

## ACCESS Programs

Jurisdiction: Manitoba

Contact: Susan Deane

Level: Post Secondary

Theme: Organizational/structural

### Description of Practice:

ACCESS programs are academic programs offered concurrently with the mainstream programs at our universities and colleges. Each ACCESS program is affiliated with a regular university or college. The programs cover a range of professional fields such as teacher education, business administration, engineering, social work, pre-medicine, and nursing. Several, but not all of the programs are offered off-campus to create a small supportive community atmosphere conducive to promoting success of the students. In the final year of their program of studies, however, students are required to take courses on main campuses with regular students. The credential earned is from the host institution and is similar to that earned by regular students.

Key features of the programs include provision of personal and academic supports available to each ACCESS student. Each program has counsellors assigned to assist students (including on personal matters) throughout the course of their study. Faculty are assigned students for academic advising. Additional courses such as academic writing, and introduction to university is also offered. English language supports; workshops on computer skills, study skills, writing academic papers; use of libraries etc are also provided. As well, Manitoba offers an ACCESS Bursary program that provides non-repayable bursaries to selected students in the ACCESS programs.

### Background:

ACCESS programs have been in existence for the last 30 years and have received national attention for their success. They are targeted programs specially designed to provide educational opportunities for those members of our society who would traditionally not consider post-secondary education. The priority groups include Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees, single parents, and inner city residents.

Individuals are selected on the basis of demonstrated life experiences that have disadvantaged them to access post-secondary education. Applicants must also demonstrate a potential or readiness to succeed in a program of study. An extensive selection process is undertaken as the opportunity does not meet the demand. Community members are actively involved in the selection of students which includes the paper sift of applications and the extensive interview processes.

Historically, ACCESS students were once fully funded while in the program, but federal government cuts (in the early 90's) have resulted in limited bursaries being available to current students.

Since their conception, ACCESS programs were funded outside of the base funding arrangements that exists between the provincial government and the universities and colleges. This resulted in a level of instability for the programs and through the 1990's

these programs experienced some severe cuts. Since 2000, however, funding for ACCESS programs was moved to form part of the base operating grants provided to the post-secondary institutions. The funding is earmarked for ACCESS and must be spent on these programs. Including ACCESS programs as part of base programming of universities and colleges has provided stability and job security for the faculty and staff, allowing longer term program planning and development.

Development:

ACCESS programs are guided by community need and a number of them are located in the community. Relationships with the communities through individuals' remains strong and typically ACCESS graduates tend to return to work in the communities that they came from. Communities engage actively in student recruitment and encourage participants to pursue a post secondary education even when their experience with secondary education has not been positive. ACCESS students are typically mature students with very informal education.

Due to limited resources no new program areas have been considered or developed in recent years.

Evidence:

As is expected, some ACCESS programs are more effective than others. An extensive review of the ACCESS programs in the mid-nineties highlighted their success (Hickel Report, 1994). Graduation and retention rates are comparable and in some cases better than those in the regular main stream institutions. A case could be made that would show the positive cost benefit analysis of these programs as it allows individuals to become members that contribute to society rather than be dependent on it.

Adaptability:

With sufficient resources, successful components of the ACCESS model could be adapted into other programming. The ACCESS model could also be duplicated and utilized in any post-secondary education system.

Further information:

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