

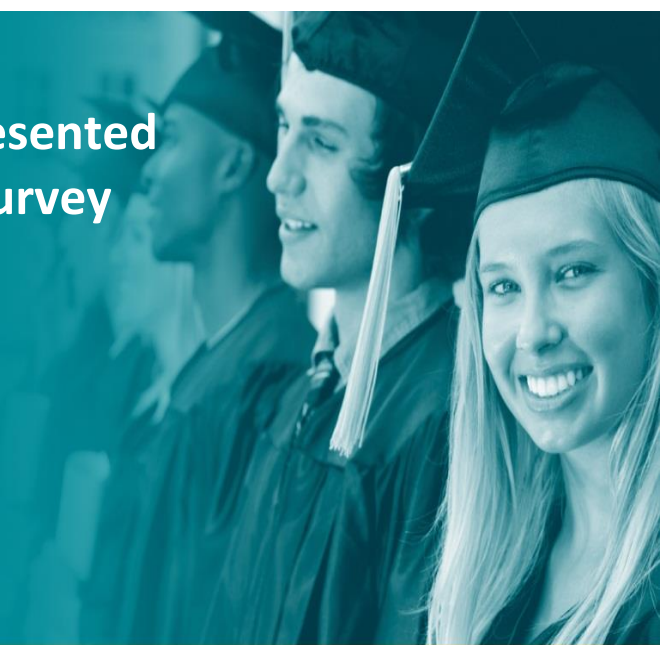


Higher Education
Quality Council
of Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario

The Recruitment of Under-represented Groups to Ontario Colleges: A Survey of Current Practices

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Published by

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

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Cite this publication in the following format:

Stonefish, T., Craig, J., & O'Neil, A. (2015). *The Recruitment of Under-represented Groups to Ontario Colleges: A Survey of Current Practices*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.



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Acknowledgements

The research team would like to acknowledge the contributions of several individuals without whom this research project could not have been possible.

Thank you to Dr. Shelagh Towson, who was instrumental in engaging us with this project. Her mentorship has helped to further hone our skills as researchers and her significant contributions helped shape the results of all our hard work.

We wish to thank Lisa Plant for being so eager to assist with the coding of the francophone college websites and for translating our interview questions and email correspondence in order to facilitate communication with French-speaking college administrative staff. Thanks also to Ashleigh Erdelyan, Kirsten Jamieson and Marisa Kfrerer, who were invaluable during the data collection process.

We would also like to thank Gulam Khan, John Doran, Ruth Childs and the rest of their research team from the University of Toronto. Their project examined similar research questions within the university sector and their willingness to exchange ideas, chat over emails, and share news of challenges and research progress enhanced our research experience.

Finally, we wish to thank the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario for providing the funding that made this research possible. Your contributions to the research process, development workshops and consistent constructive feedback made this an extremely valuable experience for all those involved.

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Executive Summary

Since their creation in 1965, Ontario's colleges have played a pivotal role in providing PSE opportunities to all residents (Rae, 2005). Often located in smaller and more geographically dispersed communities than Ontario's universities, colleges were intended to be more responsive to and reflective of these communities (Canadian Council on Learning, 2010) and to work closely with business and labour sectors to ensure programming that produced employment-ready graduates (Rae, 2005).

Research indicates that Ontario colleges have succeeded in fulfilling their mandate, and they continue to provide "the most accessible option for high-quality [PSE]" (ACAATO, 2004). For example, Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and first-generation PSE students, while significantly less likely to continue their education after high school than other Ontario residents, are much more likely to go to college than to university (Finnie et al., 2011a; Holmes, 2005; Norrie & Zhao, 2011).

The purpose of the present study was to explore current Ontario college recruitment efforts directed at under-represented groups. The research was guided by three research questions: How do Ontario colleges define under-represented groups? How do Ontario colleges recruit under-represented groups? How do Ontario colleges measure the impact of recruitment activities focused on students from under-represented groups?

In order to answer these questions, the research team collected and analyzed data from four sources: Ontario college Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs); Ontario college viewbooks; Ontario college websites; and interviews with Ontario college recruitment managers. The results of these analyses indicated that many Ontario colleges seem to be actively engaged in identifying members of under-represented groups, developing recruitment strategies that will increase their rate of enrolment in PSE, and finding ways to evaluate the success of these initiatives. Results pertaining to each of the research questions are also reported.

How do Ontario colleges define under-represented groups?

Analysis of the data indicated considerable variation across Ontario colleges in their definition of under-represented groups, from colleges that did not define them at all to those that used the groups named in the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Strategic Mandate Agreements.

A key theme that emerged from these data was a tension between system consistency and regional diversity. In the absence of explicit rationales for the identification of particular groups as underrepresented, some colleges take their cues from broader Ministry initiatives or funding streams. Where local demographics differed from province-wide concerns, some colleges chose to emphasize their mandate for regional responsiveness.

How do Ontario colleges recruit underrepresented groups?

In addition to general recruitment activities such as high school visits, college fairs, general open houses, and the distribution of viewbooks and promotional materials, our research revealed multiple examples of unique and innovative outreach and recruitment programs for prospective students from under-represented groups. Three themes emerged with respect to recruitment activities and perspectives.

Ontario colleges differed significantly in their emphasis on *active* or *passive* recruitment, with active recruitment defined as getting out and engaging with students and communities, and passive recruitment involving reliance on more traditional marketing campaigns, as well as information on support services found in Ontario college viewbooks and on college websites. While support services are designed to increase student retention, they may also act as recruitment tools.

Ontario college recruitment-related infrastructure also differed in the extent to which it could be described as *collaborative* rather than *independent*. Collaborative systems were characterized by open communication and cooperation between administrative units. In colleges using an independent model, the departments responsible for recruitment, support or services to specific under-represented groups functioned quite separately, with relatively little knowledge-sharing.

All recruitment initiatives are driven by the goal to increase student enrolment. However, the research revealed a key difference in perspective between *global outreach* and *institution-specific* recruitment. Global outreach recruitment is aimed at increasing student motivation to pursue PSE regardless of the institution; it involves community and family in the PSE recruitment process and encourages all members of the target under-represented groups to think beyond the access challenges they face. Institution-specific recruitment emphasizes the merits of the specific college.

How do Ontario colleges evaluate their recruitment efforts?

The data indicate that some Ontario colleges are employing a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools in order to track students from some under-represented groups. However, it appears that the predominant method emphasizes post-registration measures of service usage, retention and success, with less emphasis on tracking applicant and admission data. Ontario college recruitment managers expressed a keen interest in developing and implementing comprehensive evaluation models, but identified a lack of financial resources as a significant barrier.

Conclusions

As evidenced by the lack of consistent and agreed-upon definitions of under-represented groups, the process involved in developing these definitions is complex and challenging. However, greater definitional clarity could facilitate decision making regarding best practices (and funding allocations) for targeted outreach and recruitment programs, and evaluation models to assess their effectiveness. The Ministry could work with Ontario colleges toward this definitional clarity.

Collaborative infrastructure models for outreach, recruitment and access activities appear to work better than more siloed approaches and could be encouraged in order to reduce redundancy, facilitate knowledge sharing and help address the challenges surrounding student self-identification. In addition to institution-specific outreach, Ontario colleges could also be encouraged to focus on proactive global PSE outreach to under-represented group families and communities starting when prospective students are in elementary school.

Some Ontario colleges already have innovative outreach and recruitment programs for prospective students from under-represented groups. Information about these programs could be shared more broadly within the Ontario college sector. In addition, the secondary and postsecondary cross-sector collaboration model that currently exists in the GTA could be the first step in the development of a province-wide accessibility community of practice that would facilitate knowledge-sharing and encourage research and evaluation initiatives. Ontario colleges are committed to tracking the success of their outreach and recruitment efforts and could fulfill their goals with added Ministry support to develop a province-wide comprehensive evaluation system.

Introduction

In 2005, the Rae Report (2005) identified accessibility to postsecondary education (PSE) as essential to Ontario's economic viability:

...education, research and innovation lie at the heart of our economy. This is not new. Every society has relied for its survival on the transfer of skills and abilities from generation to generation. What is new is the level and breadth of knowledge and skill required to make our way in the world. The wealth of Ontario now depends much more on the power of our brains. Today our standard of living, and consequently our quality of life, depends on people having access to education that is on a par with the best in the world (p. 6).

This concern with accessibility is not a recent development. In fact, from their inception in the 1960s, Ontario's publicly funded colleges were mandated "to provide accessible, quality career education and training to enhance social and economic development throughout Ontario and to meet local, regional, provincial, national and global marketplace demand" (ACAATO, 2004). Often located in smaller and more geographically dispersed communities than Ontario's universities, colleges were intended to be more responsive to and reflective of these communities (Canadian Council on Learning, 2010) and to work closely with business and labour sectors to ensure programming that produced employment ready graduates (Rae, 2005).

Research by Finnie et al. (2011a) indicates that over the past 50 years, Ontario colleges have succeeded in fulfilling their mandate; they have been called "opportunity equalizers" because they continue to provide "the most accessible option for high-quality [PSE]" (ACAATO, 2004). Research supports ACAATO's position. For example, Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and individuals from families with no history of PSE, while significantly less likely to continue their education directly out of high school than are other Ontario residents, are much more likely to go to college than to university when the decision to pursue PSE is made (Finnie et al., 2011a; Holmes, 2005; Norrie & Zhao, 2011). Despite this success, however, it is also true that Ontario's population has changed significantly over the past 50 years, with important increases in immigrant populations and international student enrolment (Arbuckle, Williams & Williams, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2013b), and significant growth in the Aboriginal as compared to non-Aboriginal populations (Aboriginal Human Resource Council; Statistics Canada, 2013a). These changes have created new challenges, not only for Ontario college recruitment of members of under-represented groups, but also for the definition of those groups for whom barriers to PSE accessibility continue to exist.

While colleges are not mandated specifically to focus on access, they are mandated to be locally responsive and provide accessible quality education. According to several reports (Conference Board of Canada, 2007; Deloitte, 2012; TD Economics, 2011), in order to meet growing labour market demands Ontario must first increase its pool of educated workers. This can be accomplished at least in part by assisting members of under-represented groups to access PSE and attain postsecondary credentials. Effective recruitment strategies are required to increase the number of students from under-represented groups who apply to

and are accepted into Ontario college programs. This study was designed to explore the ways in which Ontario colleges are meeting this recruitment challenge.

Finnie et al.'s (2011a) research demonstrated considerable variation in university and college access rates for under-represented groups. Using the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) Cohort A data and defining under-represented groups as “those from low-income families, those from families with no history of attending PSE, those living in rural areas, those whose mother tongue is French, first- and second-generation immigrants, those from single-parent (or other “non-traditional” families), those of Aboriginal or First Nations ancestry, and those with disabilities” (p. 3), Finnie et al. found that in some instances (and in some regions), while still underrepresented in PSE overall, some groups access colleges at higher rates. For example, individuals with no parental history of PSE (first-generation), while significantly less likely than other students to seek PSE directly after completing high school, are much more likely to go to college when they do eventually attend a PSE institution. Similarly, both Aboriginal students and students with disabilities, while significantly underrepresented in PSE overall, are more likely to attend college than university (Holmes, 2005; Norrie & Zhao, 2011). Additionally, Aboriginal students on average are much older than their non-Aboriginal counterparts when they do access PSE, suggesting that for many individuals (especially those inclined to attend colleges), PSE access occurs in a non-traditional, non-linear fashion (Holmes, 2005).

Considerable research focuses on PSE access and participation (ACAATO, 2004; Finnie et al., 2011a; Norrie & Zhao, 2011), attainment and success (Holmes, 2005; Norrie & Lin, 2009; Wiggers & Arnold, 2011), and retention (Deloitte, 2012; Hansen & Dishke Hondzel, 2015; Malik, Guan, Vetere & Abramovitch, 2011), but there is a paucity of research that focuses on student recruitment, especially in the Ontario context (Miner, 2011).

Research Questions

In 1965, Bill 153 amended the Department of Education Act to create Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs; Ontario Department of Education, 1967). Although the Act mandated accessibility as one of the primary goals of Ontario colleges, under-representation of certain groups as a specific concern was not mentioned. Instead, Minister of Education William G. Davis spoke in more general terms in his statement to the Legislature, reiterating economists' warnings that in order to compete in an increasing industrial society and within the context of rapid technological change, significant investment in education was imperative. In order to do so, a new system needed to be established. Attention was drawn to changing community demographics and the need for CAATs to work closely with community officials to ensure that local needs were met. However, neither Premier Davis nor the Act itself identified specific groups to be targeted for CAAT recruitment. The mandate of the college system was to provide an accessible PSE option for every individual who wanted to develop his or her potential but was not eligible for or did not wish to attend university. Minister Davis's statement, however, does indicate that one major responsibility of every college is “to meet the educational needs of adults and out-of-school youth, whether or not they are secondary school graduates” (Ontario Department of Education, 1967, p. 13), and his outline of the range of possible CAAT programming included retraining and upgrading courses.

Fifty years later, Ontario's demographic landscape has changed significantly. Ontario is a more ethnically and culturally diverse province, with considerably more new Canadians and under-represented ethnocultural groups. And with the passage of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005), people with disabilities were clearly identified as a group with the same rights to accessibility as other Ontario citizens. There have also been significant changes in our understanding of the rights of groups with different sexual orientations, increased recognition of the gaps between men and women with respect to education and earning potential, as well as efforts to redress Aboriginal communities for the failings of residential schools.

The approach to recruitment has also changed over the past half-century, with the development of strategic enrolment management models and access to electronic recruitment tools that provide Ontario colleges with the possibility of moving beyond visits to local high schools and developing targeted recruitment initiatives for specific populations.

Just as our definition of under-represented groups and our approach to recruitment have changed, so has our understanding of the importance of evaluating our efforts. Successful recruitment management requires systematic and comprehensive evaluation of recruitment efforts.

For all these reasons, our research questions are:

1. How do Ontario colleges define under-represented groups?
 - Do all the colleges define certain groups as underrepresented?
 - Do the colleges share a common definition of underrepresentation?
 - Do the college definitions of underrepresentation reflect the regional variations in underrepresentation?
2. How do Ontario colleges recruit under-represented groups?
 - What are the range and types of recruitment activities that focus on students from under-represented groups?
 - How do these recruitment activities differ from general recruitment activities?
 - What are the ranges and types of activities that assist incoming students from underrepresented groups in the transition into PSE?
3. How do Ontario colleges measure the impact of recruitment activities focused on students from under-represented groups?
 - Do the colleges have a systematic evaluation system?
 - Do the colleges differentiate and track student recruitment using indices associated with underrepresentation?

Literature Review

Defining Under-represented Groups

Although the term ‘under-represented groups’ is now an accepted part of the educational and political lexicon, examination of the available literature indicates that it is defined in many different ways. The 1986 Canada Employment Equity Act defined four groups as “disadvantaged”: women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities. This federal definition of targeted or designated groups is still the basis for hiring policies at many Ontario institutions.

The Rae Report (2005) identified the need for participation targets and suggested the expansion and encouragement of outreach programs for a somewhat different list of under-represented groups: “low-income groups, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, some racial minorities and francophones” (p. 11). In line with this recommendation, groups empirically identified as “disadvantaged” with respect to PSE access include students from low-income families; students whose parents did not attend PSE (first-generation students); students who were not born in Canada or whose parents were not born in Canada; rural students; Aboriginal students; students with disabilities; and students whose mother tongue is French (Finnie, Childs & Wismer, 2011a; 2011b; Holmes, 2005; Norrie & Zhao, 2011; Smith & Gottheil, 2011; Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2009a). It is important to note that very recent research suggests that international student enrolment in Ontario colleges has actually increased significantly over the past decade, creating another significant demographic shift within the college system (Arbuckle et al., 2015).

In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) developed a Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education, which in Section 3.3.3 identified “Aboriginal students, students with disabilities, first generation students [and]... francophone students” (Ontario MTCU, 2013, p. 11) as underrepresented. Most recently, in her September 2014 letter to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Premier Kathleen Wynne described the importance of “[c]ontinuing to recognize and meet the needs of diverse groups of learners, including Franco-Ontarians, Aboriginal Peoples, first-generation students, persons with disabilities and students with special needs through an equitable system of supports...as they transition from high school to postsecondary education and the workplace” (Wynne, 2014).

Summarizing these data, it is apparent that Aboriginal students and students with disabilities have been identified consistently as underrepresented. It should be noted, however, that the definition of disability is much broader now than it was 50 years ago, now encompassing students with special needs (e.g., learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, mental health issues). Additionally, students with no family history of PSE have also drawn special attention through government funding initiatives to increase enrolment.

Recruiting Under-represented Groups

On the basis of an in-depth exploration of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) data, Finnie et al. (2011a) concluded that the most important determinants of low PSE enrolment included lacking a family history of PSE, followed by having a disability, being Aboriginal, living in a rural area and coming from a low-income family (p. 20). Finnie et al. noted that being a member of one or more of these groups resulted in significantly lower PSE access than other youth. However, when members of these groups did make PSE decisions they were more inclined to access colleges than universities. This research reinforces the importance of college as a pathway to PSE for members of many under-represented groups. There is, however, a dearth of research on how to better facilitate these PSE decisions, how to best recruit members of under-represented groups, and on the effectiveness of these recruitment strategies in the Ontario context (Miner, 2011).

Research from other jurisdictions¹ (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010; Gulf Coast Community College, 2011, National College Access Network, 2015) indicates that tailored recruitment activities are more effective than general initiatives at recruiting members of under-represented groups. For example, a 2010 survey of chief administrative officers at community colleges across the United States revealed that the most successful retention programs focus on, among other things, “targeted interventions to specific populations, and easing the transition of students to the college environment” (Gulf Coast community College, 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, a report by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (2002) suggested that the types of activities that were most effective in assisting individual institutions to meet their “minority student recruitment and retention goals” were specific and targeted in nature. Specifically, this report indicated that recruiting in ‘non-traditional’ settings (e.g., community centres and churches), enlisting minority students and alumni in recruitment activities, recruiting the family, and early outreach interventions beginning in the elementary grades contributed significantly to increasing minority enrollment.

The most effective recruitment strategies were also proactive. In addition to enlisting minority student representatives to assist in the recruitment process, these strategies include community outreach (e.g., recruitment in non-traditional settings, recruiting the family, native language recruitment materials) and outreach initiatives that increase prospective student awareness of PSE at the elementary, middle school and high school stages. For example, Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta has had tremendous success by increasing recruitment efforts targeted at latino students to include a college presence at a wide variety of community gatherings in order to recruit not only potential students but their families as well (Diamond, 2009). Especially in the cases of first-generation students, engaging the family and showing how students will be supported once they get to the college environment are key for both recruitment and retention (Gulf Coast Community College, 2011).

¹ The authors recognize that there are significant differences between the Canadian and American college systems with respect to funding, access, and political intervention and support. However, the above-cited examples provided a wide variety of successful targeted recruitment examples from a variety of American jurisdictions that can be used to support the variety of examples that were also revealed by the Ontario institutions examined.

Although there has been little systematic research on the effectiveness of such approaches for the recruitment of students from under-represented groups to Ontario postsecondary institutions (Miner, 2011), various access initiatives are being developed and implemented. Miner (2011) describes Greater Toronto Area (GTA)-specific postsecondary access initiatives underway at Humber, Seneca, Centennial and George Brown colleges, as well as Ryerson, Toronto and York universities. These initiatives include summer camps and community and parental outreach programs targeting first-generation students as early as Grade 10.

Though focusing primarily on retention initiatives, Deloitte's (2012) report for Colleges Ontario provides an interesting analysis of Ontario college transition and retention initiatives meant to support an increasingly diverse student body. In order to assess the relationship between supporting and enhancing the success of at-risk students and the added stress on colleges' operating budgets, Deloitte examined Ontario college programs and services for at-risk students from a cost-benefit perspective and found that programming and service provision come at a cost of approximately 10% of operational and special purpose grant funding to colleges across the province. At-risk students, as defined by Deloitte, include students from groups underrepresented in PSE due to "real or perceived barriers and challenges of access and success who often face greater attainment challenges due to their unique situations unless they receive additional support during the course of their education" (p. 1). This group includes Aboriginal students, first-generation students, students from low-income families, rural students, students with disabilities, and academically challenged and under-prepared students. It should be noted that some students may be categorized as belonging to some or all of these groups. It is important as well to recognize the possibility that retention initiatives may also serve a recruitment function, in that prospective students exploring PSE options might focus on campus services as an indication of the campus environment and how they might 'fit' within it.

The Deloitte study reported that Ontario colleges "collectively demonstrate best practices and strategies for serving students at risk, through effective and innovative programming" (p. 34), highlighting the provision of a wide range of services supporting students from entry to completion, including but not limited to academic transition and/or preparedness programs; personal counseling; targeted programs and efforts for specific groups; peer mentoring; and community partnerships. Deloitte (2012) also indicated that "providing support services for students at risk has become part of the core business of colleges" (p. 10) and, according to the college administrator respondents, has become firmly entrenched in institutional missions as Ontario colleges are committed to addressing the need for targeted growth.

Evaluating Under-represented Group Recruitment

Among the priorities identified for MTCU by Premier Wynne in 2014 were helping people choose their path; ensuring an accessible, high-quality and sustainable postsecondary education system; and building Ontario's integrated employment and training system. Embedded within these overarching priorities were a number of specific tasks, including recognizing and meeting the needs of diverse groups of learners, "working with postsecondary institutions and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to improve the consistency and availability of institution-level and system-level outcome measures," and focusing on key outcomes for

students, institutions and the economy (Wynne, 2014). In an earlier report commissioned by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, researchers from the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC, 2009a) explored existing data on postsecondary student access and retention strategies in Canada. First, they reviewed international data on strategies to promote PSE access and success for under-represented groups, specifically for Aboriginal students, first-generation students and students from low-income families, and found that data in the Canadian context were very sparse. The second stage in the research process involved partnering with five Ontario and Manitoba institutions (two colleges and three universities) identified as having promising access and/or recruitment programs. Key informants at each institution were interviewed, and the research team met with representatives from various levels of government and other private institutions in order to gain further insight into data collection and the evaluation of access and retention strategies nationally. Based on their review, the researchers concluded that Canadian PSE institutions are not 'data-ready' – they have not been collecting the data necessary to adequately track the success of their programs. However, the researchers also reported that PSE institutions in Canada are strongly committed to developing and implementing more adequate measurement systems.

Methodology

The process used to assess our research questions involved the collection of data from four sources: Ontario college Strategic Mandate Agreements; Ontario college viewbooks; Ontario college websites; and key informant interviews.

Prior to data collection, the research team had to decide how to define under-represented groups. As referenced above, there is considerable variation in the ways these groups have been defined. Using the literature as a point of reference, a list of general search terms was compiled in order to begin to determine what kind of data the team would be collecting. In addition to reviewing existing literature, information was shared between our team and another team of researchers exploring university recruitment of under-represented groups in order to establish a common search list from which to begin our investigation. The list developed through this process is extensive though not exhaustive, and the research team recognizes that additional terms could have been chosen by other researchers. The list of search terms is itemized here.

- Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, Inuit
- First generation, first to attend
- Students with disabilities, learning disabilities²
- Francophone students
- Mature student, continuing education, Second Career
- English as Second Language (ESL), English as Additional Language (EAL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

² Note that when using 'students with disabilities' and 'learning disabilities' as search terms, RAs recorded indications of services for any physical, visual, auditory, learnings, or developmental disabilities for each institution and for each analysis method (SMAs, websites, viewbooks).

- New Canadian, immigrant, landed immigrant
- Financial aid, scholarships, bursaries

The research team also had to decide on its definition of ‘recruitment’ and how recruitment was related to access and outreach. As defined by the research team, outreach includes efforts to increase prospective student motivation to attend PSE, foster relationships with community and family stakeholders, and develop partnerships with local interest groups in order to better understand and serve local and regional needs. Typically, initiatives to improve PSE access focus on “the willingness, readiness, and ability of a student to apply to and enrol in a PSE program” (SRDC, 2009b). Recruitment initiatives focus on the physical actions employed to engage with potential students, in addition to the marketing materials and campaigns that institutions implement in order to increase institution profile and brand.

Strategic Mandate Agreements

As part of an initiative to drive policy toward sustainability and fiscal accountability while preserving and enhancing the postsecondary education system in Ontario, MTCU released its Differentiation Policy Framework in 2013. Key priorities of this framework are included in and supported by the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) recently negotiated between MTCU and all publicly funded postsecondary institutions in Ontario. Each SMA outlines the institution’s definition of its role within the PSE system and how each institution plans to build on its current strengths to achieve its vision and aid in the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the differentiation framework. The SMAs provide the blueprints for each institution’s activities, including the college’s plans for recruiting and retaining members of under-represented groups. With respect specifically to Ontario colleges, each SMA:

- Identifies the college’s existing institutional strengths;
- Supports the current vision, mission and mandate of the college, and outlines how the college’s priorities align with Ontario’s vision and Differentiation Policy Framework; and
- Informs Ministry decision-making by better aligning institutional areas of strength with MTCU priorities (e.g., Algonquin College, 2014, p. 2; Cambrian College, 2014, p. 2; St. Lawrence College, 2014, p. 3).

The research team reviewed each Ontario college SMA in its entirety. Particular attention was paid to the “College Mission” and “Vision” statements and to each college’s response to Section 3: *Student Population*, as described in the MTCU SMA template:

This component recognizes the unique institutional missions that improve access, retention, and success for under-represented groups (Aboriginal, first generation, and students with disabilities) and francophone. This component also highlights other important student groups that institutions serve that link to their institutional strength. This may include, but is not limited to, international students, mature students, or indirect entrants (e.g., Durham College, 2014, p. 7; Humber College, 2014, p. 6; Niagara College, 2014, p. 5).

The colleges' mission and vision statements were coded for reference to access and/or diversity issues. Section 3 of each SMA includes several subsections: areas of institutional strength; additional comments; institutional strategies; and metrics. Each subsection was coded for references to any of the search terms listed above. Focusing on Section 3 of each SMA, data were also collected on the number of specific references to each under-represented group, the way in which under-represented groups were defined, the range and type of programs or services offered that highlight institutional strengths, strategic enrolment mandates, and the range and type of metrics used to evaluate the success of these programs or services. For each of the main sections of the SMA template (for example 'alignment with the differentiation policy framework', 'teaching and learning', 'student population'), colleges were asked to provide information with respect to how they evaluated the initiatives outlined in their signed agreements. The 'metrics' subsection included space for each institution to list system-wide metrics (those consistently required across the sector for MTCU reporting) and institutional metrics (those specific to individual institutions).

Ontario College Viewbooks

Each college in Ontario publishes an annual viewbook, which describes the college and its offerings. The viewbook acts as the public face of the college and provides an indication of how the institution markets itself. It is distributed to secondary school guidance counsellors and to prospective students and their parents at college open houses and at the annual Ontario College Fair.

Understanding that these Ontario colleges might use these viewbooks as an opportunity to showcase programs for students from under-represented groups, the research team examined downloaded electronic or hard copy versions of the 24 Ontario college viewbooks for specific references to these groups. Viewbook content was coded using the under-represented groups listed above, with note made of references to under-represented groups not included in the common list. The research team's data collection and analysis was guided by the first two of its three research questions: How did the viewbooks define under-represented groups? What range and type of recruitment activities were mentioned? Did the viewbooks offer prospective students from under-represented groups a snapshot of how they might 'fit in'? Were programs and support services for these students mentioned specifically? Given their purpose, it was not anticipated that the college viewbooks would include information on the internal evaluation of recruitment success.

Website Analysis

Ontario college websites provide information regarding location, facilities, program choices, admissions and student services. These websites are a way for colleges to present a vibrant picture of what prospective students can expect and what current students are already experiencing. While there is some debate over the effectiveness of this institutional web-based marketing (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hendricks, 2006), Burdett (2013) found that her sample of University of California, Irvine undergraduates ranked postsecondary institution websites as more influential than social media websites or other college search sites when searching for PSE information. MacAllum et al. (2007) held focus groups composed of under-

served students, their families and guidance counselors ($N = 90$) across eight states and found that focus group participants reported relying heavily on the internet when searching for information regarding college and the application process.

Given the centrality of Ontario college websites to their recruitment process, the research team developed a coding strategy and web data collection template for the analysis of all Ontario college website recruitment information targeted at under-represented groups. The website content for each institution was coded according to the number, type and amount of targeted recruitment strategies and support services. While support services are not generally interpreted as relevant to recruitment strategies, they were included in the website analysis in recognition of the possibility that available services and an engaging campus community may influence prospective students in their PSE decisions. Support services in this context are considered by the research team to be passive forms of recruitment.

For colleges with multiple campuses and campus-specific websites, a search was conducted on each of the individual campus websites. All information was recorded in Fluid Surveys, with a new survey for each institution and campus. The research team trained three upper-year undergraduate research assistants (RA) on a data collection protocol. Additionally, a francophone graduate student was trained on the data collection protocol and was responsible for collecting data from the French-language institutions. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the research team randomly selected a number of the college websites and completed the full web-data collection survey. Their analyses were compared to RA analyses of the same colleges; inter-rater reliability was greater than 96%.

The Ontario college website analysis was carried out in three steps (see Appendices A, B and C for detailed templates). The first step required the RA to record and follow the links provided on the college website homepage (e.g., prospective students, future students, student life, services) for each designated under-represented group. The RA recorded the number of clicks required to get to the target information and subsequently recorded the services outlined. For example, for Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis and Inuit groups, the RA clicked the student services link on the homepage and searched for these terms. The RA identified the number of clicks required to get to the target information and recorded the services explicitly provided to students in these groups. The RA then recorded the quantity of information provided for each identified service: no information; little information (< 50 words); some information (50-150 words); very detailed (> 150 words).

For the second step in the analysis, the RA typed the under-represented group search term into the search bar located on the main webpage (e.g., first-generation, first to attend) and recorded the number of links that appeared. Links were sorted by relevance and the top ten were examined for information specific to the target group in any of the following categories: outreach initiatives; transition activities; financial aid; clubs/social activities; media/press releases; research; and other. For the 'other' category, the RA recorded a detailed description of the information provided. For example, the RA typed 'students with disabilities, learning disabilities' into the search bar on the college home page. The top ten links were sorted by relevance and reviewed. Additionally, all categories were recorded according to their rank in the top ten; for example, first result, 6th-8th result, or not in the top ten.

Finally, for the third step in the analysis, the RA typed the designated under-represented group search term into Google, accompanied by the target college name (e.g., first-generation, first to attend, Algonquin College). For each college, the RA also searched using four additional terms: outreach, recruitment activities; mission statement; diversity, statement of diversity; transition activities. The RA recorded the URL where the information was found, noted how many links were produced, used the 'sort by relevance' function and examined the top ten links for target information.

Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with key informants were used to provide greater insight into the information on under-represented group definition, recruitment strategies and processes, and evaluation efforts available in SMAs, college viewbooks or institutional websites. Interview questions were developed in consultation with members of another research team working on a similar research project exploring recruitment of under-represented groups in the university sector.

The research supervisor emailed the 24 Ontario college registrars, asking if they and/or one to three other college staff would consider participating in the research. After initial contact with the institution, a follow-up email was sent to each key informant confirming the interview details; a copy of the University of Windsor REB approval and a Letter of Information was also attached to this email. Additionally, participants were emailed a copy of the interview questions in advance in order to facilitate the interview process.

Twelve colleges agreed to participate and 22 key informants were interviewed, including six registrars, two associate registrars, and others holding various positions (e.g., VP student services, recruitment & enrolment manager, access centre supervisor, director of community outreach). Geographical representation of the colleges was excellent, with three colleges from each of the Northern and Eastern regions, four colleges from the Central region and two from the Western region. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from January to February 2015. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate recording of data. RAs were present during each interview to take notes. The research supervisor conducted 10 of the 12 semi-structured interviews, nine by telephone and one in person. One interview was conducted by another member of the research team and one informant emailed her responses to the research supervisor.

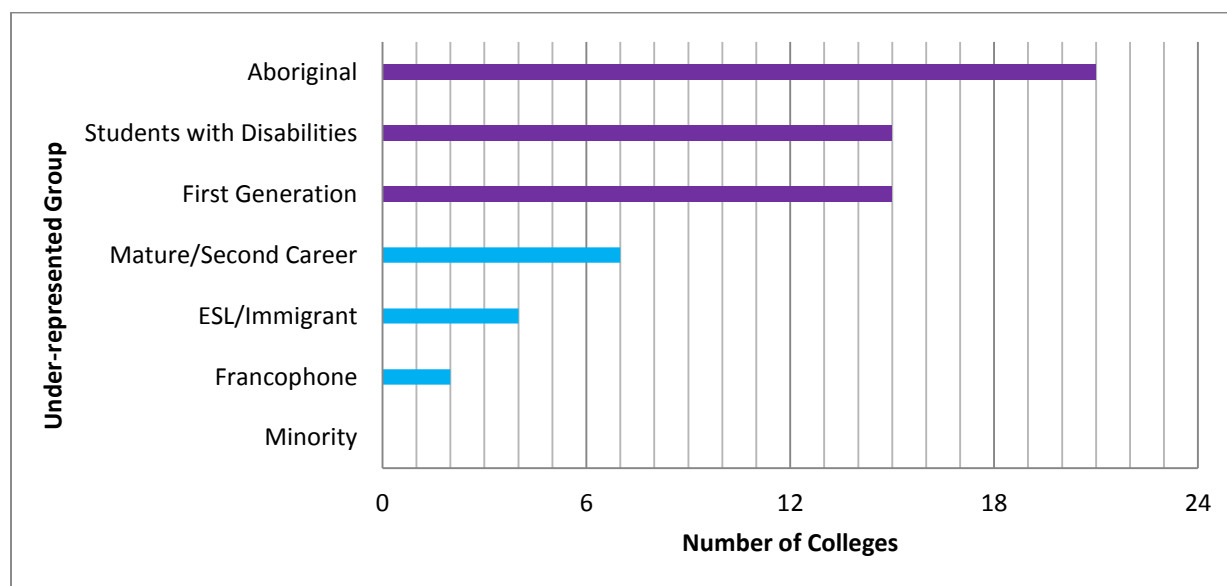
Findings

Research Question 1: How do Ontario colleges define under-represented groups?

Strategic Mandate Agreements

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of each college SMA were coded using the search terms noted on page 12. Section 3 was guided by the template provided by MTCU and included groups the Ministry has identified as underrepresented and/or served by the college sector: Aboriginal, first-generation and students with disabilities. Figure 1 reveals the number of colleges providing information with respect to services for under-represented groups. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that these were the three groups identified by the MTCU as underrepresented, Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and first-generation students were reported most frequently.

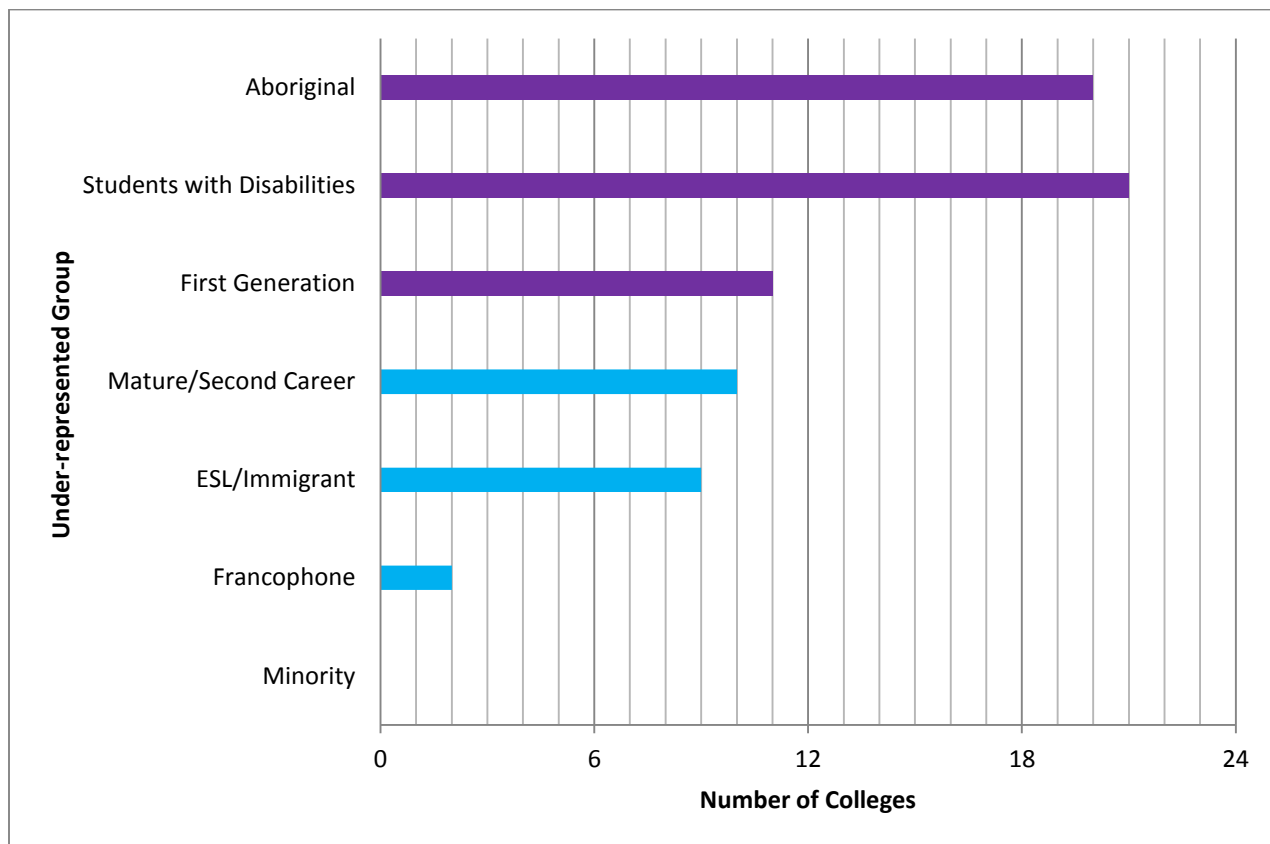
Figure 1: Number of College SMAs providing Information for Under-represented Groups



Ontario College Viewbooks

College viewbooks were also coded using the search terms found on page 12. The predominant focus of the viewbooks appeared to be the delivery of general program and degree information to high school students. Considerably less information was provided with respect to support services for specific groups. Figure 2 shows the number of colleges that reference under-represented groups in their viewbooks. Again, information on Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and first-generation students was most frequent.

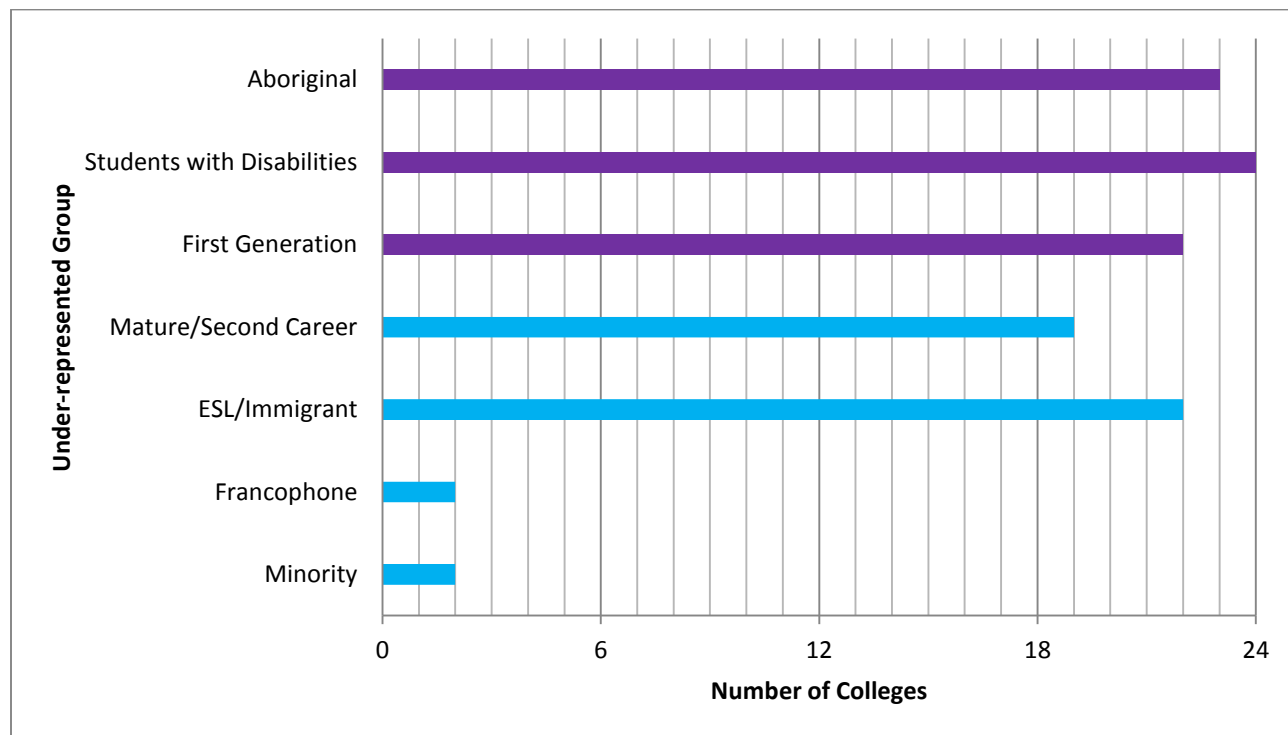
Figure 2: Number of College Viewbooks providing Information for Under-represented Groups



Ontario College Websites

Similarly, Figure 3 represents the number of college websites providing information with respect to the under-represented groups listed on page 12. Consistent with the SMA and viewbook data, analysis of the data collected during step one of the website analysis process suggests that Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and first-generation students are the top three groups targeted. However, it is interesting to note that a larger proportion of colleges provided targeted information on their websites to mature/Second Career students and ESL/immigrant students than was provided overall in college viewbooks. Likewise, the information provided by colleges with respect to their institutional strengths in the area of Student Population did not indicate the same level of targeted initiatives or information to members of either of these two categories.

Figure 3: Number of College Websites providing Information for Under-represented Groups



Key Informant Interviews

Of the 12 Ontario colleges that participated in the interviews, 10 (83%) indicated in response to the question ‘How has your college defined under-represented groups?’ that formal definitions of under-represented groups were in place at their respective institutions. Nine of these 10 colleges identified specific groups, and one college had a more general definition – people who may not traditionally access education. Two colleges indicated they did not formally define under-represented groups.³

Of the 10 colleges that identified specific under-represented groups targeted in recruitment activities, all of them specified Aboriginal, first-generation students and students with disabilities. The colleges varied considerably in their identification of other under-represented groups. Three colleges identified Francophones as an under-represented group. Two colleges identified one or more of the following groups

³ Given the fact that responsibility for the recruitment of under-represented group members is shared across a number of individuals and departments at each college, and given the time constraints of the project itself, it should be acknowledged that the interviewees did not possess *all* of the key knowledge required to give a complete representation of the multiple under-represented groups at their respective institutions. In fact, many of our interviewees made exactly this point. However, the respondents designated by their colleges as most appropriate to interview appeared to be in the best position to provide the most comprehensive overview of their colleges’ recruitment activities.

as underrepresented: internationally trained immigrants, mature students, low-income students, new Canadians, Crown wards, underserved youth, and single parents or non-traditional families. Dual credit students, at-risk students, students living in rural areas and women in non-traditional careers were each identified by at least one college of the total respondents.

Two reports (Deloitte, 2012; ACAATO, 2004) listed academically under-prepared (or those with low literacy or foundational skills) individuals as warranting extra attention because access to postsecondary education opportunities is difficult for them. This is reflected in the number of colleges that offered academic upgrading and college prep courses. Likewise, a review of the financial assistance offered to students suggested that there were a number of the 'peripherally identified' groups that were provided targeted support through bursary and scholarship application processes.

When asked *how* these groups were defined, respondents most often suggested that institution-specific definitions were based on MTCU definitions, provincial initiatives (including SMAs) and funding sources. However, other sources of input included the Committee for Registrars, Admissions and Liaison Officers and strategic enrolment management committees. Two colleges specifically noted that definitions of under-representation evolved through community partnerships and understanding the needs of the communities they served. One respondent noted that this was a philosophical perspective. Another respondent noted that as diversity within the institution evolves, so too does the nature of under-representation at that institution. This is encouraging news given the fact that the vast majority of the respondents indicated a reliance on provincial and Ministry definitions and initiatives.

Reliance on predetermined targets and associated definitions has the potential to conflict with the mandate of the college system to be regionally responsive. Colleges need to be prepared to work closely with their communities/regions in order to define regional targets appropriately, and then work on establishing communities of practice in order to facilitate the development of best practices that can be used across the sector as demographics change over time.

Research Question 2: How do Ontario colleges recruit under-represented groups?

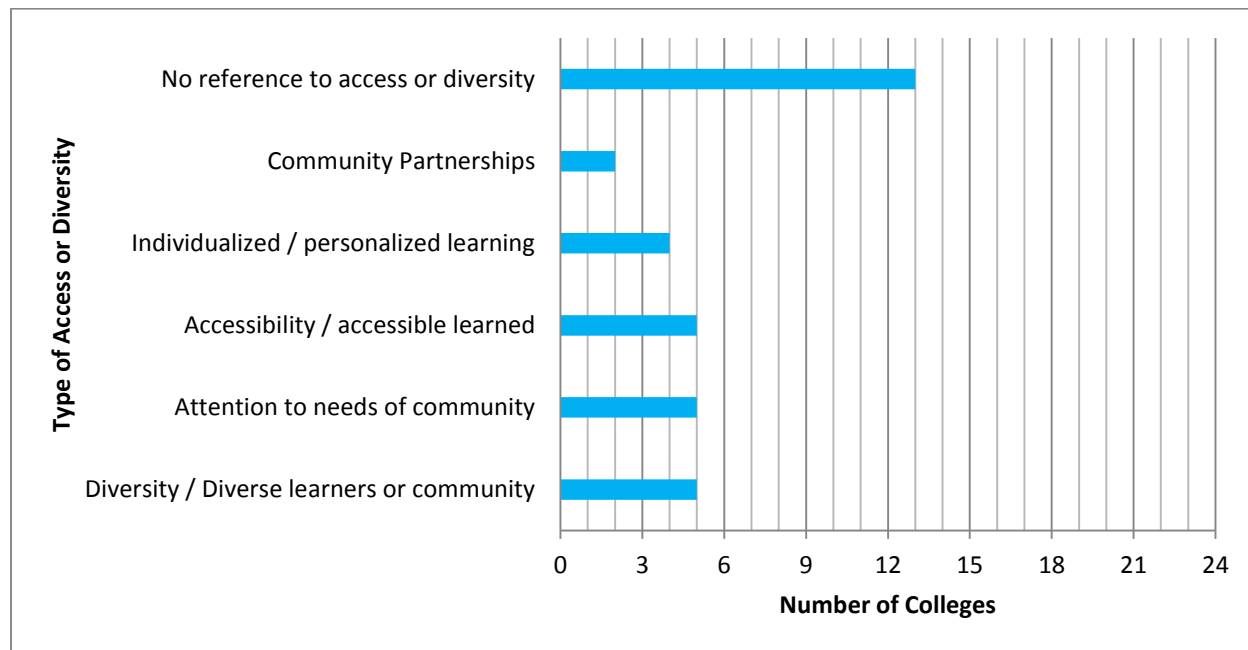
Ontario colleges employ many activities in order to recruit prospective students to their institutions. In addition to general recruitment activities such as high school visits, college fairs, general open houses, and the distribution of viewbooks and promotional materials, some colleges specifically target recruitment to under-represented groups. Our data revealed the following information regarding recruitment of under-represented groups.

Strategic Mandate Agreements

College mission and vision statements were provided in each of the college SMAs. Mission and vision statements were coded for reference to access and/or diversity. Deloitte (2012) reported that Ontario college administrators who participated in their study suggested that the provision of support services for at-risk students had become firmly entrenched in institutional missions. This finding was not supported by

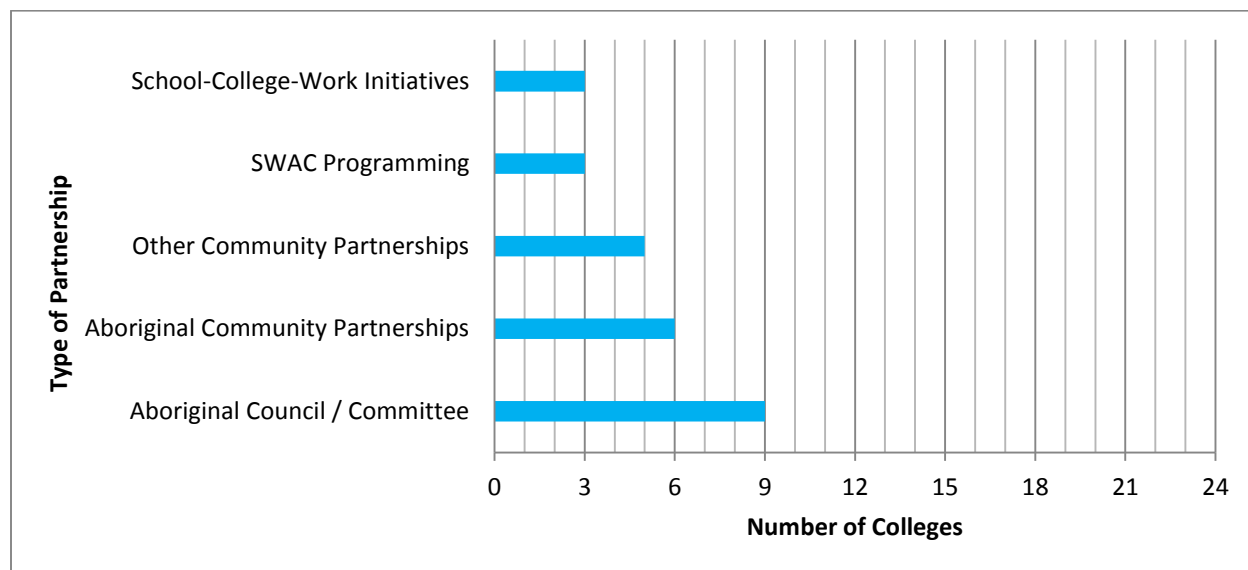
the review conducted by this research team. Figure 4 provides the frequencies for the number of colleges that referred to access or diversity issues in their SMA mission and/or vision statements.

Figure 4: Number of Colleges that References Access or Diversity in SMA Mission Statements



An analysis of all 24 college SMAs revealed very little information with respect to specific recruitment activities. However, the data did reveal that a number of institutions are engaged in proactive efforts to connect and foster relationships with local communities. From this, we can infer that these institutions are using these opportunities to heighten exposure to various PSE pathways and to promote inclusivity by being attentive to the multiple stakeholders representing members of under-represented groups. It is worth noting the particularly heavy emphasis on Aboriginal initiatives. It is possible that colleges did not list every community relationship or partnership-building initiative with which they are engaged, but instead chose to highlight initiatives that they felt were most relevant to the SMAs. If this is the case, it could be inferred that Figure 5 does not represent the complete list of activities that colleges undertake in order to foster relationships with local communities. However, given the relatively higher notation of Aboriginal initiatives, it is apparent that colleges are engaging in relationship building in ways that indicate inclusive and respectful environments.

Figure 5: College Partnerships listed in Section 3 of SMAs



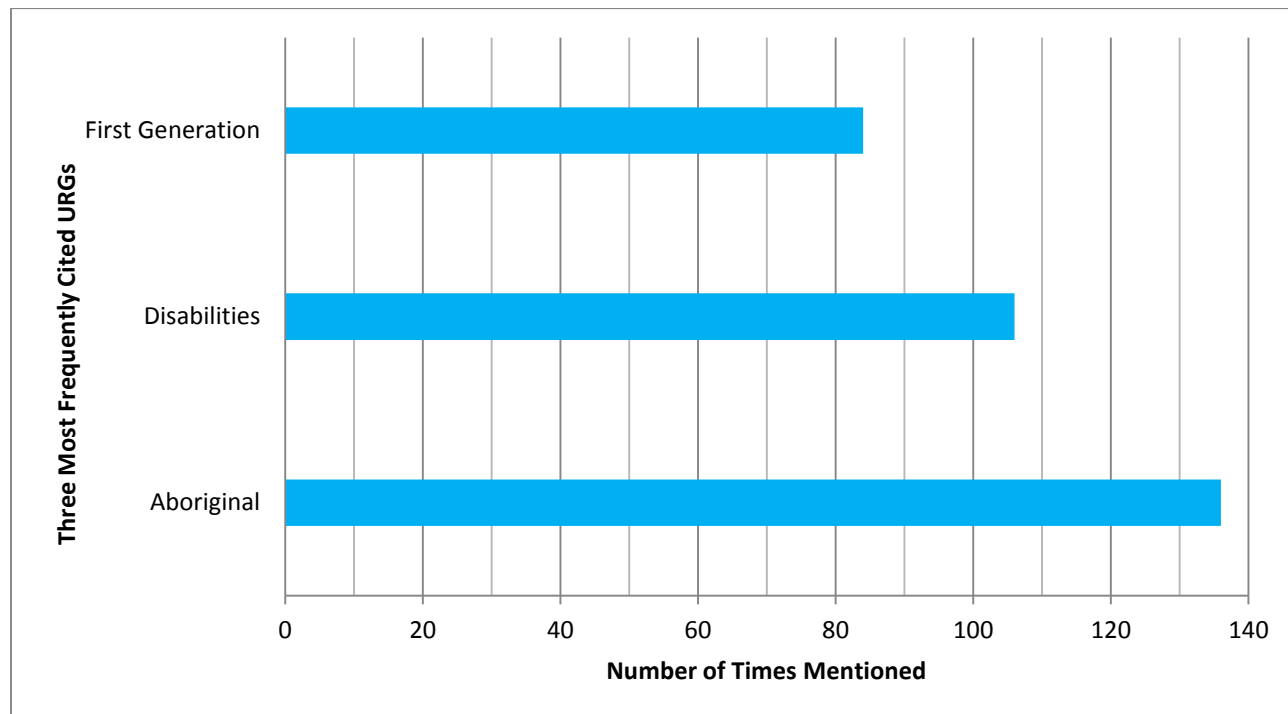
Ontario College Viewbooks

Viewbook data were quite limited with respect to recruitment initiatives targeting under-represented groups. College viewbooks were more focused on suggesting program options and basic degree requirements to prospective students than providing students with a detailed description of available support services.

Ontario College Websites

Website data provided important information regarding the range and types of targeted outreach, recruitment, transition and support activities used by Ontario colleges to attract and retain students from under-represented groups. College websites do not provide information regarding how or where institution administration and staff target students, or which groups they target. However, it is understood that potential students and their families may visit institution websites in order to explore opportunities available to them. This exploration process often occurs prior to the admissions process and may in fact provide potential recruits and/or their families with the kinds of information that would lead them to decide to proceed with the application process. Therefore, while these services are most often referenced in the context of retention or student support, the kinds of services identified below may act as passive recruitment tools, providing potential students with an idea of how they will fit within the college environment and ultimately how they will grow and be supported in their journey through PSE. Figure 6 provides a graphical representation of the total number of times the top three under-represented groups (first-generation students, students with disabilities and Aboriginal students) were mentioned on college websites across the sector.

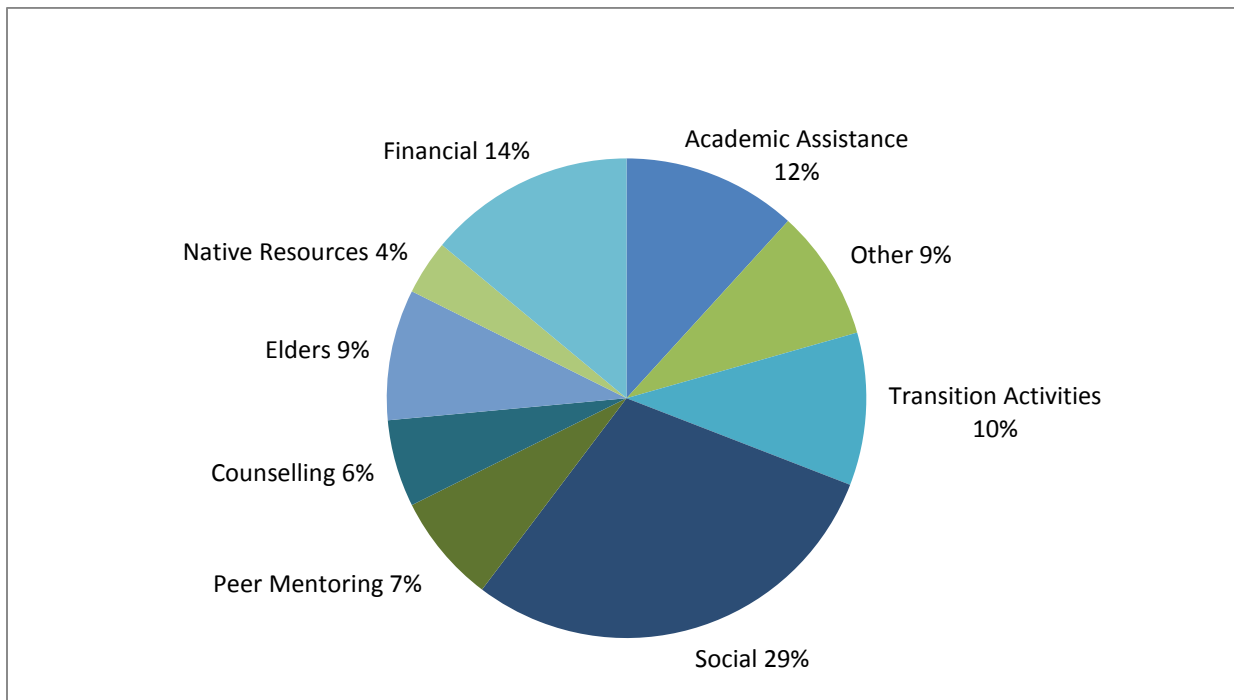
Figure 6: Number of Times the Three Most Frequently Cited URGs were Mentioned on College Websites



Aboriginal Student Activities

Figure 7 represents the kinds of services available for Aboriginal students across the sector based on the information we were able to find on the colleges’ websites. For each college, all instances of support for Aboriginal students were recorded. Transition activities are included as well as services that are provided to the students throughout their tenure. The graph represents percentages of each kind of service based on 136 reports/mentions of services (across all 24 colleges) targeting Aboriginal students. Social services include support initiatives such as shared space on campus for students to be with other Aboriginal students; periodic events, such as luncheons or traditional ceremonies; and student groups. Social services represent 29% of Aboriginal-targeted initiatives and are the most frequently reported. Financial services include support such as targeted bursaries (14%) and academic assistance, including such supports as tutoring and learning strategies, and account for 14% and 12% respectively. However, it is interesting to note that each is reported half as often as social services and even combined are still not reported as often as social services. This suggests that colleges offer a significant proportion of supports that serve to nurture the social and emotional needs of Aboriginal students.

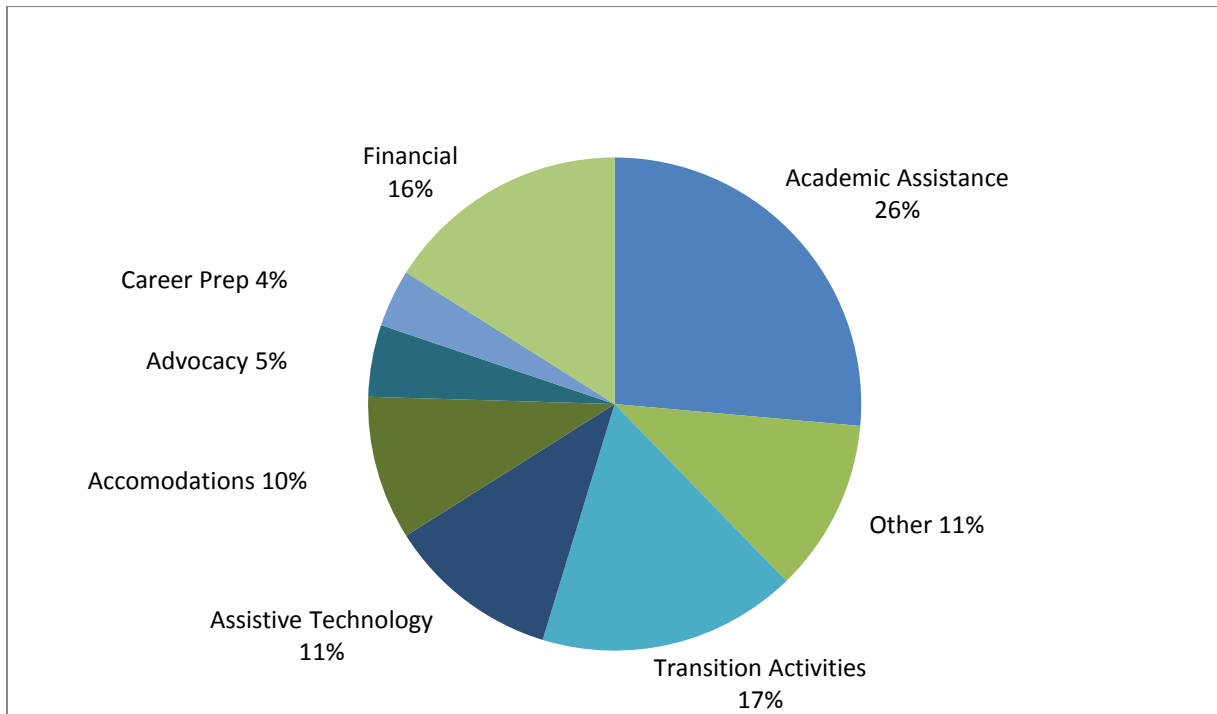
Figure 7: Types of Services provided for Aboriginal Students



Services for Students with Disabilities

As in the figure above for Aboriginal supports, Figure 8 represents the percentages of each kind of service based on 106 mentions of support services for students with disabilities across all 24 Ontario college websites. Again, transition activities are included as well as services that are provided to the students throughout their tenure. These data suggest that academic assistance (26%) is the predominant type of service offered to support students with disabilities. Academic assistance includes services such as tutoring, academic workshops and learning strategies. Additionally, of all support services identified for this group, financial services (16%) and transition activities (17%) are also reported to a great degree. These data suggest that the sector has recognized that students with disabilities may require additional academic support in order to function at a level comparable to students who have not identified as having disabilities. Together, accommodations (e.g., extra time allotted to write exams) and assistive technology (e.g., braille textbooks, audio-recording equipment) account for 21% of the mentions of services targeted to students with disabilities across the sector. These types of supports may be underrepresented in the data, however, as providing reasonable accommodations is a standard practice among all colleges and is mandated in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

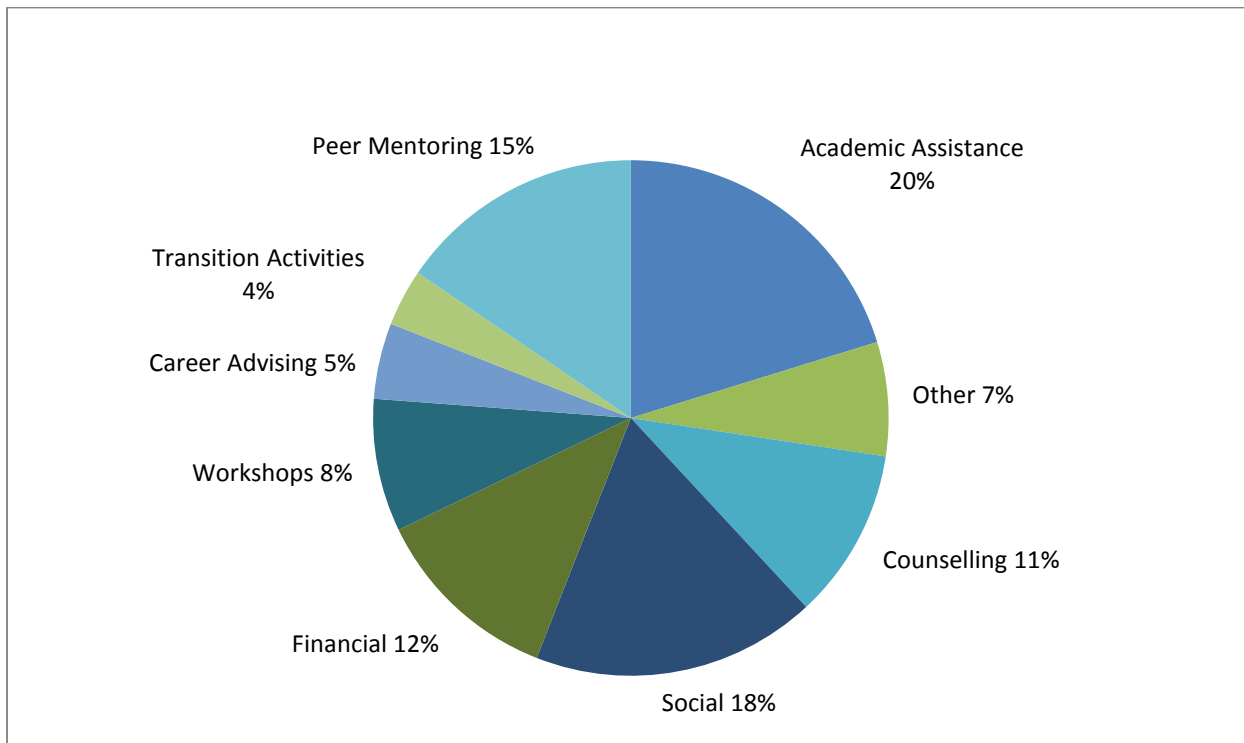
Figure 8: Types of Services provided for Students with Disabilities



First-generation Student Activities

Consistent with the graphical representations of Figures 7 and 8, Figure 9 represents percentages of the total mentions of support services identified for first-generation students across all 24 colleges. First-generation services were mentioned 84 times, with academic assistance (20%), social activities (18%), peer mentoring (15%) and financial services (12%) reported most frequently. Academic assistance includes services such as tutoring and learning strategies. In addition to social events and shared space on campus, the social services provided for first-generation students included such initiatives as newsletters and social media designed specifically for members of this group.

Figure 9: Types of Services provided for First-generation Students



Several services were noted as being commonly available for these three under-represented groups and across the college sector as a whole: Head Start/pre-orientations sessions, shared spaces, mentoring programs, workshops, college readiness programs and personalized phone calls. Based on this observation, we infer that these kinds of services are agreed upon across the sector as ‘best practice’ initiatives.

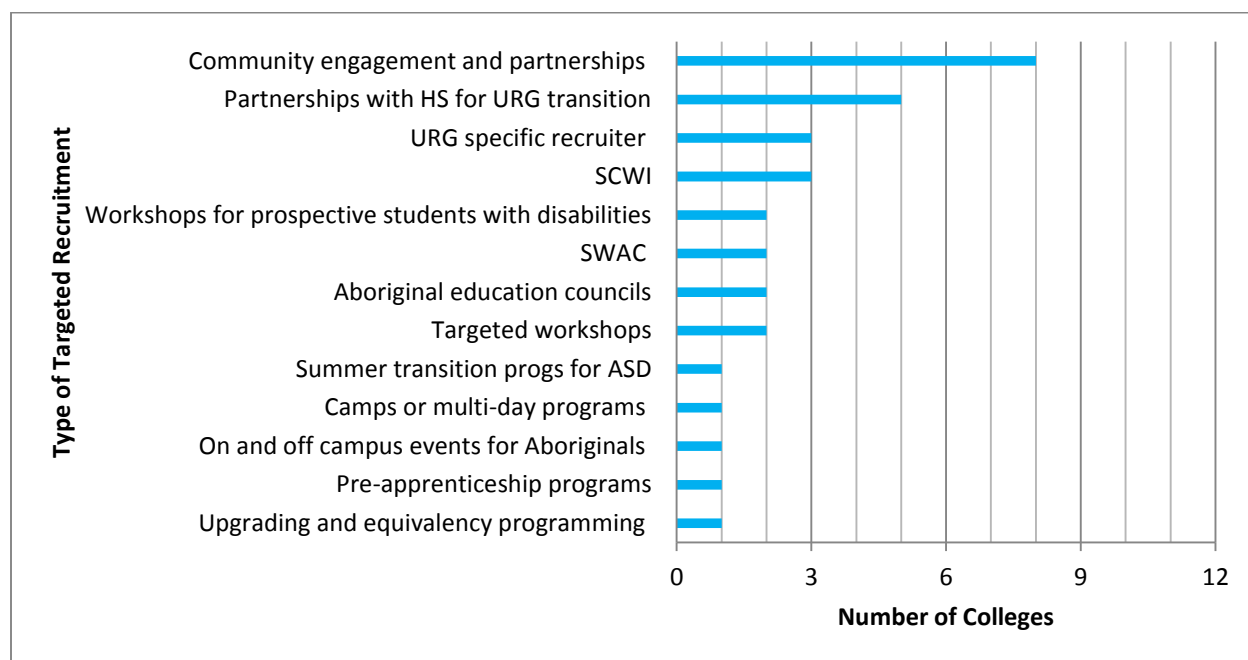
Ontario College Interviews

Prior to being asked to discuss institution-specific recruitment practices, the key informants from 12 Ontario colleges who were interviewed were asked, “Do you and your colleagues distinguish among ‘outreach,’ ‘access’ and ‘recruitment’ when talking about efforts to reduce underrepresentation?” The purpose of asking this question was to determine whether Ontario colleges used a common and consistent language. Two colleges indicated no differentiation between the terms with respect to the recruitment of under-represented groups. Three suggested that they do differentiate between the terms, and the remainder (7) indicated that they differentiated between outreach and recruitment. There appears to be little focus on the term ‘access’ specifically. Additionally, many informants indicated a lack of collaboration between services designated as either access, outreach or recruitment and between services designated to support specific under-represented groups once they have successfully registered. In fact, only one college informant indicated a seamless path from recruitment to transition. Informants noted that this lack of continuity

creates problems not only for access and recruitment initiatives, but also for the evaluation of those initiatives as students may identify as members of more than one under-represented group.

With respect to targeted recruitment practices specifically, participating colleges indicated a number of ways in which they are actively targeting members of under-represented groups. An interesting finding was the fact that the highest reported activity was active engagement in local community events and community agency project partnerships. Figure 10 provides a graphical representation of these data. It should be noted that these data are based on the feedback of 22 representatives from 12 Ontario colleges and are not representative of the entire college sector.

Figure 10: Targeted Recruitment Mentioned in Interviews



In addition to the recruitment initiatives described above, the interviews with key informants enabled the researchers to identify a number of exemplary programs.

STARs

STARs (student admissions representatives) is a recruitment initiative at Sheridan College that enlists current students from all programs to help prospective students with program choice, admission procedures, application assistance, mentorship and other academic matters. These students (the STARs) are chosen by faculty to assist in the recruitment process, and special care is taken to employ students representative of a

wide variety of groups (e.g., Aboriginal, international, Second Career) in order to provide a good fit for a broad range of prospective applicants.

HYPE

Centennial College's Helping Youth Pursue Education (HYPE) program is a summer program for participants ages 17-26 from local at-risk neighbourhoods with a high rate of youth gang violence and crime. The program accepts approximately 120-140 participants for a six-week summer program that introduces them to a wide variety of college program choices. Participants choose a program that interests them (for example, business, health, hospitality) and participate in a variety of learning experiences that provide them with a sample of what that program has to offer. The students also participate in resume, career and leadership development workshops and are given tokens for transportation and meals. The Centennial College interview participants indicated that 60% of program graduates go on to pursue PSE, although not necessarily at Centennial College. HYPE graduates are given support during the application and admission process, are assisted in accessing upgrading programs to increase prospects of PSE admission and success, and for those not ready to pursue PSE are given support to find employment. HYPE participants are under no obligation to attend Centennial College and are provided assistance regardless of where they decide to pursue PSE.

SWAC and SCWI

School Within A College (SWAC) programs and School-College-Work Initiatives (SCWI) focus on students at risk of not completing high school and provide them with opportunities to engage in the college experience. SWAC and SCWI programs are classified under Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU) guidelines and implemented in coordination with dual credit systems set up collaboratively between EDU and MTCU. SWAC programming is "aimed at disengaged and underachieving students who have the potential to succeed but are at risk of not graduating, and students who have left school before graduating" (EDU, 2013, p. 14). SWAC programs allow high school students to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements under the guidance of secondary school teachers while taking college preparatory courses under the direction of Ontario college faculty. The education experience occurs on the college campus; compared to the typical secondary school experience, students learn in smaller classroom settings with greater opportunity for faculty attention and support. Teachers in these programs also act as liaisons between the students, the school board and the college in order to best serve the needs of the students. Similarly, SCWI programs facilitate student engagement in apprenticeship dual credit programming.

Bridge

The Bridge is a program provided by Humber College and developed specifically to support Black, African and Caribbean students by involving them in workshops and mentorship programs that encourage academic success and campus and community engagement. The Bridge began as a small pilot project within the community and justice services program and was initiated in response to faculty concerns over attrition and

lack of student engagement. Student participants in The Bridge program attend a series of workshops on a variety of topics including motivation, leadership development, identity and career development.

PostSecondaryIsPossible.ca

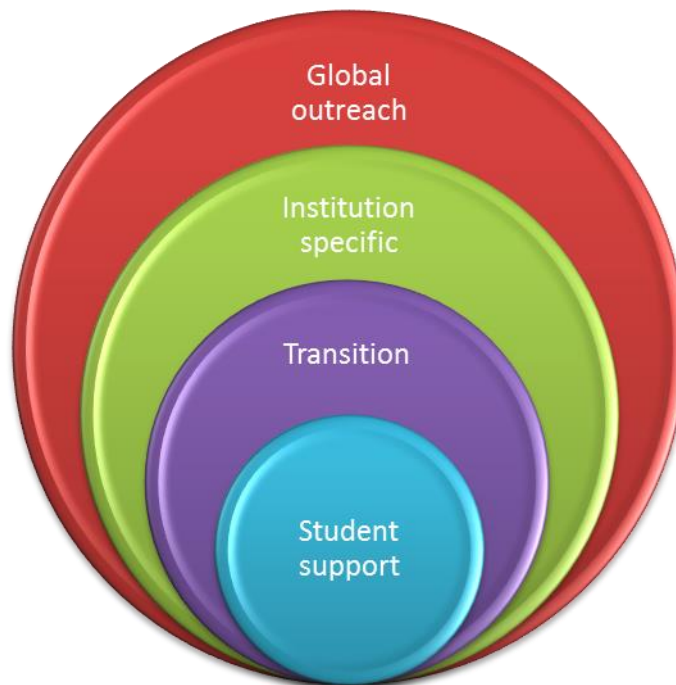
A notable cross-sector collaboration in the GTA could serve as a template for the development of a province-wide accessibility initiative. The Council of Educators of Toronto (CET) is a twelve-member network of representatives from five colleges, four universities, two school boards, and United Way Toronto's Community of Practice on Youth Educational Attainment Partnerships (for more information see www.postsecondaryispossible.ca). Following Miner's (2012) report, the current mandate of the CET is "to develop and implement a collaborative and coordinated approach among educational institutions to enable easier and better student-program matches in the access and outreach programs they offer (CET, 2014, p. 4). CET provides clear definitions of access and outreach for the communities they represent and serves as a valuable resource for collaboration and global outreach initiatives. The expansion of this program to encompass a provincial community of practice would facilitate greater knowledge mobilization across institutions. The development of a province-wide system would support Ontario colleges in their efforts to fulfill their mandate of regional responsiveness and accessibility, by providing a broader platform from which to explore opportunities to enhance outreach, access, and recruitment initiatives at local levels. It could expedite the development of best practices and encourage research regarding the effectiveness of those efforts through greater opportunities for knowledge and data sharing and comparisons.

Emergent theme

Taken as a whole, the approaches colleges take to targeted recruitment could be characterized as either global outreach or institution-specific recruitment. Global outreach encourages members of the target under-represented group to access PSE regardless of the institution they decide to attend. The focus is on increasing interest in and motivation to seek PSE generally, providing members of the target group with enough information to make PSE attractive and not only possible, but plausible. Additionally, some institutions may provide members of under-represented groups with opportunities to engage with key aspects of the college experience to get a feel for how they would fit into the system without the obligation of attending.

On the other hand, institution-specific recruitment focuses on getting potential students to apply to and attend a particular college or program of study. For example, a college may enlist members of the under-represented group who are current students or alumni to act as recruiters or help with the application process for their specific program at that specific college. While both approaches are driven by the intent to increase enrolment, global recruitment processes extol the virtues of PSE participation in general and guide potential students to see beyond the degree or the program and the challenges they may have to overcome to access PSE in the first place, to how they will be supported in an inclusive system that values their strengths and differences. These concepts can be represented visually as follows:

Figure 11: Visual Representation of Recruitment Perspectives

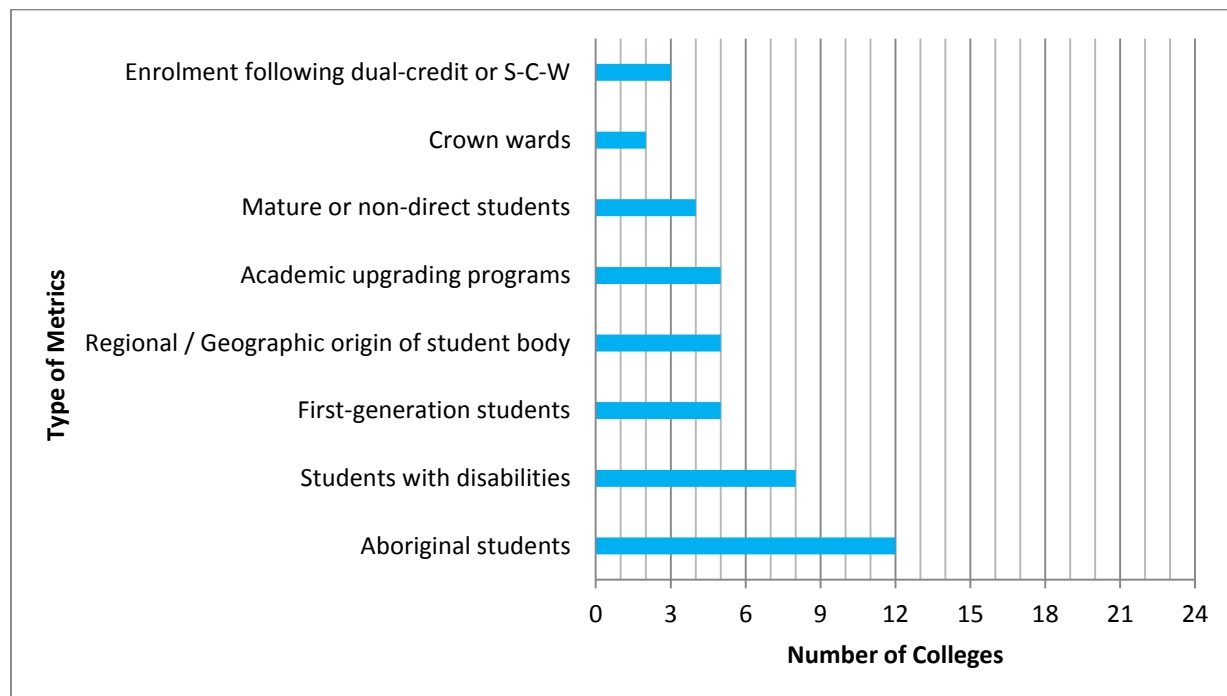


To summarize the data sources above, in addition to regular high school visits, college fairs, general open houses, and the distribution of viewbooks and promotional materials, some colleges specifically target recruitment to under-represented groups. This targeted recruitment exists in many different forms, which can be classified as global outreach or institution-specific recruitment. For example, some colleges get involved in community events such as powwows, offer targeted workshops and/or open house events, employ experts and recruiters who are members of the target group, and provide student mentors to facilitate decision making and application processes.

Research Question 3: How do Ontario colleges measure the impact of recruitment activities focused on students from under-represented groups?

The answer to this question was derived from two sources: SMA analysis and key informant interviews. First, results of the SMA analysis indicate that all CAATs keep track of the number and percentage of Aboriginal students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, francophone students, and students receiving OSAP using system-wide, provincially mandated metrics. Data collected from the college SMAs also indicate a wide variety of additional efforts to track students with unique needs. However, most of the metrics identified in the SMAs infer that the focus on tracking is limited to success measures, retention and service usage numbers, and percentages of students in specified groups. SMA analysis provided the following frequencies of reference to institution-specific metrics:

Figure 12: Indication of Metrics in College SMAs



The information from the key informants revealed a different perspective. Interview participants were asked specifically about recruitment initiatives: “How is (institution) measuring the impact of your activities on student application/registration rates from under-represented groups?” Participants were asked if their institution looked at changes in application, admission or registration numbers over time, for how long and for which groups. Additionally, participants were asked what other evidence their institution considered when evaluating the impact of recruitment initiatives, and if there were plans for future evaluation.

Many informants indicated that they did little in the way of tracking or evaluation at the recruitment stage; tracking initiatives were predominantly employed at the admissions and retention stages. Other institutions indicated that their respective tracking initiatives were very new, having been developed and implemented only within the past one to three years. A respondent from another college indicated that the evaluation of outreach efforts was highly qualitative and anecdotal. However, in almost every interview, the dependence on the willingness of students from under-represented groups to self-identify was suggested as being the biggest obstacle to success for tracking initiatives and targeted evaluation efforts. Likewise, the intersectionality resulting from some students’ membership in more than one group (e.g., first-generation student with a learning disability) creates additional challenges for tracking and program evaluation efforts as different groups may be serviced by different areas of the institution. Furthermore, many informants noted that because recruitment, retention and support services are more often than not separated by departmental barriers, either bureaucratically, organizationally, proximally or all of the above, tracking

efforts across the institutional system are difficult to develop and implement. Alternatively, informants from colleges whose departments worked collaboratively indicated greater success not only with the development and implementation of tracking initiatives, but also with program delivery and support services more generally.

Conclusions

It became apparent when conducting this research that the process of defining under-representation is complex and challenging. The list of terms grew longer as more relevant literature was reviewed. A significant problem at the institution level is the lack of an explicit rationale for the designation of a particular group as underrepresented. Colleges often seem to take their cues from broader MTCU initiatives or funding streams. When local demographics differ from province-wide concerns, a tension is created between fulfilling the college sector mandate of regional responsiveness and adhering to provincial definitions. Alignment of definitions with a clear rationale for these definitions could contribute to the discourse surrounding policy and programming initiatives to better serve target groups.

In order to define regional targets and establish communities of practice, it is important for colleges to work closely with the communities they serve. Developing clear and consistent definitions within the context of a mandate to be responsive to the communities served could support the evolution of programming initiatives during periods of demographic change. Currently, it appears that the top three groups defined as underrepresented by Ontario colleges are Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and first-generation students. However, there appear to also be regional differences with respect to additional target populations.

With respect to recruitment and access, the reliance on student self-identification was noted consistently as a significant obstacle in the process of evaluating efforts to increase access and retention for students from under-represented groups. However, putting the onus on students to self-identify as members of one or more under-represented groups assumes that students recognize the benefits of self-identification in the PSE institutional context, which ignores the reality that students may have encountered situations outside the institution in which self-identification was detrimental. Perhaps institutions might consider how to provide a structure and demonstrate a culture that consistently values the identification and participation of members of under-represented groups. For instance, colleges might consider examining the language that is used in their recruitment and admissions media and marketing processes in order to ensure that the language is inclusive and promotes respect for and value of diversity. Institutions would also need to balance the desire for this information with privacy laws, while at the same time respecting the myriad reasons why members of particular under-represented groups might choose not to self-identify.

Interviews with key informants at some of the colleges suggested that there is movement in this direction. One informant noted that the introduction of a checkbox option during the application process had doubled the self-identification rate for under-represented group members. Similarly, informants at another college indicated that their institution had changed its self-identification procedure and added questions to project

and promote inclusiveness, including making it clear to students why they were being asked to self-identify. By changing the wording and providing more content and context to the questions, this institution found that students were more likely to self-identify as members of single or multiple groups.

Intersectionality does not have to be seen from a deficit-based perspective. Rather, institutional departments should consider working collaboratively to frame self-identification from a strength-based point of view. Identification has traditionally been perceived from a “let’s see what makes you different” perspective. Instead, self-identification should be presented as a means of celebrating the strengths that every difference can bring to the college community. Instead of trying to figure out ‘who goes in what box?’, a seamless system in which all units, departments and support services work together would strengthen the institution as a whole and facilitate the sharing of resources and knowledge. In this sense, the focus would not be on what group membership was most salient to a student at a particular time, nor whether an individual belonged to one or 10 different under-represented target groups. The main priority would shift to ensuring that there were supports in place for all students, irrespective of the need, and that access to and success in PSE would be increased.

Key Themes

System Consistency versus Regional Diversity

As noted above, arriving at clear definitions of who is under-represented and why was a difficult task. Many colleges indicated that their definitions were guided by MTCU definitions. Others discussed the evolution of definitions in consultation with community stakeholders and partners in order to best serve their region. In terms of program development, a ‘one size fits all’ definition of under-representation may not provide the most workable template and does not fulfill the original mandate of the colleges, which was to be responsive to local communities.

Active versus Passive

Active versus passive recruitment is the distinction between recruitment efforts focused on actively getting out and engaging with students and communities, versus recruitment via marketing campaigns, viewbooks, websites and the existence of services predominantly meant for student engagement and retention once registered, which simultaneously act as recruitment tools.

Collaborative versus Independent

Our research revealed a distinction between *collaborative* and *independent* recruitment systems. Collaborative systems were characterized by open communication and cooperation between departments, an approach that seemed to facilitate a seamless transition for students from prospective, to applied, to accepted and supported. In colleges using an independent or autonomous model, the departments

responsible for recruitment, support or specific under-represented groups functioned quite separately, with relatively little knowledge-sharing as students progressed through the college.

Existing research clearly indicates the greater effectiveness of collaborative rather than siloed approaches. A system-wide collaborative approach could provide clarity with respect to outreach, recruitment and access, and could streamline services as academic and administrative units work together to better serve under-represented students. A collaborative process could reduce redundancy across support services and could help to address the challenges described by interview participants regarding the issues surrounding student self-identification and intersectionality.

Global versus Specific

A significant theme is the concept of *global outreach versus institution-specific recruitment*. Recruitment initiatives are driven by the intent to increase enrolment. However, it was noted that there was a key difference in perspectives between recruitment aimed at increasing interest and motivation to pursue PSE regardless of where, and recruitment aimed at increasing enrolment at a specific institution. Global outreach perspectives guide potential students to envision themselves in a PSE community where they can be supported and celebrated for their strengths and differences. Global outreach involves community and family in the PSE recruitment process and encourages all members of the target under-represented groups to think beyond the challenges they face that create obstacles to access.

Community partnerships and engagement with local community stakeholders can help to create a welcoming and inclusive PSE environment. Especially in the case of under-represented groups, community and family engagement are critical in developing positive PSE attitudes and the interest and motivation to pursue PSE. Our findings suggest that outreach initiatives are more successful when there is a focus not only on what prospective students can learn or achieve with PSE (e.g., how they will benefit academically and with respect to career opportunities), but on how they will be supported socially and emotionally during their PSE journey.

Evaluation Clarity

SRDC (2009b) highlighted further inconsistencies in their comparison of indicators and definitions that Canadian PSE institutions use to identify under-represented groups, noting specifically that “defining each of these populations was most often a function of the question used in any given instrument” (p. 9). Basically, how the question was asked and the type of answer provided determined how students were grouped. For example, some instruments asked questions about Aboriginal ancestry, others asked respondents if they “considered themselves Aboriginal.” “First-generation” might mean first in the family to attend excluding siblings, it could mean first to attend university, or it could refer to being the first to pursue PSE in Canada. What questions get asked and how they are asked can have significant implications not only for the collection of data, but for the evaluation of those data.

Summary

Members of certain groups continue to be under-represented in PSE across the province. However, with the continued support of Ontario college administrations, members of some under-represented groups continue to seek access to college education to a greater degree. PSE education is the key to economic viability, and increasing PSE access of under-represented groups is vital to community growth. Ontario colleges continue to try to meet the needs of the communities they serve and actively contribute to increasing access and recruitment of members of under-represented groups. Ontario college informants were engaged with initiatives that serve under-represented groups on a global level by being open to community needs and promoting inclusivity. Continued movement in this positive direction will serve to strengthen an already vibrant college sector. Moreover, informants are committed to developing and implementing tools to evaluate the success of these initiatives. As better evaluation methods develop and best practices emerge and are implemented more widely, colleges will be better able to keep pace with the evolution of the communities they serve.

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