FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ORAL EXAMINATION
HEATHER FRIESEN

FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
EdD

Tuesday, March 31, 2009
SFU Surrey (Room 15-645) at 1:00 PM

EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair: Dr. Fred Renihan
Senior Supervisor: Dr. Milton McClaren
Member: Dr. Timothy Rahilly
Member: Dr. Hasnat Dewan
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External Examiner: Dr. Mary Bernard
 Royal Roads University
 Associate VP Research
POST-SECONDARY PERSISTENCE AND PARTICIPATION:
DOES NEIGHBOURHOOD MATTER?

ABSTRACT

Attrition in open-admission institutions is high. While educational patterns have been studied for decades and have arguably been the central focus of higher education research, despite this large body of inquiry approximately four of every ten new students do not continue their education.

Student characteristics such as socioeconomic status and academic ability have been demonstrated to have explanatory relationships with educational attainment. Unfortunately, given that open admission institutions seldom require these data as a matter of course, they are restricted in regards to the extent to which they can assess the educational patterns of their students. The absence of socioeconomic information in open admission institutions therefore presents a compelling argument for the exploration of alternate datasets to research variances in educational outcomes. As such, this study’s methodology was drawn from a body of literature that argues that neighbourhood effects (relationships between neighbourhood characteristics and education) rival predictions based on individual-level socioeconomic and academic factors.

To determine the feasibility of this approach, this study employed only those student-level data that are normally available to open admission institutions via the application process, including high school records, gender, age, and address. Using the postal code on record at the time of high school graduation, 10,000 high school students and 500 first-year university students were mapped to neighbourhoods which were subsequently characterized using multiple variables from the 2001 Canadian Census. The relationships between neighbourhoods and the participation, performance and persistence of were then explored.

Significant differences were found between neighbourhoods in regards to high school course options, final grades, and participation and persistence in post-secondary. Multiple regression was used to determine which of the neighbourhood characteristics were most strongly related to educational outcomes. Consistent with the literature, students living in neighbourhoods with higher proportions of affluent households, residential stability, household income and professionals generally enrolled in more academic courses in high school, attained higher grades, participated in post-secondary, and persisted longer than their peers in lower-class neighbourhoods.

Conference Presentations


