

CAUCE Research Fund Final Report
Executive Summary (for publication on CAUCE website)

Project: The Educational Outcomes and Demographics of Indigenous University Students

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Research objectives

To investigate the demographic and academic factors associated with retention and academic progression of undergraduate Indigenous students at the University of Manitoba (2006-2015), identify trends and changes in academic outcomes over time, develop predictive models, and provide recommendations to enhance programming, student support, and success.

Our primary research questions were: What are the demographic and academic profiles of Indigenous students at the University of Manitoba? What are the trends in demographics, academic choices, and academic progress? Which factors are associated with academic progression and success? Have these changed over time?

Research design

The study involved quantitative analysis of the demographic and academic factors associated with retention, and academic progression and outcomes of all self-declared Indigenous students at the University of Manitoba (2006 to 2015). Variables analyzed using institutional data for almost 4,500 undergraduate students included:

- a) Demographic: age, sex, date of admission, faculty upon admission, admission status (e.g., mature; regular), high school location and grades, and Manitoba financial aid and/or financial sponsorship (e.g., Band), and
- b) Academic choices and progression: In each term after admission: faculty and program, courses and credit hours enrolled, grade in each course enrolled (A-F, or VW/AW), sessional GPA, cumulative GPA, and graduation date and degree.

Key findings

Demographics. From 2006 to 2015, the population of undergraduate self-declared Indigenous students at the University of Manitoba has trended younger (median age: 18 years in 14-15), with an increase (to almost $\frac{3}{4}$) in the proportion of students admitted with a completed Grade 12 and required high school courses and grades (i.e., Regular student admission). The vast majority of those Regular students came from high schools in Manitoba, with about half from high schools in Winnipeg. An additional 6% of students were from First Nations operated schools in Manitoba. The population continues to be almost 2/3 female, and there is an almost equal proportion of First Nations (Status/non-Status) and Metis students. There has been a small decrease (to 43% in 14-15) in the proportion of students who are financially sponsored through First Nations Bands or Indigenous organizations.

Academic outcomes. Some Indigenous students are progressing well academically, but as one of the objectives of our study was to identify factors that are associated with academic progression, we also investigated academic risk (defined as a sessional or cumulative GPA of less than 2.0). Indigenous students at academic risk were more likely to be mature students (those over age 21, without high school admission requirements), male, First Nations, and from a First Nations operated high school. Preliminary analysis of graduation data suggests that these groups are also less likely to graduate.

Results suggested that Year 1 (and especially Term 1) is a critical predictor for academic progression: We found that in their first fall term enrolled, one in three students failed a course, and one in four had a GPA of less than 1.0. Almost one in five did not return for winter term, and one third did not return for Year 2.

In an analysis of the most heavily enrolled first year courses, we found that in 80% of courses, the proportion of final grades of D, F or Voluntary Withdrawal (i.e., VW: withdrawal without academic penalty) was at least 30%, and that in 75% of courses, a greater proportion of students had grades of D or F rather Voluntary Withdrawal. When we subsequently compared course grades in the first course attempt to repeat attempts, we found that a) courses were most often repeated by students with grades of D or F or VW on their first attempt, and b) grades often did not improve in repeated courses.

When students who had committed to university studies do poorly academically or do not return for a second semester or year, it is a great set-back for them as well as a lost opportunity for the institution. Some of the results of this study give rise to questions regarding the availability of supports for Indigenous students, and the extent to which Indigenous students are aware of and can access academic supports, transition programs, and student advising. There is much more to be done regarding ways in which universities may support Indigenous students in academic preparedness and transition.

Project next steps

The analysis supported by the CAUCE Research Grant has been completed. Additional funds have been garnered for community consultation and to add an additional three years of data to the analysis. Results were presented at the 2017 CAUCE conference, and an article for JPCOE is being prepared. In the articles and reports being prepared, these findings will be put in context of the barriers faced by Indigenous students, and used to develop recommendations to enhance student support and success.