

Stakeholder Summary

Report examines alternate entrance pathways for non-traditional students

There is no one-size-fits-all pathway into university for non-traditional students as they face different barriers and require varied supports, according to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). Examining four entrance pathways into York University for non-traditional students, the report finds that full and equal access to a university education can best be achieved by offering multiple program options that vary by intervention type, delivery, financial and academic supports, and by addressing student characteristics.

Project description

Is there a Best Fit? Assessing Alternative Entrance Pathways into an Undergraduate Degree for Non-Traditional Students at York University examines four alternative entrance pathways for students who apply from outside the formal education system. The pathways include: direct admission for mature students; pre-university courses that facilitate access into a degree program for mature students; the Women's Bridging Program, which allows mature students (women only) to take non-credit courses within the community and facilitates access into a degree program; and the Transition Year Program (TYP), which is a combination of credit and non-credit courses that serves as a qualifying year for a degree. Each of these pathways allows under-represented students the opportunity to pursue higher education, but they differ by type of intervention, tuition and delivery costs.

Through a literature review of the barriers, focus groups of under-represented students and a quantitative examination of financial need, the study aimed to better understand the academic, socioeconomic and social needs of non-traditional students and examined which entrance pathway is best suited to a student's situation given the barriers they may face.

Findings

Mature students who enter university through the direct admission pathway tend to face low to moderate financial barriers, be academically prepared and possess a strong feeling that they belong in university. Students in this pathway tend to be flexible to take their studies on a full- or part-time basis.

Students entering the pre-university pathway face low to moderate financial barriers as they tend to be working in low-paying or unsatisfactory positions and require a university education to upgrade their skills. They are also moderately prepared for university, having completed some form of schooling. Students tend to require flexible options and benefit from alternate delivery methods, such as courses delivered in the evenings.

Students in the Women's Bridging Program face moderate to high financial barriers, are moderately prepared for university through some formal schooling experience and require flexibility in program offerings as a result of prior commitments or caregiving roles.

Finally, students in the Transition Year Program benefit from financial and academic supports. These students face high financial barriers accessing education and throughout their programs, as many come from low-income backgrounds, require social assistance and have trouble accessing OSAP. They also experience low academic preparedness, having not completed high school, or have a history of interrupted education.

Recommendations

The authors offer a number of recommendations to other institutions seeking to improve access for non-traditional students such as ensuring course options at low cost to both men and women who face high financial barriers; ensuring the best access to academic advising, the writing centre and other supports by including evening or weekend operating hours; and offering a range of programs to students.

*Authors of *Is there a Best Fit? Assessing Alternative Entrance Pathways into an Undergraduate Degree for Non-Traditional Students at York University* are Andrea Medovarski, Leslie Sanders and Brenda Spotton Visano, York University.*