

Interim Report

presented

by the

Task Force on Access

to

Dr. Lloyd Axworthy

March, 2007

Dr. Axworthy

We, the members of the Task Force on Access, are pleased to present to you this interim report on the work we have completed to date. We thank you for the opportunity we have been given to help the University find new ways to improve access.

We are very pleased that some of our ideas have already been incorporated into the new Opportunity Fund. Before proceeding further, however, we believe that broader discussion with the university community is needed. It is our intention to present this report to the members of the University community, and to some members of the external community, over the next month. Upon completion of the consultation phase, and based on the information and advice we receive, we will complete our report.

Yours truly,

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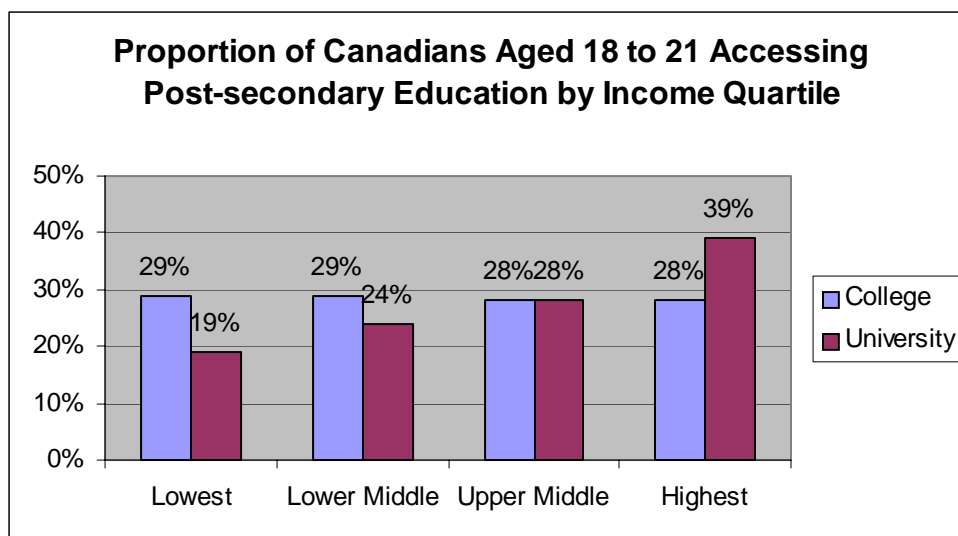
Honorary Member

Nolan Reilly

In October 2006, Dr. Lloyd Axworthy posed a pair of questions to his management team: how does The University of Winnipeg become an agent for change? What barriers can be removed to increase participation among populations traditionally under-represented in postsecondary education such as people from low socio-economic status (SES), Aboriginal, new Canadian or rural backgrounds? He then established a task force of students, faculty and administrators who were given the responsibility to provide, by the end of April 2007, a strategy to improve access for students of lower socio-economic status. After examining the issue for five months, the Task Force has developed a number of ideas, and would like to solicit broader discussion and commentary from both within and outside the University. This interim report should be seen as the basis for this discussion.

The Current situation - Accessibility

It is generally acknowledged that access to postsecondary Education is disproportionately related to economic circumstances. This is more true for University than for other forms of post-secondary education. The following chart makes this clear.



Source: Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics as cited in "The Price of Knowledge" 2004 (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation)

Although it is generally recognized that university access is income-based, progress towards reducing this under-representation has been minimal. According to an AUCC report, "[A]lthough participation rates grew for children all backgrounds from 1976 to 1994, the participation gap between poor and middle-income groups also grew during the same period". (AUCC 2002 p.10) Marie Drolet from Statistics Canada has updated the data. She concludes that "the rate of university attendance is about two times greater for youths from high income families (over \$100,000) compared to youths from the lowest

income families throughout 1993 and 2001.” (Drolet 2005 p.11) In Manitoba the Universities of Brandon, Winnipeg and Manitoba did a recent comparison using postal code data. Our enrolment was split into SES quartiles based on the model developed by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. The data showed minimal change between 1999 and 2004.

University enrolment by SES - Manitoba		
Total	1999/00	2003/04
High SES	12.1%	12.7%
Middle Class	63.4%	61.7%
Low-Middle	15.4%	16.0%
Low SES	9.1%	9.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

This is not to say that the numbers of persons of low or low middle SES did not grow in this period. They simply did not grow faster. This is shown in the following table.

Rate of enrolment growth between 1999-2000 and 2003-04	
High SES	35.6%
Middle Class	25.2%
Low-Middle	33.7%
Low SES	34.7%
Total	100.0%

This under-representation of persons of lower SES in Manitoba’s universities has major implications for the future of our province. University graduation has a significant impact on future jobs, income, the economy and the social fabric. If a university system is not contributing to social mobility, and not providing all members of the society with opportunities afforded by a University education, the whole society suffers. The relatively fluid notion of socio-economic status becomes the fixed notion of class, equality of opportunity becomes an empty phrase, and the disenfranchised become the disenchanted. Although, as the data above shows, the Manitoba university system is making some contribution, the fact remains that a larger proportion of people from low SES neighbourhoods than at present could be and should be offered the opportunity.

We at The University of Winnipeg are very much aware of this issue. We live in downtown Winnipeg, the epicenter of the lower SES areas identified in the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy maps. Although we score better than other universities in Manitoba in our openness to persons from lower SES neighborhoods, we are also aware that most of the students who go to the University of Winnipeg are not graduates from our downtown high schools. Our students are far more likely to come from Kelvin than Daniel Mac. In fact, over 20% of the Kelvin grade 12 classes in the past four years entered the U of W while the applicable figure for Daniel Mac is less than half that amount. **We intend to do something about this situation.**

The Nature of the Problem

It seems a simple tautology. If family income is a predictor of University enrolment, then financial support is the solution. Unfortunately the situation is much more complex than that. A recent report from Statistics Canada makes it clear that financial constraints, on their own, represent only a part of the difference. As Marc Frenette describes it “Differences in long-term factors such as standardized test scores in reading obtained at age 15, school marks reported at age 15, parental influences, and high-school quality account for 84% of the gap. In contrast, only 12% of the gap is related to financial constraints.” (Frenette, Marc 2007 pp. 5-6). Frenette is echoing a number of studies (Junor, Sean and Usher, Alex 2004 provide a good survey of the literature) suggesting that, although many people who do not proceed to universities mention financial barriers, the financial reality is, in fact, filtered through a series of intermediate relationships. It is not so much that the student graduates from grade 12 eager to go to university and then runs into the financial barriers. Rather, the student either never engages with or mentally withdraws from the notion of university at a much earlier age and then either does not complete high school, moves to a non-academic stream or goes to a community college for post-secondary education (PSE).

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, for example, tracked Manitoba High School students who entered grade nine in 1997-8 for five years. At the end of that time 37% of students in low SES neighborhoods had graduated and 25% had withdrawn. In contrast, 81% of students from high SES neighborhoods had graduated and only 3% had withdrawn. According to The Caledon Institute of Public Policy (Mendelson, Michael 2006 pp.3) a similar situation applies to Aboriginal students. In fact, they say, “about the same proportion of Aboriginal high school graduates is going on to graduate in some form of PSE as high school graduates in the general population.” The problem is not that high school graduates do not go on to PSE. The problem is that students do not graduate from high school. 70% of people aged 20-24 on Manitoba’s reserves did not graduate from high school at all. **If we are to get more students to come from high school we must get them thinking about university at a far younger age.**

This basic problem is compounded in a multitude of ways. It is not so simple as to point out that people from lower SES areas are less likely to finish high school. There are a number of other factors that are part of the cycle, and reinforce the basic relationship. First, is health care. Learning disabilities, for example, can often be effectively treated once diagnosed. However, the failure to diagnose may be economically determined. Second is the level of the parent’s education. If one’s parents went to university then the likelihood of continuing the tradition is much higher. At the same time those with university education have higher incomes. So parent’s education contributes in two ways – affordability and commitment. Family income for single parent families is less than half the income for couples. So single parent families and family income compound to reinforce each other. It should also be mentioned that all poverty indices show a decided gender bias so that women are more likely than men to face many of these economic impacts and constrained choices. New Canadians’ first address in their new country is often a low-income neighborhood. For these new Canadians, there are major cultural and

language barriers that must be breached. Low income neighborhoods are also neighborhoods with a greater incidence of crime and other aspects of social pathology.

If we look at all of these together, the result is that the income measure becomes a proxy for undiagnosed learning disabilities; parental education and parental commitment to education; language, culture, and racial barriers; and other social dysfunctions such as crime or unwanted pregnancy, that may lead to early withdrawal from high school.

If the first nexus of the problem is our high school graduation rate, it is then compounded by the greater difficulties faced by those who decide to return to schools at a later date. These returning adults are faced, not only with achieving the high school education, but also with the increased responsibilities and commitments. They have jobs, they have children, they have other family or social commitments. This means they need affordable child care, an accessible administration, the opportunity to take the classes at times which best fit their schedules, a sense of safety when proceeding to and from classes in the evenings, and the extra financial support for books, transportation and child care, that will change their task from impossible to merely daunting. The existence of these barriers is often enough to defeat these second-stage learners.

Universities themselves become a barrier. The conventional rite of passage to university education is high school graduation. The most significant information provided to the university is the high school transcript. Our course curricula assume a common level of pre-university knowledge, based on the high school curriculum.

At The University of Winnipeg there has long been a recognition that our student body is more diverse than most, and that our location creates a different mandate. Even so, the focus on the high school graduate has meant that other students have had fewer options and supports. In fact, in 1991 the Report of the President's Committee on the Future of the University adopted a clear strategy of increasing the proportion of full-time compared to part-time students. The primary argument was administrative.

Within the University, course schedules, administrative hours and service schedules all cater to the student who can enter university between 9 and 5. Our pedagogical culture is focused around traditional teaching methods that work for the middle class student coming directly from high school. There is, in other words, an unconscious bias by which we treat all students as if they are like the core of our student body.

The Current Situation – hopeful signs

If it is clear that students give up on university as an option long before they reach grade 12, it is also true that many students return to school, and to university, as adults. Between 1999/00 and 2004/05 the number of mature students who graduated from high school has more than doubled. The majority of these students were enrolled in one of Manitoba's adult learning centres. This second entry has also been the major source of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students, in general, are older than other students and have spent more time away from school. For example, our survey data has consistently

shown that Aboriginal students are about 7% of our total enrolment. However, they only represent 4% of the students straight from high school. **We believe that this current trend towards entering university several years after leaving high school can be fostered, and that our university's commitment to social mobility can be realized as much from supporting young working parents as it can from raising expectations in elementary and secondary school students.**

There is a second hopeful sign. We are beginning to see the results of actions we have already taken and the combination of these actions is beginning to provide us with the base we need to make a meaningful impact. The university has two long-standing programs that focus on students while they are at school. The College and University Bound (CUB) program in co-operation with the Seven Oaks school district, and the Career Trek program, help us identify and mentor high school students who have the academic potential to succeed at University. More recently, with the opening of the Innovative Learning Centre we are providing a place for the young people in our neighborhood to feel at home, explore the on-line world and, not coincidentally, become used to the idea that university could be for them. We are now introducing outreach programs such as Eco-kids and ENVIRO Techs. Our attempts to make university a reasonable expectation for inner-city kids will be based on such outreach efforts.

We are seeing a similar foundation being built for Aboriginal programs. We have a new Aboriginal Student Services Centre. A new career stream is being developed with the introduction of the Aboriginal Governance program. Students are being offered alternative entries to the University through our Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC) and Community-based Aboriginal Teachers Education Program (CATEP) programs. The transition year program and other services offered by the Aboriginal Student Services Centre are helping to foster student success. In fact, student satisfaction with our Aboriginal services has risen from the low 60's to the high 80's in the past few years.

We are also able to build from a burgeoning internal support structure for adult learners and apply it to the needs of our returnees. We currently have courses available on-line or televised through Center for Distributed Distance learning (CDDL). We have an active Adult Learner Office implementing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). We have always offered evening courses and recently returned to Saturday courses. We offer courses off-site through several Manitoba high schools and this year established a special relationship in Steinbach. The Sociology department has guaranteed that their course selection will ensure that a student can get a B.A. with a Sociology major without ever taking a class between 8:30 and 4:30. We have just introduced a new course through the Division of Continuing Education (DCE), Introduction to University, to give students the confidence and skill to try university. The student can get University credit upon successful completion of this course.

The third hopeful sign is the development of a community support structure that is dedicated to similar goals and has successful experiences to share. The Pathways to Education program in Ontario provides one successful example that can be adapted to meet Manitoba's situation and then applied. Lord Selkirk Park has introduced a number

of innovative new supports. We have already commented on the expansion of enrolment in adult learning centers. There are new initiatives being undertaken by Seven Oaks and Winnipeg School Districts. As part of the background for the Task Force's study, the Office of the Vice-President (Research and Graduate Studies) has developed an inventory of current courses, programs and services. This compilation identifies over 60 community organizations with which the University could expand existing, or explore future, partnerships and service arrangements. **We know that we aren't starting from scratch. There is an excellent base upon which to build upon.**

THE TASK FORCE GOALS AND TARGETS

Our long-term goal is that the percentage of persons from low SES neighbourhoods who graduate from the University of Winnipeg should be the same as their percentage of the overall population. In order to achieve that goal we have established two intermediate targets. The first target is to increase the number of students from low SES neighborhoods who first register in the University of Winnipeg from 330 to 510 over the next five years. The second is that the graduation rate for these students will be equal to or better than the graduation rate for all students.

The first target will bring the number of first year students from low SES neighborhoods very close to their proportion of the overall society. The second will ensure that the students who enter the university graduate. If we achieve both of these targets, then over time we will have achieved our goal.

Areas for consultation

Based on our analysis of the current situation, the members of the Task Force have settled on four key areas in which to concentrate our efforts. We view these areas as a series of questions. They are:

1. How can we best help students in the primary and secondary school system to see university as a viable option for their post-secondary career?
2. How can the University best engage with current and future community programs to help adults return to university?
3. How can we ensure that students who enter the University of Winnipeg have every opportunity to succeed?
4. What are the major financial and social barriers to post-secondary education and how can the University of Winnipeg mitigate these barriers?

UNIVERSITY AS A VIABLE OPTION

One of our task force members discussed, with her class, the question of what made the difference. The response was very simple and very clear. The dominant change can best

be described as a “Tap on the Shoulder.” Someone, somewhere, got them to think of a university education as a viable option and gave them the confidence that they could make it. Our program design and recommendations were based on this simple idea. We have to find more ways to give more people the tap on the shoulder and then find ways to ensure the initial tap becomes a steady hand.

When one thinks about it, all of the current programs with which we reach out to high school students (CUB, Career Trek, Eco-kids, ENVIRO-tech, etc.) are variations on this theme. We have already added one big new program. Beginning in 2008, we will be offering a new form of deferred scholarship to elementary and secondary school students. Students will be able to “earn” credits towards future tuition beginning as early as grade 4. The size and scope of this fund is dependant on the size of the new Opportunity Fund. This new fund was recently launched by Dr. Lloyd Axworthy at a benefit concert provided by Chantal Kreviazuk and will, we hope, become the cornerstone of our accessibility thrust. We will start small, in one or two schools, and then expand as resources permit. Students in the ECO-kids or ENVIRO-tech programs will be eligible. A student beginning in grade 9 will have the opportunity to earn credits equivalent to one year’s tuition by the end of grade 12. The largest credit will be achieved by completing the grade. Additional credits will be available for higher marks and extra-curricular activities.

We believe there are other ways to create and sustain that “tap on the shoulder” and we are very much interested in ideas or suggestions.

HELPING MATURE STUDENTS RETURN TO UNIVERSITY

The major discovery that guides our actions in this area is the number and quality of community-based programs that are involved in this area. The University of Winnipeg’s job is not to develop new programs but rather to find ways to link with these existing programs. We believe we can do this first by expanding alternative course offerings. As mentioned above we currently offer a number of courses in alternate times and locations. We believe these can be expanded to include other venues like housing projects or the offices of large companies.

Next we believe we can reach out through DCE, PLAR and our other adult-learner services to introduce people to university in ways that decrease the fear level associated with the transition. One recent example is the Introduction to University course. Students get a taste of university within the Continuing Education milieu. They get credit after-the-fact for course completion. They gain some of the skills they need to survive. But the course delivery is designed to reduce the stress that would be associated with a university course. Another example is the new Urban and Inner Cities Studies program that is making outreach a core component of its program. In fact a second mandate of the program is to deliver courses in the inner city to further strengthen the connection between the program and the local community.

Finally we believe that by working with existing community organizations and adult learning centres we will be able to enhance our recruiting at the same time as we support them in their programs.

We are interested in any ideas that will help us to graduate more persons who are coming to university as an extension of their “second time around.”

INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS

There are two basic principles that have been more or less accepted when one tries to develop a program for increasing the graduation rate of students from lower SES neighbourhoods. The first is that the focus should be on student success as part of retention. The second is that the programs that improve retention for students from lower SES backgrounds are the same programs that improve success for everyone. The Task Force’s considerations in these areas have focused on two aspects.

The first is in the development of an effective transition program. The first year is the toughest year. Our retention data already supports that notion. Approximately half of the people who leave this university without graduating do so before the beginning of year two. The University has already established a transition year program for our Aboriginal students. We have had remarkable retention rates for students in the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC). We also have developed academic counseling support services that mean that students who enter the university with averages of less than 60% have the same retention rates as students who enter with averages of 60-65%. We believe that an effective transition program would go a long way towards increasing student success. Initially the program would be targeted to adult learners and have a direct link with Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). The program, however, should not be restricted to adult learners alone but should be expanded to include students who qualify under the normal entrance requirements but could benefit from participating in a cohort system of learning with a significant level of support.

For the program to be successful it must be comprehensive, ongoing and holistic in its approach, providing all the necessary support in terms of finances, child care, advising, peer mentoring, acquiring skills in literacy, writing and math, while the students are taking their university courses and engaged in learning within the classroom with their instructors. These supports are additional and complementary to the classroom experience, and to accommodate them, the university will need to be innovative and flexible in the delivery of course material, both in terms of how students are evaluated, and when and how long they meet. The programming includes three distinct parts that must work closely together to ensure success: academic advising, teaching and preparatory work. The academic advising needs to be ongoing, and for this reason students in the program could meet with the academic advisor as often as once a week to monitor their progress and to assess any needs of the student, which can then be addressed in a proactive way. In order to accommodate both regular teaching and preparatory work we will need to revise some of our courses so that they are more modular, with breaks to provide for “catch-up” or preparatory work. Some will need to

extend beyond 12 weeks. Others may be more concentrated. Finally, we will need to develop course combinations that fit a cohort approach and this may change the manner in which other students register in their first year. This type of dramatic change in the way we educate our students can only proceed if it is based on broad discussion and deep analysis. We welcome all comments.

The second is in the development of a “sense of belonging.” The University of Winnipeg is, in many ways, a commuter university. In comparison to students at similar universities, people who attend our university are generally older, more likely to be working and more likely to be part-time students than students. In addition, we have very few residence spaces. This means that the creation of community, which in most universities is fostered automatically as full-time students spend time in classes, cafeteria, libraries, residences and social events, is less likely at the U of W. For many students this is not a specific issue. They walk into the University knowing people from their high schools and simply reform their communities from their known acquaintances. As this program reaches out, to include students who are the “first” from their family, or neighborhood, or community, or school it will become increasingly more important to foster a sense of belonging for these new students. This, in turn, will lead to greater student success.

In order to help build this sense of belonging we on the task force believe we need to foster both a more diversified and inclusive approach to pedagogy, and expanded opportunities for community engagement. This is not a simple add-on. It represents, in fact, a cultural change that will involve all of those who have direct contact with students – including both administrative staff and faculty. These two major new thrusts could lead to a more diverse academic community and course selection. We see examples of this in flexible majors, the new major in Inner-city Studies and a prospective major in Aboriginal Studies. They could also lead to a renewed focus on co-op programs, community partnerships and other programs related to the community envisaged in the Academic Plan.

The service initiatives that, we believe, could support our academic and pedagogical push include the creation or expansion of central meeting places modeled after the successful Aboriginal Student Services Centre, the development of student mentor or peer support, and either the expansion or targeting of counseling services and services to adult learners.

We know that student success, and not initial registration, is our focus. We are very much interested in any ideas that will help us to build a successful program in which more students not only come to the University but more students actually graduate.

REDUCING SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Students who want to come to university face a number of social and financial barriers. Among these are arranging for the care of children, building an academic program around work demands, finding the funding, and most important, finding the time. The Task Force's first response to these barriers is the second half of the proposed "opportunity fund." We are recommending the development of an enhanced bursary program that is available to more people coming for the second time around. It funds not only tuition, but also special needs like child care and transportation or other needs. This bursary program will be multi-year and will be available to students in any transitional program. It will be available to students who do not have a high school diploma.

Many cultural barriers have been discussed in the section above on a "sense of belonging." The task force has identified three major social barriers that still remain. The first is child care. In previous discussions around non-traditional students, the topic of child care has surfaced repeatedly as an important issue. The access population has clearly identified for the university its need for child care, including some increase in available spots; expansion of the number of infant spots; extension of care to school-age children while their parents take late-afternoon and evening classes; and some general expansion in hours of operation. Child care can be vital to the success of Aboriginal students coming to the U of W from communities outside Winnipeg, as well as other groups, including immigrants and single parents, who may lack family or other support systems in the city. Previous reports on recruitment and retention of both Adult Learners and Aboriginal students have confirmed this need.

The second issue is getting support from funding agencies that meets the work-and-study cycle of our potential students. Discussions need to take place with such funding agencies as Band Councils, Social Services, other federal and provincial government agencies, and employers, so that the funding can be adaptable enough to meet the needs of students who may take less than full-time courses, or are receiving public assistance, or whose career plans switch part-way through their degree.

The third is finding ways to match our course selection to their ambitions. It should be a reasonable expectation for someone who is working full-time and taking a couple of courses in the evening, or through CDDL, to be able to complete a degree. So far, the Sociology department has guaranteed that someone can get a Sociology major entirely through courses available either through CDDL or in non-traditional hours. If this were to be expanded to other departments we would be able to assure students that they can get a degree without leaving their jobs.

The committee is interested in any innovative ideas that will help us to reduce the impact of these social and financial barriers.

Conclusion

The conclusion is simple. The University of Winnipeg is committed to improving access. The Task Force on Access is looking for ways that this can be achieved. Your ideas are needed. Your comments are welcome. The committee started with four questions to answer, as described on page 9 above. We would like to leave you with 3 three additional questions.

- Do you think that student recruitment and retention are serious issues for the University of Winnipeg?
- If so, what are the major concerns for us given our downtown location and the programs we offer?
- What are some important steps we can take to ensure that students who would not apply or subsequently stay at the University of Winnipeg, see it in their future?

Please help!

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