Breaking silos: Improving the recruitment and admission experience of international students (0181)

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Ontario (Canada) now counts 111,171 international PSE students, representing 41.9% of the 265,400 international students (IS) in Canada - a number that the country wants to double by 2022, according to Canada's International Education Strategy (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). Canada's largest bilingual university, the University of X in Ontario, has an institutional objective to increase the ratio of Francophone IS from 14% of total IS in all programs in 2013-2014 to 40% by 2020. This objective looks to correct the French/English created in 2010, with the sharp influx of Chinese students in our English language programs. In order to increase the number of our Francophone IS and continuously improve our recruitment and admission processes at the University of X, it is important to delve into and better understand the experiences of IS applicants.

There is very little research relating to the experiences of Francophone IS studying in French in Ontario. Despite this paucity, a CBIE (Deacon, 2015) study, conducted among 654 Francophone IS across Canada contributes significantly to our understanding of their experiences. Moreover, the survey commissioned by the Montreal Regional Conference of Elected Officers poses a particular focus on the experience of IS in Montreal (CROP 2006), allowing us to better understand the choice to study in French in Canada. Beyond these studies, numerous reports regarding IS in Canada (AUCC, 2014; CMEC, 2011; Ortiz & Choudaha, 2014) and the experience of other IS groups in various contexts such as Australia, United Kingdom and the United States (Choudaha et al., 2012; Helmsley-Brown, 2012; Hobsons, 2014; Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2013) have inspired our study.

Senior administrators at University of X requested a study regarding Francophone IS recruitment and admission processes, as part of the institution's commitment to research informed policies and practices. It would have to adopt an inter-sectorial collaborative approach, facilitating dialogue between personnel from the International Office personnel, the recruitment, admission and student experience sectors, as well as scientific literature and reports from those fields, to push the collective thinking underlying the conceptualization and implementation of the current study. The collaborative thinking that underlined the development of the survey, the primary data collection tool, highlighted three global themes: 1) the communication experience; 2) the recruitment process experience, and 3) the admission and transition process experience at University of X.

The main research question is: what are the recruitment and admission experiences of Francophone IS applicants admitted and / or committed to registering at the University of X?

In conceptualising the survey, we kept in mind that the findings would first and foremost contribute to our institutional understanding of our strengths and challenges regarding recruitment and admission processes of IS. Furthermore, we wanted to contribute to the field by revealing the needs, resources and particular experiences of Francophone IS choosing to study at a bilingual post-secondary institution, in a linguistic minority context.

The University of X has a four-stage recruitment and admission process: the prospective student, the applicant student, the admitted student and the engaged student. In August 2016, we invited all admitted and engaged students to a French-language program for the 2016-2017 year to voluntarily complete the survey. This invitation was followed by two reminder emails.

The literature review and University of X staff members note the importance of studying student-applicants' **communication experiences** as well as their level of understanding and satisfaction with various methods of communication. This study thus addresses the challenges faced by students concerning the different international varieties of the French language (register, vocabulary, syntax, etc.). Data from this study will also allow the University to modify, improve, and innovate regarding its communication tools - such as websites, brochures, emails - and to identify which tools students prefer when communicating with universities (social media, blogs, video-sharing, etc.).

Several questions concerning the **recruitment processes** for the Francophone IS were raised in the conceptualization of our study. We are interested not just in the process of choosing a postsecondary institution, but also in choosing the country, the city, and the language of instruction as well as the program. In short, we want to better understand: why do students chooses to study in French in a bilingual university in Ontario, Canada? Several factors of choice, such as the reputation of the country, the ranking of the institution, the official bilingualism, the level of teaching excellence, the financial support available and so on were this included in our survey.

The improvement of our policies and processes to better serve our Francophone IS during the months preceding their arrival also requires an analysis of **the admission process** experience as a whole. This includes taking into account cultural differences, linguistic variation, PSE terminology and multiple pathways, as well as interactions between IS and institutional resources such as mentors dedicated to IS. There is also interest in highlighting the issues students face during the period of their study permit / visa request. As the application and admission process can take place over several months, we looked to identify specific moments when students feel abandoned or forgotten by the University.

Hence, our findings clarify some of the grey areas regarding the ways IS experience the numerous phases of the admissions process, such as course selection, financial aid and housing

applications to name but a few. More importantly findings demonstrate how the University of X can better support these students as they prepare to transition to Canada in general and to the institution.

Our presentation will first describe the collaborative process which led to the conceptualization of the current study and its data collection methods. Secondly, we will present the results of the survey as well as how these are informing, modifying and improving our recruitment and admission processes particularly for Francophone IS. Finally, we will address the importance of an inter-sectorial collaborative approach. Breaking silos ensures better institutional understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of recruitment and admission processes regarding IS.

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