

The Others: Who Are They?

A Pilot Study



September 2003

College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading

Project Worker: Dee Goforth

The Others: Who Are They?

THE PROJECT

Rationale: The number of LBS college students categorized as 'Other' has risen dramatically during the past four years - from 1962 in 1999/2000 to 3704 in 2002/03. This represents an increase of 89%. The numbers of 'Others' vary from college to college, and from campus to campus. Some campuses have experienced significant increases from the previous year while others have experienced decreases. At present, there is little data about this growing number of students. Having a demographic profile of Others and information about their specific training needs would help LBS programs provide the right mix of support services and programming.

Project Goal: The goal was to develop a profile of the Others, analyze their needs and identify issues related to classroom management.

Methodology: Colleges with (a) a large number of Others or (b) a significant increase of Others would be asked to participate in this study. Regional representation would also be considered. The proposal identified file examination as the best means of gathering information about the Others, e.g., information on gender, age, goals, source of income, LBS levels, length of stay in program and weekly schedules. It also suggested efforts to talk to Others directly through focus groups. Support staff would be consulted for ideas related to data collection, and practitioners would be consulted for ideas on effective classroom management.

Approach: A very thorough and systematic approach was developed. It was decided to pilot this approach at one college to see what quantitative and qualitative information about the Others could be gathered.

In brief:

- LBS year-end program stats from all 22 Anglophone colleges were carefully analyzed to discover information about Others
- Cambrian College was chosen to pilot the approach since it was one of the colleges with over 100 Others (both in 2001/02 and 2002/03) and the location was convenient
- Four staff (support and teaching) were consulted at Cambrian
- Over 200 current LBS learner files were reviewed
- Nearly 49 Others were identified from the files
- Five Other learners were interviewed in person
- The remainder were surveyed by a written questionnaire

See [Appendix A](#) for a more detailed description of the approach.

THE FINDINGS

The analysis of LBS year-end program stats showed 10 colleges with more than 100 Others in 2002/03. These 10 colleges were distributed across all regions. Upon examination, 4 of the 10 showed an increase of Others from the previous year. The percentage of Others of the total enrolments was also calculated for each of the 10 colleges. The percentages ranged from 27% to 52%. The Others represented 35% or more of the total enrolment in 7 colleges. See [Appendix B](#) for more detail.

The pilot itself resulted in identifying a relatively small number of LBS students at Cambrian College - too small to be conclusive. See [Appendix C](#) for questionnaire results. It did, however, offer a number of important insights. Anecdotal information from staff and faculty pointed to two main groups of Others - a younger male group and an older female group supported by spouses or partners. Percentages were used to compare the distribution of Others (using the sample of 49 Others taken from the files) to the distribution of the total enrolment. This information was plotted on a graph. See [Appendix D](#). The sample of Others showed a slightly larger number of males and a slightly smaller number of females compared to the total enrolment. Of the 49 Others, 15 students were in the 19-24 age group. Twelve of the 15 were males. Again, while no valid conclusions can be drawn, the data doesn't contradict anecdotal information. While there were more females in the 25-44 age group, the gender differences were less marked.

The interviews with five young Others provided insight into what it's like to attend a program with little or no steady income. See [Appendix E](#). All were financially dependent on parents, siblings or partners. Their incomes were derived from a variety of sources including travel allowance from the college, weekly allowance from parents, financial support from parents to cover certain expenditures, credit cards, money saved from summer employment and very part-time, low-wage jobs. Juggling finances was an ongoing challenge for these students, and yet all five appeared motivated and committed to the program.

Cambrian faculty also noted a substantial increase in the number of younger students. Their observations are supported by the year-end summary stats which show a 77% jump in the number of students in the 19-24 age group from the previous funding year. Faculty reported that the younger students presented a number of challenges for classroom management, e.g., problems with commitment to program and disruptive behaviour patterns. It may be that faculty have not had to deal with such numerous and extreme types of classroom behaviour problems in the past. In other community colleges that have experienced increased numbers of youth in their adult upgrading programs, teachers have requested professional development in:

- minimizing classroom behaviour problems
- diffusing conflict
- using communication skills to resolve problems. [1]

Since the anecdotal information about increased numbers of young students appeared to be accurate for at least one college, other colleges with more than 100 Others were asked to provide anecdotal information about their Others. This resulted in some very interesting responses. One college reported an influx of Mennonite Mexican women into its LBS program after fall harvest when their spouses journey south to Mexico to continue working. These women remain in Southern Ontario and take advantage of the opportunity to resume their studies. Another college reported that a large number of their Others were adults who had buy-out packages as a result being downsized or laid-off. Other colleges reported that Native students supported by their bands and students supported by private insurance plans made up a considerable portion of their Others.

While this anecdotal information is speculative, it would appear there is a considerable amount of demographic and cultural diversity within the Others group. According to a study by Beder and Medina, two of the greatest challenges for adult literacy/upgrading programs are (1) the continuous intake of students and (2) the multi-level classroom. [2] It would appear that a highly diverse demographic and cultural student population would present even greater programming challenges for LBS college practitioners.

In addition to gathering demographic and cultural data about Others, colleges also need information about their financial status, e.g., how many students are financially unstable and what are the implications for classroom management? The pilot raised a number of important concerns which should be examined before any further statistical study is undertaken.

1. Definitions for source of income

Programs are asked by the Ministry to use the following categories: Employed, EI, WSIB, Ontario Works, ODSP, and Other. The LBS Program primarily serves an economic vulnerable and unstable group of adults. Students who have a sponsor have some steady means of support. Students who are fully employed may also have a measure of financial stability. This may not be true about the student who is working part-time since there is no explicit definition of what part-time means. The blurring of the 'Employed' and 'Other' categories makes it difficult to differentiate between students who are financially stable and those who weren't. Take the real-life example of the 20 year-old student who makes \$51.00 a month delivering newspapers and earns a few more dollars as a bus girl. She lives with her parents and is dependent on them. Should she be categorized as Employed or Other? Neither category reflects the reality of her situation.

2. Student records

More information is needed about how data on students is collected and how often student files are updated. It is quite possible that students make the source of income designation themselves. If this is the case, we need to know how they are coached to distinguish between 'Employed' and 'Other'. More information is also needed on how often the Others change their status. As previously mentioned, anecdotal information gathered in the pilot suggested that there are two main types of Other students in the LBS Program at Cambrian - the younger, mainly male, non-self supporting student, and the older female who may be self-supporting or supported by family. If this is accurate, the younger group may be the most unstable and vulnerable group of all. As a result they may change sponsorship fairly

frequently. Programs would need an efficient process in place to record such changes and ensure the data is up to date and reliable.

3. Sensitivity of topic

Asking students about their personal financial situation is an extremely sensitive topic, and any further research involving individual students would have to be conducted in a highly private and delicate manner. Some students may be in very desperate economic circumstances that have ethical or even legal implications. In the pilot, attempts were made to get both quantitative and qualitative information about the Others. The written questionnaire was not particularly effective. Of the 26 questionnaires that were administered, only 27 % or 7 were returned. Of the ones that were returned, not all the information was complete. The one-to-one interview produced very valuable information, but this method is highly labour intensive. While focus groups might be more efficient, they are not recommended because of the highly sensitive and personal nature of the topic.

4. Anomalies in statistical data

A small number of anomalies were noted when the year-end data from 2001/02 was compared with data from the previous year for those colleges reporting more than 100 Others. There were few anomalies with the 2002/03 data. Given the ongoing challenges associated with the implementation of the Information Management System (IMS), any anomalies would need to be analyzed further for accuracy.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The most recent program statistics indicate another substantial increase in the numbers of Others - from 3230 in 2001/02 to 3704 in 2002/03. The number of Others represents 30.5% of the total enrolment for 2002/03. See [Appendix F](#). Developing an accurate profile of Others and discovering what their needs and issues are remain a critical need for LBS college programs.

The pilot highlighted the challenges involved in trying to extract reliable, detailed demographic data from existing student files. While anecdotal information may provide important insight, it needs to be supported with accurate statistical data. It is therefore suggested that any further research involve the collection and analysis of new data, preferably starting in the fall or early January when large intakes of LBS college students are anticipated. Again, the study would target colleges with more than 100 Others and seek regional representation as much as possible. It would attempt to clarify definitions for 'Employed' and 'Other.' Intake staff, as the primary collectors of data, would be briefed on what data to collect and how to collect it. Finally, teachers and students would be surveyed to identify issues related to classroom management.

References:

[1] Lincoln Land Community College, Area Planning Council 526. (2002) Lawrence Education Center. Illinois. USA. <http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/lawrence/apc.html>

[2] Beder, Hal & Medina, Patsy. (2001) Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education. NSCALL Reports18. Rutgers University. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/report18.pdf>

Appendix A

<i>Pilot Study</i>	
Actions	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed year-end summary stats to gather data on Others • Developed graphs of Others by region to show anomalies or patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The graphs were effective in highlighting those colleges with large numbers of Others and colleges with a large increase of Others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a one page introduction that explained the purpose of the study to share with staff • Made a list of colleges to contact that had more than 100 Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 colleges had more than 100 Others in 2001/02. • 10 colleges had more than 100 Others in 2002/03.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed all current files at Cambrian to collect data on Others in Levels 1-5 • Recorded data on a spreadsheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found that students sometimes entered conflicting income/sponsor information on different forms . • Much of the confusion seemed related to the terms Employed and Others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacted MTCU for definition of Others and employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It appears that there is not a sufficiently detailed explanation for distinguishing Others from Employed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared sample of 49 current Others to total population on the basis of age, gender and goals by plotting information on a graph 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant differences showed except that there were somewhat more males (and conversely fewer females) in the sample group. More Others also had employment as their goals compared to the total enrolment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed 5 Others at Cambrian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students interviewed were young highly dependent on family and partners for support. • Tried to track schedules (part-time/full-time and day/evenings) but this was difficult as schedules appeared to change frequently. • 29 of the 49 Others had been in the program 6 months or less. • There was very little information that helped identify source of income. 22 checked off own income or family income in addition to 'other.' 3 mentioned they were working part-time, one had OSAP, another CPP and one was sponsored by the band.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a questionnaire for Others and reviewed its use with the Academic Advisor and support staff (in progress) • Reviewed list of Others to with Support Staff person in charge of attendance to identify possible change in income status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the Others were now OW clients while others had left the program. • 26 questionnaires were attached to attendance cards. • 7 questionnaires were returned.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result of initial meeting, intake worker collected data on 18 Others who attended an information session but did not register for the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most interesting finding was that most were young, e.g., 13 of the 18 were 21 years old or younger.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed preliminary results of findings with faculty for reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty agreed with findings especially that there seemed to be an increase of younger students and that this presented a number of challenges for classroom management.

Appendix B

Composite picture of colleges with '100' others in 2002/03

Region	College campuses reporting more than 100 Others in 2002-2003	Increase/Decrease in overall enrolment from previous year	Increase/Decrease in males from previous year	Increase/Decrease in females from previous year	Increase/Decrease of Others from previous year	Percentage of Others of total enrolment in 2002-03
North	Cambrian (Barrydowne)	I (56%)	I (55%)	I (57%)	I (32%)	36%
	Confederation (Thunderbay)	I (.5%)	I (.5%)	I (.5%)	D (2%)	29%
East	Algonquin (Nepean)	I (12%)	I (4%)	I (17%)	I (17%)	27 %
	Durham (Oshawa)	D (7%)	D (4%)	D (9%)	I (13%)	29%
	Sir Sanford (Sutherland)	I (10%)	I (11%)	I (11%)	D(14%)	38%
West	Conestoga (Guelph)	I (12%)	I (4%)	I (32%)	D (11%)	52%
	St. Clair (Windsor)	I (31%)	I (27%)	I (35%)	D (12%)	35%
Central	Sheridan (Davis & STC)	D (14%)	I (22%)	D (7%)	D (11%)	36%
	George Brown (St. James)	I (27%)	I (32%)	I (23%)	I (25%)	36%
	Seneca (Yorkgate) 1 of 2 campuses	I (1%)	I (10%)	D (4%)	D (32%)	36%

All percentages are rounded off.

Appendix C

Questionnaire Results (based on 7 responses)

1. Background information

Gender: male(3) female(2) (two did not check box)

Age: 16-18 19-24(1) 25-35(1) 36-45(4) 46to65(1)

Goals: employment (2) further education (5) independence (0)

Length of time in program:

3 months or less (0) 4 to 6 months (3) longer than 6 months (4)

2. Attendance (Check all that apply) full-time (6) part-time (1)

3. Transportation to school bus (3) own vehicle (3) ride with another student (1)

4. Main source of income (Check all that apply)

- employed full-time (35 hours a week or more) (1)
- employed part-time (between 20 to 34 hours a week) (0)
- employed part-time (between 10 to 19 hours a week) (0)
- employed part-time (less than 10 hours a week) (0)
- financial support from spouse or partner (2)
- financial support from parents or other family members (sister, brother) (0)
- other: OSPD, (CPP, INCa and Spouse) (Savings, waiting for alimony), (CPP) (0)

5. How would you describe your financial situation?

- money is not a problem for me (1)
- money is tight, but I manage to get by (4)
- I am having a lot of problems financially (2)

6. How does your financial situation affect your participation in the program?

a lot (1) somewhat (4) not at all (2)

7. How does the program help you?

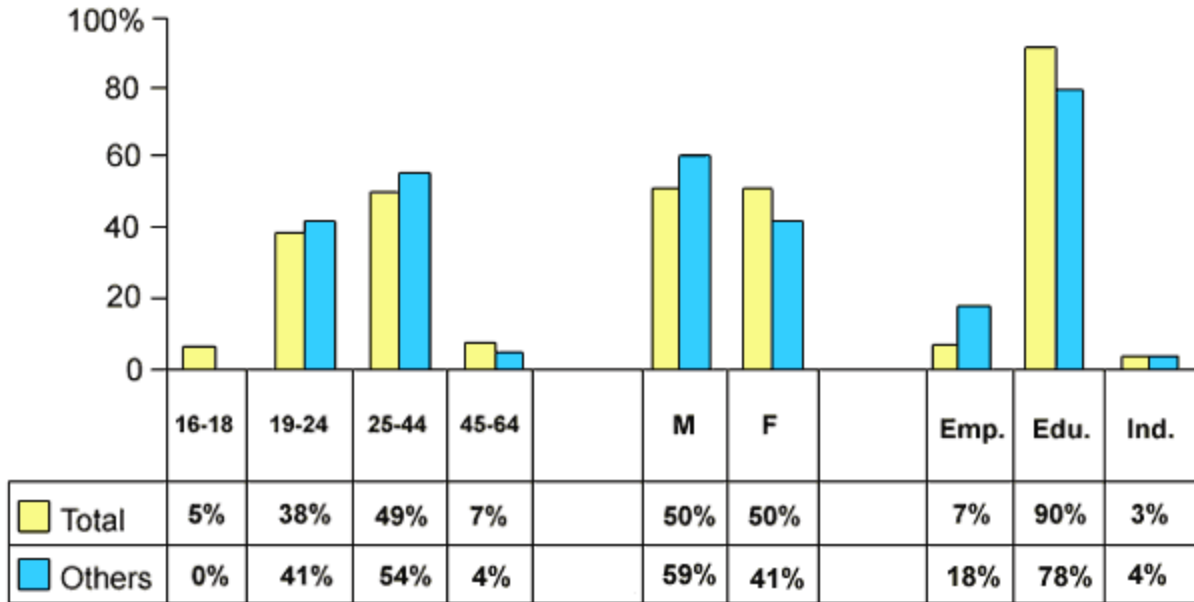
flexible scheduling (5) transportation support (4) counselling (1)

8. What else can the program do to help you?

- Tell me what I can do to become an Addictions Worker
- Pay for travelling or for: gas money for travelling
- Uncertain
- It would be helpful if someone on CPP could be guaranteed a seat in their post secondary course
- Work and compromise with schedule (this student was fully employed)
- It helps me with my math and English.

Appendix D

Total Enrolment 2001-02 and Current Others



Appendix E

The Others: 5 Students - 5 Stories

Demographics:

4 male and 1 female (ages 19 to 23)

Goals:

- Millwright
- Electrician
- Mechanics
- Social worker
- To get a job in a machine shop

Sources of income:

- Travel allowance from college
- Weekly allowance from parents or support to cover certain expenditures
- Credit cards
- Babysitting
- Summer employment
- Delivering newspapers
- Works part time at minimum wage 16 hours a week
- Girlfriend "helps out"
- Parents provide room and board and cover most personal expenses

Managing income:

- Driving with no insurance
- 'Maxing out' several credit cards

Transportation:

- Walking to school (can't afford to put car on the road)
- Taking buses with or without a travel allowance
- Driving own vehicle (2)

Living accommodation:

- Parents (3)
- Girlfriend/boyfriend
- Sibling

Family Support: In some cases parents are very supportive financially, providing room and board and other supports. Other parents provide very little, either in the way of personal or financial support. One student said his father wouldn't assist him financially since he "didn't make it through the school the first time."

Two EI Stories: Two students had enough hours to apply for EI, but saw their jobs as dead end and not providing enough money to live on. Both felt a college education would help them get

a better life and secure steady employment. Both left their jobs to start school in September. Both applied for EI but both were denied. One appealed with the support of his employer, but the appeal was overturned. The other is considering an appeal.

Attempts at Employment: Most are seeking part-time work by dropping off resumes. One said s/he had dropped off 275 resumes in the past year. Those who were already working were trying to get more hours.

Appendix F

LBS College Students 2002-2003

