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An Analysis of Access Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

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Introduction

Post-Secondary Education (PSE) in Ontario and in Canada has expanded on both the demand and supply sides in the last couple of decades. As of 2007, 50% of the population aged 18 to 24 was enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Enrolment in Ontario universities grew from 10,000 in 1960 to approximately 400,000 in 2007 (Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, (2009). The federal and provincial governments have pushed institutions to increase their capacity, especially at the university level, because of the belief that knowledge is a means of power and economic stability. "In a post-industrial economy, knowledge has replaced labour and raw materials as the key determinant of productivity and competitiveness" (Clark et al., 2009, p. 50). In a globalized world where prior international relationships are strengthening and others are new, human capital and investment in education are the main drivers of competitiveness in the global economy.

The Demand for Postsecondary Education

On the demand side, Canadians understand and are aware of the advantages that PSE offers. In 2003, Statistics Canada released the Survey of Approaches to Educational Planning which indicated that 93% of Canadian parents expected their children to enter some sort of PSE after high-school (Educational Policy Institute, 2008). Canadians believe that PSE, especially university, will provide their children with higher wages, economic stability, and secure job employment. To a certain degree, their beliefs are not unfounded. The Martin Prosperity Insights (2011) analyzed the wages of Canadian citizens by education level in the 1971 to 2006 census period. It concluded that the average income for those who did not complete high school was $12,800. High-school graduates earned approximately $5,500 to $18,300 more, followed by a further $9,200 to $27,500 for an individual with a college diploma or certificate. Lastly, a university degree increased the income by $21,000 over just a high-school completion to result in an average income of $39,500. University graduates earn an average hourly wage of $23 more than those with only a high-school diploma. Similarly, Lightman et al. (2009) predict that 70% of jobs will demand post-secondary credentials, whereas only 6% will be available for individuals who have less than a high-school diploma. Considering the importance of PSE, the questions that naturally arise are who has access to PSE and should this access be equal for all Canadian citizens? In this paper I propose to identify the various barriers to access to PSE and to argue that financial constraints, cultural background, and academic achievements are the main determinants in attending PSE.[1]

Types of Access

Let us first identify and explain the background of access. The Educational Policy Institute (2008) identifies two types of access: type I and

type II. Type I access is "how many," which is the actual number of people attending and participating in PSE; whereas, type II access is "the who," which is the composition of the participants in PSE and their relative percentage of the overall population. Ross Finnie, a leading scholar in higher education, states: "the best way to learn what has been happening to access is to look at data that provide information on who goes and who does not go. (2005, p. 20)" This essay will examine type II access, "the who." The purpose of this essay is not to argue that all Canadians should attend PSE, but rather that those who wish to pursue PSE should have an equal chance to other citizens, regardless of factors such as income, ethnicity or gender. Such barriers to PSE will be identified and explained through various studies and surveys, such as the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) and the Postsecondary Education Participation Survey. The access rate is a term that will be used throughout the essay; it represents the percentage of likelihood that a given individual has in pursuing PSE. Traditionally, the literature on access has been mainly concerned with the financial barrier to PSE, but it will be argued in this paper that the culture of PSE and academic achievements pose are equal threats to potential students.

Financial Issues

Research (e.g., Bell & Anisef, 2005, Neil, 2009) has determined that financial barriers, especially when examining tuition, are relatively slim determinants in preventing students from accessing PSE in Canada. The tuition rate has grown considerably since the nineties in Ontario and family incomes have declined. For example, from 1989 to 1997, tuition rose by 85% and the average income declined by 5% (Bell & Anisef, 2005); yet there was still an over-supply of students who chose a PSE pathway. Arguably, due to the high demand for PSE and limited capacity of the institutions, it could have been students from high-income families that filled the gap; but, since 1990, participation rates have increased for individuals from lower-income families and not as much for higher-income families (Finnie, 2005). The Survey of Consumer Finances also finds that university tuition fees have little effect on PSE demand (Neil, 2009). Student protests to increases in tuition would lead us to believe that tuition is instrumental to PSE attendance, but the reality is that students' perceived values of PSE outweigh the associated costs. Typically, a $1000 increase in tuition fees is likely to reduce the enrolment rate by two to three percentage points (Neil, 2009), but the rate does not actually decrease because the higher education market is in a constant excess of demand. We would once again be led to assume that individuals from lower-income families are being replaced by those who are from higher-income families, yet enrolment rates state otherwise. Finnie (2012, p. 1162) sums up the argument, as he states: "In short, it now appears that if a child is taught to value PSE, is prepared for PSE (academically and otherwise), and ultimately wishes to attend PSE, there is a high probability that the child will participate in PSE —and cost will not stand in the way."

When compared to other access barriers, financial constraint does not play a large role; however, this largely ignores the success of the existing financial aid system for PSE—via loans and grants—which, consequently, paved the way for the other barriers to become forefront issues. Frenette (2007) concludes from the YITS Cohort A that financial constraints make up only 12% of barriers to PSE. Similarly, Finnie (2011) states that, after

other variables are included, 50% of the financial effect disappears and low-income families are only 7% less likely than high-income families to attend PSE. When high-school grades in particular are added to the effect of being from a low-income family, the gap is reduced and individuals from high-income families only have a 3.6% greater chance of attending university. Similarly, only 23% of youth who did not attend PSE listed financial reasons as a barrier (Finnie, 2012). However, unlike most scholars in the field of higher education, Finnie acknowledges the equal importance that financial barriers can have on potential students, as he states:

> ….it is important to recognize that this situation holds in the context of existing PSE fee structures, a student financial aid system that essentially provides enough money to at least most of those who need it… [And] because the 'affordability barriers' have been successfully addressed that we can—and must—now turn to these 'cultural barriers'. (2012, p. 1162)

The median spending for students in an eight-month academic term was reported to be $11,200 in 2001 to 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Students have an array of options to chose from to fund their PSE, such as the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), university bursaries and scholarships, external/public scholarships (e.g., from businesses), the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP), family contributions, and part-time or full-time work (depending on the student's status). The Ontario Government Tuition Grant, which was recently implemented, gives a 30% rebate for students enrolled in PSE at the undergraduate or college level. OSAP in particular is arguably the most helpful and reliable to students. It can loan up to 15,000 interest-free dollars in financial aid to students. Leslie and Brinkman (1988) found that anywhere from 20% to 40% of enrolment for low-income students was made possible because of grants. A study conducted by York University found that 45% to 47% of PSE students need to borrow money to finance their education and that they depend on OSAP to pay for 55% of their tuition (Bell & Anisef, 2005). Employment is expected to pay for 23%, family for nine , and the rest by a combination of multiple sources (2005). Thus, around half of students attending PSE who rely on financial aid would have otherwise not been able to attend PSE. Financial barriers may not seem to be important factors in access, but it is only because there is already a strong and successful aid system that this no longer becomes an issue.

Financial burdens can have a negative effect on the environment of students during high-school, which reduces their potential to attend PSE. "Research has shown that students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-income students and racial minorities, are disproportionately channelled into the low ability tracks" (Anisef, Brown, & Sweet, 2011, p. 42). The reality is that parents with low incomes cannot afford tutoring services, new technology, and other variants that would allow their children to remain competitive. Kamanzi, Doray, and Murdoch (2009, p. 48) identify this problem, stating: "Upper-income families have deployed extra resources to enable their children to maintain their competitive advantage in school." Frenette (2007) takes the data from YITS and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and examines various characteristics amongst four income quartiles, with Q1 representing the bottom 25% of income distribution and Q4 representing the top 25%. He

found that 50.2%of youth from families in Q4 attended university by age 19, whereas the participation rate for individuals in Q1 was only 31%. Academic trends were also visible: 32.8% of students in Q4 were in the top 25% on the reading test, compared to only 18 percent of students in Q1. Also, in Q4, 50.6% of students had at least one parent with a university degree, compared to 16.3%for those in Q1. Lastly, 37.5% of students in Q4 stated that their friends plan to attend PSE, whereas only 29% did so in Q1. Evidently, students coming from high-income families are going to have an advantage in access to PSE over students in low-income families, not because of financial barriers during/entering university, but rather because of financial issues (i.e., not being able to afford tutoring or making less of a commitment to studies because of employment) during high school.

Culture as a Factor

The "culture of PSE" is an increasingly important factor in determining access to PSE. With an equal opportunity to take advantage of financial aid, students' information sets and perceived costs and benefits of PSE are going to greatly affect the decision to attend. Various factors are included in the PSE culture, such as the importance of academic achievement, the overall parental pressure to attend PSE, a student's peer influence, and the student's own willingness to attend PSE. Finnie (2012, p. 1169) states that PSE culture includes '"cultural communication' the child experienced with their parents, their 'social communication', the family education support they received in the form of help with their school work...cultural activities, cultural possessions, the amount they read , and the diversity of those reading activities." Similarly, Sweet, Anisef and Walters (2010, p. 61) comment on the importance of the culture of PSE, stating: "Many parents have accepted the role of educational manager, characterized by aspirations to university or college, high expectations for academic performance...homework monitoring, and help and support for social, cultural, and sport involvement." The culture of PSE starts relatively early in a child's life, and can often develop into an unquestionable decision to attend PSE. It becomes ingrained into the child's mind that it is the only option. For example, 40% of individuals who went to university declared that they had always known they were going to pursue university. Another 40% of students said they decided by grades nine or ten, and the remaining 20 percent decided in their senior years of high school (Finnie, 2012). PSE decisions are made relatively early on in a child's life, before any other factors even begin to surface.

Immigrants to Canada have a considerably higher ratio of attending PSE, especially university, because of the specific culture they embody surrounding PSE. First generation immigrants have 19 percentage points and second generation have 15 percentage points higher than native-born Canadians in the access rate (Finnie, 2011). Clark et al. (2009) had higher results, indicating that young people aged 25 to 34 were 50% more likely to attend university. Anisef et al.(2011) examined a sample of 14,525 students from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) administrative file from 2000 to 2006. Of the sample, 8443 confirmed acceptance to PSE (6409 to university and 2034 to college). The information collected was combined with data from the Ontario Universities Applicant Centre (OUAC) and the Ontario College Application Centre (OCAC). It is particularly important that the sample is from Toronto because the TDSB is comprised of 80% immigrant students. The study found that 74.6% of South Asian immigrants

chose university and 25.4% chose college. The rate is even higher for East Asian immigrants, as 90.5% chose university and 9.5% chose college. European immigrants had similar results, where 80.2% chose university and 19.8 chose college. Comparatively, 74.8% of English speakers born in Canada chose university and 25.2% chose college. Thus, the overall PSE rate for native-born Canadians is higher, but the university attendance is lower.

However, Caribbean and African immigrants have a considerably lower rate of attendance. Only 42.4% of Caribbean immigrants chose university with 57.6 percent choosing college, and 62.1% of African immigrants chose university with 37.9% choosing college. This immigrant group's college attendance is significantly higher, which suggests that it was an alternative to university. It could be due to financial or distance barriers. Not enough research has been done on this subject as to why these ethnicities have chosen the path that they did. Finnie (2012, p. 1169) offers one explanation, stating: "In a context where Canadian immigrants are a very highly selected group, where they come to this country because they see it as a land of opportunity, and where they know that PSE is the key to their children's future economic prosperity." That explanation would certainly align with Asian prerogatives but does not explain the trend for African and Caribbean students. We do know that Black females have a proportionately higher ratio in university than Black males, but there is no study explaining this dilemma. Nonetheless, to equalize access, these trends have to be studied.

There is also a higher likelihood for immigrant parents to save more for their child's PSE endeavours. Students with at least one foreign-born parent contributed more frequently to their RESP than native-born Canadians. Sweet et al. found that if both parents were immigrants, they saved more than native-born parents, but less than the combination of immigrant and native-born parents. Table 1 (2010, p. 67) lists the saved proportions. Immigrants value PSE and attempt to prepare their children for it despite their limited capabilities. However, they are often impaired from saving for their child's PSE because they are coping with new lifestyles, paying off a mortgage, and often looking for secure jobs. Sweet et al. (2010, p. 73) concludes, stating: "In families with two-foreign born parents, children have relatively high levels of achievement but their parents' lower incomes and less-settled housing arrangements make PSE savings difficult." The excellent financial aid system that Ontario offers is a good start in combating this problem, but other policy changes involving free programs during the high-school stage are also necessary.

Table 1 — PSE Savings by Immigrant Status (N = 5580)

PSE Savings	Immigrant Status of Parents *		
	Both parents Immigrants	One Parent Immigrant	Native Born
Mean	$5,627.70	$6,605.14	$5,064.20
(Standard eviation)	($10,137.20)	($11,390.44)	($9,577.51)

* p < .01

Found in Sweet et all, 2010, p. 67.

Academic Factors

Academic success, specifically in languages, mathematics, and science, play a large role in securing access to PSE. In Frenette's study (2007), reading scores accounted for 20% of the gap in access and marks accounted for 14% . Together, they accounted for 34 percent of the total gap and were the highest reason for the inaccessibility to PSE for students from low-income families compared to students from high-income families. Table 2 (Kamanzi et al., 2010, p.17) lists the likelihood of participating in PSE based on average in languages, mathematics, science, and time spent on homework per week. A student who has a mark of 70% to 80% in languages has a 43% likelihood of attending PSE, whereas a student with a mark of 60 to 70 has a 23% chance. Further, a student with 60% or lower in languages has a 13% likelihood of attending PSE. The results in math and science are very similar. A student who spends more time on their homework, namely 4 to 7 hours, has a 56% chance of entering university, whereas a student who spends one hour or less has a 23% chance. Anisef, Brown, and Sweet (2010) concluded in their study on immigrants and non-immigrants in high-school that Chinese-speaking students exceeded all other groups in participation levels and achievement in core university programs. Their conclusion helps explain the high participation rate in university and reaffirms the close relationship between high-school grades and university participation.

Table 2 — Distribution of respondents by PSE attainment, social background characteristics and academic background (%)(continued)

	University studies	College studies	No PSE atainment	Total
Average in language				
90-100%	77	16	7	100
80-90%	66	22	11	100
70-80%	43	34	23	100
60-70%	23	36	41	100
60% or below	13	31	56	100
Average in mathematics				
90-100%	78	15	7	100
80-90%	60	25	15	100
70-80%	43	32	24	100
60-70%	32	36	33	100
60% or	22	33	45	100

below				
Average in science				
90-100%	79	14	6	100
80-90%	62	26	13	100
70-80%	41	33	25	100
60-70%	27	38	37	100
60% or below	16	31	51	100
Time spent on homework per week				
1 hour or less	23	32	45	100
1 to 3 hours	42	31	27	100
4 to 7 hours	56	29	16	100
8 hours or more	73	19	9	100
Dropout status				
No	45	30	24	100
Yes	5	12	83	100
Fell behind				
No	46	29	24	100
Yes	9	23	68	100
Problems at school				
No	49	29	21	100
Yes	29	26	44	100

Found in Kamanzi et all, 2010, p. 17

Grades also affect the amount of savings parents set aside for their child's PSE. Children with C averages have approximately $4000 in accumulated savings, compared to $5700 for B averages, $6600 for A averages, and $7500 for A+ averages (Sweet et al., 2010). As well, parents who employ the services of tutors on average save $1100 more for their child's PSE than do other parents. Considering the importance of high marks, more concern and attention needs to be given towards equalizing the opportunity to achieve high marks. Free tutoring is a necessary start, since many students from low-income families are not be able to afford tutoring and, consequently, they have less access to PSE than students from high-income families. For example, Education. Discover Your Potential is a federally recognized not-for-profit organization that offers free tutoring in English, math and science to high-school students with the aim to eliminate such access barriers. It also provides mentoring to facilitate the transition to university. This would acculturate students to PSE during the high-school stage and thereby increases access without having to provide

monetary means to the students. The connection between university access and high marks is undeniable and, arguably, the largest barrier to PSE.

Parental Education

Parental education is the second largest barrier in access to PSE; however, its influence reduces as more Canadians attend PSE and a universal PSE system is achieved. Frenette (2007) finds that parental education accounts for 30% of the gap in access. Neil (2009) also finds that youth from families with at least one parent with a university degree are 28.5% more likely to attend university. First-generation students have a 25% access rate, whereas non-first-generation students have between a 40% to 69% access rate (Kamanzi et al., 2009). The explanation for this trend is that parents who have already attained a university degree understand its value and have a higher level of expectation on their children to attend PSE. A student's ambition to attend PSE will likely be higher if one of their parents shared the experience. As well, these parents are more likely to be able to prepare their child for university and assist them in choosing the right university or program. As mentioned earlier, they are also more likely to have higher incomes, and can therefore afford services that will give their child a competitive edge. In Frenette's study (2007), a parental education can decrease the gap between Q1 and Q4 by 50% . A concerning problem is the positions of individuals who have single-parent families or those who are in foster care and have no parents. These groups are at a clear disadvantage because they do not have as strong of a parental support to instill the culture of PSE.

Distance to PSE

Distance to post-secondary institutions is not a barrier overall because of the large number of colleges in rural areas, but it does pose a potential barrier to university attendance. Firstly, distance intensifies financial costs. Commuting to a university or college can add a significant financial strain to students. Consider a student living in York Region, Ontario commuting to the University of Toronto. The commute time can range from one hour to two hours and a half, with an additional cost of around $200 a month ($100 for local VIVA transit and $100 for TTC subway transportation). Students who are forced to move near their post-secondary institution because their commuting distance is too great have to incur costs that would have presumably been covered by their parent(s) at home, such as rent, food, internet, toiletries, etc. Secondly, there is a social cost of having to move away. Some students are not ready nor are they mature enough—especially considering students entering PSE can be as young as 17 years-old—to live on their own. They still need parental guidance. Some students may see moving away as an opportunity of independence, but that still does not mean they are mature enough to make that step. Considering these issues, students in rural neighbourhoods are at a disadvantage if they want to attend university. Kamanzi et al. (2009) found that 32% of students who were in a rural setting chose university and 34% chose college; whereas, 48% of students in an urban setting chose university and 29% chose college. There is a higher likelihood for students in a rural setting to choose college, possibly because it is closer than a university. Approximately one in five high-school students (about 17%) live beyond 80 kilometres from a university and, as a result, are only 58% as likely to

attend university as those who live within 40 kilometres of the institution (Frenette, 2004). Comparatively, due to the number and spread-out nature of colleges, only 3% of high-school students live beyond commuting distance to a college. Thus, only a small fraction of people do not have commuting access to PSE. There are, however, a large number of people who do not have an equal access to university.

Frenette (2005, p. 429) raises the question: "Do we bring the student to the school or bring the school to the student?" Establishing a university in every rural setting, especially in a place like Canada, would be incredibly difficult, time-consuming, and a financial burden on the Canadian government. As well, there are a considerably larger number of students in urban settings who aspire to attend PSE (because it has a larger population). Creating new institutions in a rural setting could result in the same problem: due to an overflow in the urban setting, students are forced to attend the universities in the rural setting and they are disadvantaged. This problem may already be occurring: in 2007, 46% of university students who lived in the GTA enrolled in universities outside the GTA and only 9% of students living outside the GTA attended GTA universities (Clark et al., 2009). It is unclear if these students are leaving the GTA because of high competition in limited capacity GTA universities, or because they are seeking independence, but it is most likely a combination of the two (considering the new culture of living in residence to truly capture the university experience). The best policy is to bring the rural students to urban institutions, at least until Canada has enough financial means to establish new universities. In the meantime, greater financial aid should be made available for those who live in rural settings and are forced to move. OSAP does generally provide more loans for students living apart from their parents. However, a loan could still deter rural students because they know that they would eventually have to pay it back and could incur up to $40,000 dollars in debt after four years. For now, at least students are equally able to access colleges.

Aboriginal Students

Aboriginals' access rate is 28 percentage points lower than native-born Canadians. They also have a lower rate of persistence and a higher drop-out rate when in university (Finnie, 2011). Clark et al. (2009) explain that despite equal opportunity to access college, Aboriginals are one-third as likely to achieve a university degree. To close the gap, 900 aboriginal students would have to be admitted each year for 20 years (2009). One explanation for their lower participation rate is because Aboriginals typically live in rural settings or northern regions, away from universities. Thus, their cost associated with PSE is greater and a potential deterrent. Aboriginal peoples are also a very close-knit community and the social costs of moving away are greater than those for other students in rural settings. Another barrier is the level of high-school dropouts amongst Aboriginal peoples. For example, in 2001, 43% of Aboriginals aged 20 to 24 did not complete high-school (Clark et al., 2009). Thus, improving high-school standards is the start to equalizing access for Aboriginals. As well, Aboriginal peoples attending university are also older and more likely to have familial obligations, whether to a partner or for the care of children. In this case, it may be reasonable to establish higher education institutions specifically for Aboriginal peoples in their rural setting. An example can already be seen through the Nunavut Arctic College, which is an

educational institution designed to meet Aboriginal needs. It is not a degree-granting institution, but that could certainly be the next step in increasing Aboriginal access to PSE.

Gender

There is a divide in representation between males and females attending PSE, where females have a higher participation rate in university over males but a lower participation rate in colleges. In a study by Anisef et al. (2011), females were found to be 1.47 times more likely than males to attend university. In Finnie (2007) females were recorded as having 17 percentage points higher than males in access to university. Women comprise approximately 58% of undergraduates, 50% of master's students and 45% of those in a doctorate (Clark et al., 2009). Female participation expanded from a total of 75,000 in 1966 to 465,000 in 2006. Men are now only two-thirds as likely to attend university as women. One possible explanation for the increase in female participation is that females like their education while in high-school and thus are more likely to want to continue. Males are increasingly believed to dislike high-school and studies, especially because of the large amount of female teachers in the school (thereby associating education with feminization), which discourages them from wanting to attend university. Two theories explaining female progression are proposed by Kamanzi et al. (2009, p.47): "The feminist movement and socialization. The first has led to a conception of school and education as a tool for social advancement. The second has to do with cultural dispositions that appear to bring women closer to the dispositions required by the academic institution." These theories suggest that it is not because men are disinterested in attending university which explains their low participation rate, but rather because women are filling more spots, effectively pushing less qualified men out. However, to stabilize the access rate between men and women, governments need to look into either further qualifying male youth or adopt a high-school curriculum which captures both male and female interests. Noticeably, both solutions involve the pre-PSE stage.

There is also a variance of gender representation in different fields; in particular, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) dominantly consists of male students, whereas the humanities, such as English, history, or psychology, are dominantly studied by females. Cheryan and Plaut (2010) attempt to discover the reasons behind this epidemic in the U.S. (which is similar to the Canadian epidemic). They found that STEM-capable women were choosing fields in the humanities, despite any aptitude they may have had for STEM. The reverse for males is true. Thus, the barrier to equalize access to these fields is not due to a lack of capability, but rather as a result of the perceived notion of the gender orientation of these jobs. Traditional stereotypes of women being better in humanities and males in STEM can easily disinterest individuals from entering opposite-gender fields. This social identity threat can, for example, discourage females from pursuing STEM in fear of being called masculine, discriminated against, or not taken seriously. They have a preconceived expectation that they will be successful in certain fields and are not willing to risk potential failure in another field. Andres (2004) also found that young women are more likely to enter fields with broader occupational outcomes, whereas men choose fields that directly lead to a specific career. Cheryan and Plaut (2010) concluded that the best way to equalize access and

diversify these educational fields is to change the perception of the gender -orientation of these fields. For example, making a technology class, such as Shop, mandatory in high-school would force both women and men to study the subject. equal-representation in the classroom would then transfer to university, followed by the workforce.

Provincial Patterns

Compared to other provinces, Ontario has a good access rate and does not have any outstanding barriers that are exclusive to Ontario only. The effect of family income on access is actually less in Ontario, especially in comparison to the Atlantic Provinces, which had three times the effect. This data suggest more students are coming from higher-income families in Atlantic Canada. Quebec and Western Canada had similar income effects as Ontario. high-school grades and PISA scores have stronger effects in Ontario, compared to other regions, but there is not as large as a gap as the family income effects. Ontario's greater effect from grades could be as a result from the multi-cultural nature and diversity unique to Ontario. Parental education, one of the most important factors on access, does not vary substantially by region. Ontario's college participation rate is 36.4% and its university rate is 45.5% . Comparatively, Quebec's college participation rate was 40% and its university rate was 30.3% (Finnie, Childs, Wismer, 2011). Atlantic Canada had the highest participation rates in university. Western Canada's rates were similar, but not higher than Ontario. Despite Quebec's substantially lower tuition rate, it has the least participation rate in university and the highest in college, which is reflective of their unique CEGEP system (where a student can only enter university if he/she is over the age of 21 or has attended at CEGEP). In all regions, it was found that females accessed university at a greater rate than males, whereas males were represented higher in colleges. Comparing the provinces allows us to identify if access barriers are unique to specific regions or are nation-wide. Targeting barriers are easier with a comparative model.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of university enrolment since the 1960s suggests that access barriers have been largely eliminated. However, many barriers still prevent potential students from accessing PSE, while others have a greater participation percentage because of factors such as cultural backgrounds and academic achievements. However, both these factors are often not within the students' control. Many lower-income families cannot provide their children with the necessary tools to prosper academically, like tutoring or a commitment to help with homework. The "culture of PSE" is a significant factor in a student's decision to pursue PSE, yet many families cannot instill this culture in their children because of various reasons, whether it is because they do not have a PSE education that has taught them about the PSE system, or because it is a single-mother who simply does not have the time as a result of working multiple jobs. A solution that may seem to solve all problems of access is to eliminate the qualifications required for admission into PSE and accept all interested individuals. This solution may undermine the quality of PSE and may not make Canada a global competitor. As well, students may be under prepared, which would demand more attention from the university and, consequently, more finances to run the institution. Ontario is already having a difficult problem

paying for students' tuition because of the strain that the universal system has been causing. As a result, tuition fees increase and grants turn into loans and debts, ultimately creating further access barriers to students from low-income families. Richard Allen, the former Minister of Colleges and Universities, stated during the Annual Meeting of Canadian University Board of Governors in 1991:

> The success of [our] agenda will depend in large part on an open and accessible postsecondary system. A system that provides a place for every qualified student. A system that removes financial cost as a barrier to entry. And a system that identifies and removes barriers to participation in postsecondary education by members of traditionally underrepresented groups and economically and socially disadvantaged students….

Allen's plan and initiative are an introductory step to reducing the many existing barriers to access because they acknowledge that there are barriers. However, his plan is overly ambitious and the Ontario post-secondary system will collapse under the strain, without otherwise significantly reducing the quality and financial need of the institutions.

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1 Of course, alternate means could have been reached, such as bank loans, but nonetheless, a significant proportion would have been deterred or unable to attend PSE.

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