

**Support Systems for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education: A Case Study on The
University of Winnipeg's ACCESS Education Programs.**

by

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to understand the importance of inclusive learning practices in post-secondary education to alleviate social barriers for underrepresented students. There is a disconnect between access to university and ongoing support systems within and outside the classroom. This problem can be attributed to a long history of exclusive, euro-centric post-secondary structure that is often unwelcoming to underrepresented students. This thesis will discuss the social barriers to underrepresented students and the practices being implemented by institutions to provide equitable, inclusive access to higher education. Then, it will use the ACCESS Education Programs at The University of Winnipeg as a case study to evaluate the support systems offered to students in 3 programs: Winnipeg Education Centre, Community-Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, and Immigrant Teacher Education Program. Through qualitative, open-ended interviews and focus groups, this study explores what support systems are working at ACCESS Education to create a welcoming learning environment for their students.

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Key Words: equity, access to education, community, supports, belonging, inclusive learning

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background

Inclusive education practices are critical to creating welcoming learning environments for underrepresented students to succeed in higher education. Post-secondary institutions are striving to provide accessible education, but often failing to consistently support students. By creating a welcoming, inclusive environment through support systems both within and outside the classroom, post-secondary institutions can alleviate barriers to underrepresented students.

The University of Winnipeg offers three Access Programs: The University of Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), and the Immigrant Teacher Education Program (ITEP) (The University of Winnipeg, 2019). CATEP, ITEP, and WEC differ in length and diploma/certification received upon graduation. The key feature of the programs that this study evaluates are the support systems that they offer for students (The University of Winnipeg, 2019). The programs and department are referred to as the ACCESS Education Programs, and throughout this study will be titled “ACCESS”.

The ACCESS Education programs at The University of Winnipeg are a response to the need of diverse and equitable education for inner city residents, Indigenous students, mature, immigrant, and low income individuals in university and in the teaching profession. Due to social, financial, and cultural barriers, underrepresented students face undeniable obstacles that must be addressed and alleviated to level the playing field of higher education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Universities across Canada are striving to become more accessible and equitable as the demographic of those enrolled continues to diversify. A long history of exclusive, euro-centric based educational structures challenge universities willingness to change (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). Canadian Universities have operated to serve an elite group of the Canadian population and have remained restrictive in differentiating the structures of academia (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). To diversify the populations of those enrolled and offer an accessible entrance, many post-secondary institutions have established “access programs”. These programs are designed to fill gaps in post-secondary education through supporting underrepresented populations (Zurba, 2017). Access programs traditionally offer students a transition year during which they can take requirements/credits they do not have from their high school education. Increasingly access programs are evolving to adopt structural changes to the degree/education entirely, recognizing that the systemic barriers to students' transition does not disappear after the first year.

Barriers to pursuing post-secondary education include the financial position of students but also social feelings of displacement and academic risk (Adebelkarim, Asplund, & Skalli, 2008). Adebelkarim et al. (2008) found that universities that lift financial barriers, such as free tuition, still do not reflect a major difference in the socio-economic background of those enrolled. Accessible education does not end in entrance and financial support, universities striving to open their doors must also offer equitable support systems and diversify their learning structures. The University of Winnipeg offers three Access Programs: The University of Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), and the Immigrant Teacher Education Program (ITEP) (The University of Winnipeg, 2019). This case study will focus on evaluating the support systems that they offer for each group (The University of Winnipeg, 2019). Briggs et al. (2012) researched student’s

transition to university in England and have found that feelings of displacement are intensified for mature students, ones that are the first in their family to attend university, and/or those from an ethnic group that is under-represented in the university population (Briggs, Clarke, & Hall, 2012). Areas of success for these student's transition come from targeted, consistent and individual support (Briggs, Clarke, & Hall, 2012). The ACCESS programs at the University of Winnipeg addresses that the needs required by mature, immigrant, and Indigenous to be unique and flexible in order to alleviate the social barriers to completing their education. The supports system of the ACCESS programs at the University of Winnipeg are academic, cultural, individual, relational, and family.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

In order to evaluate how The University of Winnipeg has restructured their institution to offer inclusive support systems. I seek to understand the need for the ACCESS programs, the barriers to higher education for underrepresented students, and how ACCESS at The University of Winnipeg has addressed this through offering inclusive supports systems and a welcoming community. A case study approach was chosen for this research to gain insight to the evolution of access programs through a literature review followed by semi-structured interviews conducted at the University of Winnipeg's ACCESS Education department. Interviews will explore how The University of Winnipeg integrates support systems into the structure of their programs. This study will interview faculty members and staff from ACCESS Education programs. This case study will ultimately provide a review for the ACCESS Education programs t at the University of Winnipeg to evaluate how they are supporting their students, and where they can improve for the future vision of the programs.

1.4 The Context for Study

The University of Winnipeg offers three ACCESS Education programs, a degree/certification program that provides real work experience in partnered elementary schools. The University of Winnipeg/ACCESS Education recognizes that there is a need for teachers from a diverse background to represent the needs and comfort of elementary school children (University of Winnipeg, 2019). They also acknowledge the systemic barriers that higher levels of education impose on individuals who wouldn't otherwise transition into university from high school.

The programs offered include the Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), the Immigrant Teacher Education Program (ITEP), and the University of Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC) (University of Winnipeg, 2019). WEC is designed for adult learners from diverse backgrounds (Indigenous people, minorities, and other inner-city residents) who are underrepresented in the teaching profession, participants receive a BA and certification to teach. WEC combines theory and practice of teaching with an emphasis on inner-city experience. Barriers to WEC students include (but are not independent to) low family income, single parents, ethnicity, lack of prerequisites from academic qualifications (University of Winnipeg, 2019).

CATEP is designed for Indigenous People in Manitoba who are Education Assistants to complete the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts and Education while working full-time with a partner school (University of Winnipeg, 2019). CATEP is a joint venture between The University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education, Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade and partner school divisions. During the spring and summer CATEP students take classes full-time and complete the program in 6 years on average (University of Winnipeg, 2019).

The ITEP is designed for internationally trained teachers that are unable to get work in Manitoba schools. ITEP is a joint venture between the University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education and partner

schools' divisions. ITEP was created due to the growing population of students in Manitoba schools from families of newcomers and lack of teachers to reflect this growing cultural demographics (University of Winnipeg, 2019). ITEP students are employed in schools and take classes/courses on the evenings and weekends. ITEP includes training in language, overcoming stereotyping, knowledge of Manitoba school culture, curriculum and management strategies. ITEP also provides support for students who are applying to schools while training, resumes, interview and professional profile training. The courses that ITEP offer respond the perceived knowledge gap of immigrant teachers like Indigenous Perspectives, Special Education in Manitoba, and interpreting Manitoba curriculum (University of Winnipeg, 2019).

1.5 Significance of the Study

ACCESS programs, their evolution, and the key structural changes that The University of Winnipeg took on to provide support systems for each group are reviewed. This research will build on the field of equitable access to post-secondary education and social inclusion theory and provide a review for the ACCESS Education program to summarize their strengths and collect information for moving forward. It is important to demonstrate the value of access programs in creating welcoming environment for underrepresented students.

This case study is relevant due to the large funding cuts that the Manitoba government has made to access programs in 2018. The Progressive Conservative party led by premier Brian Pallister was elected as the majority government in 2016 and re-elected in 2019 (King, 2019). Brian Pallister terminated 210 access bursaries worth \$1.5 million and cut the access programs by an additional \$1 million (King, 2019). Here, we will address the outcome of the budget cuts on the ACCESS programs and the students enrolled. Therefore, there is potential for this review to be used as a tool for advocating

on the importance of access programs in alleviating systematic barriers to disadvantaged residents in Manitoba to pursuing university education and entering the work force.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The topic of research surrounds university access programs efforts to create inclusive, accessible, and equitable education practices. Focused on specific supports and structural changes that post-secondary education can make to not only provide financial assistance but an inclusive learning environment through a variety of social, cultural, and community supports. This case study uses a social inclusion framework centered around student belonging and community. Inclusion pedagogy in access to higher education has transitioned from merely accessible entrance into providing a learning environment that facilitates individual empowerment and community for underrepresented students. Access programs are a response to inclusive education, the majority of Canadian post-secondary have a form of access program or transition year. The literature review includes articles published throughout the 1990's to early 2000's, a period when access programs were being reviewed and evaluated. As well as more recent inclusive theory frameworks emerging to support student belonging. The literature surrounding specific support systems for equitable education is not prevalent in the field and inconsistent between studies. There is more consensus that the feeling of not belonging in higher education is due the social/personal barriers that higher education imposes on students who do not meet the entry requirements and social expectations. For the relevance of the case study, this literature review will also include the purpose and need of access programs. The literature review was used for an inductive research approach, to shape my research questions on the importance of structural supports for

access students at The University of Winnipeg and evaluate their effectiveness for student belonging and community.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Inclusive Pedagogy is an education approach that aims to make learning as accessible and welcoming to all students as possible (Sanger, 2020). Inclusive frameworks are used by educators in different contexts, such socio-economic diversity, gender, cultural or can also be used for differently abled learning. Social inclusion in higher education has evolved, shifting from a policy standpoint to an engagement and empowerment focus (Gidley et al., 2010). Researchers in the field of inclusive higher education emphasize the difference between accessible entrance into institutions and ongoing engagement and participation to drive student success (Gidley et al., 2010). This connects to the idea that there is not a single structure to providing higher education, expecting all students to adjust to pre-existing euro-centric educational models in not accessible (Gidley et al., 2010). Instead, embracing diversity and restructuring to provide support regardless of age, culture, gender, or previous education (Gidley et al., 2010).

A central component to Inclusive Pedagogy, is the feelings of student belonging (Sanger, 2020). A sense of belonging among student's increases confidence, engagement, and learning (Sanger, 2020). Inclusive Pedagogy can be used within the classroom, through course delivery, support systems, course content, but ultimately addresses the need to diversify learning environments for accessible, inclusive education. Frameworks for inclusive education are centered around community and belonging. With the goal to adopt inclusion frameworks institutions, policy, and educators must embrace the goal of dismantling systematic exclusions in higher education (Slee, 2019).

2.3 Displacement in Higher Education

To create accessible education, intuitions initially must recognize the tool that academia played in establishing dominance over marginalized groups (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). It was assumed that with entrance, the structure and content of university will be a natural fit (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). This is harmful and daunting for students who do not shape into the euro-centric academic model that is still largely at play in higher education (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). Even with accessible entrance, the feelings of displacement are still present for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Briggs, Clarke, & Hall, 2012). Accessible entrance ranges from scholarships, outreach, modified entrance requirements, and lower tuition. Frennette, (2007) study found that these policy responses do not have a significant impact on participation from individual from low socio-economic backgrounds. Accessible entrance is a small component of the social inclusion framework, it is unreasonable to assume that entrance without further support and diversified learning environments will give access students a fair chance to succeed (Harwood et al., 2016). Unfamiliar post-secondary culture to underrepresented students creates feelings of isolation, these students are faced with a higher risk to completing their education (Hardwood et al., 2016). A student who is the first family member to enroll in university, often referred to as “first generation college student”, experiences unfamiliarity that can lead to self-doubt and imposter syndrome (Sanger, 2020, pg. 43). These social barriers experienced are intensified for mature, minority and first generation college students (Briggs, Clarke, & Hall, 2012).

A study done in Australia at the University of Tasmania evaluated Education and Accounting access programs for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, most of them mature students and/or from rural areas (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). Through interviews, surveys, focus groups, and analyzing test scores the study concluded that entry into the programs is less important than the

ongoing support structures that the students receive throughout their studies (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). The study found that not only do support systems positively impact student's academic progress, but personal satisfaction and motivation to graduate (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004).

2.4 Access Program & History

In the 1970s, literature and policy surrounding post-secondary education systems started to identify the need for minority populations in higher education. This stemmed from the belief of scholars and policy makers that if education was accessible, individuals would be able to overcome social-economic inequalities (Baker, & Gadsby, 2003). In the 1980's, the answer to diversifying the student populations was to offer access programs and courses (Ball, David, & Reay, 2002). This was part of the larger reform to university systems to recruit non-traditional students. By the 1990's there was a significant expansion to higher education with over 40 institutions offering a form of access program or course (Ball, David, & Reay, 2002). The financial barrier to education was assumed to be the dominant factor in the enrollment of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Adbelkarim, Asplund, & Skalli, 2008). However, institutions saw that when financial barriers were alleviated, the diversity in the population enrolled changed insignificantly. A study done on European access programs found that even institutes that offer free tuition, such as Sweden, do not see a major difference in the socio-economic background of those enrolled (Adbelkarim, Asplund, & Skalli, 2008). By 2000, it was becoming recognized in the study of accessible education that access programs could be improved by offering forms of supports to students (King, 2009). It was recommended though a review on college access programs that these supports be focused on student individually, and aimed at building interpersonal relationships and community (King, 2009)

Due to their existing commitment to inclusive education, access programs are more readily available to offer diversified program delivery and support systems compared to traditional programs. Providing in-program support systems can be used to alleviate social barriers to participation in education (Koper & Oskarsdottir, 2019). Support systems inside and outside of courses can respond to diverse needs (Koper & Oskarsdottir, 2019). An example of a cultural support system outside the class are cultural events that “facilitate deeper feelings of social inclusion that align to engagement and empowerment is for people to be able to express their own cultural values in ways that they are fully honored and valued” (Gidley et al., page 17, 2010). Social and cultural events are an important part of the Access Programs at The University of Winnipeg, family potlucks are an example of how the Program welcomes mature students and creates environments for them to feel at home along other parents. The University of Winnipeg Access Education Programs reflect the ability to alleviate social barriers and foster an environment for students to succeed by providing a variety of support within and outside the classroom.

2.5 Community and Belonging

A central component to Inclusive Pedagogy, is the feelings of student belonging (Sanger, 2020). A sense of belonging among student’s increases confidence, engagement, and learning (Sanger, 2020). Inclusive Pedagogy can be used within the classroom, through course delivery, support systems, course content, but ultimately addresses the need to diversify learning environments for accessible, inclusive education. With the goal to adopt inclusion frameworks institutions, policy, and educators must embrace the goal of dismantling systematic exclusions in higher education (Slee, 2019). A post-secondary access program does not immediately foster a sense of community or belonging for students. Inclusive education offers an opportunity to reconstruct university community and “expand the meaning of higher education” (Bjornsdottir, pg. 134. 2017). A dedication to providing an inclusive environment is not up to

professors or counsellors alone but the entire staff and faculty working together to adapt and provide individual and flexible methods to support student needs (Bjornsdottir, 2017).

2.6 ACCESS University of Winnipeg – Support Systems

ACCESS at The University of Winnipeg differ their support systems based on the program/student population; mature, Indigenous, inner-city, and immigrant students. Based on the 2003 Program Review, the ACCESS Program divides their support systems into “individual” and “community” (Baker, & Gadsby, 2003). In 2003, the Program review highlighted the program and delivery supports available student in the WEC Program. This review was based off the Hikel report, an access program evaluation system created in the late 1990’s. The review addresses that the feelings of belonging, connectedness, continuity and dignity must be built into any access program for the students to have equal opportunity (Baker, & Gadsby, 2003). The “community” feeling in the programs are critical to the positive feelings of belonging along with the various counselling and personal supports (Baker, & Gadsby, 2003). At this point the 2003 review is outdated and did not include CATEP or ITEP but provides insight into the creation of WEC.

A review of the first CATEP cohort’s experience was published in 2014, *the Success and Challenges Experienced by the Participants of Cohort 1 of the Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program* (Mays, 2014). The Mays review follows the first cohort of students from their first year in the CATEP program until their sixth and final year. The purpose of the review was to highlight changes needed to improve quality of the program and provide presentations/publications available for other educational institutions to increase their numbers of Indigenous students. This review interviewed individuals and groups associated with CATEP. The director of ACCESS, UW faculty, staff, and students were interviewed. A challenge well documented in the 2014 review is the conflict between the

CATEP program and the university system. Negotiations between the CATEP and the university administrations covering the registrations, late fees, academic standards, and flexibility. Despite CATEP operating with the same academic standards of all university programs, there is judgement passed on the CATEP program. Staff and faculty of the CATEP program must negotiate and advocate for the pre-existing credits and hours on behalf on their students to be recognized by various departments.

From the perspective of Faculty Members, some of the main challenges facing CATEP were childcare, evening courses fatigue, and pressure to “represent all things Aboriginal” (Mays, 2014, pg. 24). The need for childcare in the ACCESS building is highlighted in the review, the university daycare has a long waiting list and children must be signed up for entire year which does not apply for the needs of CATEP students. The CATEP students are also exhausted from working full-time in their practicum while simultaneously taking evening courses. The successes of the program include the cohort model and the program structure. Both the 2014 CATEP and 2003 WEC review provided insight into the ACCESS Programs and help shaped the case study research questions.

Chapter 3 – Methods

3.1 Rationale for Case Study and Qualitative Research

A case study and qualitative research approach was chosen to capture the experience of student’s in the ACCESS Programs at The University of Winnipeg. A case study methodology investigates a case or “phenomenon in depth and within real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 15). The “phenomenon” of the case relating to the research question in the context if this study is the structural supports system for creating community and belonging for access students in post-secondary education. The real-context and case for investigation of the issue will be ACCESS Education Programs at the University of Winnipeg.

This research will use a *single instrumental case study* variation, with a focus on one issue which is bounded to a case to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2009). A case study approach is appropriate for the study of equitable support systems in higher education, as specific evaluations and recommendations are understudied in accessible education.

Qualitative research methods allow for meaningful expression of values, which is critical to understanding the context of this case study. The success rates or scores of the ACCESS students at the University of Winnipeg could be analyzed to evaluate the support systems through quantitative methods. However, for the values and emotions researched in this study it would be inadequate to use a solely quantitative method approach. For the time and scope of this study, a qualitative approach through interviews and focus groups will be employed. Evaluating the “success” in terms for this study will be related to values such as community, belonging, and sense of student identity.

3.2 Goals of Methods & Collection

The goal of the case study is to assess how the structural support systems at the University of Winnipeg ACCESS programs create inclusive, accessible, and equitable post-secondary education. The support systems for ACCESS vary depending on the program: The Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), the Immigrant Teacher Education Program (ITEP), and the University of Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC). Each program has unique support systems in place for the demographic of the students enrolled. Through this research, I hope to evaluate if the support systems have an impact on the student’s feeling of belonging. Another key component to evaluate is how the support systems create a sense of community for ACCESS student’s and how it is created and facilitated through the programs.

The research in the field of accessible higher education has evolved to address the inadequacies in access programs that provide solely entrance and financial support. It has been widely acknowledged that the systemic barrier to higher education do not disappear with entrance. This study aims to focus on the support systems as a key element of access programs for evaluation. While other studies have addresses various point of evaluation, this one will clarify the importance of support systems both within and outside the classroom and creating community in access programs.

3.3 Methodology Framework

The University of Tasmania conducted a study to evaluate and improve access for disadvantaged and mature students for their Education and Accounting programs through examining factors that affect success (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods consisting of interviews, questionnaire surveys and focus groups were held at various stages of the research. The report also analyzed scores from interviews and from the STAT test. For the relevance of this study I will analyze the research of “Phase 3: Monitoring Skills Support and Academic Progress” (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). For this phase of the project the methods were qualitative, consisting of progress interviews, questionnaires, and a focus group held at the end of the students’ first year of study. The interviews took place for 20 minutes and a series of open-ended questions were asked (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). The fourth and final interview for each student was replaced by a written questionnaire, a new questionnaire was sent to the student for 3 years following the interviews. The questions were grouped into 5 sections: background information, attitudes of student life, competing demands of time (such as childcare), personal identity/social interactions, and students study relationship on campus and use of student services (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). The focus groups ran with a total of 11 students in the access programs. A set of questions guided the discussion with the

allowance for content to be pursued further with follow-up questions (Abbott, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004).

Themes were identified from the transcription notes from the focus groups that were used to confirm the themes found in the interviews and questionnaires. This study done at the University of Tasmania is a main source of influence on the methods conducted. However, the scope of the University of Tasmania study is much larger and over several years. For the capacity and scope on the research of ACCESS at University of Winnipeg, I will use the qualitative methods done in the University of Tasmania as a guide for addressing support system for equitable higher education.

3.4 Types of Design Used

This research features a case study on The University of Winnipeg's ACCESS programs. The study population involves 12 participants from the faculty and staff from The University of Winnipeg Access Education Programs. The ACCESS staff were identified and contacted to participate in one-on-one interviews and a focus group. A follow-up email was sent to inform participants of the nature of the research thesis and topic of the questions to be asked.

This research involves semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviews and a focus group. The semi-structure was selected to open discussion and gain insight to the views and experience of the faculty members on the ACCESS programs. There is an interview guide to ensure that the researchers remain on topic and ensures all questions necessary to the study are asked. The focus groups will consist of a set of questions that guide discussion, with the room for follow-up questions and examples. The interviews and focus groups will be recorded and coded for words, phrases, and themes for the case study analysis.

3.5 Research Questions

- How did support services in ACCESS Education begin and evolve?
- How does Access provide support within course delivery?
- What are the current forms of support systems?
- How do the ACCESS programs build a welcoming, meaningful community for its students?

The interview guide for the interviews and focus groups are built of the larger research questions and objectives.

3.6 Data Analysis

The themes, phrases, and words from the interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and coded. The codes will be created based off the values in the research questions that evaluate support systems in access programs for alleviating social barriers of post-secondary education. The codes can be found in the appendix.

3.7 Limitations – Delimitations

The focus on this study will be on the values, supports, and structural components that are provided throughout the ACCESS programs at The University of Winnipeg. The limitation of this study is that it evaluates only one institution, consisting of only one case study. Due to the time period and constraints, it will only evaluate The University of Winnipeg's ACCESS programs. Thus, the evaluation of one institution, on the review of the supports systems for equitable education, cannot be generalized as a one size fits all framework for other institutions. The ACCESS programs are relatively small which creates the potential for weak representation of the research group. Communication issues due to the geographic distance between the interviews conducted and the research analyzed may also be an area of

concern. Finally, these values and opinions gathered from interviews are not from students, limiting the sincerity of the study.

Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1 Participants

The Access Education Programs are comprised of a Director, Program Coordinators, Academic Advisors, Support/Administrative Staff, and Instructors. Some staff members including the Program Director and CATEP Coordinator are new to the program while other members have been around for years. While each role is distinct, the staff are flexible in offering support to whoever is in need. The staff are all compassionate and dedicated to the programs and their students. This creates dynamic relationships that cannot be entirely transmitted into this case study through words and cannot necessarily be recommended for another institution to implement. It is a unique program that is fundamentally fueled by the staff and their confidence in the ACCESS Students. The findings in this chapter highlight the views and opinions of the staff and faculty, and their visions of the program moving forward.

4.2 Program Challenges

ACCESS has been in a time of transition over the past couple years. The programs lost three major positions and have dealt with the Manitoba cuts to Access Bursaries. Although this time has been stressful and uncertain, staff are exercising the opportunity to develop a timely program vision, changing the course material and cultural components that staff members have acknowledged as becoming stagnant.

Employee Turnover

ACCESS has been going through a transition of multiple key roles; the Director, WEC, and CATEP Coordinators. It is not unusual for organizations to lose staff, and more of an anomaly that the programs have experienced decades of dedicated employees. The employee turnover should be not viewed as a criticism of the program but instead an opportunity for renewed direction. The staff are in a period of adjustment as the lead positions are filled, some positions are still empty. This can be difficult for both the original staff and the new when questions arise around why certain operations exist and if there is a fresh direction that the program can aim for.

Financial Impact

The ACCESS Students are impacted by the Provincial cuts to Access Bursaries. The Provincial Government cut to Access Bursaries came with little warning to the program and students. This affects how students receive funds, the amount, and ultimately the amount of debt that the students will take on. The CATEP program is 5 years in length, including the summer term. The cut to Access Bursaries happened quickly, leaving Access Staff grappling to find alternative funding methods to student students. An interview participant expressed their concern on the cuts:

What impact is that going to have on our retention. I mean we lost some students in the first year afterwards. New students because we promoted the program that year with the understanding that there would still be access bursaries and when they came for September there weren't. But I purposely met with all the students that summer to go over that. - Interview 8.

An ACCESS staff member explained these funding cuts in detail and how they impact students. Otherwise the information is difficult to find and understand as the Province claims the funds are merely “distributed differently” in most online resources. Before the cuts, Access Students would receive the maximum amount of Canada Student Loans, and the rest would be filled with Access Bursaries.

ACCESS had students receiving up to 20 thousand dollars of bursaries. These bursaries were replaced with the Manitoba student loan funding, so now those students are looking at \$70-80,000 in debt for the five-year program compared to the \$40-50,000 before the cuts. Some students are eligible to receive up to \$4,000 from the Manitoba bursary program, but these are only given to certain demographics of students.

The amount of potential funding available through loans and bursaries has increased for married couple, decreased for single parents, and stayed about the same for a single individual. However, the debt load has increased for all demographics. A single parent is looking at an increase of \$5,000 to 7,000 increase in debt through the Fall to Winter semesters and then half of that amount again for the Summer semester. This becomes close to a \$10,000 loss of money each year that students are enrolled. The new funding scheme took away a large component of financial security that ACCESS used to promote their program on. Despite experiencing a greater financial risk of pursuing University Education, Access Students now qualify for the same funding format as any student in any University program in Manitoba. An interview participant explains the impact these cuts will have on single parents:

It definitely has made things more difficult especially for those single parents in particular. ... we are looking at students that, we've talked about this, are taking such a huge risk to come after school. Now you're saddling them with substantially more debt than we were just a couple of years ago. And their earning potential sadly decreased as well because their time in the workforce is potentially less than more traditional university student. - Interviewee 8.

The financial impact of the cuts to Access Bursaries is likely going to have an impact of future enrollment into the Access Programs, however the Programs are not sure what it like look like. The funding to the Access Programs is not impacted, only the students. This could potentially change the future support systems in the program as funding is redirected to provide scholarships and financial assistance for students.

Stagnant

The Access Education Centre has been operating at The University of Winnipeg since 1997 and the CATEP program since 2005. Due to the recent staff turnover, the program has an opportunity to re-evaluate the goals and values they are striving for. From the perspective of new ACCESS Staff, coming into new positions at the Department requires asking new questions and sometimes questioning why certain operational tasks haven't changed. Since many of the key staff members remain and view the programs as successful it is understandable that content and procedures have stayed on their track. For some staff, the program has become stagnant, failing to address a new vision that could appropriately respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 94 Calls to Action and needs of the Programs Indigenous students:

You know one of the concerns I've had is that this has been a program without vision or without innovation ... And I think that one of the opportunities that we missed was to really begin responding in a meaningful way to the ninety four calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission That's not something that we've done and I honestly think that our students deserve to have every single instructor and staff member being trained in trauma informed care and practice. It's just good wisdom not just for residential school survivors intergenerational or first generation but refugees. You know we invite newcomers to be a part of our program without really sort of having a framework for responding to the experiences of people who have lived in refugee camps. You know when I'm very proud that we have these spaces available but very disappointed that we haven't sort of backfilled our professional development opportunities to be more responsive to needs. - Interviewee

5

There is no question that the Programs are creating successful educators, however, there are opportunities to be more responsive to the needs of Indigenous students and commitment to the Calls to Action. All the staff and faculty at Access are committed to this improved vision, but their opinions on the best strategy to do so differ.

4.3 Barriers Specific to ACCESS Students

Each ACCESS Students face different barriers in pursuing their degree. While some require more academic assistance or financial support, many students would face a degree of social barrier while pursuing their degrees at the main campus. Majority of the ACCESS Students are mature students, many single parents with young children. There are also first-generation university students, Indigenous students, refugee students, and newcomers. The barriers of pursuing a traditional academic degree is not impossible for these students, and they can succeed on the main University of Winnipeg campus. However, attempting to alleviate some academic and financial barriers on the main campus does not create a welcoming environment for every student. Identifying the barriers that ACCESS Students face has helped staff work towards alleviating them and providing an inclusion learning environment.

For mature students, attending the main campus can be alienating. Especially since the activities and social events are aimed at young student who are fresh out of high school. The ACCESS Programs provide a space for students to be among other parents. An interview participant explains how the programs work reduce stress for parents enrolled in the program:

Social barriers, I think one is the age. My old boss used to call these programs of second or third or fourth chances. Another one would be their family obligations. And it's very difficult to raise a family and go to university. Some of our students are single parents, most of them are single parents. So, we schedule our classes with that in mind right. We don't start till nine or nine thirty. Their courses are picked for them so that frustration of you know logging ongoing to register for your courses and finding all the ones that suit you are all gone. So, we take that barrier away. -

Interviewee 2

Cultural barriers to higher education are also considered at the Access Programs, for Indigenous student are faced with feeling alienated or underprepared. An interview participant vocalized this barrier

well, defining culture as simply as “culture that which seems normal to us” (participant 5). For many students whether they are Indigenous, mature, or newcomers, must adjust to traditional educational environments if they want to pursue their degrees or diplomas. The participant below articulates the negative impacts that this has on students:

For a lot of our students here school, secondary, post-secondary was not nor was it a cultural expectation. It was a place where we went and we felt bad about ourselves and we went down we felt ostracized or overly punished or like we were always the ones playing catch up. And you know it's demeaning, that's dehumanizing, it's demoralizing. And I really do see that as the fault of institutions and not the kids and that's why I go back to that original statement that it's really the message that you know those problems that began in terms of being able to connect they're not on him and they don't speak to your ability, they speak to a very narrow way of conducting business as usual in institutions that hasn't been responsive to the needs of people. – Interviewee 5

Students in the ACCESS have the means to become successful teachers, the Programs are a way to provide the additional support student need.

4.4 Support System Evaluation

Individual

Students at the ACCESS can expect to receive endless one-on-one support. This is ultimately a commitment and drive from the staff to see the students succeed. This individual support and commitment to students is possible due to the small size of the programs, part of what makes the programs unique. The individual connection to students is an essential piece to creating a welcoming environment and accountability for students to remain engaged. An interview participant explains the drive to understanding the individuals needs required by the students:

any of our students could be could just attend main campus students but they choose to come here. And so I think that the common factor is underlying support and understanding of students who may need a little extra leg up in whatever that might be. We have to discover with each cohort that comes in what are their unique needs. - Interviewee 4

The staff at ACCESS are flexible and understanding with each cohort and student. They take the time to understand the unique needs of each student and they should be approached. A student yet to enroll in the Programs can expect to have multiple meetings with different support staff and coordinators to be sure the program is the right fit for them. This extends to going over personal budgets, the cost of living, and a realistic plan for the students if they choose to enroll. The staff put hours into potential applicants going over the risks and opportunities that the next five or six years will look like. Starting in September, the programs advisors and coordinators go over budgeting, how to apply for bursaries, grants, and general information to assist the student. This one on one supports continue for the student's entire time at ACCESS, becoming more personal with each year. Below an interview participant gives an example of the importance of providing individual support from the beginning of the student's experience:

This woman I met with the other day came to an orientation session and she had asked the question like 'What are my chances of getting a job when I'm done.' When we talked about it, then she e-mailed me. She has a full time job as an EA. She doesn't want to give that up and go to school if there's not going to be anything on the other side. There's the risk we're talking about. I responded to the email. That wasn't good enough either she wanted to talk to me in person, so we'll meet with students before they're students here. we build that community as we will meet with them before they even come here to sort of welcome them and make them feel at home..... So you're already gaining that. You know that relationship so to speak right. - Interviewee 2

The Immigration Teacher Education Program (ITEP) is built on the idea of using the educational background newcomers already have and filling the gaps to provide them with the credentials they need

to be employed in Manitoba schools. ITEP is built on the idea of offering individualized supports to students. This is explained below:

every individual has a different scenario. It's not a fixed structure. So, everybody coming in different countries have a different education background so it's always different. So, it's based on the evaluation. We decide what courses they need. So that's a first step for them. And then the second step, so if they get selected to the program as a candidate then we help them with the workshops. We create workshops as needed. - Interviewee 10

The ITEP program provides workshops such as English language training, an example of this is for students from India who are more familiar with British English can receive support through workshops that provide that with tools to become familiar with cultural English in Manitoba.

Academic

The academic support systems at the ACCESS are flexible and unique. Each student can expect to have easy access to academic advisors, tutors, and support from instructors. In the fall term of the first year, each cohort enrolls in an Introduction to University course, focusing on study skills and time management. The academic advising is available whenever the students might need it. It is recognized by the department that CATEP student's schedules are full, leaving little room to book an advising appointment. The advisor's office door stays open, leaving it up to the student to come by for one on one help when they need it. The time availability of this support adjusts with the student's schedules, the advisor will transition to staying late in January to accommodate the CATEP students who attend class during the evenings. This flexibility ensures that students receive help when they need it, accommodating their schedules. An interview participant reflects on the importance of flexibility in providing academic assistance to students:

CATEP students are only here in the evening during the school year and they work full time It is really hard for them to find the time to also say 'okay I'm going to have tutoring one or two hours a week in order to you know to get help' or whatever. So we do offer tutoring but I suspect I haven't seen the statistics on it. But I suspect it's underused. - Interviewee 1

This one on one relationship with the program advisors and other support staff creates an environment that encourages students to express academic concerns and the personal root of the issue. Students are more likely to seek assistance from staff they have a pre-existing relationship with, compared to a traditional student advisor on the main campus. An important academic support in the Programs are embedded into course delivery. Instructors adjust delivery to suit the needs of each cohort. Many of the instructors at ACCESS also teach at the main campus. The instructors are determined to provide the same quality of content that is provided at the main campus but adapt their delivery. This form of support requires a willingness to diversify traditional educational means of delivering lectures, assignments, and presentations. The need for diversifying the course delivery is shared by a interview participant:

Instructors understand that they've all (students) come from a very diverse background and they're not changing their course content for them but maybe they're changing the delivery on how they're doing it Our end goal is to turn out good teachers and I think we're all committed to that in a very strong way. We've all been able to understand the diversity of our students. - Interviewee 9

Creating an academic environment that makes students feel confident helps build inclusive learning practices in access programs. Instructors integrate multiple modes of student learning for the diverse ACCESS group. For example, math instructors use storytelling and hands on examples to back up what they are putting on the board:

I think it's really important that as instructors we make decisions about how we teach and that means that we use multiple ways, multiple modes to teach. Generally, that would mean use of all the multiple intelligences. I think one of the most important things to hope that they don't feel

anonymous so that they feel like they're part of a community they're part of the class. - Interviewee 11

The staff and faculty at the ACCESS understand that students are not always going to have time to seek academic help outside of their coursework. Allowing for flexibility with course delivery and offering support when students need it are highlighted as important areas of building academic success for students.

Relational

The ACCESS relational support systems refer to the relationships that are created and develop between all members of the programs. This dedication to building relationship is not a support system that can be easily replicated by other institution and a significant example of the uniqueness of the Programs at The University of Winnipeg. The commitment to students can be seen throughout the whole program, and reason why so many staff members have been working at ACCESS for over the last decade. Instructors are determined to provide learning environments that work for each cohort and further provide individual assistance when it's needed. They see the importance and potential in all their students and the drive to give them a leg up makes the relationships meaningful.

people you know went above and beyond in terms of their commitment to students. And it had nothing to do with job description. ... they're not working too minimum levels, they're working out of a sense of obligation to the people that they're working with and I don't know how you sort of inspire that I don't know how we talk about that it's about relationship. It's about empowering people to work at a level that is compassionate and humane and authentic. - Interviewee 5

The relational supports create conversation to go beyond seeking financial or academic advice, the student can expect to receive genuine help in resolving their situation. No meeting is black and white, staff make sure to follow-up with students and provide ongoing support to lessen their burden as described here:

“They'll still always follow them up and most of our instructors do that. We invest in these guys we take we take their five years here very seriously and we want to see them succeed” . - Interviewee 9

ACCESS students are cared about and there is not a nameless face in the building. Instructors and staff know the names of all their student's, their kid's names, and where they live. This is also experienced between students in cohort model who are working together and encouraging one another to succeed. Below an interview participant explains the significance that the cohort model has on creating relationships between students:

I think the one of the first things is because it's a cohort model. It's the relationships between and among the students. And I would say that without that, I think a lot of them wouldn't stick it out. So I think that sort of sense of working together, they're all working together to get this degree. Obviously, it's a little different for each cohort but there is this sense of kind of working together. -

Interviewee 1

This investment in relationship also holds students accountable, no one of them is slipping by unnoticed. Staff and instructors are approachable and accommodating. They are committed to the students and are passionate about helping their students succeed. The student's in these programs are cared about.

Cultural

The Community Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP) students are all Indigenous and roughly half of the Winnipeg Education Center Program (WEC) students are Indigenous. Over the couple years, the cultural supports available to students has changed. A previous permanent Elder in Residence was loved by students and could expect up to 20 students attend her teachings at a time. Unfortunately, this Elder is no longer with the Programs. In the past year a new Elder has occasionally

offered teachings, but staff found that they were not used due to time conflict with courses. Other cultural supports available outside of the classroom such as access to a cultural room and occasional potlucks. Staff stressed that the CATEP program schedule is packed because students are teaching during the day in practicum and attending classes in the evenings, most students don't have the time to seek these additional support systems. An interview participant described this conflict:

“I think there has to be a bigger cultural piece for sure. I think we have tried over the years various things but I think we need to do that a little better too.... we can offer resources, but we can't make students take them. But I've always said for busy people you have to build those things into courses and you have to do it in a way when that it's part of a course and then students are more likely to do it.” - Interviewee 1

Within the classroom, instructors bring Indigenous knowledge focused content whenever possible, especially in English and History courses. History instructors can provide a large selection of Indigenous focused content courses available at the History Department. In English courses, instructors aim to use Indigenous authors and literature. The faculty and staff are working towards integrating more Indigenous knowledge and practices into the coursework by bringing in Indigenous knowledge keepers and land-based learning.

Family

Mature student with children makes up most of the demographic enrolled in the ACCESS programs. Family support systems are important to making sure that student's needs are being accommodated. The average age of the program is 31 years old, it's not uncommon for students to have babies while they are completing the program. It is also not unheard of for instructors to hold babies while student's take notes or participate. The staff provide family nights and events through the year, students are encouraged to bring their families along. Instructors are open to having children in class,

especially babies that are too young for daycare or when parents are not able to find childcare. The child-friendly aspect of the program helps alleviate some barriers that parents experience in post-secondary. An example of this was a story told during one of the interviews of a student, a single mom at the time that started the program with low confidence and uncertainty:

We do get to meet more the family of these students as well. We're introduced to their children in class and at any rate she had she had support, and my support, she had a supportive family and she persevered. And so, she went from a point of which she was seriously considering quitting the program to come to my seeing her on the podium years later and receiving her degree - Interviewee 3

The staff make an effort to know the names of student's children, even where they go to school. Providing an environment that welcomes and supports parents makes the post-secondary experience far different than a traditional program. Students are more willing and able to come to class if they know they'll be supported and their children can come.

4.5 Community & Belonging

The community created at ACCESS provides a space for students to feel like they belong. This community feeling is in part created through the supports described above: individual, academic, relational, cultural, and family. Creating relationships and offering safe spaces for cultural activities and families to gather is vastly different than the experience these students would receive at the main campus. According to staff, students begin at ACCESS feeling overwhelmed and nervous:

You know every student that starts here in first year they're scared.then you start seeing you know B's and B pluses and the odd A and there and you just see the life come into them and it's hard to explain but hopefully you can imagine what I'm talking about. Such a great thing to see. – Interviewee 2

While staff and faculty explain to me how students begin to fill with confidence throughout their time at ACCESS, it's impossible not to see the pride in their eyes as they describe this. They believe in giving these students an opportunity that they may not otherwise have access to. An interview participant told me a story about a student they had that articulated the confidence and belonging growing within a student during their time at ACCESS:

There was also a student that we took in a few years ago that was shy, timid, no self-esteem whatsoever. And I swear the first month of school she cried every day when she was here. She just couldn't believe that she had stepped outside of her comfort zone to even consider something that she would never succeed at. And through the encouragement of staff here, and her cohort, she in her words 'she doesn't know how she got through it'. But she persevered and she got through it. And one of the most touching part of her journey was she had a teacher in first year ... she had her again in third year. And when the teacher gave her paper back in the third year, the teacher asked if she could give her a hug because the improvement from first year to third year was so profound. She just wanted to say you know 'fantastic job good for you'. Those again are such heartwarming stories and you know this young lady is now in the world being a teacher and doing what she didn't think she could do because she just didn't have the belief in herself and the self-esteem to go forward. -

Interviewee 9

Staff and faculty believe that the community at ACCESS provides a space for student to belong and in doing so their chances of staying in the program increase. An interview participant beautifully articulates the meaningful community at ACCESS:

That's one of the gifts of the access program is that people have the opportunities to build long term meaningful lasting relationships. And I truly that goes back to that idea of belonging and generosity that if you know if I feel connected to people who are important to me that I respect the likelihood of me disappearing drops dramatically, the likelihood of me being able to reach out for help when I need it increases dramatically. And so it's one of those things that doesn't exist on Main Campus for whatever reason and we can talk about class size structure whatever the case may be. But what if

what if we had teachers graduating who genuinely cared about each other and loved each other and cared about each other's families. - interviewee 5

Through support both within and outside the classroom, ACCESS students are well equipped to succeed in their classes and graduate. As explained by a staff member, by the time graduation comes along many students can't imagine leaving the program because of the community and because they feel safe.

4.6 Program Vision

The final section of the one-on-one interviews was focused on recommendations that participants have for the program moving forward. The answers varied between participants but almost all stated that they want to find a strategy that appropriately responds to the cultural needs of Indigenous students. CATEP students who have graduated express that because they are Indigenous, schools expect them to be integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices into their teachings. However, this is a large assumption to make and many students do not feel prepared to pass along their knowledge as explained below by an interview participant:

I believe that the cultural element the cultural teachings are so critical to the success of our student to stabilize them as individuals to show them to us. A lot of people Indigenous people don't have access to these things in the city. They don't have access to cultural teachers. So if we're if we can provide that if that it can help them most school divisions have that now. - Interviewee 4

With the course content already full, staff and instructors are trying to find the right space to make these courses available or to incorporate it. This interview participant continues to explain that integrated Indigenous content into coursework is at start but it can't end there:

our faculty and instructors work really hard to integrate that into the academic scholarly part but then there's other things like ceremonies which they cannot. They cannot do or teach or demonstrate a pipe ceremony or a smudge or a sweat lodge. There's limitations to what they can do but that's

where our cultural supports need to come in. So, I think it's gonna be a blend. That's part of the expectation is that when we graduate Aboriginal teachers that they're not just Aboriginal teachers in name only but they have this specialized knowledge skill and I think we have a responsibility to make sure that they have that. – Interviewee 4

Overall, it is agreed that there needs to be a commitment to Indigenous student at ACCESS. This does not only answer the needs of ACCESS students but creates teachers who can pass this knowledge into elementary schools. Staff and faculty agree that this needs to be incorporated into course work. Options for implementing this include providing in course teachings with an Elder every month, a separate class introduced into the curriculum, and land-based learning trips.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The University of Winnipeg ACCESS Educations Programs demonstrate a commitment to their students to succeed. The support systems offered within the programs are Individual, Relational, Cultural, Family, and Academic. Through semi-structured interviews, participants reiterated the role that support both within and outside the classroom play in creating a welcoming environment for students. The Programs have been going above all means in offering personal support to their students and adapting course delivery to create inclusive learning environments. Area's that the participants believe need to be improved are the cultural programming for Indigenous students. Important structural components that were not considered in the analysis of the review include small class size, designated building, and school-partnerships for practicum placements. These areas are embedded to the history and function of the program.

Access Programs are available at several post-secondary institutions in Manitoba, at The University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, Red River College, and the University College of the

North. The Provincial cut to the Access Bursaries puts greater risk and barriers in the path of students who are already faced with inequitable access to education. These students are taking on a larger debt load than before and discouraging many to enroll in available programs. While this study highlights the social barriers to post-secondary, the importance of finance relief to underrepresented students makes these programs possible.

As mentioned previously, the uniqueness of the Access Education Programs makes it difficult to replicate at other post-secondary institutions. This is because the community and belonging for students largely stems from the relationships fostered between staff, students, and instructors. For future studies, I recommend that in the field inclusive higher education, there is more focus on the importance of relationships and welcoming environments.

Through using a social inclusion as a theoretical framework, this thesis adds to field of accessible education by introducing support systems as a tool to alleviate social barriers for unrepresented students. Specifically, understanding the importance of social inclusion through personal support systems, relationships, and community. My research supports the findings in the literature that accessible education does not happen through transition year programs and financial aid alone but by deconstructing traditional practices in post-secondary institutions. Access students are hardworking, highly capable individuals, it is time that institutions create an environment for them to thrive.

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Appendices

Interview Guide

1. Personal

- a. What's your role in the Access Education Programs?
- b. How long have you been involved and how has your role changed?
- c. Have you been more involved with a specific program? ITEP, CATEP, or WEC?

2. Knowledge/perspective of the systems

- a. What are the biggest changes you have seen in the development of the access programs?
- b. Besides academic and financial supports, what type of support systems or activities do you think are most important to access students?
- c. Do you have any specific experience or stories that reflect on the success of the access program in creating confident, capable teachers?
- d. What type of social barriers do you believe that access students face that students on the main campus do not?

3. Recommendations

- a. With the budget cuts to Access what do you think will change to support systems in Access with less funding and resources?
- b. What do you think must remain in place or return to the access programs in order to maintain success for its students?

Focus Group Guide

General Program Questions:

1. When were the CATEP and ITEP programs introduced?
2. Has there been fluctuations in the number of students enrolled in each program?

- a. Is there a steady enrollment in each or an emphasis on enrollment of one program during certain time periods?
3. Are all three programs still hosted at the Access Education Centre on 511 Ellice Avenue?
4. Importance of the practicum component of the degree

Support Systems

1. From the UWEC Program Review in 2003, the support systems were divided into Individual and Community. In this section I'll be asking about the individual support systems.
2. How the individual support systems changed for each program:
3. WEC students
 - a. Do WEC student still receive individual counselling sessions?
 - b. Are professional development sessions available to the students?
 - c. Academic advising, tutoring, prep courses?
4. CATEP Students
 - a. Faculty and Elder support within the university program?
 - b. Cultural awareness/perspectives integrated into the course work?
 - i. Land-based learning component to the course work?
 - c. Are Indigenous cultural support systems available to Indigenous students in the WEC programs?
- 5) ITEP Students
 - a. What support systems are in place for the ITEP Students?
 - b. What type of course work/workshops help ITEP students overcome stereotyping?
 - c. Any other individual support systems available to the ITEP students apart from financial and professional?

Community

In this section I'll be asking questions about the community support systems available.

1. How does ACCESS facilitate a welcoming, warm environment for its students?
2. Does WEC support staff still organize social events?
3. Are there still family events available to access student?
4. Do the community feelings at Access come from having the campus separate from the main?
5. Are there any other activities or orientations to the Access Department that provide the community feeling for students?

Success

In this section, I'll be asking about student success in access. This will be focused on student belonging, positive attitudes, and confidence in their skills and practicum.

- 1) How do students in access develop a sense of student identify and confidence?
- 2) What contributes to students feeling of belonging in university? Separate location, practicum, smaller class sizes?

Shifts in programming

1. How has the Access programs and specifically the support systems been compromised by the provincial budget cuts to access?
2. Has the programs and support systems changed since 2003 due to the shifts in administration and faculty?

Coding Tree

