EQUITABLE UNIVERSITY ACCESS FOR UNDER-REPRESENTED AND DIVERSE GROUPS OF STUDENTS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE IN MISSION STATEMENTS AND STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

by

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Abstract

Ontario’s post-secondary education sector has sought to address access of under-represented groups since the 1980’s. This study investigated whether and how these efforts are reflected in university mission statements (MSs), and the more recent Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), which indicate how and why the institutions are differentiated. Key term searches and critical discourse analysis (CDA) found few mentions of access or diversity in either the MSs or the differentiation sections of the SMAs across the 20 provincially-funded Ontario universities that were included in this study. The universities emphasized geographic location and national and international partnerships. These emphases can be read as less welcoming to members of some under-represented groups than to others. Implications for universities as they create public statements of their priorities and values are discussed.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Ontario’s post-secondary education sector has addressed access of under-represented groups since the 1980’s. This study investigated whether and how these efforts are reflected in university mission statements (MSs), and the more recent Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), which indicate how and why the institutions are differentiated. Differentiation in this context refers to what makes the institution unique or distinctive.

1.1 Background of the Problem

Discourse refers to expressing oneself using words, which creates a context for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalization, for the development of new knowledge and power relations, and for hegemony (excess authority of one over another) (McGregor, 2003). In relation to practice, “discourses can play a central role in regulating social institutional practices, including the valuing and justification of certain actions over others” (Razack, Maguire, Hodges, & Steinert, 2012, p. 1324). This study does not begin with a problem, but a curiosity: is equitable access for under-represented students reflected in university MSs, and the more recently developed SMAs? If not, then the findings will identify a problem which could be addressed in further studies.

1.2 Problem Statement

MSs and SMAs represent universities’ characters, core ideologies, and aspirations (Khalifa, 2012), and should portray a commitment to social and cultural diversity (American Council on Education, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Council for Higher Education Accreditation, & International Association of Universities, 2004; Universities Canada, n. d.). MSs are – or should be – clearly accessible on university websites and in their informational brochures. The problem is that a diverse body of readers can interpret the text of a
MS in a way not intended by the university. Despite a growing responsibility among universities to address equitable access for under-represented groups, MSs did not seem to have been updated to reflect access initiatives that the universities may have in place. This also holds true for the recent SMAs, where universities state how they are differentiated. The discourse within these documents may guide institutional practices, including the valuing and justification of certain actions over others (Razack et al., 2012) as well as determining government funding, and so, possible interpretation holds important implications for practice.

1.3 Purpose of the Research

Ontario is diverse, particularly with regards to economic status, culture, and populations across regions (Weingarten & Deller, 2010). The purpose of this study is to analyse how Ontario universities address equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups in their MSs and SMAs. Everyone with a stake in access to postsecondary education (PSE) and social justice, including policy makers, would benefit from understanding how university MSs and SMAs may be interpreted in unintended and possibly undesirable ways by diverse readers. It is important to critically analyze any document which is intended to represent institutional characters, core ideologies, and aspirations.

1.4 Historical Context

Equitable access to PSE for under-represented and diverse groups, henceforth referred to as social inclusion, is in some ways synonymous with democracy, as both democracy and access to PSE are human rights (Ashford, Ward, & Alexander, 2008). However, Ashford et al. (2008) believe that the role universities fill today resembles the decree of Edward VI in 1551: access was for all with the qualifying pedigree). a rather “uncomfortable acknowledgement” (2008, p. 39). In the contemporary context, those with “qualifying pedigree” are the privileged who do not
face access barriers. In order to address how social inclusion should be addressed in university policies (and eventually practice), I believe there needs to be recognition of the history of the university in terms of its purpose and function.

As described by Ashford et al. (2008), in the past 50 years North America has shifted to viewing the university as a public resource rather than a private privilege. North America post-World War II saw PSE become recognized as a contributor to a strong economy. The economic growth brought international flows of capital and therefore social stability. In broad strokes, policies were socially inclined until 1970 when Neo-Liberalism transformed education into a business rather than a social good. Whether education should be a public resource rather than a commercial commodity is a continuing controversy.

One may view Ontario’s current focus on access to PSE as a remedy. Since the 1980s, access has been a policy interest, driven by enrolment-based funding mechanisms and a strong commitment to financial aid (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario [HEQCO], n.d.a). In the report Ontario, A Leader in Learning: Reports and Recommendations, Rae (2005) discussed the state of the postsecondary system in Ontario, and made a number of recommendations for improvement. One of the goals set for Premier McGuinty and the Minister of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) was to “reach out and expand the opportunities for those capable of participating in higher education” (Rae, 2005, p. 32) but who are under-represented in PSE.

Rae (2005) made six recommendations to increase opportunities for under-represented groups to access PSE, of which the key points are: (1) Better information: Set up and maintain a web portal as a resource for current information on postsecondary institutions, programs, and admissions; (2) Participation targets: Set targets for growth in participation of students from
under-represented groups; (3) Aboriginal students: Extend support to Aboriginal institutions for recognized postsecondary programming; (4) First Generation Strategy: Assist students who are the first in their family to participate in PSE through outreach and support once enrolled; (5) Students with disabilities: Require institutions to reach out to students with disabilities within their institution and in their communities to ease the transition to PSE; and (6) Promote family savings for education. These six recommendations were a call to action for social inclusion.

1.5 Contemporary Context

In 2006, 16% of jobs in Canada were classified as requiring a university degree or equivalent (Yuen, 2010). Between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of people pursuing post-secondary education increased from 53% to 60% for people ages 25 to 64 (Yuen 2010). The sharpest increase of individuals pursuing higher education was at the university level where the number of students increased by 32% despite the tuition rate also increasing during this same time period (Yuen, 2010). In 2012, Ontario had the highest percentage (31%) of people ages 25 to 64 with a university degree when compared to other Canadian provinces, with New Brunswick the lowest at 18% (The Conference Board of Canada, n. d.). This is in part a result of an almost 35% increase in government expenditure on PSE in 1995/1996 and 2005/2006 — an increase from $24 billion to $31 billion (Yuen, 2010). Between 2004 and 2014 Ontario increased funding for PSE by 83%. For example, the province’s 30% Off Tuition Grant along with other financial aid from the Ontario government helped more than 230,000 students start college or university in 2013 (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU], 2013; MTCU, 2014). In the 2013/2014 academic year, 512,712 students were enrolled in universities, of whom 429,585 were full-time students, and 83,124 were part-time students (Statistics Canada, 2015).
Rae, in his 2005 report, identified groups who continue to face barriers accessing PSE despite initiatives such as financial aid: francophone, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and those who are the first in their families to attend PSE. These finding still hold true in 2016 (HEQCO, 2016).

1.6 Rationale

This topic is noteworthy and holds relevance for the field of PSE, specifically within Ontario. There is a need to further the understanding of how students are categorized through discourse in terms of their geographic location, and commitments to certain academic and institutional agendas that support the universities’ intentions to stand out as contributors to local, national, and international communities and partnerships.

It is important for all stakeholders of PSE to be conscious of the discourse within documents which represent the institution. This is particularly true of MSs, and the differentiation section of the SMAs because of the purpose of both documents, and because of their intended use. There are a number of implications for the public, the university, and the government, considering hegemony in policy and policy implementation. Based on how MSs are interpreted (and by whom), universities may need to consider what is, and what is not included within the document, as well as possible interpretations. Moreover, government funding may be allocated based on variables associated with differentiation. Discourse, and interpreted meanings within these documents may affect contemporary policy implementation, and the extent to which the SMAs fulfill their purpose. Will equitable access for under-represented groups be as frequently stated within the documents as academic characteristics such as research intensity? Lastly, there is meant to be an alignment between MSs and SMAs (MTCU, 2013), and so, will misalignment between each university’s MS and SMA have implications for how the two
documents are meant to be implemented? These questions are beyond the scope of this study. My intention is to identify how often the diversity of students, particularly underrepresented groups is mentioned, and to analyse how they are mentioned in university policies.

1.7 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which Ontario universities address equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups in their Mission Statements (MSs) and Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs). Through critical discourse analysis (CDA) the following questions will be answered:

1) How do Ontario universities address diversity, equity, access, diversity, and under-represented groups within their MSs and within the differentiation section of their SMAs?

2) How do these documents communicate who are considered valued applicants?

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Discourse refers to expressing oneself using words, which creates a context for hegemony (McGregor, 2003). Discourse must be understood in its specific historical and political context (Locke, 2004). As a theoretical framework, CDA views power in society as an inevitable effect of how particular discursive configurations privilege the status and position of some people over others (Locke, 2004). Within educational research, CDA may reveal the way power is diffused through the prevalence of various discourses throughout the micro- and macro-levels of an education system, and in other settings. Locke (2004) argues: “CDA has to be seen as a political intervention with its own socially transformative agenda” (p. 2).

Fairclough (1992) writes about discourse analysis as a practice by which to examine multiple disciplines. Locke (2004) presents a summation of Fairclough’s (1992) three theoretical
dimensions of discursive practice, describing how interpretations occur through CDA as a method. Firstly, interpretation manifests in a linguistic form within text (Fairclough 1992). Here, the process of CDA focuses on patterns in language which extend to other related signifying systems (Locke, 2004). Secondly, interpretation is an instantiation of a social practice (political, ideological, etc.) (Fairclough, 1992). Here, the focus of interpretation is on the way in which texts reflect larger patterns of social practice (ways of identifying, thinking, and being in the world) (Locke, 2004). The third dimension focuses on socially constructed processes of production, distribution, and consumption which determine how texts are made, circulated, and used (Fairclough, 1992). Here, interpretation highlights the ways in which texts operate in the world (how they are made, disseminated, and read) also drawing attention to the relationships between texts (Locke, 2004).

Literacy is pertinent to CDA as a theoretical framework. Gee (1996) defines traditional literacy as the ability to code language (as a writer) and to decode writing (as a reader). In this view, textual interpretation is psychological as it occurs in the reader’s head. The ability to decode results in understanding the meaning of text. Locke (2004) extends this by stating that meaning, consequently, is inherent in text, and corresponds to the real world. An alternative to this traditional view is the sociocultural approach, where, as described by Locke (2004), literacy is a set of socially constructed practices that readers and writers are apprentices of as members of a particular social group. Here, different types of text require different ways of reading, allowing for the same text to be read in different ways that derive different meanings. It is the theoretical view of literacy that frames this study, as this “approach to literacy allows for the observation that some versions of ‘literate’ practices [that] are discursively constructed as having higher status than others” (Locke, 2004, p. 13). Through the social semiotic point of view (the process
through which society constructs meaning, and its effects), Hodge and Kress (1988) present the relationship between the traditional, and sociocultural approaches to literacy which encapsulates the theoretical framework of this study. Hodge and Kress argue that “texts are both the material realization of systems of signs, and also the site where change continuously takes place” (p. 6). Bakhtin (1986) also connects language and society through intertextuality, where the history of society is connected to the history of language. Consequently, all discourse is a response to the discourses that came before, including the language system used, the preceding discourses, and creators of those previous discourses. This creates a relationship with audience and past discourse by “build[ing] upon them, polemiciz[ing] with them, or simply presum[ing] that they are already known to the listener” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69). Therefore, discourse is social in origin in that it recalls past discourses, and anticipates future ones, and it is the social context that elicits descriptions of discourse, and that makes the analysis meaningful (Locke, 2004).

In sum, a critical orientation to discourse analysis is based on several assumptions according to Kincheloe and McLaren (1994). Firstly, that all thought is fundamentally mediated by history, and is socially situated in power relations. Secondly, that language is central to the formation of conscious, and unconscious awareness (subjectivity). Thirdly, that some groups are privileged in society over others, and that oppression that characterizes societies is reproduced when those with less power accept their social status as natural. Moreover, fact is always subjective to an individual’s perception. Lastly, that mainstream research practices are implicated in the reproduction of class, race, and gender oppression.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

The data sources within this study are the 20 Ontario universities’ MSs and the differentiation section of the 20 SMAs. These are not departmental MSs, but rather, the MSs of
the universities that were selected for the study. MSs were obtained from university websites. SMAs are available on the website of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (formerly the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities). The purpose and function of SMAs are discussed in this study, as well as the purpose and function of the differentiation section within the SMAs. Sections of the SMAs other than the differentiation section are outside the scope of this study. The 40 documents were analyzed using CDA with a particular emphasis on identifying power imbalance. The findings are unique to Ontario, as each province serves a unique population, and so MSs will also be unique. Moreover, SMAs are a provincial initiative.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the historical, and contemporary context of equitable access for diverse and under-represented groups in Ontario PSE, specifically in universities. In Chapter 2 I will review the literature about social inclusion, as well as the purposes and functions of university MSs and SMAs. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, and discusses the purpose and process of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Chapter 4 presents the results of the CDA. Chapter 5 discusses the implications for social inclusion, and policy in practice.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses the difference in definitions of the terms *diversity, equity, access,* and *under-represented groups.* The literature review does not include social inclusion *agendas,* widening participation, access initiatives, and the experience of diversity workers. It is the definitions which will allow for greater consideration, accuracy, and similarity in interpretation of the terms, which becomes important when examining references within MSs and SMAs.

2.1 Diversity

The Canadian Human Rights Code (1990) lists grounds for which people are protected from discrimination. That list includes age, ancestry (colour, race), citizenship, ethnic origin, place of origin, Creed, dis/ability, family status, marital status (including single status), gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public (housing) assistance, record of offences (in employment only), sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding), and sexual orientation. It could be said that Canada’s Human Rights Code forbids discrimination based on social identity and diversity.

Defining the term *diversity* is important as the definitions of equity and equality are dependent upon it: do we treat all people the same (equality), or do we recognize diversity and seek to remove barriers (equity)? Ontario maintains the definition of diversity with Canada’s Human Rights Code (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). However, the scholars whose works are summarized below do not include gender identity or sexual orientation in their definitions of diversity within PSE.

Ashford et al. (2008) argues that *ethnic or racial* diversity in the university is a prerequisite for quality, and for the safeguarding of the broader cultural, social, and economic
contributions of PSE. The authors write out of Ontario, however, according to the American Council on Education (ACE), Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the International Association of Universities (IAU) (2004), and Ahmed (2012), the fact that a university has, in its student and/or faculty body, visible minorities, does not make it a culturally diverse setting. Counting non-whites is an inappropriate measure of diversity.

Inglis (1996) presents definitions related to the terms cultural diversity and multicultural. Her demographic application of the terms refers to ethnic or racial diversity within populations in a society. The programmatic-political usage refers to programmes or policy initiatives designed to respond to or manage ethnic diversity. Here, diversity is viewed as a problem to be solved. The ideological application of multiculturalism – a term sometimes used synonymously with diversity – refers to political action based on sociological theories, and ethical philosophical considerations about the place of those with distinct cultural identities in society. Ashford et al. (2008) comment on the latter definition, writing that “the marketing of universities as invested in diversity, and as paradigmatically multicultural may be more of an ideal than a reality” (p. 42). This ideological lens makes clear a need to account for claims of diversity, whether explicit or implicit, within official documents representing a university.

Ahmed (2012) contends that because diversity is not a term that has one widely agreed upon definition, the application of the term becomes a convenience, such as the opening of a diversity office in a university without necessarily providing resources or support, or the inclusion of the term in documents such as MSs. Moreover, advocacy for diversity has become associated with the identification of current racist practices, and so attention to diversity may be resisted. In sum, diversity can be applied as a “blanket” term which may allow readers to easily
associate with the “diverse” group and therefore, become the subject that the university addresses in the texts. Moreover, implicit messages may be interpreted as pertaining to access or the value of diverse applicant groups.

2.2 Equity

The Ontario Ministry of Education defines equity as being a state of “fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people,” not the same treatment for all people without regard for individual differences (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, p. 9), which is equality. When discussing equity, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014b) treats inclusive public education as education that is based on the principles of acceptance, and inclusion of all students. In the ideal of inclusive public education, students see themselves reflected in classroom content, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured, and all individuals are respected.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014b) also notes the economic, and societal importance of equity in an education system: “Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario’s future prosperity” (p. 1). Conversely, Finnie et al. (2011) provide a social justice perspective on the importance of equity in PSE. Finnie et al. suggest:

“Equal access is also important from an equity perspective, since the opportunity to benefit from the life-changing experiences PSE typically provides should be available to all those who have the talent to do so and who wish to make these investments.” (p. 3)

Although Acker (2006) is of the same view, she argues that inequality is inevitable, as all organizations have inequality regimes, “defined loosely as interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within
particular organizations” (p. 355). For example, department heads have more power than professors, and those identifying valuable applicants in institutional MS or SMAs have more power than potential applicants.

2.3 Under-represented Groups

When identifying groups in Ontario who are under-represented within postsecondary institutions, or those who face disadvantages for access, or those whose retention rates within PSE are low, Finnie et al. (2011), Rae (2005), and HEQCO (n.d.b) identify similar groups. Finnie et al. (2011) provide statistics based on the Ontario sample of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS, Cohort A). The first cycle of this survey started with samples of students in Canada who were age 15 in 1999. These students were followed through their later years of high school, and beyond. The demographics are in the following proportions: those from low-income families and first-generation students (28.9%) combined, those living in rural areas or far from a campus (16%), those whose mother tongue is French (4%), first- and second-generation immigrants (38%), those from single-parent or non-traditional families (17%), those with disabilities (11%), and those who identify as Aboriginal or First Nations (2.3%).

There have been debates about what qualifies an individual to be categorized into one of the above under-represented groups, particularly when funding is allocated for a group. This may be because of definitions around under-represented groups changing over time, particularly the definition of first-generation students (Doran, Ferguson, Khan, Ryu, Naimool, Hanson, & Childs, 2015). However, a number of authors have similar definitions. The following definitions are those used by Finnie et al. (2011). First-generation students are defined as those whose parents did not attend any form of PSE. Rural students as those who lived in an area classified as rural during high school. First-generation immigrant students are those born outside of Canada, and
second-generation immigrants are students born in Canada but with at least one parent born outside of Canada. In the YITS survey, Aboriginal students are defined as those who were identified by their parents as being North-American Indian, Métis, or Inuit. Lastly, students with disabilities include those with physical, sensory and/or cognitive disabilities.

Finnie et al. (2011) use the term under-represented groups synonymously with non-traditional groups. However, discussing groups whose attendance in PSE is non-traditional is not aligned with the aim of identifying which groups are under-represented. Under-represented groups are those less represented in PSE than in the population, often due to systemic barriers. “Traditional” implies a culturally and historically valued, voluntary action. One chooses to partake in tradition thus contributing to what has been shown to work, and what is valued. “Traditional” students belong to a group that has contributed to the evolution of the system. Based on this analysis of discourse, “non-traditional” students do not belong to what the “traditional” group represents, therefore having no historical connection which positively contributed to the development of the university. Non-traditional students are assumed to be part of a group that “intentionally/voluntarily” was not a part of the history of Ontario PSE. Those groups that have been traditionally represented within PSE attendance have become more powerful than non-traditional students who have been shown they hold less power. “Non-traditional” does not imply barriers to participation. The same concept holds true for Finnie et al.’s (2011) use of the term non-traditional families as synonymous with single-parent families. One must ask, traditional according to what? The nuclear family where a man works to support his home-maker wife and two children is less common when compared to other family compositions (Statistics Canada, 2015).
2.4 Access

Finnie et al. (2011) summarize the reasons why under-represented groups are a concern for policy-makers, and why they are disadvantaged in terms of accessing PSE. For students from low-income families, affordability is a barrier to accessing PSE, though it is these students who would experience benefits greater than the cost of pursuing PSE. The barriers to accessing PSE experienced by first-generation students are cultural more than financial. Parental education may affect the student’s attitude toward PSE (Finnie et al., 2011). A combination of financial barriers which arise from having to commute, in addition to cultural effects, act as barriers for rural students, though how neighbourhood culture creates access barriers was not discussed by Finnie et al. (2011). The authors identify a lack of Canadian studies on access rates of students from single-parent families. Finnie et al. (2011) measure factors such as parental education, high school grades, and parental expectations for their child’s schooling to help explain how first- and second-generation immigrants from certain regions or ethnicities have lower access rates than others. Access barriers for native French speakers are systemic (e.g., income, parental education, parents’ aspirations) rather than linguistic (Finnie et al., 2011). Finnie et al. state that it is PSE access being conditional on grades that create access barriers for those from Aboriginal or First Nations ancestry.

When discussing access to PSE, Miner (2011) groups students with disabilities within two groups: students with sensory motor and/or learning disabilities. Students with disabilities have significant financial challenges and their total income may not be sufficient to attend PSE (Finnie et al., 2011).

Although many universities implement access initiatives and programs to improve retention rates for under-represented students, many do not rigorously evaluate effectiveness,
with many institutions not having the capacity or resources to communicate their best practices with the greater postsecondary sector (HEQCO, n.d.b).

Relevant to social inclusion work is the debate about whether PSE is a public good or a private asset. Ashford et al. (2008) question who is accountable for delivering scholastic opportunity to Canadians regardless of family income, families or government. They see the inability of some Canadians to attend PSE as the result of a system that alienates those who face access barriers. This results in those individuals being less likely to participate in electoral activity, maintain a high quality of health, feel financially secure, and therefore have the means to support their own children’s PSE. This results in a cyclically reproduced two-tiered culture. According to Canadian economists, serious recruitment efforts for PSE are necessary if Canada is to sustain its prosperity in an increasingly global and knowledge-based economy (Ashford et al., 2008).

2.5 Scope and Limitations

This literature review is not exhaustive, but illustrates the variety of focuses and approaches to promoting equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups, and the variation in definitions of equity and diversity. The literature reviewed was published between 2005 and 2015, with the exception of Inglis (1996) which is a vital document within the field. The majority of the literature is from the MTCU and HEQCO (an agency that works at arms-length from the Ontario government). The majority of the scholarly works discuss PSE in Ontario but also across the broader Canadian context. Inglis’s (1996) work was published in Paris, Khalifa (2012) in the United Arab Emirates, and Ahmed (2012) in the United Kingdom, albeit all of these authors present data or concepts that have wide implications.
2.6 Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2 I reviewed literature relevant to this study. In Chapter 3 I will introduce the methodology. Specifically, I will address the study’s research questions, research design, site selection, data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions, the university MSs and SMAs will be analyzed. I will argue that both documents reflect each university’s characters, core ideologies, and aspirations.

3.1 Research Questions

3.1.1 Overall Research Question

How do the 20 Ontario universities address equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups in their mission statements and in the differentiation section of their SMAs?

3.1.2 Specific Research Questions

Through critical discourse analysis (CDA), the following specific questions will be answered:

1) How do Ontario universities address diversity, equity, access, diversity, and under-represented groups within their MSs and within the differentiation section of their SMAs?

2) How do these documents communicate who are considered valued applicants?

3.2 Research Design

In this section, I will first discuss the methodology that will be used for this study, particularly critical discourse analysis. Subsequent discussion will focus on why the institutions examined in this study were selected.

3.2.1 Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse is shaped and constrained by (1) Social structure (ethnicity, gender, status, age, class); (2) Culture (professional culture, socializations, social structure, social status, home culture); and (3) Discourse (the words and language chosen shaping identities, relationships, and systems of knowledge and beliefs) (McGregor 2003). By describing, interpreting, analyzing, and
critiquing discourse, CDA aims to reveal sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias, and to question the extent to which resemblances can be found in social, economic, political, and historical contexts (McGregor, 2003; Van Dijk, 2001). Therefore, the purpose of CDA is to resist ideological assumptions hidden in discourses where discourse may result in social inequalities. Moreover, CDA theoretically bridges the gap between discourse at the micro level (e.g., a racist statement in parliament) and the macro effect (e.g., policies created with racist connotations) (Van Dijk, 2001). This bridging of the gap is done by being aware of the individual member groups, the action-process, the context-social structure, and the personal and social cognition, of which Van Dijk (2001) provides details. Although forms of CDA vary theoretically and analytically (McGregor, 2003; Van Dijk, 2001), the purpose of CDA is typically realized through determining the relationship between: (1) the actual text; (2) the discursive practices (process of discourse); and (3) the larger social context that is relevant to the text and the discursive practices (McGregor, 2003). There are several key tenets in CDA: (a) social problems should be addressed, (b) power relations vary between subjects, (c) society and culture are shaped by discourse which is a social action, (d) discourse is historic, (f) the link between text and society is mediated, and (g) CDA work is ideological and therefore exploratory and interpretive (McGregor, 2003; Van Dijk, 2001).

CDA is appropriate for this study because it enables the analysis of the central notion of power and control through discourse in university MSs and SMAs. As discussed by Van Dijk (2001), varying levels of power are dependent upon the resources employed, although control may be limited to specific situations. The power of dominant groups may be evidenced in laws, rules, norms, or habits, or in this case MSs and SMAs. Moreover, power may be enacted in a variety of taken-for-granted actions, such as, in this instance, the government providing
resources to implement the differentiation policy, and the need of universities to align SMAs and MSs. I contend that this resulted in both documents reflecting who will be considered a valuable applicant and who will not, depending on how each university has decided to be differentiated.

### 3.2.2 Site Selection

All 20 of the Ontario universities were selected for this study. The Royal Military College of Canada is not included because it has a singular purpose of producing officers in the Canadian Armed Forces. The differences among the 20 universities are succinctly summarized by Weingarten, Hicks, Joncker, and Liu (2013). They suggest that the University of Toronto is unique in comprehensiveness and research intensity, as evidenced by the large number of doctoral degrees granted, research income, publications, and citations. Six of the twenty universities cluster at the upper end of research intensity: Guelph, McMaster, Ottawa, Queen’s, Waterloo, and Western. Nine universities are mainly undergraduate universities that are less involved in graduate education, and attract a lower level of research income: Algoma, Brock, Laurier, Lakehead, Laurentian, Nipissing, Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD), Trent, and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). UOIT and OCAD have specialized mandates and are sometimes placed in a category of “special purpose universities” (p. 17). Lastly, York, Carleton, Windsor, and Ryerson fall between the more research intensive and mainly undergraduate clusters.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

I analysed the 20 Ontario Universities’ MSs and the differentiation section of their SMAs. Both the MSs and SMAs are publicly available.
3.3.1 Mission Statements

Regardless of whether a university should be a public good or a commodity, a MS identifies an institution’s core ideology which maintains the organization’s continuity, defining the character of the organization, what it stands for and why it exists, as well as institutional aspirations (Khalifa, 2012). In 2004, ACE, AUCC, CHEA, and IAU, as well as Universities Canada (n.d.) outlined how MSs are meant to present their university’s commitment to contribute to the broader public good. This includes a commitment to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of communities, international education, outreach, linguistic and cultural diversity, critical thinking, and responsible citizenship at the local, national, and global levels. I contend that a statement within an institution’s MS can be attributed to institutional character, core ideologies, and aspirations.

3.3.2 Strategic Mandate Agreements

SMAs were negotiated with individual institutions based on Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education, with the first cycle of agreements in effect from 2014 to 2017 (MTCU, 2014). The SMAs had several purposes. Firstly, SMAs are meant to promote the government’s stated goal of increasing the differentiation of the Ontario postsecondary institutions through identification of institutionally distinctive strengths or aspirations, and of key objectives aligned with those aspirations (HECQO, 2013; MTCU, 2013; MTCU, 2014). This suggests that there should be an alignment between SMAs and MSs (MTCU, 2013). Secondly, SMAs are intended to advance productivity of the Ontario PSE system by providing quality education to more students, and so supporting the local and global economies (HECQO, 2013; MTCU, 2013; MTCU, 2014). Therefore, a main purpose of the SMAs is to increase access for students. Thirdly, SMAs are meant to direct universities in
reforming their institution and the PSE system across Ontario in order to support higher quality (HECQO, 2013; MTCU, 2014). To follow are details of the differentiation section of the SMAs which is what has been analyzed within this study.

3.3.2.1 Differentiation

The stated purpose of differentiation of Ontario universities is to allow the government of Ontario to focus on the well-established strengths of institutions, enabling them to operate together as complementary parts of a whole, and providing students affordable access to PSE as the government eventually aligns policies, processes, and funding levers with Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework (MTCU, 2013). The Ontario government asserts that differentiation is the most powerful lever available to the government. Research has shown that a differentiated PSE system will result in competitiveness, higher quality teaching and research programs, more student choice with easier inter-institution transfer and mobility, greater institutional transparency, a more globally competitive system, and a more financially sustainable system (Weingarten & Deller, 2010; MTCU, 2013; MTCU, 2014).

3.4 Data Analysis

The following steps were taken in conducting this study:

- Step 1: Using NVivo qualitative analysis software, the 20 Ontario university MSs and the differentiation section of the SMAs were searched for terms related to equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups (Figures 1 and 2).
- Step 2: NVivo was used to identify the top 100 most frequently used words across the 40 documents, as well as to find the frequency of use of other terms related to social inclusion which were outside of the top 100.
• Step 3: The text of the 40 documents (line-by-line, and across concepts) was annotated, identifying subject matter and key terms, raising questions, and suggesting interpretations.

• Step 4. The text of the 40 documents was read again through the lens of CDA, with particular attention to who is being given power and who is not, where in the document certain statements are made and what that implies about the importance of the subject, and what is not being said. Memos were made, and the interpretations were qualitatively coded line-by-line, and across concepts.

• Step 5. A coding matrix query was created for the explicit codes (Step 3) and implicit codes (Step 4) to identify themes, and relationships. Codes that occurred with greater frequency than the average were retained.

• Step 6. Step 5 was repeated on the retained themes (Tables 1 and 2). These relationships among the themes were examined (Figures 5, 14). Because the significant theme relationships have multiple cross citations (Figure 5), the significant theme which all other significant themes had a relationship with (“Geography”) was chosen as the focus of further analyses. For the SMAs, there were two sets of significant theme relationships (Figure 14), and so the cluster around “Geography” was chosen because it was almost as frequent as the cluster around “Academic Image,” and it would allow for a comparison to the significant theme relationships in the MSs which also clustered around (“Geography”). The three relationships with the highest citation frequency were selected for the SMAs (Figure 15).

• Step 7: Content within the significant theme relationships across MSs and SMAs was further analyzed. Firstly, an example of qualitative coding of the explicit text was re-
introduced and the coding relationship was presented (Figures 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 16) under each Significant Theme Relationship (across both MSs and SMAs).

- **Step 8**: An example of the process of CDA interpretations was prepared (Figure 4).
- **Step 9**: Based on the process of CDA, valued applicants (those allocated more power in discourse) were identified within their respective theme relationships.
- **Step 10**: The valued applicants across the significant theme relationships were compiled and their document source identified. The analyses were grouped together and presented through concise summations. The valued applicants that can be inferred from both the MSs and the SMAs were highlighted.

### 3.5 Chapter Summary

I contend that universities’ MSs and SMAs should be expected to reflect the universities’ stances toward increasing access. The methodology section introduced and outlined the process of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and explained how this qualitative method allows for an analysis of university MSs and SMAs.
4.1 Step 1 Key Term Search

Figures 1 and 2 show the frequencies of terms related to social inclusion, in the MSs and SMAs. The asterisks indicate terms that included variations, i.e. *Aboriginal represents a search including First Nations and Indigenous; *disabilities represents a search including disabled, disability, and disabilities; *equity/equality represents a search including equitable, and equal. Figure 1 represents the number of times a term relating to social inclusion was cited, and how many of the 20 Ontario University mission statements the terms were cited within (source count). Figure 2 represents the number of times a term relating to social inclusion was cited, and how many of the 20 Ontario university SMAs the terms were cited within (source count).

Figure 1. Frequencies of social inclusion terms across 20 Ontario university MSs.
Figure 2. Frequencies of social inclusion terms across 20 Ontario university SMAs (Differentiation).

The 100 most frequently used words across the 20 MSs and across the SMAs were also identified. Across the 20 MSs, “Research” was ranked second after university, appearing 21 times within 13 of the 20 MSs. “Culture” was ranked 20th, “Aboriginal” 26th, “Diverse” 64th, “Diversity” 65th, and “Accessibility” 89th. The remainder of the terms in Figures 1 and 2 did not appear within the top 100 most frequently cited. It is interesting to note the difference between the MSs and SMAs. In the SMAs, research is still ranked second; however, “Access” is now the 21st most frequent word, “Cultural” is 32nd, “Aboriginal” 39th, “Culture” 41st, “Bilingual” 64th, and “Diverse” 70th.

It is important to note that some of these items have multiple meanings. For example, in some instances “diversity” was used to describe programming, and not people. Moreover, “culture” is a term that could apply to ethnicity, or numerous other applications such as “culture of academia.” Nonetheless, when combining the various derivatives of “access*” (see codebook), there are three instances across the 20 MSs, and 8 across the 20 SMAs. “Access” was
the leading relevant term when looking at the frequency ranks of the documents. To identify what was being discussed, the content of each MS and SMA was coded.

4.2 Step 2 Qualitative Coding of Mission Statements

In this section, I will first introduce the process of qualitative coding of MSs. To follow is a depiction of the process of interpretation through CDA. Next, I will present the themes which emerged through the process of CDA, and the relationship among themes. Those relationships will be presented with particular focus on valued applicants and will be introduced with an example of coding for each relationship. This analysis will be repeated for the SMAs.

4.2.1 Identification of Themes in Mission Statements

Figure 3 is part of the MS of a university in Ontario that has been qualitatively coded. (The codebook in Appendix A defines the significant themes.)

![Figure 3. Example of qualitative coding of the MSs and SMAs.](image)

Figure 4 depicts the process of interpretation through CDA of the text in Figure 3.
Figure 4. Process of Critical Discourse Analysis and interpreted meaning.

After completing the coding process on the interpretations of the 20 Ontario university MSs, NVivo was used to create a coding matrix query (CMQ) to identify co-occurring themes. There were eighteen codes which emerged through the qualitative coding process. Codes with higher frequencies were identified as themes (see Appendix A for codebook). The themes to be analyzed within the MSs are “Altruism,” “Academic Image,” “Commitment,” “Geography,” and “Community/Community Service.” Table 1 presents instances of similar statements, and the citation count within each significant theme, while Figure 5 illustrates the significant themes in
relation to each other. Figure 5 includes the number of citations within each relationship. The bolded numbers indicating a relationship with Geography are those which will be analyzed.

Table 1

Coding Matrix of the Significant Themes across 20 Ontario University Mission Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Altruism</th>
<th>Academic Image</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Community / Service</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Image</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community / Service</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Average</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Depicted are the themes (frequency codes) that emerged through the qualitative coding of the 20 Ontario university mission statements. The bolded numbers indicate a high frequency of citations between two themes indicating a significant theme across the documents. High frequency citations are those greater than the column average.

Figure 5. Significant theme relationships.
This process revealed that throughout the 20 MSs, institutional commitments, community/service, academic image, and altruism have some relationship with geography. Therefore, the following relationships will be discussed; geography and community/service, geography and commitments, geography and academic image, geography and altruism. An example of the relationships in the figure above can be observed through the examples of qualitative coding of MSs.

4.2.1.1 Geography and Academic Image

Figure 6 provides an example of the relationship between “Geography” and “Academic Image.” The codebook in Appendix A defines the significant themes.

*We are unique because of our location in the heart of the nation’s capital, our bilingualism and commitment to the promotion of French culture in Ontario, and the excellence of our scholarship. As a research-intensive university, we provide our students with an outstanding education and enrich the intellectual, economic and cultural life of Canada, helping our country play an important and valued role among the nations of the world.*

**Figure 6: Example of MS text illustrating a relationship between “Geography” and “Academic Image.”**

As shown in Figure 6, there is a strong tie between the scholarly pursuits of the institution and the geographic location. Although the school being unique for its location, and the excellence of scholarship are not connected, they become connected with the next statement which ties the research intensity of the school (and therefore research actions) with the instilling of cultural life in Canada (through its students). This institution differentiates itself as a helper of nations. This is what can be interpreted from reading the explicit text. Next, I present an analysis of the MS through CDA.
Based on CDA, within the theme of Geography and Academic Image the valued applicants across the 20 Ontario universities are:

- Those from a certain Geographic area, typically in the surrounding area/ “community” of the university;
- Those with research interests that align with the universities goals (e.g., developing the university as a key contributor of community betterment), and partnerships (local, national, international);
- Those who will help maintain the environment within the school (e.g., safety);
- “High-quality” students;
- Academically inclined above other traits;
- Aboriginal communities;
- French/English speakers; and
- Global citizens: Who will network and function with/in other institutions, governments, businesses, locally, nationally, and internationally, and contribute to those communities.

Within these two significant themes, were “Problematic Interpreted Themes” where a reader may feel identified as an insider or outsider (more or less valued), may have interpreted meaning which was not explicitly stated or intended, or may feel that a statement was possibly derogatory (offensive to the reader). See Appendix A for Codebook, or refer again to Figure 6 which identifies how the themes were derived. The frequency count of such instances is presented in Figure 7; specifically, Figure 7 presents the number of instances of implicit meanings cited from the relationship between the significant themes of “Geography” and “Academic Image” as well as the number of documents those citations were found in. The codebook in Appendix A defines each theme.
Figure 7. “Geography” and “Academic Image”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university MSs.

4.2.1.2 Geography and Commitment

Figure 8 is an example of the relationship between the “Geography” and “Commitment” themes. In this case, what the university aims to develop is its commitments, specifically in the indicated geographic locations.

Based on CDA, within the theme of Geography and Commitment, the valued applicants across the 20 Ontario universities are:

- Leaders who will align academic interests to that of the universities’ learning objectives and commit to life-long learning;
- Those who will align their academic interests to local, national, and international development;
- Those who can function within the environment at the universities, e.g., those with a spirit of inquiry, but above all those who are intellectually excellent;
- Those who are global citizens and collaborators: network and function with/in other institutions, governments, businesses, locally, nationally, and internationally; and
Those who recognize the universities’ need to better the community and who will contribute.

As for the previous relationship (Geography and Commitment), the frequency count of interpretations is presented in Figure 9. Specifically, this figure represents the number of instances of implicit meanings cited from the relationship between the significant themes of “Geography” and “Commitment” as well as the number of documents those citations were found in.

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9.** “Geography” and “Commitment”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university MSs.

4.2.1.3 Geography and Community / Service

Figure 10 is an example of the relationship between the “Geography” and “Community/Service” themes. In this case, what the university encourages, results in the benefit and therefore service to communities in the geographic locations mentioned.

![Figure 10](image)

**Figure 10.** Example of MS text illustrating a relationship between “Geography” and “Community/Service.”
Based on CDA, within the theme of Geography and Commitment, the valued applicants across the twenty MSs are:

- Students who are Aboriginal or First Nations;
- International learners;
- Those connected to the geographic site of the university, e.g., via connection to the history or culture of the area;
- Those who will serve society through scholarship;
- Those who will serve the nation(s) via academia, e.g., knowledge dissemination that aligns to the interests of the university;
- Those with a global perspective that aligns with that of the universities’;
- Those who will help the university serve its social, economic, and community needs of the society, geographic or academic partnerships;
- Those with the valued character and work ethic;
- Those who will assist in the university maintaining or becoming more recognized internationally for its valued academic contributions; and
- Life-long learners.

The frequency count of problematic interpretations is presented in Figure 11. Specifically, this figure represents the number of instances of implicit meanings cited from the relationship between the significant themes of “Geography” and “Community/Service” as well as the number of documents those citations were found in. The codebook in Appendix A defines each theme.
Figure 11. “Geography” and “Community/Service”; Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university MSs.

4.2.1.4 Geography and Altruism

Figure 12 is an example of the relationship between the “Geography” and “Altruism” themes. Figure 13 represents the number of instances of implicit meanings cited from the relationship between the significant themes of “Geography” and “Altruism” as well as the number of documents those citations were found in. In this case, the service provided by the university develops the geographic community, nations, and community of nations which implies the university expending resources to develop communities with no promise of returns to the university. Consequently, the university exemplifies Altruism (see Appendix A for codebook).

Figure 12. Example of MS text illustrating a relationship between “Geography” and “Altruism.”

Based on the above, and within the theme of Geography and Altruism, the valued applicants across the twenty MSs are:

- Students who are Aboriginal or First Nations;
- International learners;
• Those connected to the geographic site of the university, i.e., via connection to the history or culture of the area;
• Those who will serve society through scholarship;
• Those who will serve the nation(s) via academia, e.g., knowledge dissemination that aligns to the interests of the university;
• Those with a global perspective that align with that of the universities’;
• Those who will help the school serve its social, economic, and community needs, of the societal, geographic, or academic partnerships;
• Those with the valued character and work ethic;
• Those who will assist in the university maintaining or becoming more recognized internationally for its valued academic contributions; and
• Life-long learners.

The frequency count of problematic interpretations is presented in Figure 13.

![Figure 13](image)

**Figure 13.** “Geography” and “Altruism”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university MSs.

4.3 Step 3: Qualitative Coding of Strategic Mandate Agreements (Differentiation)

Continuing the document analysis on the differentiation section of the twenty SMAs, the significant themes which emerged are presented in Table 2 along with citation count.
### Table 2

**Coding Matrix of Significant Themes across 20 Ontario University SMAs (Differentiation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Themes</th>
<th>Significant Themes</th>
<th>Academic Programs</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Altruism</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Community / Service</th>
<th>Student Centred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-disciplinary Partnerships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Image Programs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community / Service</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Centred</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column average</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** This table depicts the themes (frequently occurring codes) that emerged through the qualitative coding of the differentiation section of the twenty SMAs. The shaded numbers indicate a high frequency of citations between two themes indicating a significant theme across the documents. High frequency citations are those above the column average.

Figure 14 depicts the significant themes within SMAs from Table 2 in relation to each other. There are too many to present and so the relationships that are more prominent will be discussed. Although the significant theme “Academic Image” was more predominant than any
other cluster of themes, “Geography” had just one less connection, and so it was chosen to allow a comparison with the geographic content within the MS.

Figure 14. Mapping the significant theme relationships within the SMAs (Differentiation).

Figure 15 represents the themes to be analysed. Because six relationships were too many to analyse, the relationships highlighted in this figure were selected to analyse due to the higher citation counts. Within this cluster of relationships in Figure 15, the smaller the arrow, the closer the themes are together (the stronger the relationship). The numbers represent citation count. Findings presented will be based on data within these three relationships.
Figure 15. This figure depicts the significant themes in relation to “Geography” including the number of citations within each relationship.

4.3.1 Geography and Significance

Figure 16 is an example of the relationship between the “Geography” and “Significance” themes. In this case, the contributions of this university are implied to be necessary for the geographic location to transition to the desired, or required, economic structure.

University A’s continued focus on teaching and learning for undergraduate students is helping to develop the talent, skills, and knowledge needed for the Sault Ste. Marie region’s transition to a knowledge-based economy.

Figure 16. Example of MS text illustrating a relationship between “Geography” and “Significance.”

Based on CDA within the theme of Geography and Significance, the valued applicants across the twenty SMAs are:
• Students within the universities’ geographic location;
• Students who will assist the university in developing the geographic region;
• First Nation, first-generation, and rural students;
• Those students who will allow/contribute to the school developing the economic, social, and cultural geographic community;
• Highly qualified people;
• National and international students who are “excellent”;
• Students who will utilize and create university partnerships with business, industry, government, community organizations, and global research partnerships, thus upholding the balance between academic and student centeredness (which is why the university is valued), and who will enhance society, discover, and innovate;
• French/English speakers; and
• Transfer students from the local community college.

The frequency count of problematic interpretations is presented in Figure 17.

![Figure 17](image)

*Figure 17. “Geography” and “Significance”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university SMAs (Differentiation).*
4.3.2 Geography and Community/Service

The example which depicts the relationship between “Geography” and “Community/Service” within the MSs should be consulted as an example of this relationship if required, as the coding did not change for SMAs. However, note that the SMA relationship is not similar to MSs as it does not include content from the “Community” code theme, but only “Community/Service.” This is because the content within the SMAs, for example, mentioned serving communities rather than mentioning various community partnerships as presented within the MSs.

Based on CDA within the theme of Geography and Community/service, the valued applicants across the twenty SMAs are:

- Students within the universities’ geographic location;
- Students who will assist the university in developing the geographic region;
- First Nation, first-generation, and rural students;
- Those students who will allow/contribute to the school developing the economic, social, and cultural geographic community;
- Students who will extend the university as cultural, social, research hub into geographic communities;
- Students who are bilingual (French and English); and
- Students who will utilize and create university partnerships with business, industry, government, community organizations, global research partnerships, and for- and non-profit sectors, thus upholding the balance between academic and student centered (which is why the university is valued), and enhance society, discover, and innovate.

The frequency count of problematic interpretations is presented in Figure 18.
Figure 18. “Geography” and “Community/Service”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university SMAs (Differentiation).

4.1.3 Geography and Academic Image/Programs

An example of this relationship would be similar to that which was within the MS analysis. However, note that this relationship also includes programs, as programs is a significant theme within the SMAs, but not within the MSs. See Appendix A for a description of the “Programs” code.

Based on CDA within the theme of Geography and Academic Image/programs, the valued applicants across the twenty SMAs are:

- Students within the universities’ geographic location;
- Students who will assist the university in developing the geographic region;
- First Nations, first-generation and rural students;
- Those students who will allow and contribute to the school developing the economic, social, and cultural geographic community;
- Students who will extend the university as a cultural, social, research hub into geographic communities;
- Bilingual Students (French and English);
• Transfer students from the local community college;

• Civic engagers: Students who will utilize and create university partnerships with business, industry, government, community organizations, global research partnerships, and for- and non-profit sector, entrepreneurs, thus upholding the balance between academic and student centered (which is why the university is valued) and enhance society, discover, and innovate; and

• Highly qualified people.

The frequency count of problematic interpretations is presented in Figure 19.

![Figure 19](image)

**Figure 19.** “Geography” and “Academic Image/Programs”: Frequencies of themes within 20 Ontario university SMAs (Differentiation).

### 4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides summaries of the main themes, both explicit and implicit, that may affect how readers interpret the MSs and SMAs, especially to what extent they see themselves as a valued applicant or a person of power in Ontario universities. I now turn to a discussion of the findings.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Results

Combining terms and phrases from six of the 20 Ontario university (OCAD, Ryerson, York, Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier, and Nipissing) MSs yielded the following composite statement: [our] university values, respects and advances advocacy, diversity, commitment to accessibility, striving to meet the needs of all learners in a purposefully diverse community, asserting the equality of all human being, supporting Aboriginal cultures and first-generation students. Similarly, seven of the universities (Algoma, Carleton, Lakehead, Trent, Laurentian, Ottawa, and Windsor) made similar claims in their SMAs when describing: [our university] develops our region by supporting access to PSE for all, focuses on improving access to PSE for under-represented student groups, especially students with disabilities, Aboriginal, first-generation and LGBTQ students, in an environment where cultures thrive together. The table in Appendix B summarizes the results.

5.2 Discussion

The analyses conducted for this study suggest that the twenty Ontario universities have a strong interest in their geographic location and the connections developed with local, national, and international partners who hold similar values. Within the MSs, academic activities and institutional commitments focus on geographic ties. Moreover, the universities’ “altruistic” community service efforts address needs of the surrounding geographic community. This holds true within the SMAs as well. Universities explain how their existence is significant or vital to the local partnerships and greater economic stability which extends nationally and internationally. Having said that, there was limited attention in the MSs to how each institution creates equitable opportunities for under-represented groups to access PSE, though the SMAs did
include those key terms more often. Universities mentioned support for those diverse students who were already at the school but not access initiatives for those who have not yet been admitted. This allowed for a number of interpretations about who is a desired applicant, and which applicants meet the goals of the university in becoming a leader in the geographic location, and within partnerships, nationally, and internationally. This may cause some groups of individuals to feel they are not a priority, or that they were not as valued as other groups. These findings are relevant to social inclusion, government bodies like the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, and research entities such as HEQCO. Moreover, those in a position of power within postsecondary institutions should consider the implications of inequalities reflected in policies that affect how universities evolve. As Razack et al. (2012) emphasize, discourse in policies will affect institutional shifts.

Despite literature that presents altruistic definitions of the terms relating to equitable access for under-represented and diverse groups, and despite a movement by the Ministry and universities toward social inclusion agendas, there still seem to be remnants of Ontario’s historical treatment of diversity in contemporary discourses. There is no avoiding universities being in positions of power, and this study does not critique anything beyond the texts. CDA is a useful tool to bring a heightened awareness of the implicit messages the universities may be presenting, to direct anti-discriminatory practice in universities, and to support contemporary social inclusion discussions.

### 5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Ontario universities and the Ministry came together to form policies, and should do so again to refocus the SMAs and associated MSs. However, several tensions may arise considering the two bodies hold unique and powerful positions. The Ministry provides some
funds to the universities, but universities are self-governing entities. As universities and the Ministry come together to address hegemony across the MSs and SMAs, there will be tensions in the practice of refining the discourse, but also in the areas of where the policy informs practices (e.g., admissions), as well as in the broader policy context. This is expanded upon in the following questions which suggest areas for future studies:

- What are the implications of power imbalances in university policies:
  - To the public who read the documents?
  - In relation to the university as a public good versus a private commodity?
  - For university organizational change?
  - For the purposes the policy is meant to serve, and actions it is meant to produce?
  - For university access efforts?

- Are students or applicants receiving mixed or unintended messages?

- To what extent are MSs and SMAs considered by those in power when deciding what changes to make? To what extent are these individuals aware of implied power imbalances in the discourse? To what extent are they aware that their policies suggest that they exercise power by deciding who is valued in their university and who is not?

5.4 Conclusion

The goal of this study was not to identify flaws in the twenty Ontario universities’ MSs or SMAs, or to devalue the efforts of those who developed them. The purposes of this study were to raise awareness of reader interpretation, particularly of those in vulnerable positions, such as applicants and/or those belonging to under-represented groups, and to question the implications of power imbalance in university policies. It would be ideal if those in power chose to update
university policies to be more sensitive to power imbalance, in an effort to prevent inequalities being perpetuated.
REFERENCES


http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17554251211247553


Razack, S., Maguire, M., Hodges, B., & Steinert, Y. (2012). What might we be saying to potential applicants to medical school? Discourses of excellence, equity, and diversity on the web sites of Canada’s 17 medical schools. *Academic Medicine, 87*(10), 1323-1329.


**APPENDIX A: CODE BOOK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Image</td>
<td>Mention of programs, research intensity, excellence of scholarship, or other academic activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Supportive action from the University, which the University does not claim to but may from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Service</td>
<td>Actions of the university that support communities, including discussion of a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Mention of efforts put toward certain activities, partnerships, or initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Mention of geographic location, city, or surrounding community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreted Meaning</td>
<td>Meaning derived through CDA, not explicitly stated within text possibly unintended by the University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider/ Outsider</td>
<td>Insiders those identified as having more power, or more belonging, or being above in any way other groups who are the outsiders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insider/ Outsider within Under-represented Groups</td>
<td>Insiders/ Outsiders where the insiders are a group of under-represented students, and the outsiders are the other under-represented groups not mentioned, or not provided equal opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly Derogatory</td>
<td>Meaning an interpretation of the text that may offend a reader, (e.g., not being part of a group which is explicitly stated as a valued applicant).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>Mention of programs offered at the University, sometimes used by universities as a justifier of claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Mention of how, without the University, certain geographic, economic, societal, business partnerships, etc., would suffer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B: DESIRED APPLICANTS IN ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ MISSION STATEMENTS AND STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS BASED ON “GEOGRAPHY”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography and →</th>
<th>Mission Statements</th>
<th>SMAs: Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓ Desired applicant</td>
<td>Academic Image</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those from a certain geographic area, typically in the surrounding area / “community” of the university. Those connected to the geographic area, through history or culture.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who will serve / develop societies and the nation(s) through:</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scholarship that aligns to the agenda of the university.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economic contributions and contributions that meet the desired Societies’ and surrounding communities’ social needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partnerships: Desired geographic and academic bodies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal / First Nations.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ First-gen and rural students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography and →</th>
<th>Mission Statements</th>
<th>SMAs: Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desired applicant</strong></td>
<td>Academic Image</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global citizens and collaborators: Those with a global perspective, but that align with the universities’ function with/in other institutions, governments, businesses, locally, nationally, and internationally. Assisting in the university maintaining or becoming more recognized internationally.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Engagers: Students who will utilize and create university partnerships (business, industry, government, community organizations, global research partnerships) thus upholding the balance between academic and student centered which is why the University is valued, and enhance society, discover, innovate.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French/English speakers.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer students from the local community college.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who will extend the university as a cultural, social, research hub into geographic communities.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Frequent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National and international students.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly qualified people.</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and →</td>
<td>Mission Statements</td>
<td>SMAs: Differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired applicant</td>
<td>Academic Image</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-long learners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who will help maintain the environment within the school (e.g., “safe”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“High-quality” students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those with the valued character and work ethic.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who can function within the environment at the universities (e.g., those with a spirit of inquiry, but above all those who are “intellectually excellent”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically inclined above other traits.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table presents the twenty Ontario universities’ desired applicants derived through interpreting mission statements and the differentiation section of the SMAs through critical discourse analysis. The data presented are for the Significant Coding Theme relationships with “Geography.” The highlighted rows are those desired applicants reflected in both the mission statements and the differentiation section of the SMAs.