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Is there a Best Fit? Assessing Alternative Entrance Pathways into an Undergraduate Degree for Non-Traditional Students at York University – Appendix

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Appendix 1: Focus Group Report

In conjunction with the HEQCO research project “Opportunities for Non-Traditional Pathways to Postsecondary Education in Ontario,” we conducted a series of focus groups to gather qualitative data about non-traditional students entering York through one of the four alternative pathways identified in this study.

Recruitment Process

After receiving approval from York’s Office of Research Ethics, we obtained student contact information for ‘mature students’ from the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA). We requested information for ‘mature students,’ pre-university students and York bridging (which included Women’s Bridging) students from 2004, 2008 and 2013 to align with our quantitative data request. We accessed contact information for students enrolled in TYP from 2010 to 2014.

Email invitations were sent to all the students on the contact lists. In total, 1,458 students were initially invited from the list provided by OIPA and 105 students were invited from TYP. Some of these email invitations bounced back but we do not have reliable data about how many were not successfully delivered. In response to the fact that no pre-university and Women’s Bridging students registered for the focus groups, subsequent email invitations were sent out targeting students in those pathways. With assistance from the School of Continuing and Professional Education (now the School of Continuing Studies), we invited students who had enrolled in a pre-U course between Fall 2008 and Summer 2014. Through their listserv another 761 students were invited. With assistance from the Women’s Bridging Program, invitations were sent to another 670 students comprising all of the names on that program’s listserv. We did not have access to any of the names or contact information on the pre-university or Women’s Bridging listservs. Program co-ordinators sent the focus group invitations out on our behalf. We do not have reliable data about how many emails were not successfully delivered.

Incentives to participate included reimbursing participants for public transportation or parking costs incurred, offering a financial contribution toward child care for those who required it, and offering refreshments at the focus groups. Students’ names were also entered into a draw for a three-credit tuition reimbursement (a value of approximately \$700). One winner was chosen.

Information about Participants

Seven focus groups were conducted at York University between July 27, 2014 and August 25, 2014. A total of 50 students registered to participate. Every attempt was made to ensure that each focus group included representation from students from multiple pathways. Some students who registered did not attend their focus group session. A total of 37 students attended and participated in the focus groups. Their breakdown by pathway is as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1: Focus Group Participants by Access Pathway

Access Pathway	Number of Participants
'mature students'	14
Transition Year Program	10
Women's Bridging	5
Pre-university	7
Completed both Women's Bridging and TYP	1

Methodology

Upon arrival the focus group participants were asked to sign a consent form. They were informed that their responses would remain anonymous, that their names would not appear in any publication and that they could stop participating in the focus group at any time.

All focus groups ran for approximately two hours. The researcher leading the focus group began by telling participants about the research project and some of the key features of the four alternative pathways being studied. Data were then gathered in two formats. First, participants were asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix 2). This typically took approximately 15-20 minutes. In the subsequent 90 minutes the researcher posed a series of questions orally that were intended to facilitate discussion amongst participants (see Appendix 3). A note taker was present and recorded responses.

The desired outcomes of the oral discussion were:

- To better understand the barriers experienced by students entering York through the four pathways and how these barriers impacted their journey into and through PSE.
- To learn about participants' subjective experiences in their chosen alternative pathways.
- To gain a greater understanding of their identities as university learners and their affiliation needs.

Focus group results and information about our findings are detailed in the body of this report.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Questionnaire

Evaluating Re-entry Pathway Programs into University for Non-traditional Students

Focus Group Questionnaire

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION:

1. Which pathway did you take to become a student at York University?

- A) Applied as a mature student
- B) Pre-university course through the Division of Continuing Education
- C) Women's Bridging course
- D) Transition Year Program

What year? _____

2. Are you currently pursuing a degree at York?

- A) Yes – full time student
- B) Yes – part time student
- C) No – I have completed my degree and graduated
- D) No – I am not currently pursuing a degree at York

3. If you are pursuing, or have completed a degree at York, what is/was your Major?

4. When did/do you take your courses? Please circle all that apply.

- A) Day
- B) Evening/Weekend
- C) Online
- D) Summer term

5. Have you attended any other colleges or universities besides York?

- A) Yes
- B) No

6. If yes, what other colleges and/or universities did you attend, and for how long?

7. Have you attended secondary school (High school) within the last five years?

- A) Yes
- B) No

8. Have you completed high school?

- A) Yes
- B) No

9. If you did not complete High School, what was the highest level you did complete or how many High School credits did you obtain? _____

10. Have you attended secondary school outside of Canada?

- A) Yes
- B) No

11. If yes, for how many years? _____

12. Before coming to York, when was the last time you attended formal schooling? _____

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL:

13. What is your gender?

- A) Male
- B) Female
- C) I self-identify by another gender category

14. What year were you born? _____

15. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity? _____

16. What is your first language?

- A) English
- B) French
- C) Other

17. What is your status in Canada?

- A) I was born in Canada
- B) I immigrated to Canada, and am now a Canadian citizen
- C) Permanent Resident (landed immigrant)
- D) Refugee

E) Other

18. If you were not born in Canada, in what year did you arrive in Canada? _____

19. Where do you currently live?

- A) The greater Toronto area
- B) Ontario, outside of the GTA
- C) Canada
- D) Abroad

20. Which choice below best describes your current relationship status?

- A) Married
- B) Common-law
- C) Dating
- D) Single

21. Do you have any dependents?

- A) No
- B) Yes

22. If you answered yes, how many? Include children and elderly or others if relevant. Please give ages of children.

23. Which option below best describes your current employment status?

- A) Full time
- B) Part-time, working one job
- C) Part-time, working more than one job
- D) Casual/on call/temporary worker
- E) Self-employed
- F) Unemployed

24. What is your average annual household income (not including OSAP)?

- A) Less than \$20,000
- B) \$20,000 to \$50,000
- C) \$50,000 to \$75,000
- D) \$75,000 to \$100,000
- E) More than \$100,000

25. Do you currently receive OSAP? Or, if you are no longer in University, did you receive OSAP for your studies?

- A) Yes
- B) No

26. If you are/were not eligible to receive OSAP, what are the reasons?

27. At any point in your education have you ever been identified as having a learning disability?

- A) Yes
- B) No

28. Have either of your parents attended university?

- A) Yes
- B) No

29. What barriers have you experienced to accessing postsecondary education? Circle all that apply.

- A) Educational
- B) Financial
- C) Social/personal
- D) Some or All of the above
- E) None of the above

30. If you feel you have experienced barriers to accessing university please describe them in your own words:

31. In order to get a picture of your progress through your degree, please fill out the timeline below, to the best of your recollection.

- A) In column 1, circle the year and term in which you started taking courses toward a York degree and begin filling out the timeline from that point onward. If you have completed your degree, circle that year and term as well. In the remaining columns, fill out information as applicable.
- B) In column 2, indicate each term in which you were enrolled.
- C) In column 3, for every term you were enrolled indicate if you were taking classes full time or part time.
- D) In column 4, if you were not enrolled as a student in a particular term please explain the reason (For example, no courses available in your program, withdrawal due to illness, took time off to work, maternity leave, and the like.).

Year and Term	Enrolled at York? (Y/N)	Full Time (<i>at least 9 credits per term</i>) or Part Time?	If not taking any credits, why not?
2004 Winter			
2004 Summer			
2004 Fall			
2005 Winter			
2005 Summer			
2005 Fall			
2006 Winter			
2006 Summer			
2006 Fall			
2007 Winter			
2007 Summer			
2007 Fall			
2008 Winter			
2008 Summer			
2008 Fall			
2009 Winter			
2009 Summer			
2009 Fall			
2010 Winter			
2010 Summer			
2010 Fall			
2011 Winter			
2011 Summer			
2011 Fall			
2012 Winter			
2012 Summer			
2012 Fall			
2013 Winter			
2013 Summer			
2013 Fall			
2014 Winter			
2014 Summer			

Is there any other information you would like us to have about your journey to postsecondary education, your experiences in your chosen pathway into York, or your experiences as a current or former York student? Feel free to write them below.

Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Questions

Evaluating Re-entry Pathway Programs into University for Non-traditional Students

1. When and how did you decide to attend university?

- Why did you want to go to university?
- How did you first hear about your program/pathway? And how did you investigate further? (Counsellor? Pamphlet? Website? Etc.)

2. What prevented you from applying earlier?

- What were your past experiences with schooling like?

3. What were some of the reasons you chose your particular pathway into York?

4. What did you like about your program/pathway?

- Which aspects of the program did you find most helpful?
- What characteristics of your program facilitated your success?

5. What supports did you know about and did you use them?

- Writing tutors? - Counselling services? - Learning skills workshops? - Peer mentors? - Student financial services? - Student academic advising?

6. What would you like to see changed about your program?

- What didn't you like?
- If you've learned about any other programs/pathways during this focus group discussion (that you didn't know about before), would you choose them instead? Why or why not?
- Would you recommend your program to others? Why or why not?

7. Did you feel prepared to start University after completing your program? (*For students entering through a bridging program*).

- Do you feel the program you chose met your needs?
- Did you get the skills you needed to succeed in University?
- Did you get the supports you needed?
- Do you think your program was a determining factor in your accomplishment of entering University or do you think you could have been successful without it?

8. Do you feel you have formed a community at York?

- Have you connected with people here? Have you made friends with any of your classmates?
- Are there study groups in your classes? If so, do you join them? If so, how often?
- Do you like having a peer group or do you prefer working independently? (*Or some variation on the "Are you a joiner" question*)

9. When you first started your pathway, did you feel you belonged in University? Why or why not?

10. Now do you feel you belong? Why or why not?

- Academically and/or professionally, where do you see yourself in five years?

11. Is there anything else you would like to ask or add? (feel free to do so in writing on the last page of your questionnaire if you prefer)

Appendix 4: York University Alternative Entrance Pathways*

	Direct Admission under the 'Mature Student' Admissions Category	Pre-university Humanities and Social Sciences	Women's Bridging Program	Transition Year Program
York's Stated Eligibility Criteria	Individuals who are at least 21 years of age or older on the first day of the academic session to which they have applied and have been out of full-time high-school studies for at least two years	Individuals who are at least 20 years of age, who have been away from formal education for some time and do not meet York University's requirements for direct entry admission	Women who are at least 21 years of age and who have been out of school for two years or more	Individuals who are at least 19 years of age, who have been out of high school for two years or more and have completed some grade 11
Admission Requirements	Submit application, personal statement and résumé Must meet faculty specific program pre-requisites	No admission requirements beyond paying the course fee	Must attend information session	Submit application, personal statement, two reference letters and transcripts (if applicable)
Intake	Up to 3 times annually: September, January, May, depending on program	3 times annually: September, January, May 15-35 students per course	3-4 times annually Accommodates 15-25 women per course	Once annually: September Accommodates up to 25 students
Enrolment Status	York student	Not a York student	Not a York student	York student
Program Structure/ Design of Support	No specific program designed Students have access to all university resources. Finding supports may be	Single 13-week courses offering academic content with enhanced academic skills development	A 13-week course designed to bridge women who have been out of school for two years or more into PSE. Course content consists of	8-month full-time, day-time 30-credit program offering 18 academic credits and 12 non-academic credit skills supports

	Direct Admission under the ‘Mature Student’ Admissions Category	Pre-university Humanities and Social Sciences	Women’s Bridging Program	Transition Year Program
	facilitated by the Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-time Students (ACMAPS)		material focused on women’s experiences in Canada.	
Curriculum Requirements	Varies according to faculty	All courses are 13 weeks 42 hours of in class instruction for Humanities and Social Sciences courses (one evening per week) (60 hours of in-class instruction for Math for Admission Waiver)	13 week course 36 hours of in class instruction Often one evening per week; daytime courses also available	Full-time, full year Mandatory attendance 9:30 am-4:30 pm Monday to Thursday 18 academic credits 12 non-academic credits building academic skills and university-cultural competencies (do not count toward undergraduate degree)
Support Services	Student advising: one-on-one with a full-time advisor Peer mentors: Senior-level successful mature students Mature Student First-Year Experience Program: workshops relevant to mature students’ needs	In a one-hour introductory session a representative from York’s admissions office discusses admission requirements and procedures Students have access to writing tutors and workshops at the Centre for Academic Writing	During the course a representative from York’s admissions office visits the class to discuss admission requirements and help students apply to York Students participate in a one-day campus visit that helps orient them to the York University Keele campus	Small group advising sessions: designed to assist students navigating the university environment Peer mentors: Students from York Supportive counselling

*Adapted from Rayne and Forsyth (2012)



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