

# Fact Sheet

## Accessibility Chapter 2: Third Annual Review and Research Plan

This chapter examines how Ontario's postsecondary education system is doing in relation to the accessibility objectives set out by the government.

### Key Challenges

There are a number of issues to overcome when trying to measure accessibility:

- How do we determine an appropriate measure of accessibility?
- There is very little reliable information on PSE attainment, participation and graduation rates for under-represented groups in Ontario. Filling data gaps is a top priority for HEQCO.

### Family Income

Dooley, Payne and Robb (2009), in a paper sponsored by HEQCO, explore links between family income and participation in Ontario universities over the period 1995 to 2005. They begin their analysis by linking three data sets: application data from the Ontario University Application Centre, grade and school level measures for publicly-funded secondary schools from Ministry of Education data, and neighbourhood demographic and socioeconomic characteristics from the 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 censuses.

They find that the gap in the application rates between the highest and lowest income quartiles without controls is 21.4 percentage points. When other variables (including ethnicity, EQAO results) are controlled for, the gap narrows to 13.6 percentage points.

### First Generation Status

There are significant problems with data regarding the first generation status. The census does not ask about first generation status, so we do not even have information on parental educational attainment. There are no official tallies of the number of first generation students enrolled in Ontario's colleges, universities and apprenticeship programs. Estimates exist, and are reported by institutions in annual MYAAs, but they employ different definitions and survey instruments.

HEQCO commissioned Academica to profile first generation students drawing on the University Applicant Survey (UAS), College Applicant Survey (CAS), and University & College Applicant Study (UCAS) data from 2005-2009 (Data prepared by Academica for HEQCO, October 2009). Demographics from the study show that females are the most common first generation applicants for both university and

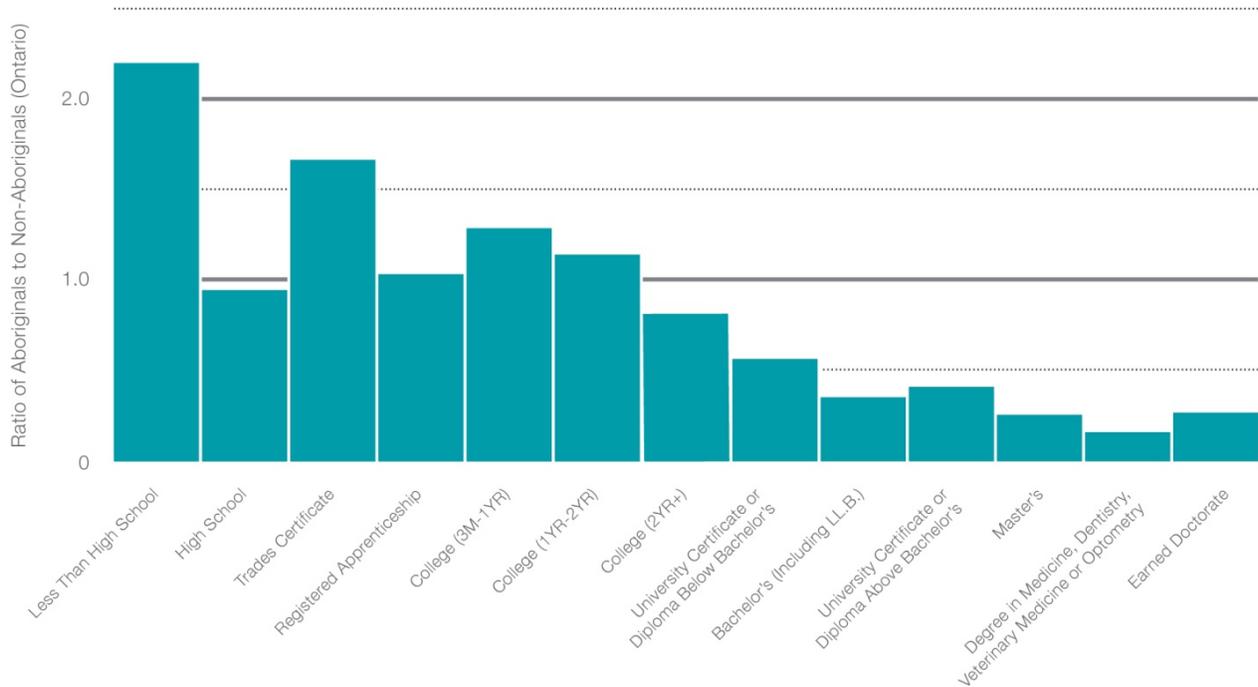
colleges, and are likely to be slightly older than non-first generation students. They are also more likely to be rural and commuting to PSE.

### Aboriginals

Data problems arise when turning to expected future PSE attainment. Simply put, we do not know how many Aboriginal students aged 18-24 (or any other age cohort for that matter) are enrolled in Ontario’s colleges, universities and apprenticeship programs. Estimates exist, but they are based on different definitions and survey methodologies. Without this information, it is impossible to calculate meaningful participation and graduation rates. Any attempt to provide reliable estimates faces two significant challenges. The first is to provide a consistent definition of Aboriginal status. The second challenge is that any survey must rely on self-identification.

Figure 2.3 shows highest educational attainment for Aboriginals relative to non-Aboriginals for the Ontario population aged 20 to 64 in 2006. A value of 1.0 on the vertical scale indicates equal attainment rates. The first point to note is that the major difference in educational attainment comes at the secondary school level. Aboriginals are more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginals to drop out of high school. This is a clear case where policy initiatives aimed at increasing PSE attainment must focus on identifying and implementing appropriate early intervention strategies.

**FIGURE 2.3**  
 Ratios of Highest Educational Attainment for Population Aged 20-64, Aboriginals to Non-Aboriginals, Ontario, 2006  
 Source: Statistics Canada 2006 Census



## **Persons with Disabilities**

The numbers of students with disabilities participating in Ontario's PSE system will increase significantly in future. The challenge will be to facilitate the trend.

A HEQCO-supported paper by Susan Alcorn MacKay (forthcoming) provides an excellent example of the challenges facing the PSE sector with respect to one type of disability. Based on reports from 72 of the province's 93 school boards and school board authorities in Ontario, Alcorn Mackay estimates that there are at least 5,800 students currently in the secondary system identified with ASD. About 1400 of these students will be graduating with a diploma and over 1,100 of those students will be seeking to enter college or university between 2009 and 2011.

Alcorn MacKay summarizes recommendations from disability service providers and finds that there is a need for institutions to consider a focus on professional development activities for staff in the area of autism spectrum disorder, especially front-end staff providing direct service, security staff, faculty and staff with the responsibility for emergency preparedness. If there is a concentration of students with ASD in an institution, consideration should be given to additional staff in the Disability Service area with the responsibility for developing and implementing services and supports for students with ASD, including transition activities and a dedicated space as a safe de-stressor for persons with ASD. In many cases the availability of such a space avoided other more socially unacceptable and even potentially critical incidents.

## **Immigrants**

Ontario has been the top choice province of settlement among immigrants. According to the 2006 Census, foreign born individuals constitute 28.3% of the province's population, the highest proportion of all the 10 provinces. In 2008, Statistics Canada projected that 54% of immigrants who arrive in Canada between 2000 and 2026 will come to Ontario (EIDakiky and Shields, 2009).

It reported that 21% of Ontarians with PSE credentials in 2006 obtained them outside Canada. This figure is only slightly lower than that for BC, and there is a significant gap between these two provinces and the rest of Canada. Immigrants are significantly more likely than non-immigrants to have university degrees, while the reverse is true for college and apprenticeship credentials.

## **Gender**

Historically, females were under-represented in PSE. As recently as 1971, 63% of undergraduate students enrolled in Ontario universities were male. Since then, PSE participation rates have increased for both genders, but particularly for women. Parity in university enrolment was achieved in the mid 1980s, and by 2006 58% of undergraduates were female, where it has remained. Enrolment at the master's level reached gender parity in 1999-2000, whereas males continue to outnumber females at the doctoral level, although even this gap is narrowing.

In the college sector, overall enrolment stood at 53% female and 47% male in 2008-09, proportions that have remained relatively stable for the past decade. Apprenticeship continues to be an avenue to

postsecondary education and training in which females are under-represented, comprising approximately 19% of registrations in 2007.