



Bridging Programs: Pathways to Equity

in Post-Secondary Education

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Bridging programs, higher education, post-secondary education, underrepresented, access, transition, persistence, participation, completion, equity, Ontario, Canada, university, college, pathways, educational attainment

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal Youth; Racialized Youth; Newcomer Youth; Youth with disabilities or special needs; Youth in and leaving care; LGBTTQ Youth; Francophone Youth; Youth living in rural and remote communities; Youth living in poverty

STEPPING UP THEMES

Education, Training & Apprenticeships

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

YouthREX

“Post-secondary bridging programs may have greater success in supporting students when they offer holistic and ongoing support services that address both the financial and the nonfinancial needs of the students.”

1. What is the research about?

Participation in post-secondary education (PSE) enhances the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and societies overall. Unfortunately, certain groups of young people are underrepresented in PSE. Bridging programs have the potential to respond to the many and often overlapping challenges underrepresented youth face by providing individualized and alternative pathways for entrance, persistence, and attainment of PSE credentials. This report reviews the social policy context for PSE access programs, describes youth who are underrepresented in PSE, presents case study examples, and outlines key concepts related to bridging programs. The report concludes with a series of recommended strategies for leveraging bridging programs in order to increase equity in PSE.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research was a desk research literature and policy review that examined evidence related to program design, student persistence, and necessary institutional supports for successful PSE bridging programs.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about Ontario youth facing barriers to PSE. The youth facing the most significant challenges to accessing PSE include those who are:

- from a low-income family
- the first person in his or her family to attend PSE (first generation)
- Aboriginal
- from a rural area, or from the North
- responsible for dependents
- living with disabilities, or
- in or leaving government care (Crown Ward)

Other factors include the race and/or gender of the individual.

4. How was the research done?

This report selectively reviews and summarizes evidence from academic and grey literature and includes perspectives of bridging program staff. The purpose of the research is to:

- Review and assess the most effective bridging strategies and/or programs for engaging underrepresented youth in PSE;

- Present evaluated strategies for engaging young people in bridging opportunities and for keeping them engaged and supported after transitioning to PSE;
- Reflect on the challenges in the delivery of bridging programs; and,
- Examine case studies of programs that have achieved significant success.

5. What are the key findings?

The research suggests that local educational institutions should offer bridging programs that allow students to earn PSE credits. Bridging programs should adapt to local contexts, institutional policies, and workforce requirements. PSE bridging programs may have greater success in supporting students when they offer holistic and ongoing support services that address both the financial and the nonfinancial needs of the students. Critical features of successful bridging programs include:

- a) academic and career planning
- b) tutoring in course content
- c) support navigating PSE, PSE admissions, and community resources; and
- d) additional personal and social support

Transition coordinators provide crucial support service as long as this person has the ability to respond to the diversity of student needs and has a good knowledge of institutional and community services.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

A PSE credential is increasingly necessary for meaningful participation in the current economy; it is linked to a person's health and career satisfaction and contributes to a healthier and more sustainable economy. The challenge of accessing PSE for youth facing multiple barriers is increasingly shouldered by youth sector organizations and frontline youth workers. Many young people turn to their community-based youth organizations, youth employment counsellors, youth transition workers, youth outreach workers, frontline youth service workers, and peers for insight, guidance and support related to life after high school.

Increasingly, bridging programs are collaboratively designed in partnership with community-based organizations, as well as with employment, education, and government bodies that have a stake in ensuring that all young people have an opportunity to contribute to the future of Canada. Youth workers often fill the role of informal career counsellor. By knowing about bridging program pathways, youth workers can support youth to access and navigate PSE. Youth workers can also reach out to PSE institutions to find out how the institutions are increasing access for youth facing barriers to participation. By having conversations with youth, and seeking out opportunities for youth to experience PSE people, places, and processes, youth workers can facilitate connections and increase possibilities for the youth you work with.



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