

PRIVATE PATHWAY PROGRAMS/COLLEGES: WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

Compiled by Dr. Marianne A. Larsen mlarsen@uwo.ca

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BACKGROUND: Last year, Western entered into negotiations with the for-profit company, Navitas University Preparation and Pathways Programs, to open a private pathway college for international students at Western. This would involve recruiting undergrad international students, providing them with academic language preparation, as well as teaching them their 1st year undergrad courses (by non-unionized Navitas instructors). Western senior admin has visited other Navitas Colleges in Canada and have hosted Navitas representatives on campus a few times already. Western's President has assured us that any decision to partner with Navitas will go through all of the regular decision-making bodies at the university and that there will be a full debate at Senate before any decisions are made. The information provided here is to help inform those discussions and the decision-making process on this issue.

First they outsourced the university cafeteria, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a cafeteria worker. Then they privatized the University bookstore, and I didn't speak up because I didn't work in the bookstore. Then they outsourced university libraries cataloging, but I didn't speak up because I was not a librarian. Now they are coming for the Intensive English Program. (Winkle, 2014, p. 3).

Pathway programs – a program that recruits international students who would not otherwise be eligible for entry to a foreign university, and then prepares them for entry (matriculation) to the university

Pathway colleges -an institution or segment of larger institution that recruits international students who would not otherwise be eligible for entry to a foreign university, and then prepares them for entry to the larger higher education institution.

Private/for profit pathway programs/providers: Bridge Pathways, Cambridge Education Group, Culture Works, INTO University Partnerships, Kaplan Global Pathways, Kings Education, Navitas (formerly IBT and now owned by BGH Capital), Shorelight Education, and Study Group International.

For profit pathway providers are a part of a group of educational multinationals that either establish or take-over existing education programs/providers or establish new programs/colleges themselves. Due to their size, they are able to offer economies of scale and market intelligence for student recruitment, curriculum development, assessment, teaching and management often at competitive costs. (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015)

Curricular models

- a) EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program - assists students to upgrade their academic language skills (Western English Language Centre WELC; Culture Works). This is a pathway program.
- a) Language classes + academic support program (Navitas offers an academic program with built-in language supports rather than only separate language classes.)

Ownership models

- a) Pathway programs/colleges owned by their parent institutions (e.g. WELC at Western; Vantage College at UBC); the majority (almost 70%) of pathway programs/colleges in Canada are owned by their parent higher education institution
- b) Private, for-profit programs/colleges that engage in formal partnership agreements with public universities (e.g. Culture Works; Navitas)

Navitas (www.navitas.com)

Navitas University Preparation & Pathways Programs, headquartered in Australia, is one of the world's largest global education service providers. As a for-profit enterprise, Navitas is responsible to its shareholders. In its fiscal year 2018 report the Navitas group stated that their University partnership division grew enrollments by 6% ahead of their 2020 target of 5%.

In 2018, its after-tax profit was \$19.5 million (Cdn).

Its parent company, Navitas Ltd was bought out by the consortium BGH Capital in 2019 for \$3.2 billion (Cdn). Before the takeover, Navitas had 2 major divisions (having scaled down from 4 previous divisions), offering educational services to students and professionals including university programs, creative media education, professional education, English language training and settlement services.

After the corporate take-over, BGH wanted Navitas to focus on university partnership (UP) business of the company, as these are the most lucrative divisions. Currently, the UP divisions form the largest part of Navitas across three regions: UP Australasia, UP Europe, and UP North America. They currently have 38 partnerships (down from 42 in 2018) with universities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, Sri Lanka, U.A.E., the U.S. and the U.K. (Navitas Limited, 2018; Navitas, 2020; Union, 2010)

Examples of Navitas in Canada include:

- I. Simon Fraser University (SFU) entered an agreement with Navitas in 2006 and established the Fraser International College (FIC)
- II. The University of Manitoba (UM) entered an agreement with Navitas in 2007 and established the International College of Manitoba (ICM)
- III. Ryerson University in spring 2020 signed an agreement with Navitas

“They are terrible at working with uni [sic] partners (which is the bulk of the work).” (Former Navitas Employee) <https://www.glassdoor.ca/Reviews/Navitas-Reviews-E911560.htm>

In 2012, Navitas had a pre-tax profit margin of 16% from its Canadian operations. In that time the firm generated more than \$40 million in revenue, most of it from the colleges on the UM and SFU campuses. (Maclure, 2013)

CRITIQUE OF PRIVATE PATHWAY PROGRAMS/COLLEGES: WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

Lack of transparency and accountability -Overall, there is very little research on private pathway colleges like Navitas. It is difficult to gain information about Navitas, its profits, operations, #s of students who enrol in its programs, #s who leave, #s who matriculate to university programs, etc. (Maschmann, 2018)

Negotiations shrouded in secrecy

Negotiations to develop partnerships between private pathway program providers and other Canadian and US universities have been done rapidly, shrouded in secrecy, and without meaningful input from local stakeholders. As well, there is little info (e.g. financial) available about contracts between Navitas and universities it partners with (CAUT, 2013; Maschmann, 2018; Winkle, 2014)

Manitoba - “[S]ecret brokering of the deal with no notice to the university senate, board of governors or faculty association...” (CAUT, 2016); lack of oversight by Senate

At SFU, negotiations in 2006 around the Navitas (then known as IBT) partnership were contentious with much opposition from students and faculty. Some felt that the partnership was motivated by profit over what was best for instructors and students:

For those who attended that Senate meeting... It was a very intense debate... But, the university [administration] was able to intimidate some faculty members by threatening [them] that if IBT [did] not pass then revenue was going to be lost. So, once their employer begins to make those kinds of threats, I just can't see how IBT would have failed because the consequence to the faculty members was you either go with IBT and maintain the funding levels that you have now and possibly increase it or you go against IBT you can be sure that your budgets will be cut. ...So, as much as some [faculty members] opposed the agreement in principle, the practical reality [is that] they didn't want to see their budgets cut. I think that was really the key argument that swayed the vote. (Buenaventura, 2007)

Ryerson's experience has been similar: "At the meeting of the Ryerson Senate on 7 April 2020, a motion was approved for the proposed academic structure of a potential agreement with Navitas... A motion to table the vote in order to allow further discussion was narrowly defeated with 58% in favour of no delay. The final vote to approve the motion received 67% support. One RFA member who attended the Senate meeting commented: "Ryerson's Administration orchestrated a flawed proposal to be passed at a late night, virtual Senate meeting, with almost no discussion or debate". This process allowed little room for collegial discussion and decision making." (Email sent to Ryerson's Faculty Union)

Outsourcing faculty - *Pathway partnerships create a two-tier workforce in higher education*

Pathway programs/colleges – private pathway companies hire their own faculty

In general, courses in these programs are "taught by faculty who have little or no experience teaching international students with developing English proficiency and who may be neither willing or able to provide the cultural and linguistic support which those students need" (Quoted in Winkle, 2014).

Pathway college instructors

- not unionized, thus not protected by faculty collective agreements
- forbidden from engaging in any kind of labour action (see below about anti-union clauses)
- lower salaries, unprotected, vulnerable, and precarious labour
- their labour is undervalued, and perceived as less scholarly (as they teach courses that are generally considered 'remedial' and they not expected to engage in research)
- sessional EAP faculty move from teaching at the university to teaching at Navitas college
- take jobs away faculty teaching in 'in-house' EAP programs (e.g. WELC)
- Navitas maintains ownership of course materials

(Brophy & Tucker-Abramson, 2012; Maschmann, 2018; Richert, 2013; Steele, 2010; Union, 2010)

Contracts between universities and Navitas include anti-union clauses:

Instructors employed [at SFU's FIC] are not covered by SFU's collective agreements with academic workers, and are thus subject to a privatized and union free approach to labour management. The flexible exploitation of a precarious workforce at FIC has been engineered into the institution. The contract between Navitas and SFU has an anti-union clause stipulating that the University may terminate the agreement if any of the colleges employees provoke a Labour dispute: "[If] the college does not obtain and implement a lawful order or direction requiring that all persons cease and desist from picketing, or from conducting disruptive Labour action, on the campus, the university may, in its sole discretion terminate this agreement" (Brophy & Tucker-Abramson, 2012, p. 31).

“Pathway colleges may contribute to the vulnerability of academic staff by increasing the number of contingent faculty within the academic production cycle for public postsecondary degrees....[T]here has been a slow and steady rise of contingent faculty working in public institutions in Canada...with corresponding issues of exploitation, the effects of which are worse for women and racialized teachers. Pathway colleges represent a potential acceleration of this trend” (McCartney & Metcalfe, 2018, p. 213).

Exploiting international students

Questionable Recruitment Strategies

Navitas works with local (e.g. Asian) student recruitment agents who are not Navitas employees. They are incentivized by Navitas to get students. They take a cut of the tuition dollars (as high as 10%) in addition to charging students directly (Brophy & Tucker-Abramson, 2012)

- lack of transparency and misleading claims from recruitment agents (about where they will study; opportunities to work and gain citizenship in Canada; guarantees to progress to degree programs); refund policies (CAUT, 2013; Larsen, 2012; Richert, 2013; Union, 2010)

e.g. 2010 external review of Navitas’ partnership with SFU that found Chinese language marketing documents did not mention that students at FIC needed to meet eligibility requirements to transfer later to the university (Maclure, 2013)

International Students as Commodities

- overall marginalization of international students, especially those at pathway colleges
- lower student admission standards with for-profit pathway programs/colleges (Winkle, 2014)
- tuition paid directly to for-profit pathway college company
- students treated forms of revenue generation

“In 2008 this was a great place to work ... From 2011/2012 this started to change. When asked always stated that the goal was to educate the very best we could and the dollars will follow. That was the way we looked at things. **Now the goal is to maximize every cent out of every student. Remove things from courses and add them as additional items...at a price of course.**” (Former Senior Manager, Navitas, <https://www.glassdoor.ca/Reviews/Navitas-Reviews-E911560.htm>)

International College of Manitoba 2020/21 fees and charges: 1 st year Mixed program (1 term) = \$5,485 1 st year University Transfer Program (UTP) (2 terms) = \$34,748 2 nd year UTP (3 terms) = \$55,581 Plus ancillary fees = approx. \$2000/year Total for 2 years = approx. \$100,000 (per student)
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30% of the tuition fees collected by Navitas (FIC) is redirected to SFU. In 2006, anticipated to be approx. \$1 million after 2 years and \$10 million after five years. (McCuaig, 2006 in Maschmann, 2018)

Little data about the #s of students who enter Navitas colleges, return home, and/or complete and matriculate into the university. Navitas has admitted its difficulties with retention. (Maschmann, 2018)

Grade Inflation

Staff working in private pathway colleges report being pressured to ensure that students pass their programs (grade inflation) even if they have not fulfilled the program requirements

Curriculum materials used as standardized and not produced by EAP specialists.
Concerns that pathway programs provide a backdoor through which otherwise unqualified students gain entry to university programs.
Leads to pressure on academic standards at the university to support these students who might not have the academic skills to succeed. (Bataille, 2017; Maschmann, 2018; Steele, 2010; Union, 2010)

Mahmood & Burke's study of 880 international students in Navitas' programmes in 2 US universities found that the undergrad students faced greater challenges and difficulties during their time studying abroad (compared to grad students) and increased levels of acculturative stress. This, in alignment with previous research, was largely correlated to English language fluency. Students with increased language barriers, experienced greater difficulties adapting to the host culture. "This study provides evidence that significant relationships exist between international students' levels of acculturative stress and sociocultural adaptation and that significant differences are evidence among certain demographic factors, especially gender and English language comfort" (Mahmood & Burke, 2018, p. 118).

Other concerns/issues

Private pathway colleges get to use the name brand of the university they partner with for marketing and recruitment purposes.

Impact on Existing EAP Programs at the University (e.g. WELC)

Private pathway programs/colleges undermine (and in some cases, takeover) the work of existing EAP/EAL (English for Academic Purposes and Learning) programs on campus – this happened at SFU as their existing EAP and EAL programs disappeared and/or moved into programs which pathway students into FIC's programs (Maschmann, 2018)

Threats to existing EAP programs in 2 US universities faced when the university entered into agreements with private pathway providers. Private partnerships (in place of existing in-house programs) left existing EAP administrators and instructors feeling frustrated, under-valued and, in some cases, leaving their positions due to admissions fraud, lack of transparency, accountability and inequitable course content and requirements, as well as lowered program standards. There is also evidence that they contribute to a "declining employment status of the teaching faculty – including those who teach English to speakers of other languages – at university level" (Winkle, 2014, p. 217).

Competition with university for use of resources

Navitas Colleges (e.g. FIC, ICM) get access to the use of facilities on campus– compete with university for access to use of resources (e.g. classroom space, library, sports facilities) on campus (Richert, 2013)

Navitas business plans may include eventually delivering full degree programs in partnerships with universities such as the U of Manitoba (Steele, 2010)

Lack of Diversity

The argument is made that Navitas will diversify the international student population (i.e. recruit students outside of China). This is a weak and unfounded claim. No published evidence to suggest that they have had success in diversifying international student body beyond Asia.

SFU – 2010 review of Navitas partnership questioned whether FIC was helping to diversify the campus given that three-quarters of its students were from China and Hong Kong, a country that already represents about half of the university's international undergraduates (Brophy & Tucker-Abramson, 2012; Maclure, 2013)

There is a limited market of international students and families able to afford international tuition fees like Navitas charges. Navitas' recruitment agents are no better able to recruit students from other countries (outside of Asia, for example) than other recruiters.

Finally, Western claims we are 'behind' other universities in terms of the proportion of international students at our university. This is not true. Data on [Western's website](#) indicates that 11% undergrad and 30% graduate students are international (total = 20.5%). According to [Statistics Canada](#), international students account for 14.1 % of all postsecondary enrolment (2017/18).

AN ALTERNATIVE: VANTAGE COLLEGE – University of British Columbia

- the only international college of its kind at a top-tier university in Canada
- a living interdisciplinary laboratory/hub for transformative teaching and learning

Background

- 2012 - UBC considered Navitas and other private pathway colleges and decided to build a system for recruiting and supporting international students internally
- March 2013 - the program approved by UBC Vancouver Senate
- June 2013 - UBC Board of Governors approving the tuition program fee and capital plan
- UBC saw the establishment of VC as an opportunity to hire talent and invest in it

Vantage One Program:

- full 11-month (3 term) 1st year program in Arts and Science, Management, Engineering
- combine 1st yr coursework with additional academic mentorship and English language resources
- program taught by full-time 55 UBC faculty who are a part of UBC's faculty association
- courses are full UBC courses approved by Senate and Vantage students are UBC students who receive an undifferentiated transcript
- embedded staff person/faculty as academic advisor; peer mentors (former Vantage One students)

Vantage One Students

- 2019/20 academic year, VC has more than 350 students
- students have come from over 28 countries around the world including: Brazil, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Turkey, and Vietnam
- only accepts applicants who are academically strong and meet UBC's competitive (not minimum) academic admission requirements
- VC has a financial aid program for international students who do not have sufficient financial means, ensuring the college is able to attract students from diverse economic backgrounds
- students take first year UBC courses with embedded academic English and perform well as they transition into the second year of their UBC degree program
- student data tracking system shows that students from Vantage programs, by their 4th year UBC program studies are on par with (and in Engineering exceed) domestic and other international (non-Vantage) students in terms of their GPAs
- students viewed as novice scholars - at end of program, they participate in a conference where they present their final capstone research project
- data tracking students over a 5-year period shows that the majority of VC students graduate within a 4-5 year time frame (meeting UBC's expectations)

UBC has a central recruiting unit that recruits students for programs across the campus, including VC.

\$\$ - VC is financially sustainable. It is a totally cost recovered model.

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