

Underrepresented Students at Canadian Universities: Exploring Stories of Resilience

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- 2-year funded research
- Project title: Diversities of Resilience: Understanding the Strategies for Success used by Underrepresented Students in Canadian Universities
- Team members:
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Why do the project?

- ▶ Why study “successful” students?
- ▶ Previous research focused on:
 - ▶ “at-risk”/“vulnerable” students
 - ▶ Barriers to access
 - ▶ Family background
 - ▶ First generation students
 - ▶ First year students
 - ▶ University retention programs
- ▶ Universities have been successful at:
 - ▶ Improving access
 - ▶ Improving 1st year persistence
 - ▶ Improving First Gen persistence
- ▶ Research needed to:
 - ▶ Improve persistence to 4th year and graduation
 - ▶ Understand student views on success strategies
 - ▶ Better understand what we mean by “non-traditional” students and what they need to persist

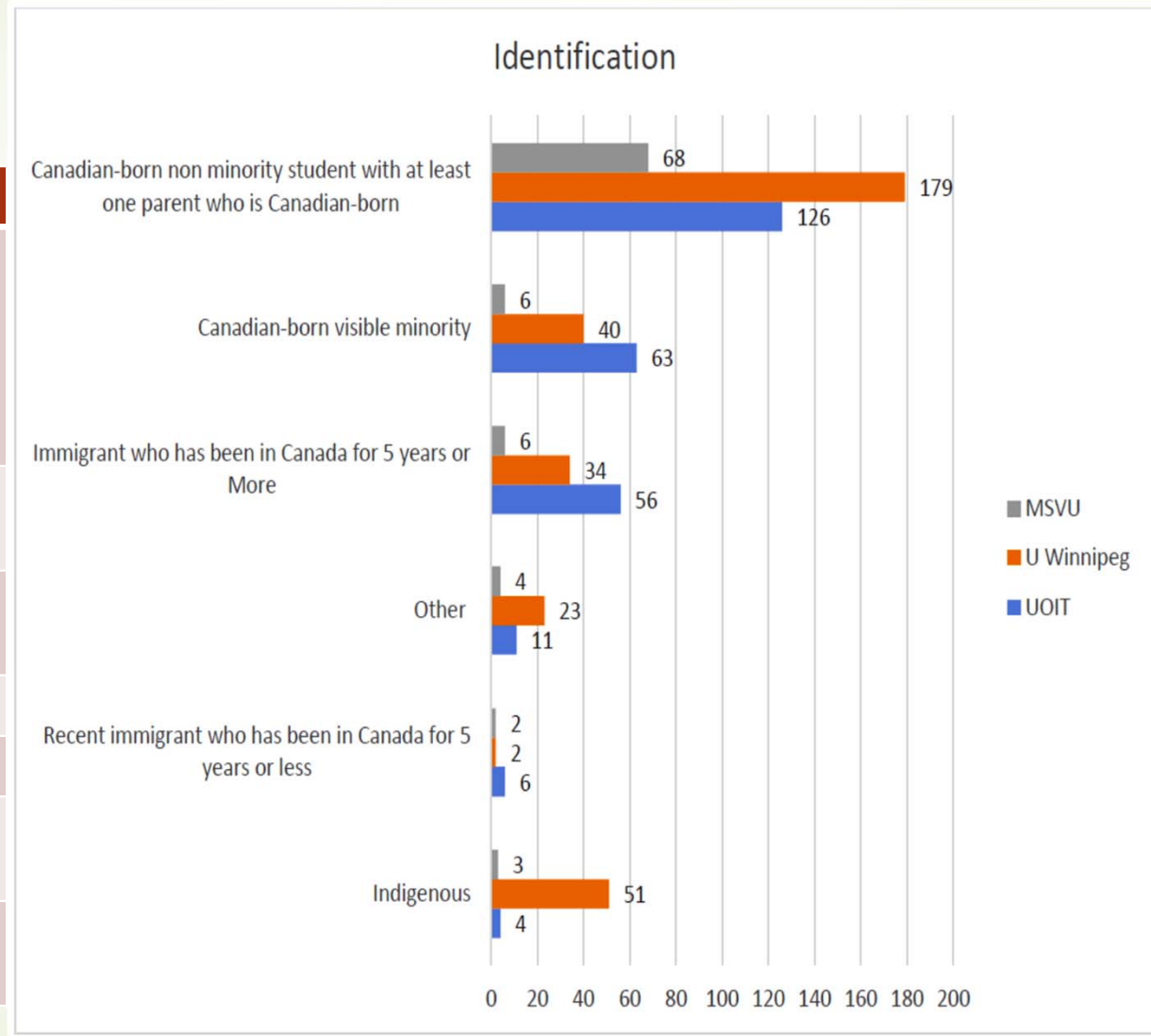


Current Project: Surveys & Interviews

- ▶ Full Sample (some questions may have been skipped): 690
 - ▶ MSVU: 89
 - ▶ UOIT: 269
 - ▶ UWinnipeg: 332
- ▶ Recorded Responses (Including those who got filtered out by the first 5 questions): 1,555

From the survey ...

Identification	Frequency	Percentage
Canadian-born non-minority with at least one parent who is Canadian-born	373	54.53%
Canadian-born visible minority	109	15.94%
Established Immigrant	96	14.04%
Indigenous	58	8.48%
Other	38	5.56%
Recent Immigrant	10	1.46%
Total VM/Imm/Indig/other	311	45.5%





27 Interviews

- ▶ Purposively selected from random volunteers to meet demographic criteria
- ▶ 50% female, 50% male
- ▶ One female and one male who self-identify from the following “categories”:
 - ▶ Indigenous, Recent Immigrant (in Canada 5 years or less), Established Immigrant (in Canada more than 5 years), Canadian-born visible minority, Canadian-born non-visible minority
- ▶ Selected participants from within these demographic parameters to include a variety of fields of study:
 - ▶ UOIT: life sciences, commerce, 4 from criminology, networking & IT, mechatronics engineering, nursing (all UOIT Faculties are represented here)
 - ▶ MSVU: arts & science, business, women’s studies, communication studies
 - ▶ UWinnipeg: education & urban studies, environmental studies, human geography, kinesiology, geography, Indigenous studies & film,



Resilience

- ▶ Planning and preparing
- ▶ Time management
- ▶ Relationship building (with peers, professors)
- ▶ Willing to ask for help
- ▶ Sense of inclusion or belonging (vs integration)

- ▶ New environment, new expectations → personal growth



Challenges



- Experience of immigration: new country, new language, new friends, new school, new family dynamics
- Personal tragedies: illness and/or death of a parent, grandparent or other family member or close friend
- Being a single parent
- Financial problems
- Racism and/or discrimination
- Expectations
- Failing an assignment or test for the first time



Strategies

- ▶ Be confident in yourself
- ▶ Ask for help
- ▶ Make friends
- ▶ Get to know the professors
- ▶ Use the student services and other resources
- ▶ Participate in student organizations that support specific cultural, racial/ethnic groups



Last thoughts

- ▶ The university experience → resilience
- ▶ Overcoming academic failure??
- ▶ Do we learn resilience in university??

- ▶ Future research questions & problems:
 - ▶ How do we capture the experiences of those who drop out?
 - ▶ How do we capture the experience of students too busy to take part in the study?
 - ▶ Is there a bias in that those who are struggling with more significant challenges might not have the time to take part in studies?