Chapter 102
Diversity and Inclusion in Ontario Universities:
A Snapshot Through the Lens of Institutional Strategic Mandates

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ABSTRACT

In relation to institutional-level policy and planning, the Province of Ontario signed strategic mandate agreements (henceforth, SMAs) with all 45 publicly funded colleges and universities. The SMA planning process is a comprehensive, province-wide exercise that identifies the respective strengths of each university and directions for growth and development. This chapter reports findings from a qualitative analysis of SMAs that was conducted to understand priorities for diversity and inclusion in the province's universities. This chapter finds that the general focus remains on promoting diversity and inclusion in the international and Indigenous contexts. In these contexts, universities are making a range of efforts to support international and Indigenous students and enhance overall learning by internationalizing and indigenizing curriculum. Surprisingly, very little emphasis is placed on diversity and inclusion in the faculty and staff context within all SMA documents. The chapter concludes with recommendations for institutions seeking to bolster diversity and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

International student flows for higher education are a defining feature of globalisation. Industrialized countries of Europe and North America remain centers of attraction for students around the world seeking a better life and education (Yang et al, 2006; Robertson and Komljenovic, 2016). The United States and Canada are major destination countries for students seeking university-level education abroad (Organization

for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2016) estimates that there are approximately 353,000 international students studying at all levels in Canada. At the university level, Canada continues to experience substantial growth rates in international student enrollments. From 2004/2005 to 2013/2014, the number of international students in Canadian universities almost doubled, rising from an enrollment of 66,000 to 124,000 (Statistics Canada, 2016).

While the growth of international student populations has resulted in more diverse campuses across Canada, Coleman (2017, p. 121) has cautioned that "simply creating a more diverse campus is not enough—even if that campus was created through hard work and strategic recruitment". The emergence of diverse campuses necessitates teaching, learning, research, support services and programs that foster inclusivity and cater to the needs of diverse students. According to Hall (2010), inclusion in higher education should create a sense of acceptance, value, belonging and connection to the greater community. Ramsay et al (2009) found that first-year international students in an Australian university experienced challenges understanding lectures due to the speed and vocabulary of the teaching. Similarly, Robertson et al (2000) found that the unsatisfactory participation of international students in class was linked to language barriers and anxiety. In a comparison of international and domestic students, Rajapaka and Dundes (2002) discovered that the former struggled with integration due to homesickness and loneliness. These examples are but a few of the many challenges faced by students who choose to study abroad and justify the need for interventions that promote inclusion and create better learning environments.

International students are not the only group who can benefit from inclusive learning environments. Research suggests that inclusivity is critical to the success of Indigenous students as well. As Milne et al (2015) have noted, the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in countries such as Australia, New Zealand (NZ) and Canada have been and continue to be negatively impacted by their experiences of colonization. In addition to areas such as health, these challenges manifest themselves in education as well. For example, it is estimated that only 9.8% of Indigenous people in Canada have completed a university degree relative to 28% of non-Aboriginals (Universities Canada, 2015). Some factors identified as responsible for lower educational attainment among Indigenous students include, but are not limited to: "inadequate financial resources, poor academic preparation, lack of self-confidence and motivation, absence of role models who have post-secondary education experience, lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture on campus, and racism on campus" (see Restoule et al, 2013, p. 1). It is widely recognized that diverse and inclusive campuses do not only benefit international and Indigenous students. Diversity on campuses also benefits domestic students by exposing them to alternative cultures and presenting opportunities to learn how to interact with people from different backgrounds (Mamiseishvili, 2012). With increasing globalization, it is essential that university graduates develop skills such as cross-cultural competency (Gorelova, 2014).

Within Canada, the province of Ontario attracts a significant number of international students (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2017). According to the 2006 census (Statistics Canada, 2017), Ontario also has the highest population of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The Province is an excellent case for the analysis of successes and tensions in diversity and inclusion within its educational institutions. In relation to institutional-level policy and planning, the Province of Ontario signed Strategic Mandate Agreements (henceforth, SMA) with all 45 publicly funded colleges and universities (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2014). Our focus is on the Province's 20 universities. The SMA process is a comprehensive, Province-wide planning exercise that identifies the respective strengths of each university and directions for growth and development (Ontario, 2017). We peer through

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