

Stakeholder summary

Lakehead University examines impact of its Gateway program on student success

A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examines Lakehead University's Gateway program, which was developed to help non-traditional students – those who do not meet the entrance requirements but who exhibit academic potential – enrol and succeed in university.

Project description

Discovering the Benefits of a First-Year Experience Program for At-Risk Students: Quantitative Follow-up Analysis compares Gateway students from the 2007, 2008 and 2009 cohorts to a control group of students not admitted into the program against measures such as GPA, retention rate from first to second year, academic eligibility to return and graduation rate. This is a follow up to an earlier [study](#) from Lakehead University on the effectiveness of the Gateway program in helping non-traditional students transition into university.

Findings

Compared to their peers, Gateway students had slightly lower GPAs after their first year at Lakehead.

In two of the three years studied, the retention rate from first to second year for Gateway students was lower than the comparison group. The authors suggest that relying on the retention rate to compare the success of these two groups may not be a fair comparison as Gateway students may face additional barriers that affect their decision to return to their studies in second year. Also, non-Gateway students who fail to meet the required GPA for year-to-year continuation are allowed to pursue their studies under a probation status. Gateway students are already considered to be on probation – if they do not meet the GPA requirements, they cannot return.

Looking at academic eligibility to return removes some of the external factors that affect retention rate. A higher proportion of Gateway students are academically eligible to return for second year (93% in 2008, 82% in 2009) than those who actually return to their studies. However, eligibility to return was still lower than the comparison group.

While students in the Gateway program had lower GPAs and retention rates, those who persisted in their studies graduated at similar rates to their peers.

The authors acknowledge that caution must be exercised when drawing general conclusions from the data as the Gateway and comparison cohorts were small.

Discovering the Benefits of a First-Year Experience Program for At-Risk Students: Quantitative Follow-up Analysis was written by Sarah Browne and Robert Perrier, Lakehead University.