

Questions Submitted by Senator Notash for the May 22, 2012 Senate meeting

The “mature student” category for admission at Queen’s University has recently been changed such that it is now part of the “student interest” admission process. That is, students who formerly would have been admitted as mature students must now take a series of online courses (amounting to 4 full courses) before they will be admitted to on-campus courses. This change could present a significant barrier to many mature students: for some mature students the classroom environment is an essential part of the experience of university; the interaction between professors and students is very beneficial for many students; classmates are also important as they often support one another’s learning; the physical environment, including libraries and laboratories, reinforces a sense of belonging and purpose for these students. On the other hand, mature students readily share insights that raise the level of debate in classrooms from which everyone benefits.

Mature students are generally recognized to be those students who either have not completed high school or do not have secondary school grades sufficiently high to permit them to enter university, and who have been out of school for a significant period of time. Mature students are normally admitted on a conditional basis if they can demonstrate through either a test, or a letter, as well as through a history of successful employment, or volunteer work, that they have the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in their studies. There are many reasons for not succeeding in high school, including physical and mental health problems, poverty, parental health or addiction issues, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, learning differences, cultural issues, bullying, and gender identity conflicts. All of these might affect their performance at high school but do not affect their intellectual capability, and hence, those students may do well at university. Universities have historically recognized that these issues are beyond the students’ control, and therefore, these students are typically not excluded from post-secondary education. As well, Canadians in the lowest socioeconomic bracket are often those who benefit from a mature student admission. These individuals bring a richness and diversity much needed in our classrooms. The new Queen’s procedure with preliminary online learning component will restrict access for many non-traditional, adult students, and hence, will reduce/eliminate their chance to improve their skills, their knowledge, and their earnings.

I would appreciate some information on and clarification of the following issues:

1. Had the University considered keeping the former admission requirement for mature students as an option with on-campus classes while introducing the online learning as another option for these students?
2. It will be helpful to know the reasons for abolishing the on-campus classes option and what measures the university is planning to take to improve access for mature students.