

Equity in education enhances social cohesion and trust. When these are absent, 2SLGBTQ+ students deal with stressors that impact their well-being and academic engagement.

Queer Student Advocacy Changes Lives

When I think of equity in education, I often think of my time as a Black woman student leader at Carleton University. Student organizing made me the Black queer feminist I am today. It gave me activist training to learn how best to organize a protest, the importance of student peer support, building solidarity across movements (and across the country), media training (even with the school paper), and articulating a message of change to people who oftentimes do not want to hear it. These skills need to flourish on campus for the sake of equity in education.

The coming-of-age experience of discovering who I wanted to be with my future career was accompanied by me 'coming into' my queer identity. My gender studies classes and student feminist circles equipped me with the language to name who I was in relation to the intersecting systems of oppression. It also gave me the critical skills to deconstruct how inherently racist, colonial, and anti-Black post-secondary institutions can be. Coupled with the campus hostility towards queer and trans students, I had no choice but to become a leader in the student movement and fight for education equity. I started my student organizing career while working at my undergraduate student union Womyn's Centre and ended it off as the President of the Graduate Student Association. Those eight years as a queer student leader, and mentor, enabled

5 Zachary J. Rose, LGBTQ+ Student Experience Survey Report: LGBTQ+ students' experiences and attitudes at universities. (Toronto, ON: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2015) https://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/103/attachments/original/1473428414/2015-11--LGBTQ_Student_Experience_Survey_Report_document.pdf?1473428414.

my contribution to major campaigns on gender-neutral washrooms, funding for 2SLGBTQ+ safe(r) spaces, a campaign for a student-run sexual assault centre, and campaigns on building consent culture on campus. There were a lot of wins, losses, and lessons learned. The biggest result of all this student organizing is that it shifted the conversations we had on campus which, like we've seen in other PSIs, made them more affirming for marginalized students.

That was in the 2010s.

From the outside looking in as the Executive Director of the CCGSD, something feels different now about the conversations on education equity. There is something about the pandemic putting a mirror towards existing inequities, combined with the protests in 2020 and 2021 on Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate, and Every Child Matters, that have put an urgency on those in power to act. This is no exception when queer and trans issues intersect with issues of race, colonialism, and class. These issues are all showing up on different campuses now, even in a virtual context. Very recently, students at X University (Ryerson University, if you're curious about the 'X')⁶ and the University of Toronto have been fighting their own battles against ongoing homophobia, transphobia, and racism on campus.⁷ They were speaking truth to power and demanding swift action from administration and faculty for the support of 2SLGBTQ+ students all while navigating the burnout of pandemic learning. Something about student advocacy while students were physically distant from each other actually brought them even closer in their fight for equity in schools.

With students returning to campus after a year and a half of learning virtually, the case for 2SLGBTQ+ education equity is stronger now more than ever. PSIs need to reevaluate how they are going to take those social justice statements they have made over the last year or so and interrogate how their implementation of change will centre marginalized student voices.

6 Indigenous Students at X University, "Introducing X University: An open letter to the community from Indigenous students," Yellowhead Institute, May 11, 2021, <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/05/11/welcome-to-x-university-an-open-letter-to-the-community-from-indigenous-students/>.

7 Hoard, "What gets ignored in campus debates over 'free speech'," *Xtra Magazine*, April 27, 2021, <https://xtramagazine.com/power/activism/campus-debates-free-speech-safety-199489>.





Conclusion

Post-secondary institutions mirror the oppression we see in the real world. PSIs model and replicate the existing systems despite the assumption that universities are unequivocally progressive. Look at who makes the most money on campuses, who makes the most important decisions, who gets to decide to increase your tuition fees (while we fight with them on where we want that money to go) or whether gender markers on school documents are worth changing to be inclusive – the clear power divide is systemic. Student advocacy to hold those in power accountable has historically been viewed as a threat to a PSI's reputation. Stopping student dissent, without meaningful engagement and understanding of concerns, has been very common. The most marginalized students (Black, 2SLGBTQ+, poor students, and their intersections, etc.) put themselves at the forefront of these fights at the risk of their mental health and education.

All of the challenges faced by 2SLGBTQ+ students and the needs and recommendations to improve them have long been issues highlighted through student advocacy. The structural issues of post-secondary institutions are embedded in the culture. Cultural change is needed for equity. University decision-makers must take the lessons learned from the collective and community-centric advocacy of 2SLGBTQ+ student leaders and work towards shifting the culture with the ongoing engagement of these students.

2SLGBTQ+ affirming campuses provide an education in a different sense – one of self-acceptance, community, and resilience.⁸ Investing in this is an investment in equity for all.

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⁸ Lisa Basil, "Why the death of the college and university experience is so detrimental for LGBTQ students," *CBC News*, September 27, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/opinion-lgbtq-students-university-pandemic-1.5739203>.

Pathway to Prosperity: Enhancing the International Student Experience

Sam Titus (he/him/il)

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)

Like much of society, the world of post-secondary education has undergone something of a forced perspective shift over the past year and a half. One of the biggest takeaways drawn from a year of studying and living online is that post-secondary education is far more than the in-class, academic experience. Students do not attend post-secondary to just go to classes; they attend to form social and professional networks, gain valuable experience, and integrate into their communities.¹ For domestic students, these aspects will almost certainly return once in-person classes resume, but for international students, that return is less certain – and in some cases, has never been the reality. As we begin the process of re-opening and re-building, it will be crucial to remember that the “normal” we are returning to was not always an equitable space for international students and that we have been given a chance to build a stronger, more inclusive sector.

Across Canada, international students have played an increasingly large role in post-secondary education. Since 2009 international enrollment has skyrocketed, reaching nearly 340,000 in 2018-2019, or roughly 16% of total enrollment in Canada.² As pandemic restrictions begin to ease, international student interest to study in Canada remains high – study permit applications have increased significantly in the first half of 2021 compared to the same time period in 2019 and 2020.³ These trends are even more

pronounced in Ontario, where the international student population has doubled since 2016-2017⁴ and where nearly half of international students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and college programs across Canada have chosen to study.⁵ Indeed, of all the international students enrolled at Canadian colleges, 70% are located in Ontario.⁶ Economically, international students represent an important source of revenue for institutions. Across Canada, international student fees accounted for \$6.9 billion of total system income for post-secondary institutions in 2018-2019.⁷

Governments at all levels also praise international student enrollment as crucial to the success of the Canadian education system and as a way to bolster the Canadian economy. In 2020, the Government of Canada reported that international students contributed \$21.6 billion to Canada's GDP and supported nearly 170,000 jobs.⁸ International students too have expressed their interest in staying in Canada, with 60% reporting that they plan to apply for permanent residency upon graduation.⁹

ized for New Study Permit Applications (in Persons) by Month.” Accessed online: <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/9b34e712-513f-44e9-babf-9df4f7256550/resource/c294b584-bee1-4fc2-b02e-cef8601816ab>.

4 Ibid.

5 “Facts and Figures: International Students in Canada.” (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2020.) Accessed online: <https://cbie.ca/infographic/>.

6 Usher, *State of Post-Secondary*, p. 20.

7 Ibid., p. 9.

8 “Flexibility in post-graduation work permit rules to help international students and Canadian post-secondary institutions.” (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020.) Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/pgwpp-rules-covid19.html>.

9 “Facts and Figures,” Canadian Bureau for International

1 “Continued Concerns: Post-Secondary Students One Year into COVID-19.” (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Alliance of Student Association, 2021), p. 15-17.

2 Alex Usher. *The State of Post-secondary Education in Canada*. (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Strategy Associations, 2020), p. 19.

3 Statistics Canada, “Operational Processing – Monthly IRCC Updates - Source Countries - Applications Final-

However, despite the obvious benefits of attracting international students to Canada and a clear desire by international students to stay in Canada, they are often denied many of the opportunities that make a Canadian education so valuable. Recently, Citizenship and Immigration Canada reported that since 2000, only about 30% of international students transitioned to permanent residency within 10 years of completing their studies.¹⁰ Part of this gap can be attributed to inadequate and uneven opportunities afforded to international students compared to their domestic counterparts.

For Canadian students, the post-secondary education experience is increasingly being centred on work-integrated learning as a central aspect of education. In the past, these types of opportunities were primarily available to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and Business students – those programs with clear market equivalents – but more recently, there has been a noticeable push to provide every student, regardless of field of study, with a chance to apply their academic skills in the workplace. Groups such as *Co-Operative Education and Work Integrated Learning Canada* and the *Business/Higher Education Roundtable* have promoted the idea that access to work-integrated learning for all students ought to be the standard for a quality Canadian post-secondary education.¹¹ For a growing number of institutions, too, the availability of work-integrated learning opportunities are a central recruiting feature and are presented as a core component of what defines a quality education.¹² While we certainly agree with this sentiment, the true accessibility of these programs is suspect.

Education.

¹⁰ Youjin Choi, Eden Crossman, and Feng Hou. “International students as a source of labour supply: Transition to permanent residency.” (Ottawa, ON: Economic and Social Reports, Statistics Canada, 2021). Accessed online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021006/article/00002-eng.htm>.

¹¹ “Work-Integrated Learning 101.” (Ottawa, ON: Business/Higher Education Roundtable, 2020). Accessed online: <https://bher.ca/work-integrated-learning/wil-101>.

¹² For example, the University of Manitoba offers co-operative placements for students in seven of their faculties, ranging from Arts to Business to Environment, Earth, and Resources. Each program is designed for the specific faculty and all offer either monetary or academic compensation. Importantly, they also allow for student- or employer-driven placements, providing a balance between tailored learning and opportunities to match labour market needs. For more: <https://www.umanitoba.ca/career-services/co-ops-and-internships>.

Despite the importance placed on work-integrated learning, these opportunities are limited at best for international students and, in many cases, denied outright.

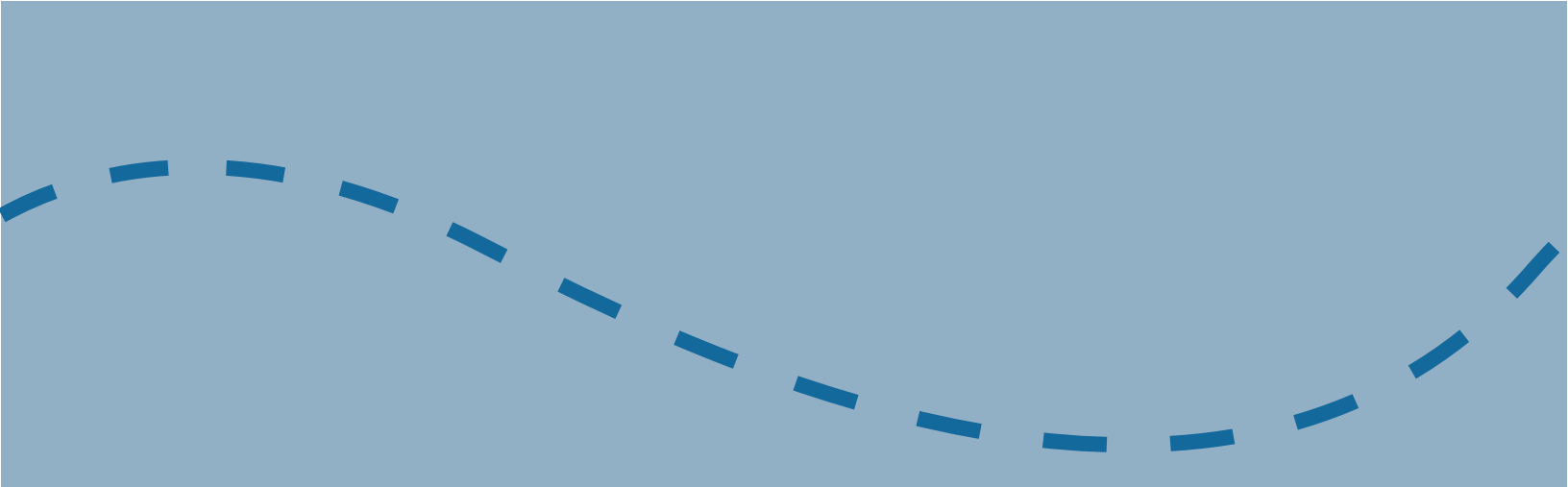
Despite the growing value and importance placed on work-integrated learning, these opportunities are limited at best for international students and, in many cases, denied outright. In order for an international student to study in Canada, they must acquire a study permit. Along with granting the individual the right to study in Canada, the permit allows the holder to work either full-time on campus¹³ or part-time off-campus.¹⁴ Programs that have built-in work-integrated learning opportunities (such as the professional practicum component of a Bachelor of Education program) are also covered under the study permit. However, if the opportunity is not deemed an essential part of the academic program, they cannot be accessed without a separate permit.¹⁵ In a small number of cases, international students can apply for a co-op permit that allows them to participate, but this requires a letter from their school stating that the co-op placement is mandatory for the completion of their degree.¹⁶ Currently, even as the number of opportunities expands, most are still considered optional, meaning they are largely inaccessible to international students.

¹³ “Work on campus.” (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2021.) Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/work-on-campus.html>.

¹⁴ “Work off campus as an international student.” (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020.) Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/work-off-campus.html>.

¹⁵ Another notable barrier in working while in-study is the requirement of having a Social Insurance Number (SIN). While international students are eligible to receive a SIN, acquiring one presents yet another hurdle, as the system is complicated and applications take time to process. Easing this process would also greatly improve the international student experience in Canada.

¹⁶ “Work as a co-op student or intern.” (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2021). Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/intern.html>.



One of the key benefits of work-integrated learning is that it exposes students to employers within their community and enables them to find employment within their field of study. According to a 2020 Statistics Canada report, of the graduating class of 2015, 88.4% of those that participated in work-integrated learning have a job that is somewhat or closely related to their field of study, compared to 71% that did not participate in work-integrated learning.¹⁷ Although participating in work-integrated learning does not necessarily guarantee employment upon graduation, it does significantly improve the quality of that employment and reduce the risk of underemployment.¹⁸ Both benefits, though, are lost for international students when they are not able to fully access these types of opportunities.

Prior to the pandemic, individuals holding a study visa were only given 90 days after finishing their program to find employment and apply for a work permit before being asked to leave the country. In 2020, though, the Post-Graduate Work Permit Program (PGWPP) was revamped and extended to give graduates 180 days to find employment. This brings the program's timeline in-line with the average time spent unemployed while seeking work.¹⁹ However it still places international students at a disadvantage compared to domestic students. To be eligible for the PGWPP, the student must have retained full-time status for the duration of their studies,²⁰

17 "Work-integrated learning during post-secondary studies, 2015 graduates." (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2020). Accessed online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00003-eng.htm>.

18 Ibid.

19 "Duration of unemployment, annual." (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2021). Accessed online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410005701>.

20 The only exceptions are during the student's final semes-

ter, where they are able to shift to part-time, or if they take an official leave of absence.

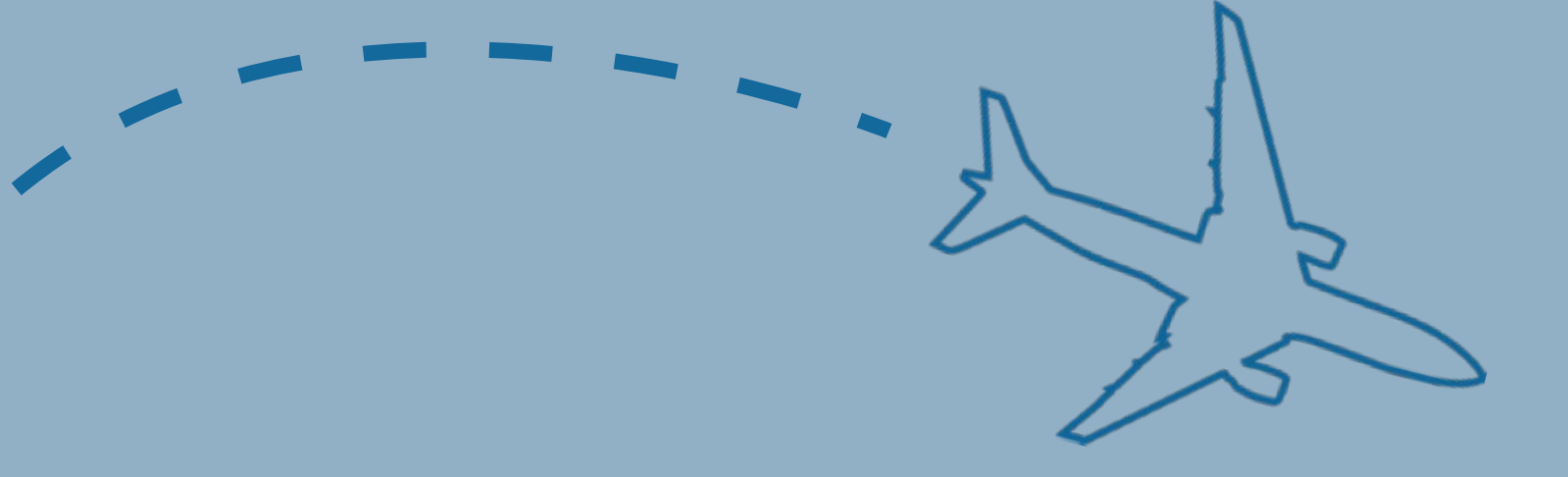
These limitations unnecessarily restrict international students' options when it comes to navigating their post-secondary experience. One of the main reasons a student may wish to alter their enrollment status is to commit more time to seeking work to develop their skills and build their professional network. Even if international students could work while in-study under the study visa, they could risk jeopardizing their PGWPP eligibility. This type of trade-off is deeply counterproductive and reflects the types of barriers that international students face when trying to remain in Canada post-graduation.

While there are some programs designed to assist skilled immigrants in staying in Canada, such as Provincial Nominee Programs²² and its parent program, the Express Entry program, their benefits have a limited scope as well. They primarily focus on easing the pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for those that demonstrate a clear benefit to the Canadian labour market, and heavily prioritize those with a job offer in hand. However, relatively few inter-

ter, where they are able to shift to part-time, or if they take an official leave of absence.

21 "Work in Canada after you graduate." (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2021). Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/after-graduation/eligibility.html>.

22 Each province administers their own version of the program, but adhere to a shared function of attracting immigrants based on economic need. In Ontario, the program is called the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. For more information: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-immigrant-nominee-program-oinp>.



national students meet this requirement. Of the 239,115 valid applications for Express Entry submitted in 2019, only 12,841 received points for “Arranged Employment,” amounting to just 5% of applicants.²³ If Canada wishes to continue attracting and retaining international students, more has to be done to build a welcoming and accessible space for them.

Post-secondary education sector stakeholders have been united and unanimous in their praise of international students and the value that they bring to Canada, but government action rarely matches. Given that work-integrated learning has become central to post-secondary education as a means to both enhance the quality of in-class learning and assist in gaining employment upon graduation, the barriers international students continue to face in accessing these opportunities is unacceptable. Not only have international students shown interest in remaining upon graduation, but their presence would enrich Canada culturally and economically. Within the context of the post-COVID-19 rebuild, the post-secondary sector has been given the opportunity to enhance its quality of education for those from equity-seeking groups. In continuing to limit the ability of international students to fully participate in work-integrated learning, institutions and governments have more to do to ensure the post-pandemic post-secondary sector is stronger than the previous iteration.

²³ “Express Entry Year-End Report 2019”. (Ottawa, ON: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020). Accessed online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/express-entry-year-end-report-2019.html>.

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CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit advocacy organization representing over 275,000 students at 24 student associations across the country that advocates for accessible, affordable, innovative, and high quality post-secondary education in Canada. For over 25 years, CASA has done this by working with its members and other stakeholders to develop evidence-informed policy, conduct effective awareness campaigns, and maintain strong government relations.

The Kids Aren't Alright

Stephanie Ye-Mowe (she/they)

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA)

Two months ago, I stumbled across a report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)¹ that called attention to the disparate outcomes in education and employment for students with disabilities. And I remember thinking: “Isn’t it concerning that when confronted with this all I could think was ‘Yeah.’”

Because however grim the report’s conclusions were, they simply rang true with what I already knew.

Students with disabilities don’t experience post-secondary education (PSE) the same way as our abled peers. We don’t access it at the same rates, or finish at the same rates. And to add one more blow, we don’t benefit from it to the same degree. Among those who finish, we are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, without benefits, or in other precarious work positions.

Even as Vice President, Education of a student association that represents 32,000 undergrads, at the end of this year I will still be a student with a disability that regularly interferes with my ability to be consistently productive. I’m not somehow immune from the systems that drive these outcomes. What futures are actually accessible to people like me? How much does my life now depend on a fragile bubble of access, divorced from “The Real World”? These questions bother me a lot. Within the vast range of futures available to university grads, the set of likely outcomes for students with disabilities seem

dismal, as if there was never any way to succeed from the start.

These narratives are drowning. As disabled students, it’s far from uncommon to wonder if you’re just fundamentally unsuited for post-secondary or meaningful employment, if those futures are just better left to those whose minds and bodies agree with them, and if these outcomes just reflect your personal failings. As a society, we put so much responsibility on individuals to mold themselves into the right shapes for success. But maybe it’s time we flip the narrative – asking ourselves what it means to live in a world where we can build skyscrapers and decode lost languages, but not design societies that work for their disabled members.

So what are we going to do about this? What can we do? I won’t pretend it’s easy to achieve equity for disabled students, as if there’s a switch someone’s just forgotten to flip. However, the acceptance, normalization, and sense of inevitability around these worse experiences and outcomes are all part of the problem. While there isn’t one trick to fix the experiences of disabled students, there are many ways we can create change. And if anywhere needs to change, it’s post-secondary education – what should be the “great equalizer” across race, class, and all other kinds of privileges or oppressions.

Post-Secondary Institutions are Part of the Problem

Post-secondary education is a prerequisite for so many opportunities in our society. Success at university can lead to even greater successes after graduation; but exclusion, poor performance, and failure can lead in the opposite direction. 2 years after graduation, 51 percent of university

¹ Ken Chatoor, “Post-secondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes for Ontario Students with Disabilities,” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario* (Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2021), <https://heqco.ca/pub/post-secondary-credential-attainment-and-labour-market-outcomes-for-ontario-students-with-disabilities/>.

alum stated they needed at least a bachelor's degree for their current position, and most of these graduates earn between \$46,000-\$50,000 a year, which is approximately \$3,800-\$4,200 per month.² But when looking at the scant, barely-livable state of ODSP, a single recipient (one without dependents or a partner) can earn, on average, about \$1,169 per month.³ Evidently, post-secondary achievement can be the turning point between economic mobility or likely-permanent poverty. Barriers in post-secondary education have long-term impacts for disabled students.

Not all vocations are suitable for everyone; the nature of some work might make some accommodations impossible. But we ought to consider what attributes aren't essential, and whether we should deny someone accreditation because of (often misguided) perspectives of what kinds of learning or achievement are essential. It may be illegal to deny someone based on disability, but job applicants need post-secondary degrees.

The working world is vast and varied. While some professors might frame their refusals to accommodate as "tough love" or preparing students for "The Real World," in actuality, they are preventing students from finding and creating spaces in the labour force where they can thrive. Post-secondary systems may want to shrug off responsibility for the students they deem unfit, but their failure to facilitate participation and make room for disabled students is part of the problem.

Aside from their importance in shaping our future, publicly-assisted and regulated post-secondary institutions should be the easiest places to make accessible. Legislation like the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) provides a starting point for identifying and accommodating around barriers, but why should those barriers exist from the start?

In pursuit of ideals around academic integrity, cost-effective education, and fostering only the brightest minds, post-secondary institutions often lose sight of the needs of their students,

especially those with disabilities or other marginalizations. When they systematically exclude disabled students – regardless of intentions – they send the message that these students just aren't capable of learning or aren't right for university.

Rather than thinking of disabled students as unsuited for post-secondary learning environments, we ought to interrogate why we aren't designing post-secondary learning environments for the diversity of students who inhabit them. In other words, why do we choose to create barriers to access and equity for disabled students?

Designing Systems for Reality

Post-secondary systems, like all of our social systems and supports, don't like cheaters, or like to be cheated. They expect "fakers" and demand proof and evidence in ways that simply don't align with the capabilities or timeliness of our medical systems. By not recognizing the structure and biases of these systems, post-secondary institutions and their "disability support

Why do we choose to create barriers to access and equity for disabled students?

offices" instead create additional barriers, excluding many from ever accessing support.

Demands for documentation to establish legitimacy fail to take into account the costs, time, and effort it takes to attain them, not to mention how diagnoses are less accessible to students who are racialized, international, or of marginalized genders, and are more reflective of someone's relationship with their medical practitioner and support systems.

Intersecting oppressions play a large role in access to documentation and diagnoses. Diagnostic processes rely on explaining your symptoms with sufficient articulacy and credibility to be taken seriously without coming across as too disabled, emotional, or broken to know your own situation. There are racial and gendered bi-

2 Government of Ontario, 2018-19 Ontario University Graduate Survey (Ministry of Colleges and Universities), accessed August 20, 2021, <http://www.iaccess.gov.on.ca/OsappRate-sWeb/enterapp/overview.xhtml>.

3 Income Security Advocacy Centre, OW & ODSP Rates and the Ontario Child Benefit, March 2020, accessed August 20, 2021, https://cjppr.on.ca/content/user_files/2020/05/March-2020-OW-and-ODSP-rates-and-OCB-EN_.pdf.



ases when judging who is considered credible versus who is overreacting or faking; for example, (cis) women experience higher rates of severe and long-lasting pain than (cis) men, but more often have their pain treated as “psychosomatic” and get referred to therapists rather than pain clinics.⁴ Furthermore, accessing care and letters to confirm your suffering, symptoms, and diagnoses is financially expensive and sometimes out of reach for students who don’t have a spare \$5,000 floating around. Racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression impose greater burdens on certain people and limit who can get their disability status verified. Asking a student with a known, verified chronic condition to retrieve a \$20+ doctor’s note every time symptoms flare up and file it within 48 hours, when some campus clinics are booked two weeks out, doesn’t just constitute additional barriers and it doesn’t reflect reality.

In their accessibility operations, post-secondary institutions adopt an “accommodation model”, where they mimic the medical model in that students must validate their disability through a diagnosis and provide evidence of this through documentation,⁵ thus making equitable participation in PSE contingent on an external approval or denial of their disability. NEADS identifies three main stressors that result from this accommodation model: “(1) disclosure of disability; (2)

4 “What is the Health Gap and Why Should I Care?,” *Women’s College Hospital*, accessed August 20, 2021, <http://thehealthgap.ca/>.

5 “Landscape of Accessibility and Accommodation in Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities,” *National Educational Association of Disable Students*, July 2018, 45, <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/AccessibilityandAccommodation%202018-5landscapeareport.pdf>.

development of accommodation solutions; and (3) provision of accommodations to access an inaccessible environment.”⁶ The mental and emotional burden of this model on disabled students is further compounded by the discrimination experienced during this process and, consequently, enhances feelings of stigma.⁷

Can’t Create Something Out of Nothing

Part of the issue lies in funding and resources: disability offices deal with a lot of students. In fact, in Canada the estimated student to staff caseload is somewhere between 1:125 to 1:250.⁸ In comparison, U.S. colleges averaged around 1:80.⁹ The existence of these offices, like the sight of disabled parking spots and the occasional ramp, can function to create the illusion that all is well – but for those navigating the systems, the gaps are evident. In their current manifestation, these offices alone cannot meaningfully resolve access issues.

Disability offices don’t work to improve the built environment, rethink pedagogy, or create community. That’s not within their mandate, much less their available time or resources. Thinking of accessibility only in these ways, we can only ever be reactive, not proactive.

While disabled students experience barriers throughout their post-secondary education, the limited supports of disability support offices don’t extend beyond the classroom. Funding that is provided to accessibility offices excludes experiential learning accommodations.¹⁰ This means opportunities intended to build practical work experience end up being another inaccessible component of PSE, excluding a population that already faces disproportionate outcomes in employment and further compromising the quality of education for students with disabilities.

The built environments of post-secondary institutions remain broadly inaccessible, despite frequent construction across campuses. Current policies expect universities to find infrastructure

6 Ibid., 46.

7 Ibid.

8 Fichten, Catherine S et al., “Canadian Post-secondary Students with Disabilities: Where Are They?,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 33.3 (2003): 71–130.

9 Wendy S. Harbour, Final Report: The 2004 AHEAD Survey of Higher Education Disability Services Providers (Huntersville, NC: Association of Higher Education and Disability, 2004).

10 “Landscape of Accessibility and Accommodation.”

funding from a mixture of donors and the government, but this limits infrastructure spending to what donors want to spend on. Money for infrastructural improvements is dedicated to shiny new builds plastered with donors' names, because that's what donors want. No one wants to pay for retrofits for what's already there. It's no wonder the system doesn't work.

A scarcity of resources not only prevents important work from being done by those who are willing to take it up, but fosters resentment against disabled students for "wasting" those resources. Legislating "compliance" to accessibility standards, without enforcement or financial support for those standards, shifts the burden and blame onto "complaining" disabled students who simply don't want to be designed out of their own campuses.

This Game of Odds

I whole-heartedly believe that I got lucky. My presence here – at the University of Waterloo, as VP-Education of its student association – stems not from being "brave" or "resilient", but rather from luck. In actuality, there is very little separating me and the many I've known who were either kicked or dropped out, least of all any difference in tenacity or intelligence. And yet, here we are.

In my work, I get to do cool things, inform provincial policy, and draw attention to little-known system flaws. I get to volunteer my time and energy to make a difference. Now, I get to enjoy the benefits of a post-secondary education, even while many people just like me can't. Because I was lucky. But so was the institution, which now gets to benefit from my insights and perspective – in disability and other matters – most of which I've only come to know or pay notice to because of my disability.

I'm here because of a mix of luck and privilege, and meddling from friends, that helped carve out a less-inaccessible path for me. But here's the thing: it should never be a matter of luck.



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From High School Through Post-secondary and Into the Labour Market: Understanding the Needs and Experiences of Ontario Students with Disabilities

Ken Chatoor (he/him) and Victoria Barclay (she/her)
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)

The journey to and through post-secondary education (PSE) is exciting and challenging for many Ontario students. Students with disabilities experience many of the same triumphs and setbacks as their peers, but also face unique challenges during their education and transition to the labour market. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) undertakes research to expand our understanding of the systemic barriers and unique burdens faced by students from equity-seeking groups. In a recent research report,¹ we combined Statistics Canada data with a review of provincial policies and processes to explore the experience of students with disabilities as they move into and through PSE before moving into the labour market. Our findings are sobering but not surprising.

What are some of the challenges and barriers faced by PSE students with disabilities?

Students with disabilities experience barriers at each stage of their journey through the PSE system and into the labour market. They are less likely to participate in any type of PSE program, especially programs at or beyond the bachelor's level. Those who do graduate report significantly worse labour market outcomes compared to those without a disability, not only after graduating but throughout their careers. Moreover, the data used for this analysis was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, which we know has significantly impacted PSE students. HEQCO research conducted during the pandemic² reveals

that students with disabilities are more likely to encounter challenges accessing support services, and this issue worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transition from high school to PSE

The transition from high school into PSE is a major adjustment for all students. One of the key findings is that for students with disabilities, the transition to PSE includes a shift from a system of built-in supports to an environment where it is the student's responsibility to seek out and engage with support systems. Although the process for identifying and assessing the needs of students has its drawbacks in the K-12 system, students who are identified as requiring additional supports have access to a system of teachers, administrators, and specialists able to provide assistance within the school environment. Once in PSE, these students must self-identify and register with their institutions' Office for Students with Disabilities to access supports and grants.

Disability type matters — a lot

When it comes to PSE attainment rates and labour market outcomes, people with different disabilities confront different challenges. Students with mental health, learning and physical disabilities are less likely to graduate from PSE and experience worse labour market outcomes after PSE than other graduates. For example, individuals with a learning, mental health or physical disability are more likely to be low income compared to graduates without these disabilities.

¹ Chatoor, K., MacKay, E. & Hudak, L. (2019). Parental Education and Post-secondary Attainment: Does the Apple Fall Far from the Tree? Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

² Pichette, J., Brumwell, S. & Rizk, J. (2020). Improving the Accessibility of Remote Higher Education: Lessons from the

pandemic and recommendations. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Labour market outcomes

PSE graduates with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or out of the workforce. Those who find employment are more likely to work in a job without employment benefits like paid sick leave and other health supports, and they are more likely to feel they are overqualified for their position. For many with disabilities, health is a significant factor limiting employment success. Approximately 36% of recent graduates report health as the primary reason they do not have the job they intended at graduation. PSE has been shown to have important quality-of-life benefits beyond labour market outcomes, such as mental and physical health improvements, increased civic engagement, and greater optimism for the future. However, graduates with disabilities do not enjoy these benefits to the same extent as others. Graduates of all disability types are less likely to feel optimistic or hopeful about the future, and often cite health as an emerging source of stress.

Recommendations for students and PSE institutions

How do we begin to address all these challenges and improve outcomes for students with disabilities? We offer recommendations in various areas of policy and practice that we think can improve the lives of Ontario's students with disabilities and note that the most effective actions and solutions will be achieved through consultation and partnerships with students with disabilities.

ities and note that the most effective actions and solutions will be achieved through consultation and partnerships with students with disabilities.

1) Data should reflect the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and students must be part of data collection design and procedures.

What stood out to us in doing this work is the great diversity that exists within the broad grouping of 'people with disabilities.' With the data available to us, we were able to differen-

Graduates of all disability types are less likely to feel optimistic or hopeful about the future, and often cite health as an emerging source of stress.

tiate by vision, hearing, physical, learning, and mental health disability. Unsurprisingly, disability type has huge implications for students' experiences in our education system and labour market. At an administrative and national level, data collection that accounts for disability type is very inconsistent. As a result, the nuances of the experience of students with different types of disabilities are often lost in the research and data used for policy and program development. We emphasize that including students with disabilities in data collection design and procedures will ensure data collection is consistent in defining and differentiating disability type, reflects lived experiences, and uses appropriate language. We understand the trepidation and concern over collecting data for under-represented and vulnerable communities, but we hope our findings demonstrate the impact that adequate data collection and appropriate survey tools could have on the outcomes of students with disabilities both in education and the labour market.

2) Students can work with PSE institutions to incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the development of course materials.

UDL is a framework based on evidence about how people learn that intentionally embraces learning variability and increases success and meaningful participation in learning for all



students. By using UDL's principles of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, and incorporating broader principles of accessibility and equity, PSE institutions can design courses that embrace students' learning differences. This could improve learning experiences for all students, particularly those with disabilities. Course design should involve students with disabilities and other underrepresented student groups by including students on advisory committees. UDL can also positively influence student engagement and belonging, which impacts students' perceptions and expectations for PSE. UDL can be used with accessibility and equity principles to promote culturally responsive education that benefits all underrepresented students. While it cannot account for every student's individual needs, we believe UDL can be incorporated through broad supports to benefit students with disabilities. General principles of accessibility and equity in teaching and learning will benefit all students. HEQCO is working on projects related to implementing and identifying best practices for the uptake of UDL across Ontario PSE institutions.

3) Evaluate perceptions of post-secondary among K-12 students with disabilities in order to better understand why students with disabilities are far less likely to participate in PSE.

High school is a critical period of planning for and making decisions about PSE; understanding the needs and perceptions of PSE for students with disabilities is important. Students with disabilities should be part of a holistic review of high school and PSE transition programs to inform how PSE institutions can best pick up where high school support programs leave off. By drawing on firsthand evaluations of students with disabilities, governments and educational partners can take a comprehensive approach to increase access to and improve the perception of PSE for students with disabilities.

4) Institutions and employers should work with students to develop programs to support the school-to-work transition for PSE grads with disabilities.

To support the school-to-work transition, institutions and employers should enhance participation in transition programs that connect students with employment opportunities. This includes participation in work-integrated learning, ensuring that students with disabilities have equitable access to these opportunities and are benefitting from them in the same way. Labour

market transition programs are most effective if the specific health needs of students are considered, especially for students with learning, physical and mental health disabilities. We should not overlook the significance that school-to-work transition programs can have on other areas of life, such as improved health outcomes and increased civic engagement. We must also recognize the urgency of implementing adequate solutions to combat the challenges faced by students with disabilities when entering a rapidly changing labour market.

5) Institutions should continue to improve and build upon proactive supports for students with disabilities.

Mental health is one of the most prevalent disability types among young people today and it often presents at an age when individuals are in PSE. We recommend that institutions continue to adopt accessible and culturally responsive approaches for proactive mental health support. This will help meet the needs of Ontario's diverse student population and allow students to have choices that reflect their needs and cultural context. To support students' mental health, institutions must acknowledge that needs are often based on the varying intersections of their identities – and they must work directly with students to understand how students' intersectional experiences can inform their models of support. By offering and helping students access specialized mental health supports (e.g., specific options for Indigenous students, LGBTQ+ students, etc.), institutions will be able to proactively support their students' mental health, access, and cultural needs in a much-needed holistic manner.



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The Future of Learning

Robert Luke (he/him)
CEO, eCampus Ontario

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immeasurable disruption on all facets of life, all over the world. It continues to be a global event that has drawn in sharp relief many of the disparities in societies globally. The pandemic has disproportionately affected certain groups of people: those who are marginalized have been further marginalized, those in precarious work have suffered more, and those with the privilege of isolating have been able to emerge with relatively little disruption compared to those without this privilege. The rapid development and deployment of vaccines has saved countless lives and enabled us to slowly start reopening the economy. A return to a new normal is on the horizon. As Ontario's post-secondary campuses prepare to reopen in the fall, it is worth taking stock of what has been learned from the past year, and how we can work together to ensure we are rebuilding for resilience.

The future of learning is flexible.

Online, virtual, digital learning – whatever we wish to call this – has been with us for several decades. Yet it has been a niche area until now. The slow emergence of the post-secondary education (PSE) environment to embrace online technologies began several decades ago, starting with email, web pages, and online discussions; then came wikis, blogs, learning management systems, testing, self-assessments, and participatory media; and now we are acclimating to immersive collaboration environments. But the diffusion of these innovations has not been even, nor widespread, until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced us all to scramble to put everything online swiftly.

This shift to online emergency remote teaching was achieved by an incredible collective ef-

fort. Our campuses worked together to move all learning into the digital environment. This shift was marked by adaptability, agility, professionalism, and determination to support learners in every way possible.

And during this effort it is important to note that we were all learners. Faculty who had never taught online before had to learn to do so. Even those who had used online technologies in their teaching and learning had to adjust to a fully online teaching and learning approach. The rapid emergence into fully online course delivery meant that we had to learn with and from each other, from the decades of research informing digital pedagogies, and perhaps most of all, from our learners. Above all, we learned to be adaptable, and to embrace flexible learning pedagogies, paradigms, and approaches. We learned to lead with empathy and to focus on the needs of learners and indeed all of our co-workers. We were all going through the same thing at the same time. In the process we got to know our peers in different ways. We saw their living and working spaces, their partners, their children, their pets, and we learned to embrace the interruptions stemming from no internet or the needs of families. It was, despite everything, humanizing. We have all learned that to be human is to be flexible, to accommodate the contexts in which we all live and work while supporting each other to succeed.

The future of learning is about options.

Following the pandemic pivot, our focus in education can now shift to “digital by design”: to more mindfully and artfully design digital learning environments that support all learners. The future of digital learning must be about options: options to facilitate learning in distributed, on-



The future of digital learning must be about options.

line environments, to scaffold face-to-face and *in situ* learning via mediated communities of practice, and to provide ways for learners to access education that support iterative learning and ongoing career progression.

Future-focused flexible lifelong learning ecosystems must be aligned with the needs and ways of knowing and learning from an increasingly diverse population. The massive transition to emergency remote teaching forced by the pandemic exposed critical gaps, particularly in relation to community, collaboration, socialization, and inclusion, that existed within the remote learning ecosystem. Some of these were worsened by the crisis.

As we recover, rebuild, and reimagine post-secondary education, we can collaborate on initiatives that ensure learning ecosystems allow every learner to thrive. This means co-creating learning experiences and tools that consider the social, emotional, and physical dimensions of learning, not only the cognitive and intellectual ones, from a holistic approach. It also means listening to, appreciating, and addressing the accessibility, diversity, equity and decolonization needs of learners to co-create more inclusive systems for meaningful education with those who have been continuously marginalized and harmed. It means seizing on this moment to rebuild, support, and humanize learning in an environment that prioritizes inclusion, representation, and voice.

As we now prepare to return to campuses, we must not look back at how we learned online as a bad thing. Instead, we should look on the experience as a valid learning opportunity that can enable us to move into a digital-first future that gives learners greater control over their

learning, with increased access and accessibility, increased collaboration and resource sharing across the sector, and decreased costs to the system and to students. This is the potential we have now: to build on the foundations that have been laid and the investments made – by the province and by our institutions – to shape the future of public post-secondary education as inclusive, flexible, and responsive to the needs of every learner, and the whole learner.

We know that the campus experience extends beyond the intellectual component of participating in a course or interacting with a professor. The social, emotional, physical and other dimensions of the learner also form parts of that full campus experience. This includes participation in student organizations, athletics, various events, as well as fun or serendipitous socialization. Being on campus also allows for relatively easier access to student services and supports. We can use the term “the whole learner” to refer to that multi-dimensional person and their range of needs whether intellectual, social, emotional, or physical. When we provide learning options in support of the whole learner, we support preparing every learner to gain the digital fluency for a positive entry into and success with learning in any medium, for life.

The future of learning is the future of work. That future is now.

People now come to post-secondary education at all ages and stages of life. The premise of lifelong learning is being enacted by those who are entering an Indigenous institute, college, or university for the first time no matter how old they are. They will more than likely return, to upskill, reskill, or otherwise learn new things as their careers and interest takes them. Meeting the

needs of these learners is what we enable when we design for inclusion.

When we design for inclusion we must be mindful of methods and technologies that exclude, either by design or inadvertently. We have heard many examples of these: biases being baked into Artificial Intelligence and user interface assumptions that cater to only idealized end users. Understanding the experiences of those who exist at the margins of the mainstream is important to enable education that welcomes all learners. This is part of the potential we have now, to render explicit the assumptions inherent in our technologies and our pedagogies, and to embrace universal design for learning that celebrates diversity and enables learning – and individuals and communities – to flourish.

We now turn to the challenge of scale: how to build on the work we have done, to continue to provide high quality learning environments that generate enthusiasm, engagement, and a sense of connection in our learners. We can do this by embracing the principles of human centred design that remind us to put the needs of the learner and the social contexts in which we all live at the centre of our curriculum design. We can listen and learn from the voices of our learners – and every learner – as we rebuild the post-pandemic educational environment.

And so how we learn so too do we work. As we start to return to in-person activities across society, this means designing return-to-work environments. Many workplaces are planning for a hybrid, flexible future of work. This means that the digital fluency skills gained as a digital learner will help us all navigate the future of work. This future includes the rapid emergence of new technologies and the need to update our skills and competencies. Unfortunately, the future may also mean being prepared to resume all online learning as future waves and pandemics dictate. But resilience means being prepared with continuity of education plans that build on a firm foundation of digital fluency and flexibility. By leveraging the work we have done as a community these past months, we can ensure that we can enable the success of institutions, faculty, staff, and students. By working together, we can realize the future of learning as inclusive and supportive for all.



Robert Luke is the CEO of eCampusOntario. eCampusOntario is a not-for-profit organization that supports Ontario's colleges, universities and Indigenous Institutes that connects our campuses to the future of learning. We build systems that are open, collaborative, and responsive to shifts and opportunities in the educational landscape. To learn more about eCampusOntario visit <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/>

about OUSA

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) represents the interests of approximately 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. OUSA is run by a Steering Committee made up of elected student representatives from each of our member associations. Day-to-day activities are carried out by four full-time office staff.

OUSA's approach to advocacy is based on creating substantive, student driven, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Our professional government relations practices ensure that we have the access to decision-makers we need in order for our members' voices to influence provincial legislation and policy.

VISION

Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario.

MISSION

Conduct research to identify issues affecting the accessibility, affordability, accountability and quality of undergraduate education in Ontario

Develop credible and constructive policy to address these challenges

Lobby the government to affect their undergraduate education policy

Organize campaigns to effectively articulate the needs and interests of our members

Communicate research and policy to both educate and affect the opinions of stakeholders, Ontarians and government

Build partnerships in the post-secondary education realm to accomplish our vision.

OUSA MEMBERS

ALMA MATER SOCIETY OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario
Steering Committee Members: *Ryan Sieg, Jacob Marinelli*

BROCK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Austin Hurley*

WATERLOO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Stephanie Ye-Mowe*

LAURENTIAN STUDENTS' GENERAL ASSOCIATION

Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Avery Morin*

MCMASTER STUDENTS UNION

McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Siobhan Teel*

TRENT DURHAM STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Trent University Durham GTA, Oshawa, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Nathan R.G. Barnett*

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL OF WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Western University, London, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Eunice Oladejo*

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford, Ontario & Waterloo, Ontario
Steering Committee Member: *Erin Quinn*

What Will Micro-Credentials Mean For Equity?

Sue Wurtele (she/her)

President, Ontario Confederation University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)

Introduction

Micro-credentials have gained increasing popularity in the post-secondary sector in recent years. Ontario's universities and the provincial government have both been actively investing more resources into micro-credentials with the dubious argument that they will help individuals quickly “upskill” or “re-skill” to access work opportunities without having to enroll in a full degree or diploma program.

Most discussion to-date has focused on the logistics of implementing micro-credentials, with little consideration of whether they are a good fit for universities. By their nature, micro-credentials reduce the educational experience to courses narrowly focused on the skills the labour market is predicted to need. This approach runs counter to the comprehensive, versatile educational experience universities are designed to provide, and it raises questions about how the implementation of micro-credentials will impact equity, access, education quality, and university graduate job prospects?

What are micro-credentials?

Micro-credential initiatives have been rolling out at post-secondary institutions around the world, often at community colleges. However, one of the challenges in defining micro-credentials is the numerous, divergent ways that they have been implemented.

Some are stand-alone, customized programs designed for specific employers; some are individual components of a diploma or degree program that can be “stacked” into a larger credential; and some are program “add-ons” that can be collected by students in addition to their degree requirements, with the hopes of increasing

their chances of employment. The length of micro-credentials also varies, with some lasting ten weeks and others only a few hours.

Generally, however, micro-credentials refer to short-term, highly targeted certificate courses focused on a specific skill or knowledge acquisition for the job market.

Investing in micro-credentials in Ontario

In Ontario, the Ford government has opted to invest in micro-credentials as part of its COVID-19 recovery response on the basis that they offer a “quick pathway to employment, minimizing the amount of time workers are removed from the labour market compared to more traditional credentials.”¹ In November 2020, as part of the provincial budget, the government announced a \$59.5 million investment in micro-credentials over three years.² Later, the government broadened the eligibility criteria for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to include those applying for micro-credentials.³ Since the announcement, universities and colleges across Ontario have launched micro-credential programs.

1 eCampusOntario, Request for Proposals: A Portal for Micro-Credential Offerings by Post-Secondary Institutions in Ontario (Toronto, ON: eCampusOntario, March 26, 2021), https://www.ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MCPortal_RFP-EN.pdf.

2 Rod Phillips, *Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, November 2020), 110, <https://budget.ontario.ca/2020/index.html>.

3 Government of Ontario, “Ontario Expands Financial Assistance to Include Micro-credentials,” Newsroom, March 18, 2021, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60792/ontario-expands-financial-assistance-to-include-micro-credentials>.

What about the equity implications?

A policy of questionable value

Ontario's universities have been chronically underfunded for decades. They receive the lowest per-student funding in Canada⁴ and have some of the highest tuition fees in the country.⁵ Matters were made worse in 2019, when the Ford government slashed OSAP funding by about \$670 million,⁶ cut tuition fees without increasing government funding proportionally, and later on clawed back an increase to the federal Canada Student Grant by implementing a further \$400 million reduction to OSAP expenditures.⁷ These changes negatively impacted access and education quality.

Instead of spending \$59.5 million on micro-credentials, the government could have reduced tuition fees or increased student financial assistance to improve access to post-secondary education. It might have also invested in core funding to improve important equity work at our universities, which have been starved for adequate funding. These decisions are policy choices, and the value of a new initiative, such as micro-credentials, should not be judged on

4 Canadian Association of University Teachers, *Provincial Government Funding per FTE Students (\$2017)*, <https://www.caut.ca/resources/almanac/2-canada-provinces>.

5 Statistics Canada, *Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Level of Study*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/ti/tbli/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>

6 Victor Fedeli, *2019 Ontario Budget: Protecting What Matters Most* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2019), 300, <https://budget.ontario.ca/pdf/2019/2019-ontario-budget-en.pdf>.

7 Peter Bethlenfalvy, *Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021), 174, <https://budget.ontario.ca/2021/pdf/2021-ontario-budget-en.pdf>.



its merits alone (which are dubious),⁸ but against the improvements that could have been made if that same money had been invested elsewhere. In a chronically underfunded post-secondary education system, providing funding to cash-starved universities for programs that do not align with the mission of the university threatens to distort academic priorities.

Speaking of access, the government has not increased student assistance funding to account for the increased demand resulting from students taking micro-credentials. This, despite the fact that those taking micro-credentials will be eligible for ten times more student financial assistance than those enrolled in degrees on a part-time basis (\$5,000 vs. \$500).⁹ By offering so much financial support to incentivize students to choose micro-credentials, the government is putting even more pressure on a decimated OSAP budget and effectively reducing the amount of money available to students hoping to pursue a university degree.

Credentials without credibility

The main appeal of micro-credentials is presented as their lower cost and shorter time commitment. This will be attractive to those in socio-economic groups for whom the tuition fees associated with a full degree are too high. But will choosing micro-credentials actually benefit them? Do micro-credentials provide a tool to make educational outcomes and job attainment more equitable? So far, the evidence would suggest that they do not.

Research shows that employers clearly distinguish degrees as “more substantive job qualifications that represent a greater level of commitment, depth, achievement and perseverance” and “an achievement that is distinct from simply mastering the knowledge and skills in a particular program.”¹⁰ Employers understand that university degrees provide benefits beyond a simple set of job-ready skills. They want graduates who can think creatively and ask critical questions.

8 Micro-credentials Briefing Note (Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, 2021), <https://ocufa.on.ca/assets/OCUFA-Micro-credentials-briefing-note.pdf>.

9 Government of Ontario, “Maximum Amounts of Aid,” <https://www.ontario.ca/page/maximum-amounts-aid>.

10 Scott Greenberg, “Bright Lines Between Traditional Degrees and Microcredentials,” Inside Higher Ed, May 2, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2018/05/02/clearer-distinctions-between-traditional-programs-and>.

Students also appear to view micro-credentials as having limited value. A 2019 study on the benefits and costs of alternative credentials showed a low completion rate for these credentials and concluded that “low program completion rates likely reflect that most learners do not perceive

As it stands, micro-credentials are likely to only add to the barriers that those educated abroad face when immigrating to Canada.

the benefits to outweigh the costs.”¹¹

If micro-credentials become mainstream in our universities, we risk having a system where those from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds opt for less expensive micro-credential programs because they are more affordable and promise quicker job prospects. However, the reality is that employers will continue to favour those with degrees and diplomas, hiring those who had the financial resources to pursue a full university education and leaving those with micro-credentials to struggle to make ends meet in the gig economy.

Another consideration relates to how post-secondary institutions and employers recognize micro-credentials. They can vary so dramatically between different jurisdictions and even at different institutions that there is no guarantee that a micro-credential earned at one university or college will be recognized at another. Micro-credentials are not universally defined or regulated, which raises questions about their portability and the quality and effectiveness of the training they provide.

Will universities or employers respect micro-credentials earned at foreign institutions? What will that mean for those immigrating to Canada from abroad? New immigrants already face significant challenges in having their international

11 Fiona Hollands and Aasiya Kazi, Benefits and Costs of MOOC-Based Alternative Credentials (Pennsylvania: Centre for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education, 2019), https://8606adbo-7829-4e6c-a502-3e181c6f3720.filesusr.com/ugd/cc7beb_a74e1be71afb4e72bb7f44adafo3d9eb.pdf.

degrees recognized. As it stands, micro-credentials are likely to only add to the barriers that those educated abroad face when immigrating to Canada.

A two-tier university system

What about university resources and services? Will students taking micro-credentials have access to libraries and dedicated faculty? Will they enjoy the same university supports their colleagues do? How about recreational facilities and resource centres? Will these students be members of campus students' unions, be able to join clubs, enroll in health and dental plans?

Micro-credential programs risk splitting students into two streams:

1. Students with the resources to afford a university degree will have access to all of the resources, services, and communities a university has to offer. They will receive a holistic and comprehensive education and will graduate with full degrees that are transferable, recognized globally, and will benefit them for decades to come.
2. Students for whom high tuition fees seem like too great a barrier or who are hoping to quickly gain the skills for a job will be more likely to pursue micro-credentials. These students will take stripped-down courses (most likely online), probably lack access to many of the resources and services universities provide, and graduate with a limited set of skills and fewer job prospects. As the economy shifts, the jobs for which they have trained will disappear and they will be compelled to return and pay to acquire additional micro-credentials.

The benefits of micro-credentials for equity-seeking groups are questionable. Emerging data shows that, in advanced economies, highly-skilled 40 to 50-year-old employees in "higher-end professional occupations" are most likely to complete and benefit from micro-credentials.¹²

This informal streaming of post-secondary education will amplify existing inequities at our uni-

versities and in the job market.

An investment in precarity

While micro-credential advocates suggest that "stacking" micro-credentials will eventually lead to degrees or full credentials, this vision misses the key point that a degree is more than the sum of its parts. Stacking many micro-credentials into a degree will not lead to a wholesome education or comprehensive training.

Instead, this approach will undermine the earning potential of workers and largely benefit employers at the expense of their staff. It will also create a two-tier job market, where employers will pay workers with micro-credentials less than those with full training and degrees. Instead of preparing students for stable, long-term jobs, micro-credentials support a gig economy based on exploiting workers. Gig economy workers do not have collective bargaining rights, access to health care, a guaranteed minimum wage, or paid sick leave.

Micro-credential offerings are also likely to contribute to precarity at universities as well. As universities attempt to predict and respond to rapid shifts in the labour market, they will swiftly add and drop micro-credential offerings. This approach to education will incentivize the employment of contract faculty, who often work term-to-term with less pay and no job security. Universities are less likely to hire a faculty member into a tenured position to teach a course that may not exist in a few years' time.

This approach benefits no one – whether through micro-credentials or otherwise, it is a cynical cost-saving measure by the government that will undermine a worker's autonomy and create more precarity in Ontario's workforce.

Content without critique

What about the educational content of micro-credentials? Degree programs are carefully designed and vetted through academic approval processes including ultimately, Senate approval. This ensures that while students are developing knowledge and skills, they are also developing a critical lens with which they can better understand and critique the discipline they are entering.

We live in a society with a history of sexism, racism, and colonialism that continues to pervade our institutions and workplaces. By engaging

¹² Hanne Shapiro Futures, Tine Anderson, and Kristine Nedergaard Larsen, A European Approach to Micro-Credentials: Output of the Micro-Credentials Higher Education Consultation Group (Luxembourg: European Union, 2020), <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7a939850-6c18-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1>.

in robust and critical discussions about these issues and how they have shaped the fields in which they are studying, students develop analytical tools that will help them to foster more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplaces and communities.

The value of this aspect of a university education cannot be understated. To strip away this critical debate with the goal of providing micro-credential students with only the essential skills they need to get a job, is to turn away from the fundamentally important role our universities have in creating a better and more equitable society,

These times of extreme uncertainty have proven the importance of a comprehensive university education that prepares students to adapt to an ever-changing economy and labour market. A university degree promises students a well-rounded education that includes deep and consistent engagement with a variety of forms of knowledge – including critical debates about sexism, racism, and colonialism specific to their programs. Students graduate from university prepared for work and life afterwards.

In comparison, micro-credentials offer a short-sighted and reductionist approach to post-secondary education that raises substantial equity concerns and amplifies already existing ones.

Instead of investing in micro-credentials through dedicated funding and more OSAP competition, the Ontario government should increase core funding and increase access to Ontario's universities to ensure everyone has access to a high-quality university education, regardless of their socio-economic background. Instead of trying to anticipate unpredictable labour market demands, the government should introduce stronger labour laws that protect and help graduates and those currently being exploited in the gig economy to make sure that every job is a good job.

Universities do not exist to serve the short-term needs of the labour market, but to generate and disseminate knowledge; to provide students with transferrable degrees that are used throughout their lifetime; to help students develop intellectually, socially, and morally; and to better society. As such, university programs should be grounded in pedagogy, equity, and an understanding of the broader mission of the university.



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From Theory to Praxis: Empowering Marginalized Students with Evidence-Based Action

Nathan R. G. Barnett (he/him)
Trent Durham Student Association (TDSA)

In early June of this past year, many Indigenous activists, scholars, and allies began calling on Ryerson University to address its colonial past and namesake, given Egerton Ryerson's role as an architect in Canada's residential schools. In response to these calls and media attention, particularly around the removal of Ryerson's statue and renaming the university, Ryerson announced that it would build a committee, dedicated to researching and providing recommendations on how to move forward.

Flash forward a matter of days, and protesters and activists forcibly removed the statue and Ryerson confirmed it would not be replacing the statue.

To me, this only highlights one thing: Ryerson knew the statue, its name, and every piece of colonialism within its organization was wrong and needed to be removed.

However, I don't want to pretend like this is only Ryerson's issue. Every institution has violent colonialist pasts, presents, and, unless there are significant changes, futures. For many institutions, changing their future is done through committee work. In Ryerson's case, when activists' calls were picked up by the media, Ryerson developed a committee (Mash Koh Wee Kah Pooh Win) dedicated to investigating Egerton Ryerson's role in colonialism and residential schools. Many other institutions have followed suit, or developed similar committees over the past year, particularly focusing on racism on campus as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement and the attention given to it during the summer of 2020, an example being Trent University's Anti Racism Task Force (ARTF). However, there is a glaring issue with these equity committees and something I've noticed across

all of them: they all use the words "recommend" and "could."

These committees have no power.

I've been involved in student politics for multiple years and my role and passion have always been equity focused, so I tend to sit on many equity-based committees. My experience has taught me that these committees are given no real power within the institution. Instead, such committees are locked in a cyclical process that only allows them to do useless and repetitive research.

Don't get me wrong: research is vitally important, particularly in the post-secondary sector. Consultation is even more important, especially when we're talking about equity, and people's lives and wellbeing. But as people involved in equity work who sit on these committees, we cannot continue to use research as an excuse to displace focus from action, or be bound to only doing research because we have no power to make actual change.

As a student leader, I've seen this frustration myself and will admit to being a part of the problem. Last year, as a part of the student consultations held by OUSA during our policy writing process, I developed a consultation form for the policies we were writing, including Addressing Racism and Religious Discrimination.¹ One respondent wrote about how racialized people have already been talking about these things,

1 For further reading, please see: Njonjo, Muriuki, Megan Town, Ryan Tse, and Brittany Williams, *Addressing Racism & Religious Discrimination*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2021, https://www.ousa.ca/policy_racism_religious_discrimination.



and that surveys aren't helping anyone. For me, that was an abrupt awakening. Of course people are tired of talking, doing surveys, being research subjects, and participants. That's all people in power have allowed for many, many years. It is an endless, frustrating, cynical circle – people in power need evidence (through data, statistics, stories, and scientific research) to indicate that there is a problem; however, once the research has been done, the report just sits on a shelf because the committee tasked with enacting changes doesn't have the power or budget to actually make these changes. Maybe one or two small (usually cheap or free) recommendations are adopted, but by the whole, nothing changes. The people in power eventually change, inciting calls for even newer research, and thus, progress on the issue remains stagnant in the pursuit of updated data.

I am not implying that all research is done insidiously like this, as a deliberate way to stall or wait out advocates. Rather, I would argue that the post-secondary sector's reliance and emphasis on having the most recent and relevant research/data is a direct hindrance to making real, tangible change in the sector.

The question then becomes, what can we do – either as students, student leaders, or administrators with the power – to actually address these concerns.

1) Don't duplicate the research.

We don't need to do research every time someone mentions that some form of institutional oppression is an issue on our campus. We know it's an issue because students from marginalized groups have repeatedly shed attention on it while simultaneously offering solutions to address it. Disregarding these student-led calls to action not only undermines the emotional labour put into making institutional change, but also invalidates their experiences of oppression. Many universities across the country and the province have already done and published research on a variety of issues on campus, including racism. Yes, not every institution is the same, however, we are all still post-secondary schools in Canada. The vast majority of issues, concerns, and solutions have at least some overlap. Additionally, institutions can look at what research has already been done by reaching out to equity offices or student affairs. Yes, we typically see a complete student overhaul around every 4 years however if no one addressed the problems

during that time, they're very likely still there. Research doesn't need to be brand new for it to be relevant.


2) Give your equity committees power.

For higher administrators, dedication to equity work must include giving more power (be it increased budget and autonomy, capacity to implement change, or less interference from those motivated to block change) to the committees engaging in this work. It is that simple. Ignoring recommendations because they are difficult or expensive, or because your board simply doesn't want to do them, shows a lacklustre commitment to improving equity on campuses. Equity committees need the power to implement changes because otherwise, all they can do is research. If we want to truly address equity concerns on our campuses, they need to be able to do that work, and that work can only be done if they can implement change.

What can we do – either as students, student leaders, or administrators with power – to actually address these concerns?

3) Don't be reactionary, be proactive.

A lot of this work can seem like it's on a cycle, based entirely on what is currently attracting attention. Throughout this piece, I've highlighted media attention on issues of oppression, whether it be micro-focused to (seemingly) one campus, or macro-focused to broader society. This reactionary approach often seems, and potentially is, very performative. It is about pretending to address a systemic problem as quickly as possible to neutralize negative press and turn it into a "feel good" story that bolsters the institution's image. For example, throughout the month of June, we often see institutions raising rainbow flags and promising to do more for LGBTQ+ students. However, after these "promises," there is little work that is actually done. Institutions pat themselves on the back for raising flags and maybe highlighting some programs or events



but then carry on. This ignores the numerous obstacles LGBTQ+ students face, ranging from direct barriers like proper and relevant health care and the ability to change names on forms to more campus-wide systemic barriers like homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and queerphobia. It's not like institutions don't know they have these issues, as many of them note that these are problems on campus when they acknowledge Pride at the beginning of June. However, there is no movement to actually address the aforementioned issues. By being reactive and only addressing issues while they are in the news, we allow students to continually go through hardship because that's what captures media attention. When we're proactive, it's less flashy, but it's a thousand times more meaningful and actually makes a difference in students' lives.

4) Stop overburdening students and expecting them to simply volunteer their time.

Students are ridiculously overburdened as is. To paint a comprehensive picture of this, let's start with academic workload. One of my first professors told us that for every hour we were in class, we should be spending an additional hour outside of class doing work. For many, that looks like 30+ hours a week, which almost equates to a full time job. Now, on top of that, many students have to work jobs to be able to afford their post-secondary education. And that's just the bare minimum – we're not including social time, sleeping, eating, self care, and much more that we have to do as human beings. So, when equity committees expect students to volunteer their time and emotional labour to solve issues on campus that, frankly, are not their fault or responsibility, the physical, mental, and emotional stress compounds and leads to burnout. This is especially troubling given the fact that student volunteers on these committees are doing equal amounts of this work with professionals who are paid to do this as a part of their job. This signals a devaluation of student voices and experiences despite the fact that these are central to equity work on campus. Institutions need to pay their students for doing this work; that is non-negotiable. When you don't pay students, you automatically exclude the students who can't just miss work or take on an additional role because they don't have the capacity, time, or financial resources to volunteer. Frankly, these are the students who most need to be at the table because they are the ones who often fall through

the cracks and are most impacted by the issues on our campuses.

Ultimately, our society is founded on an oppressive framework of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism, and this seeps down straight onto our campuses. We can't debate or ignore that, and doing so actively works against fixing our campuses. Instead, as students, professors, and administrators, we need to acknowledge the failings of our institutions and ourselves, and commit – truly commit, with power and money – to actively address the problems. Otherwise nothing is going to change. Empty promises and words only enable systemic oppression to continue and perpetuate further harm to marginalized students.

Nathan R. G. Barnett (he/him) is the Vice President of University Affairs at the Trent Durham Student Association, an OUSA Steering Committee member, and a recent graduate of Trent University's Social Work program.



Fostering Inclusive Communities at Ontario's Universities

Steve Orsini (he/him)
President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities (COU)

September is an exciting time for post-secondary students across Ontario as they begin the next chapter of their lives or continue their academic journey.

The past 18 months have been, without a doubt, difficult for individuals and families throughout the province, including university students, as they navigated the unprecedented challenges brought about by COVID-19.

With a firm commitment to the health and safety of our students, all Ontario universities have adopted strong and comprehensive vaccinations policies and continue to work with public health units and the provincial government in our reopening strategies.

We are looking forward to welcoming new and returning students to our campuses this month, and ensuring each student enjoys a safe and enriching experience during their time at our universities.

But we know barriers still exist for many – both in accessing a high-quality post-secondary education, as well as navigating the higher education space.

As partners in this space, Ontario's universities have an active role to play, and a responsibility to uphold and ensure that our campus communities are safe and inclusive for all students.

To help address the systemic and structural challenges students face, universities are engaging with campus and local communities and have developed action plans aimed at redressing the inequities that exist within the sector today.

These plans include developing initiatives that both increase access to a university education,

as well as on-campus supports for students who have been underrepresented in the sector.

Through strategic planning, universities have worked with students, faculty, and staff, as well as external community partners to gain insights into a range of topics, such as in-class participation opportunities, retention, curricular content and design and research supervision and mentoring requests, in order to ensure meaningful action towards fully inclusive communities.

In addition, with representation from each university at the table, Ontario's universities recently created a sector-wide reference group aimed at advancing initiatives to tackle inequitable realities and outcomes. Universities will also be working with other sector stakeholders, such as colleges and government, to advance these initiatives and improve outcomes across the higher education sector.

But we know there is still work to be done to foster inclusive post-secondary campuses across Ontario – work that is essential for the social and emotional well-being of all students.

Ontario's universities remain steadfast in their commitment to partner with student groups, government, and across the higher education sector to find ways to further strengthen efforts towards inclusive and diverse campuses by:

- Ensuring access to post-secondary education
- Creating inclusive spaces for students on campus

Together, universities will continue to work with students, educators, administrators, and government to identify and eliminate disproportionate

and disparate negative outcomes around access and on-campus supports in order to create safer, more welcoming spaces for all of our student populations.

Ensuring Access to Post-Secondary Education

Post-secondary students are Ontario's future makers – the future globalized citizens, creative entrepreneurs, and innovative employees who will imagine new societies, rebuild industries, and make positive impacts on the social and economic fabric of their communities.

That's why Ontario's universities are working to ensure a university education is accessible for every willing and qualified student and learner, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

With this commitment in mind, universities currently provide more than \$1.1 billion in scholarships, bursaries, and grants, according to financial statements prepared by the Council of Ontario Financial Officers (COFO), to help ensure those in the greatest financial need are receiving support. Even as provincial operating grants on a weighted-student basis have declined by 21 per cent since 2006-07, based on an analysis of Ministry grants conducted by COFO, universities are prioritizing access to post-secondary and will continue to increase financial supports for students.

To fully support traditional and non-traditional learners across Ontario, the province needs to do more to increase post-secondary participation rates in higher education, including skill trades and apprenticeships, as 30 per cent of Ontarians currently do not pursue any form of higher education, according to the General Social Survey (2016): Canadians at Work and Home, prepared by Statistics Canada.

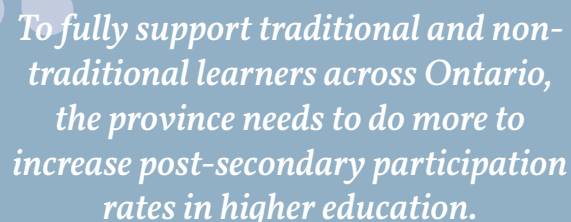
Ontario's universities will continue to engage with student groups through open dialogue and feedback to gain a deeper understanding of what is needed to reach willing and qualified students who face barriers in accessing a post-secondary education.

Because, a fulfilling post-secondary experience – one that integrates both academics and the more intangible social and cultural supports – can provide students with a solid foundation for the next stages of their life's journey. It can support students as they navigate the social, economic, and technological change that will only

continue to accelerate.

At post-secondary, students forge new friendships and relationships, develop personal accountability, and become well-rounded global citizens. They are also provided with economic opportunity – a space where students can develop critical transferrable and adaptable skills and knowledge that will allow them to enter a rapidly changing landscape, equipped with the tools they need to adapt and thrive.

In fact, a recent McKinsey survey found participants with a university degree had higher than average proficiency scores across 56 distinct elements of talent, suggesting those with higher levels of education are better prepared for



To fully support traditional and non-traditional learners across Ontario, the province needs to do more to increase post-secondary participation rates in higher education.

changes in the workplace.¹

Data shows growth in jobs that typically require a university education is projected to exceed the number of university graduates over the next decade, with the federal government estimating a surplus of 75,000 openings, compared to graduates, requiring university education by 2028, according to the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) for 2019-2028.²

We will continue to work with government and other stakeholders in colleges, skilled trades, and apprenticeships to help increase participation rates across the sector in order to help boost the social and economic well-being of all Ontarians.

¹ Marco Dondi, Julia Klier, Frédéric Panier, and Jörg Schubert, "Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work," McKinsey and Company, June 25, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work>.

² Government of Canada, "Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS)," http://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/w.2lc.4m.2@-eng.jsp;jsessionid=MifJot6x7KcjoZpvoGMB-VF-3X5h_CjsutJpO_uajBJDNc3mZ8Aoo!57767091.



Creating Inclusive Spaces for Students

While access to a high-quality post-secondary education is critical in today's changing social and economic landscape, Ontario's universities recognize that barriers and inequities extend beyond access.

Fostering safe and inclusive communities while students are on campus remains a priority for universities. Universities want students to see themselves represented when they walk through our campuses, feel a sense of belonging, and know they are supported throughout their time at one of Ontario's universities.

Initiatives that foster inclusivity encourage students of all backgrounds to attend and continue to pursue their studies at higher education institutions.

Through measures to dismantle anti-Black racism, taking critical steps towards advancing truth and reconciliation, creating accessible campuses, and celebrating global communities, universities remain committed to fostering inclusive and diverse campuses.

While some of these initiatives are outlined below, we know work still needs to be done to build these spaces.

Ontario's universities will continue to partner across the sector and with student groups to do the work that is needed to help ensure culturally sensitive supports and spaces exist on campus where all students can gather and feel comfortable.

Providing Culturally Sensitive Supports

From addressing disproportionately inequitable outcomes within various programs, particularly STEM and medicine, to implementing inter-cultural training, mentorship programs, all-gender residences, and women's campus safety initiatives, Ontario's universities will continue to respond to the need for more programming that reaches all students.

In addition, through training and research initiatives, universities are also supporting federal granting council efforts to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion within the research sector.

Not only will these initiatives support students' social and emotional well-being, but they will increase a diversity of thought, ideas, and experiences – ultimately enriching university campuses.

In one recent example from earlier this year, universities and colleges across Canada came together to discuss a national charter that focuses on taking additional measures to dismantle anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion within the post-secondary sector. The Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education outlines a series of principles, commitments to action, and accountability measures to guide Canadian universities and colleges.

More than 3,000 members of the higher education community – and more than 60 partner institutions across Canada – came together for anti-Black racism and Black inclusion.



Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

With a shared commitment towards advancing reconciliation, Ontario's universities continue to work to better support Indigenous voices and peoples in university environments across the province.

Each university is working with Indigenous communities to ensure Indigenous students encounter a welcoming and supportive environment on campus. In addition, each university is committed to incorporating Indigenous histories, culture, traditions, and culturally appropriate supports, as well as meeting the specific targets laid out for educators as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's (TRC) recommendations.

From inclusion to fundamental transformation, some of this work includes increasing access to Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in university settings; offering support programs for students; bringing cultural elements into the university space, including practices such as smudging and events such as powwows that are facilitated by Indigenous student groups and faculty; and adjusting aspects of university structures and spaces in order to more fully include Indigenous peoples and cultural practices.

Many of these initiatives were made possible through the significant contribution and leadership of members of the Indigenous community, including faculty members. Their critical work has enabled universities and Indigenous community members to work in partnership, bringing culturally appropriate supports for students, as well as Indigenous histories, culture, knowledge and ways of knowing on campuses throughout Ontario.

Developing Inclusive Design

A critical component to instilling a sense of safety on campus is creating accessible campuses that students of all abilities can navigate.

Accessible Campus is one example of a sector-wide resource for university educators and administrators to find information about accessible teaching practices in order to develop accessible curriculums, co-curricular activities, and spaces.

In addition, to further instill a sense of inclusivity on Ontario campuses, the Innovative Designs for Accessibility (IDeA) student competition, which started at an Ontario university and now involves universities across Canada, challenges students to develop innovative, cost-effective, and practical solutions to barriers for people with disabilities.

The program helps contribute to a culture of accessibility; motivates students to think about accessibility issues; and develops cost-effective, practical, and innovative concepts, programs, initiatives or designs that address everyday accessibility issues.

Beyond these sector-wide resources, individual universities are implementing their own programs and initiatives as well, which include an Inclusive Design Guide that offers tools when designing physical products, services, and built environments, as well as installing phone apps to help visually impaired students navigate campus.

Fostering Global Communities

International students enrich university campuses, and help build a multicultural student body that becomes a microcosm of a globalized world. These students bring fresh perspectives

to our campuses and communities.

In fact, nearly 94,000 international students enrolled at Ontario's universities in the 2020-21 academic year, according to Ontario's Universities' enrolment data prepared by Statistics Canada.

Recognizing the unique challenges these students faced, and continue to face, due to COVID-19, universities worked collaboratively with local health officials to become Designated Learning Institutions – implementing rigorous health and safety measures that ensured the safe arrival of all students arriving from outside of Canada.

Universities are also offering a wide range of cultural supports, such as one-on-one personal development appointments, peer support and events, as well as an app that provides students with up-to-date information, to ensure international students and students from immigrant and minority communities feel safe and welcomed while on campus.

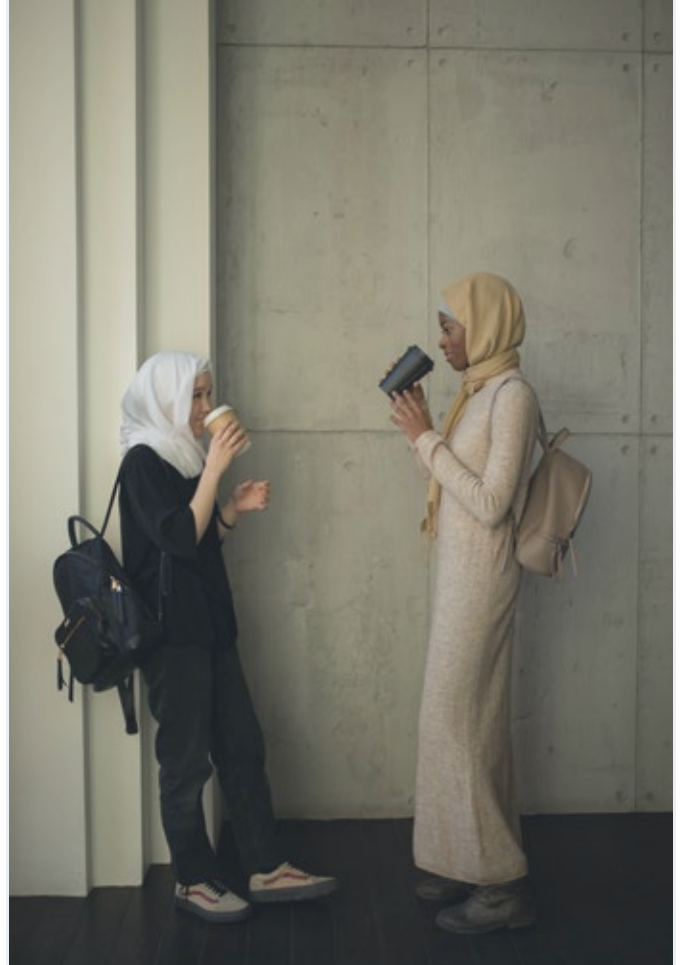
It is only by improving the inequities that exist in accessing post-secondary education, and within the post-secondary space, that we can foster fully inclusive and welcoming campus communities – communities that encourage every willing and qualified student to pursue their studies.

Ensuring each student enjoys positive experiences and opportunities to grow, develop connections, and thrive while on campus remains a priority for Ontario's universities.

Universities will continue to work together with government, sector partners, and student groups to instill a sense of safety, inclusivity, and equity on campus, while ensuring every willing and qualified Ontarian has access to a high-quality post-secondary education.

Because, this important work will extend beyond university walls, contributing to a society that is ultimately more welcoming and inclusive – the very factors that will benefit all Ontarians and enable our province to thrive as we rebuild from the pandemic.

Together, we can create a better future for our students, communities and province.



Steve Orsini is the President and CEO for the Council of Ontario Universities.



Refocusing and Recommitting to Students of Colour: Why Institutions Must Do Better

Eunice Oladejo (she/her)
Western's University Students' Council (USC)

Attending a predominantly white university as a Black student has come with many “only’s.” I was often the only Black person in lectures or tutorials, and was quickly known as the only Black girl in my friend group.

Before accepting my admission to Western, I had not extensively considered how this would affect my educational experience. Whether it was my eagerness to leave home, or just innocent ignorance, I never imagined that it would take four years until I was taught by a Black professor. I didn’t anticipate having to sit through a class as the N-word was used freely during lecture. Having now finished my undergraduate studies, the question “how is it being Black at Western?” has become a common prompt that racialized students ask me as they look ahead to post-secondary education. I originally struggled with this because, on the one hand, I wanted to clearly express how much I have loved and appreciated my time at Western. Western gave me the opportunity to grow as a student and a leader, both professionally and personally, and if I could do it all over again I would not change my decision to attend. On the other hand, I wish that I had been aware of the realities of being Black in higher education. Whether this was the amount of microaggressions that I would encounter on a daily basis, or the reality that structural systems within these institutions were not made to serve people that look like me, the unfortunate truth is that many racialized students will have these experiences as they navigate academia.

Nonetheless, I want to make it clear that these are not just “Western University” problems but rather issues that can be found within all post-secondary institutions. Although colleges and universities have made notable strides to-

wards racial equity through the establishment of special advisors, policy reviews, and anti-racism initiatives, post-secondary institutions are nowhere near where they should be. We are at a crucial time in which such institutions can no longer ignore what is right in front of them. They must step up in their response to racism and discrimination, and implement adequate supports for racialized students.

So, what does this look like? What areas are institutions currently lacking in? Before I take on this question, it is important to know why these supports are needed. Universities must answer the why if they aim to move past performative action and develop proper systems of change within their establishments. The onus is on each administration to develop their why and, consequently, hold this to be true as they work to address racial inequity. Having Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) as foundational principles means that the why must be prioritized in every action that is taken. An intersectional analysis must be part of this in order to make decisions that will positively impact all racialized students.

While I could provide a never-ending list of all of the changes that need to be made within academic institutions, my time as a student has shown me three main areas in which universities must focus their attention.

1) Post-secondary institutions must prioritize and invest in the recruitment, hiring, and empowerment of racialized staff and faculty.

In 2019, Universities Canada conducted an EDI survey which collected data from 88 Canadian universities on issues ranging from institutional EDI policies and strategies, to identity-based data collection. When it came to representation

in senior leadership they, unsurprisingly, found that in Canadian universities, racialized people are notably underrepresented within these positions. Of the 88 universities from which self-identified data was collected, racialized staff comprised only 8 percent of senior leaders, while racialized students made up about 40 percent of

We cannot expect a cultural shift within our colleges, universities, and society if racial representation in these traditionally white spaces is not expanded.

the student body.¹ Why does this matter? Without adequate representation racialized students are unable to see themselves reflected in their classrooms, which can lead to feelings of isolation and misunderstanding. As a Black woman who has never been taught by another Black woman, I truly believe that I missed out on the opportunity to learn from, and relate to, an individual with similar lived experiences as me. That is not to say that every student must have a deep connection with their professors; however this lack of representation can inhibit Black, Indigenous, and many other students of colour from having their voices heard and feeling valued. In her 2020 opinion piece, Beverly Teng stated that “Representation matters because students need to know that the people they identify with are part of the educational and decision-making processes. Representation matters because students need to know they belong.”²

Diverse faculty and staff also leads to a greater representation of views and lived experiences within the classroom and within the institutional climate. African-American professors Na'im

Madyun, Sheneka M. Williams, Ebony O. McGee, and H. Richard Milner IV note that a widely diverse staff of academics improves intercultural competence, which transfers to students and improves their cognitive capacity and level of comfort in applying cultural awareness. This assists students as they identify and connect with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and improves their respect of cultural differences “without displaying an inauthentic or condescending attitude.”³ When this standard is set by professors, and expected of students, it takes root in spaces of learning and provides a safe environment for students of colour.⁴ We cannot expect a cultural shift within our colleges, universities, and society if racial representation in these traditionally white spaces is not expanded.

Lastly, racialized academics must not only be hired within the context of EDI and anti-racism roles. Although such roles are important and essential to this work, students must also see racialized folk as professors, deans, academic counsellors, mental health counsellors, and so on. Broadening the scope of roles for which racialized staff are hired, will validate and honour their competence, skills, and experience in academia, as opposed to simply tokenizing their identity within the post-secondary space.

2) Educational institutions must stop using academic freedom as an excuse for blatant racism, discrimination, and microaggressions.

The past few years have been filled with countless reports from students who sat through lectures as discriminatory and offensive words were used by their professors. Both in the past and in the present day, it is not uncommon for a racialized student to witness their professor use a racial slur.

In October 2020, a University of Ottawa professor was suspended, and eventually returned to work, after using the N-word in his class. In his defense, 34 professors drafted and signed a letter for support in which they stated that the use of this term can offer educational value, arguing for the protection of “academic freedom.” A group of law students wrote a letter in response to this in which the Vice-President of the Black Law Students' Association stated, “I cannot even fathom what academic freedom

3 Na'im Madyun et al., “On the Importance of African-American Faculty in Higher Education: Implications and Recommendations,” *Educational Foundations* 27, (2013): 66.

4 Ibid.

1 *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Canadian Universities: Report on the 2019 National Survey*, (Universities Canada, October 2019), 10, <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019-1.pdf>.

2 Beverly Teng, “Opinion: Black Students Aren't Dropping Out of Schools — They're Being Pushed Out,” *The Varsity*, February 23, 2020, accessed July 22, 2021, <https://thevarsity.ca/2020/02/23/opinion-black-students-arent-dropping-out-of-schools-theyre-being-pushed-out/>.

is because I'm here trying to tell you using the N-word is already alienating me and not giving me a freedom to exist in these spaces.”⁵ Similar incidents have happened at a number of other universities and the same “freedom of speech” argument is used. As a racialized student, this argument communicates that the “transmission of knowledge” within a classroom can be done at the expense of my own wellbeing. This should not be the case.

Racial slurs should not be thrown around in lectures, regardless of the presence of Black students; but for a non-Black professor to feel comfortable enough to use the N-word in a lecture especially where Black students are present, shows that radical change is needed within the atmosphere of academia. Whether this is done through expectation setting, training, or policies, professors need a strict framework in order to be more cautious when exercising academic freedom. They need to be made aware of the harm that academic freedom can inflict on students, and the consequences of this on their future engagement with higher education as well as on their mental health. Professors should not be given unrestricted freedom of speech simply because they are academics.

Furthermore, what implications does this raise for students in the classroom who hear their professors use words like this? By excusing academics to use racial slurs, the present and future safety of racialized students is disregarded and compromised.

3) Lastly, post-secondary institutions must take significant steps to radically change their operational norms.

Historically, Canadian universities were founded as Euro-colonial institutions with the goal of spreading these ideals and suppressing the traditions and cultures of others, specifically Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, such institutions were developed to benefit white students and assimilate non-white students as much as possible. Without changing common practices of recruitment, admissions, curriculum, counselling, and so on, these institutions will continue to carry their colonial legacy and further oppress racialized students.

⁵ Laura Glowacki, “Students Decry Letter Defending N-word Use at the University of Ottawa,” October 20, 2020, accessed August 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/university-of-ottawa-professor-racism-1.5768730>.

For example, as it is currently not mandated by the government, most universities do not collect equity-based data on their students and faculty. Historically, this data has not been collected because post-secondary institutions were predominantly, if not all, white. However in 2021, this data is necessary for universities to adequately know their student body, develop targeted programs, recognize patterns of inherent discrimination, and generally, serve their population. In addition to this, campus climate surveys should be administered to assess gaps within pre-existing post-secondary practices and hear about student experiences with discrimination. These two forms of data collection will equip universities to better support racialized students and allow students, faculty, and staff to hold their institutions accountable.

Some universities have started to make an effort towards the collection of equity-based data. This fall, Western University will be launching a pilot program to collect this data from students through a survey format. This is one necessary step that all secondary and post-secondary institutions must take if they are to work towards racial equity on their campuses.

With all that said, these changes should not be made for the sake of rankings or reputation. While having a more welcoming and diverse reputation might be better for the institution and the students that attend it, the wellbeing and success of racialized students should be at the forefront of these changes. Institutions can no longer stick to the norms that they have operated on for years. It is time to better support racialized students and obstruct known or unknown discriminatory practices. As students prepare to enter the workforce and further contribute to society, post-secondary institutions must ensure that students of colour feel properly supported, validated, and safe in their educational journeys. Only then can our institutions meaningfully commit to equitable learning environments and future success for students of colour.

Eunice Oladejo is the Vice President of External Affairs at the University Students' Council at Western University and President of OUSA.



AFFORDABILITY

Recommendation As a response to COVID-19, the provincial government should eliminate expected parental, spousal and individual contributions in the OSAP calculation to ensure students have the financial support to return to post-secondary education. Once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, the provincial government should redevelop the calculation of expected parental, spousal, and individual contribution to: (1) at minimum match those expected by the federal Student Loans and Grants program, and (2) factor in current household debt.

Recommendation The provincial government should immediately reinstate the moratorium on OSAP payments and interest accrual. Following the reinstatement of the OSAP moratorium the provincial government should introduce a permanent, two-year grace period after graduation to ensure recent graduates are in the financial position to cover payments of interest

Recommendation The provincial government should develop a Students Benefits Package for students who demonstrate financial need throughout the school year.

SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY

Recommendation The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing approximately one-third of universities' total operating budget.

Recommendation The provincial government should increase operating funding directed to institutions to assist in making up shortfalls as a result of COVID-19 drops in enrollment so that international students are not unduly burdened with these costs.

Recommendation To ensure tuition rates are predictable for incoming international students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should: (1) regulate international tuition for incoming students at a maximum of 5 percent per year to match institutionally set limitations, and (2) regulate in-cohort increases to international tuition at a maximum of 3 percent per year.

RACIAL EQUITY

Recommendation The provincial government should amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to require all post-secondary institutions to have a standalone racial and religious equity policy and create a regulation setting out requirements with regard to the content of racial and religious equity policies at post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation The provincial government should mandate the collection of equity-based data, using the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism, at all stages of post-secondary education processes such that an all-encompassing set of data is collected at least every three years.

RACIAL EQUITY CONTINUED

Recommendation The provincial government should provide funding for community-based mental health care providers to supply culturally relevant and diverse counselling and support groups for post-secondary students.

Recommendation The provincial government should provide increased and ongoing funding for Indigenous Student Centres through the Post-secondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners, without the need for recurring grant applications.

2021

advocacy

2022 priorities

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Recommendation The provincial government should mandate that: (1) post-secondary institutions cannot require a student to be re-diagnosed with a disability where the medical practitioner believes the student's needs will not change; and (2) province-wide documentation standards do not require students with registered permanent disabilities to seek additional forms of documentation, such as doctor's notes.

Recommendation The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should partner with post-secondary institutions and businesses to increase work integrated learning opportunities that are equally available to students with disabilities to meet the current student demand

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES CONTINUED

Recommendation The government should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario with conducting adequate and timely review of: (1) the current standards on disability documentation resubmission to ensure that standards are not unduly burdensome on students with differing ranges or types of disabilities; (2) accommodation standards at Ontario universities to assess the adequacy of the range of accommodations provided; (3) province-wide documentation standards in the area of mental health for post-secondary students; and (4) reviewing the assessment requirements for students seeking academic accommodations based on a learning disability and/or ADHD to ensure that these requirements do not cause undue hardship on students.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Recommendation The provincial government should amend O. Reg. 131/16 to ensure that institutions' sexual violence policies take a trauma-informed and survivor-centric approach

Recommendation The provincial government should amend section 17 of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to: (1) require that post-secondary institutions participate in a gender-based and sexual violence campus climate survey administered by the Council of Ontario Universities every three years; (2) require post-secondary campuses to employ an appropriate and proportional number of gender-based violence educators; (3) require that all staff and faculty be trained in how to respond to disclosures of gender-based and sexual violence in a way that is survivor-centric and trauma-informed.

Recommendation The Ministry of Education should include sexual health in all subject areas of the K-12 curricula and, specifically, amend the Health and Physical Education curriculum to: (1) include lessons on gender identity, consent, sexual orientation, masturbation and sexual pleasure, STIs, pregnancy and contraception, gender norms, toxic masculinity, and technology-facilitated violence that are introduced in early grades, consistent with recommendations from experts on student development and health and the Canadian Guidelines on Sexual Health Education and the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, and built upon throughout the course of a student's education; (2) discuss technology-facilitated violence (by expanding the cyberbullying component); (3) include (under Strand A) education about consent, healthy relationships, respect, autonomy, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and other topics outlined by the Human Rights Code; (4) provide an appropriate educational curriculum that adequately addresses Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ identities, issues, and histories; (5) take an intersectional lens that addresses particular aspects of sexual health for Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ students' intersecting identities.

Recommendation The provincial government should provide grant funding to community sexual health clinics to work with post-secondary institutions to provide students with resources about local supports, as well as enhancing infrastructure and referral systems.

PUBLICATION Invisible Intersections: Bringing the Experiences of Young Adult Caregivers to Public Discourse (September 2021)

PUBLICATION Educated Solutions: Enhancing Equity in Education (September 2021)

PUBLICATION Habitats: Students in their Municipalities (May 2021)



Post-Pandemic Pedagogies: What COVID-19 Can Teach Us About Blended, Distance, and Emergency Online Learning in Tomorrow's World (September 2020)

PUBLICATION

Habitats: Students in Their Municipalities 2020 (June 2020)

PUBLICATION

In It Together: Foundations for Promoting Mental Wellness in Campus Communities (February 2020)

PUBLICATION

PUBLICATION 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Quality (December 2019)

PUBLICATION Sexual and Gender Diversity in Post-Secondary Education: LGBTQ+ Students Interview Series Report (August 2019)

PUBLICATION 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Accessibility (August 2019)

PUBLICATION 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Affordability (August 2019)

PUBLICATION Pride, Policies, and Post-Secondary Spaces (July 2019)

PUBLICATION Habitats: Students in their Municipalities (June 2019)

PUBLICATION Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workplace (April 2019)

Financing Fees: The Inequitable Burden of University Costs (August 2018)

PUBLICATION

recent PUBLICATIONS & MILESTONES

MILESTONE Proposed amendments to Ontario Regulation 131/16 to make post-secondary sexual violence policies more trauma-informed, survivor-centric, and evidence-based, specifically that: (1) a complainant will not be subject to actions for violations of the institution's policies related to drug and alcohol use at the time the alleged sexual violence took place; (2) during the institution's investigative process, students who share their experience of sexual violence through disclosing, accessing support, and/or reporting to the institution, will not be asked questions relating to past sexual history or sexual expression.



MILESTONE Additional \$7M for post-secondary mental health, allocated from gov't funding pool for broader provincial mental health, \$2.39M of which put toward expanding mental health services and increasing access for Black, Indigenous and Francophone students.

2020 COVID-19 student support package, which included, the implementation of the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB); Expansion of the Canada Student Grants and Loan Program; and a \$75 million increase in distinctions-based support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis post-secondary students.

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\$19.25M for PSE mental health supports for 2020-2021 year, with funding to support campus service providers, develop partnerships, and increase access.

MILESTONE

Six-month interest-free moratorium on Canada Student Loans in response to COVID-19.

MILESTONE

MILESTONE Fees funding student transit passes declared mandatory for implementation of Student Choice Initiative.

MILESTONE Doubled funding for the Women's Campus Safety Grant to support gender-based violence prevention and response on campuses.

2018 Release of the International Student Strategy.
First-ever province-wide survey on campus sexual violence conducted by the provincial government.
Commitments from all political parties on the need for mental health investments (saw commitments from all political parties on the need for mental health investments, with \$1.9 billion allocated towards mental health)

MILESTONE

MILESTONE

MILESTONE

MILESTONE \$190 million for experiential learning.

MILESTONE \$9 million for more frontline mental health care workers on campus.

MILESTONE \$73 million for student psychotherapy.

MILESTONE \$10,000 increase in OSAP repayment threshold.

MILESTONE \$1 million invested in Ontario's Open Textbook Library.

MILESTONE Reduction in the parental and spousal contribution expectations for applicants to the OSAP program.

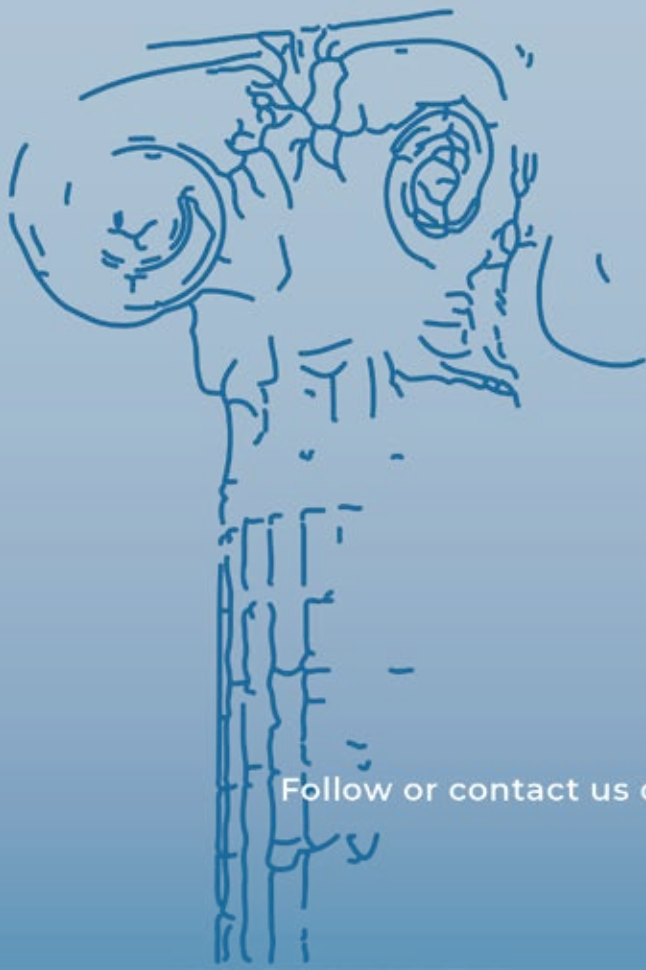


2016 \$365 million of tax credits repurposed into grants for low-income students (The New OSAP).

MILESTONE

Links created on OUAC and elnfo websites leading to each university's accessibility service for students with disabilities.

MILESTONE



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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance