

# Sociocultural Diversity in Admissions: More Than Skin Deep

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## Introduction

We take great pride in achieving diversity and academic excellence in our students. An off-the-cuff comment about the homogeneous nature of our student body struck a nerve. Discussing the comment, we determined that visibly, we may have failed in our mission.



## Background

Manitoba is a large province with a rich cultural heritage and a very diverse, yet small population of 1.3 million. Our mission at the University of Manitoba includes service to our multicultural communities. It is our goal at the Master of Physician Assistant Studies Program (MPAS) to provide representative sociocultural and economic diversity in the student body and ultimately in the provincial PA workforce.

In 2013, the University of Manitoba College of Medicine formed a Working Group on Enhancing Socioeconomic Diversity (Working Group) consisting of Dr. Bruce Martin, the Director of Admissions for the College of Medicine, and several other members representative of the University of Manitoba and the larger community. The group was tasked with identifying and assigning a value to socioeconomic attributes, and creating a “priority matrix.” Points from the matrix would be given to applicants who self-identified as possessing those attributes, so “the under-representation of individuals who come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (would be) addressed by advantaging eligible applicants in the admissions process.”

We discussed the visible homogeneity of our class and our potential research project with Dr. Martin, and he graciously allowed us to modify the Working Group’s priority matrix questions to create our diversity survey.

## Purpose

The purpose of our research was to examine the deeper diversity of all students to date, compare the results to the applicants for the class of 2019, and compare both cohorts to the statistical diversity of our province.

We wanted to answer our question: **Do the current and future MPAS students reflect the sociocultural diversity of Manitoba?**

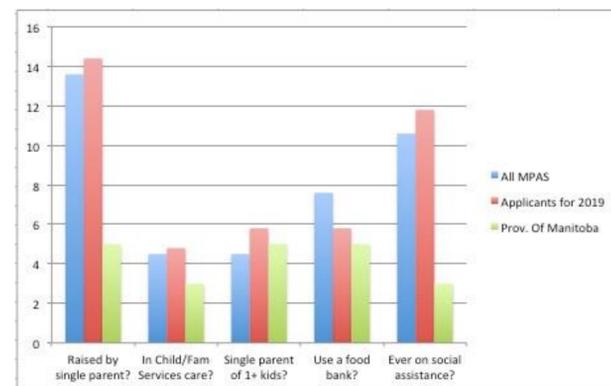
## Methods

Using the Working Group’s priority matrix, we designed an anonymous 27-question survey that asked frank questions about the respondents’ childhood, economic circumstances, debt, sexual identity, disability, and substance abuse, among others. Phase 1 of the survey was delivered electronically to all MPAS graduates and current students, and 66 were returned; a response rate of 72%. Phase 2 was deployed to all qualified applicants for the class of 2019 and 104 were completed; response rate of 63%.

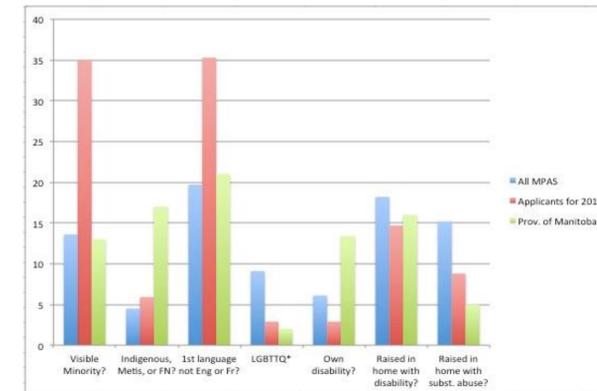
## Results

Descriptive statistics, i.e., frequencies, were utilized for the initial analysis. The MPAS grad/student cohort scores illustrated more diversity in several categories, but the applicant cohort was more likely to have visible diversity (35% vs. 14%) and speak a language other than English or French (35% vs. 19.7%). However, we found that our MPAS cohort met or exceeded many of the provincial economic and sociocultural indicators, answering our research question affirmatively.

I. Family history & economic attributes, shown as percentages



II. Other sociocultural determinants, shown as percentages



## Conclusions

While the overall visible, racial or ethnic makeup of the students to date appears to be rather homogeneous, other sociocultural determinants show the cohort to be a very diverse group, especially from a socioeconomic standpoint. Despite lack of statistical significance of several attributes, we were pleased to find that frequencies showed a positive correlation with provincial diversity statistics.

The percentage of First Nations, Métis and Indigenous peoples in Manitoba (17%) is the highest in the nation, (Canada, 5% overall), and appears under-represented in both the applicant pool and the MPAS cohort. Future research will explore this issue.

## Limitations

Due to a small sample size (n=66) and small number of respondents from several MPAS classes, we were unable to gauge year-to-year differences. The applicant cohort (n=104) only included one year’s data. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, a variety of them were skipped throughout both surveys,

## Future Research

A proposed Phase 3 of the project will survey the next group of applicants, and after the responses are de-identified and coded, points from the Working Group’s priority matrix will be added to determine if the additional points would advantage those applicants previously identified as under-represented.

## Discussion

**We speak a lot about diversity in our profession, yet do we truly understand all that implies?**

Do we use only one sense when we consider diversity? Are we aware of the stories; the narrative of the students’ journeys? This study investigates our past, current and our future student cohort. Whom are we teaching? What have we missed because we don’t look beyond the obvious indicators of diversity?



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## Acknowledgements

We both wish to thank Dr. Bruce Martin for his vision and commitment to diversity in admissions, and for his generosity in sharing his research. DW wishes to thank Dr. Malathi Raghavan for her kind assistance with the initial research ethics board submission.

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