

Purple Paper: Early Outreach

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Introduction

The problem of access to post-secondary education lies in the existence of multiple barriers which cause youth to be denied the chance to attend post-secondary education. These accessibility issues include financial barriers, academic barriers, and lack of motivation combined with diversity issues where certain groups of youth are experiencing a more difficult time than others. According to recent research¹ only 60% of students from families earning less than \$25,000 pursue post-secondary education. In the city of London, 15.5% of citizens can be considered low income according to the definition presented by the Canadian Council's Urban Poverty Project. The biggest cluster of low income persons in London is 18-24 year olds². This is relevant because this is the period of time in which students are most likely to attend university.

The purpose of this paper is to bring forward the need for programs to encourage youth to attend post-secondary education. The barriers to entry can be broken down into two avenues: external and internal. External barriers refer to the academic and financial requirements of post-secondary institutions which can be overcome if the right guidance and resources are provided. An internal barrier is the lack of motivation or belief that one can make it to higher learning programs. Every year, the youth of London have opportunities through initiatives such as the Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) Conference, a grade 8 leadership conference aimed at increasing awareness for post-secondary education. Another such program is the "Western's Initiative for Scholarly Excellence" (WISE) Program, which gives high-achieving secondary

¹ "Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Equal Access to Higher Education," *Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*. January 2011, 9.

² Release of 2006 Census Results: Income and Earnings, and Housing and Shelter Costs. *City of London*. April 2008, 1.

students to take up to one full university credit while they are still in high school. This is something that should only continue to improve, as well as expand in order to give youth in other cities the same opportunity and advantage.

Principles

- All students who wish to receive a post-secondary education should have access to post-secondary education.
- All students who wish to receive a post-secondary education should be aware of the appropriate resources and guidance mechanisms available to assist them in applying to and attend their respective institution.
- All students should be motivated to attend post-secondary education at an early age.

Concerns

In accordance with the research found by Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) Access Paper titled “Breaking Barriers: A Holistic Post-Secondary Access Strategy” and published in January 2011, the University Students’ Council sees the following as being major concerns in the university and London community:

Concern 1: Financial Barriers

The most prominent reason why youth do not pursue higher learning is due to financial constraints. Post-secondary education brings with it many expenses that delve much deeper than the simple university tuition price tag. If youth and their families can get past the ‘sticker shock’ of university or college education they still must face the burden of housing, food, books, supplies and other expenses incurred in the process. Allowing youth and families to realize the benefit of a post-secondary education and understanding that these benefits outweigh the initial

costs is of utmost importance. By increasing awareness of financial aid programs and resources, youth and families can be made aware of how university or college is attainable for them.

Concern 2: Low Level of Academic Achievement

An issue still lies with the difficulty of getting accepted by a post-secondary education. One factor may be the need for employment during high school to fund universities. According to the OUSA Access Paper, there lies a negative impact on academic achievement when students are relied upon to work part-time during high school. Students need to be given a chance to perform to their highest capability. Further financial aid literacy may help students relieve stress from financial burdens and allow students to focus on their academics.

Concern 3: Lack of Motivation and Guidance

Students are found to be given up on in terms of teachers and guidance counsellors pushing them to strive toward higher education. Current initiatives started at Western, like the CYOA leadership conference strive to motivate grade 8 students to have ambitions of pursuing a post-secondary education. New early outreach initiatives along with current programs must be implemented to further the success of improving the transition from high school to post-secondary of all students.

Recommendations

In pursuance of the principles and concerns listed above, the USC recommends the following actions on the part of Western University in the immediate future.

- 1) Continue to support and development of current initiatives. This currently includes the Choose Your Own Adventure Conference and any new projects proposed under the University Affairs portfolio, which is a portfolio addressing access to post-secondary education.

- 2) Contribute to making early outreach a priority in educational institutions across the country. This is one of the OUSA Access Papers' largest concerns. Western University, as a rapidly growing and reputed academic institution has the ability to contribute to the spread of early outreach programming across the nation.
- 3) Assist the USC and City of London in any efforts to measure the success of early outreach initiatives using the university's resources. Measuring the success of past programs has been a feat for commissioners, coordinators, and vice-presidents who only serve a one-year term on the USC. The City of London, in combination with the USC, intends to establish a long-term program. Measuring its success is the first step to long-term improvement of early outreach initiatives in the community.
- 4) Continue to foster a positive relationship with the City of London so that early outreach programs can tailored to the communities that are in need of it the most. The city of London, the USC, and Western University have a mutually beneficial relationship. In order for early outreach programs to prosper, the maintenance of this relationship is vital.
- 5) Programs such as WISE are promoted more through the administration. The WISE program offers students of superior academic standing to receive an early introduction to university. Promotions of such a program can possibly increase motivation levels within students in the community. Some studies (Junor & Usher) point motivation and information barriers to prevalent in 50% of cases.³

³ "Breaking Barriers," 17.