

## **Learning to Earning | Higher Education and the Changing Job Market Session Summary**

**Civic Ballroom  
Sheraton Centre Toronto  
123 Queen Street West, Toronto, M5H 2M9**

*Thanks to Ian Hartlen and Adrian Philp, recent graduates from the Master of Public Policy Program at the University of Toronto, for their work in summarizing the conference.*

### **Day Two | Friday, November 2, 2012**

#### **Session 5B | Under-represented cohorts and pathways to the labour market**

***Facilitator: Tony Chambers, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education***

***Lillie Lum, York University  
Role of English Proficiency***

Across the board, international students target English proficiency as the main area they needed to improve on in order to be successful, but we need to think about what exactly “proficient” means.

In other words, what is Canadian English? It is hard to pin this down, and even native speakers have a hard time agreeing what is Canadian English and what is not. There is a depth of complexity to “proficient” communication that is often overlooked in our teaching of international students.

The academic model focusses on writing, reading and speaking, but if you cannot listen, all of these areas will be hobbled. Consider the frequently used ability to skim a text. This only comes after one has a proficient understanding of the language as a whole. ESL courses, on the other hand, only tend to focus on grammar and accent reduction.

We need to consider to what extent English proficiency will impact the economic integration of new immigrants, but there are variety of challenges that we face in this regard:

#### **System challenges:**

- Discrepancy between perceived and actual language proficiency among students.
- Lack of recognition of relationship between English language, academic success and employment.
- Social isolation among international students.

#### **Institutional challenges:**

- Lack of comprehensive language services for all students.
- Lack of systematic process for the identification of students with comprehensive language needs.

- Poor utilization of existing student services.

Methods and research challenges:

- Lack of reliable and valid measures of groups of professions' specific language tests.
- Inappropriate usage of language test results.
- Minimal research about language and employment in Canada.

***Joe Henry, Humber College***

***Students with Disabilities, Options to Consider***

Students with disabilities are accessing PSE at increasingly high rates. As of 2010-11, 14% of college-enrolled students are registered as disabled and we need to consider those who choose not to register. This number has been rising at exponential rates and even more drastically in the college system than in universities.

We are also seeing a staggering emergence of mental health conditions in our institutions. Since 2008, Humber College has seen a 124.5% and 123.1% increase in Psychiatric and ADHD disabilities, respectively.

So how do we intervene appropriately? After graduation students are still experiencing barriers but graduation data are elusive. We need to plan services to effectively assist this growing population, but more data are desperately needed.

Nevertheless, investment in support will pay significant returns to both students and society. Even if we help only one student succeed, the ripple effects of this "good news story" will spread inspiration to other disabled students who might see the current system as unresponsive to their needs. Coupled with changes in attitude and government practices, we can reduce societal barriers and increase access for students of all types.

Lastly, employment and educational transitions are vital going forward. We should be focussing on skills and abilities and how we can link students to careers they are prepared for. Self-employment and entrepreneurial development may be fruitful paths to consider in this effort.