

# Resource Centre or Experience Desk? Producing Spaces for Delivering Services to Indigenous and International Students at Universities in Ontario, Canada

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, Ontario universities have increasingly targeted Indigenous and international students for recruitment. Focusing on three southern Ontario universities, I examine how service delivery for these student groups is organized in space. In light of Henri Lefebvre's work, I argue that the spatiality of the information hubs created to support them differs significantly, each being defined in the interactions between institutional assumptions about the student group, the social presence and activities hosted, and the lived experiences of the students utilizing these services. Whereas Indigenous student services are organized as a resource centre to create a separate space for Indigeneity on campuses, international student services take the form of an experience desk to emphasize rapid integration into the mainstream. Based on interviews with students and staff, I reflect on the differences between the two models to discuss the spatial politics of information hubs within the context of Ontario universities.

## **Résumé**

Les universités ontariennes ont récemment accru leurs efforts de recrutement d'étudiants autochtones et internationaux. Dans cet article, j'examine l'organisation spatiale des services offerts à ces deux groupes dans trois universités du sud de l'Ontario. À l'instar des travaux d'Henri Lefebvre, je maintiens que la spatialité des centres de service créés diffère, car elle se

fonde sur des préconceptions institutionnelles spécifiques à chaque groupe, des activités distinctes, ainsi que des expériences vécues uniques. Tandis que les services offerts aux étudiants autochtones prennent la forme d'un centre de ressources, soit un espace distinct dédié aux questions d'autochtonie, les services offerts aux étudiants internationaux s'organisent en bureau d'expérience, visant leur intégration rapide à la population étudiante générale. À la lumière d'entrevues avec des étudiants et des membres du personnel, les différences entre ces deux modèles sont examinées afin de mieux comprendre l'effet de la spatialité de ces centres dans le contexte ontarien.

## Introduction

In *Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge*, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) of the Government of Ontario lays out a framework to guide the development of higher education. The ministry argues that innovation, creativity, and productivity will provide accessible and high-quality training and will meet the future needs of the province's creative economy: "Significant productivity improvements will be needed to protect the gains we have made in accessibility as we move forward with improving the quality of higher education and the student experience in Ontario" (Ontario MTCU, 2012, p. 8).

With universities around the world adapting to the challenges of an increasingly globalized knowledge-based economy, Ontario institutions have responded since the late 1990s with strategies to increase revenue from student tuition (Cameron, 2002; Cudmore, 2005). In a context of reduced provincial funding, a key challenge for Ontario universities is to remain competitive in recruiting incoming students while still meeting their mandate of accessibility, especially for historically under-represented groups. Using aggressive market expansion plans and corporate-style initiatives, these universities offer a learning experience based on high-quality training, experiential education, technology-assisted courses, and provincial credit transfers (Ontario MTCU, 2012).

Although neither Indigenous students nor international students are explicitly mentioned in the 2012 MTCU report, they have become groups of increasing importance in Ontario universities' recruitment and retention strategies. International students are a key demographic that pays higher tuition fees, fuels local economies while living in Canada, and is a potential source of skilled labour (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Scott, Safdar, Trilokekar, & El Masari, 2015). A 2014 University of Guelph and York University joint study reveals that more than 328,000 international students were enrolled at universities across Canada in 2012, contributing CAD\$3.5 billion in tuition revenue to the country's economy. The same study, funded by the MTCU, estimates that the province attracts the highest number of international students, with more than 43% of all international students in Canada, and that institutions face significant challenges in coping with their specific academic and non-academic needs (University of Guelph, 2014).

Meanwhile, Indigenous students are less numerous and have long been considered under-represented as well as an emerging priority for Canadian universities (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). While younger generations have "greater educational levels than older age groups," the educational achievement gap in Canada is wider than ever between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (White

& Beavon, 2009, p. 3). Amid national discussions of post-secondary education institutions' responsibilities toward Indigenous peoples and a global movement of recognizing Indigenous rights, including a right to education, this new focus involves fundamental changes in how universities engage in and contribute to educating Indigenous students, despite sustained colonial power relations (Gayman, 2011; TRC of Canada, 2015).

In both instances, Ontario universities have developed internal mechanisms to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous and international students. The preferred mechanism has been the establishment of dedicated information hubs—administratively organized clusters of interests and pools of resources within the university—to share information, produce knowledge, and serve as a first contact platform for specific student groups in navigating their academic experience (Knight, 2011). Whereas previous studies have focused on the different types of services offered by these information hubs in Canadian universities (Cameron, 2009; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Rawana, Sieukaran, Nguyen, & Pitawanakwat, 2015; Robertson, Holleran, & Samuels, 2015), the intent of this study echoes Carrie Paechter's (2004) observation that “the spatial aspects of educational settings are often taken for granted and left un-interrogated” (p. 307). At the intersection of spatial analysis and higher education, I ask how Ontario universities have spatially organized the services they offer to both Indigenous and international students.

In light of Henri Lefebvre's (1984) work on the production of space, I argue that, despite similarities in the services offered, the spatiality of the two types of information hubs differs significantly. As spatiality emphasizes how places result from specific social relations and are social practices in and of themselves (Massey, 1999), I focus on how service delivery is physically organized to reach each student group—namely, a resource centre for Indigenous students and an experience desk for international students. I maintain that the spatial differences can be explained by examining the intersections of institutional assumptions about each student group, historical relations, and social practices between the university and the given community, as well as the lived experiences of the students utilizing these services. After a brief discussion on the theoretical framework and methodology, I present how service delivery is spatially organized to reach both Indigenous and international students. I explore two models—the resource centre and the experience desk—as found in three southern Ontario universities in order to discuss their differences and reflect on the spatial politics of information hubs.

### **Framing Students, Organizing Services**

The successes and challenges of Indigenous and international students at Canadian universities have been documented along two lines of research: how their experiences are linked to broader external processes like federal policies, and how they are influenced by internal institutional strategies (Hardes, 2013; Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; White & Beavon, 2009). To complement these studies, I use a Lefebvrian perspective to examine how institutional responses unfold in space. In this section, I explore key insights into the challenges of recruiting and retaining Indigenous and international students at Canadian universities. Then, I present how Lefebvre's (1984) lens contributes to this body of work, both analytically and methodologically.

## Challenges in Recruitment and Retention

In the wake of recent developments in public debates about Indigenous rights, the need to redress historical injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples in the Canadian colonial context have made its way into higher education strategies (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; TRC of Canada, 2015). Challenges to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students have been linked to structural factors outside of the purview of universities. They include the need for students to relocate far from their social support systems; the lack of recognition of the colonial structures at play; and the repercussions of these processes on university life, especially during the first-year of study (Arenas, Reyes, & Wyman, 2009; Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013; Rawana et al., 2015).

Canadian universities have also had internal challenges pertaining to recruitment and retention due to the lack of collaboration with off-campus Indigenous actors, and some profound disconnections between Eurocentric and Indigenous perspectives on education. More specifically, the Eurocentric undertones of the curriculum and the social interactions on campus have been identified as a starting point for institutions to frame their support for Indigenous students (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Gorman, 2013). Caught between a parallelist perspective, which advocates for Indigenous education on Indigenous terms, and an integrationist perspective, which focuses on the best ways to bring Indigenous students into the mainstream (Widdowson & Howard, 2013), university strategies navigate a middle ground in combining activities that address discrimination, make Indigeneity visible in curricula and through partnerships with local Indigenous organizations, and launch initiatives aimed at mitigating the lack of traditional social support (Battiste et al., 2002; Hades, 2013; Poliandri, 2011).

Similarly, the increased attention given to international students in Canadian universities over the last 20 years comes with unique challenges pertaining to their recruitment and retention. Some broader processes affecting international students have been linked to the lack of regulation with respect to their annual tuition fees, as well as immigration and multicultural policies that facilitate their entry to the country as permanent residents and citizens, but with little to no follow-up on their social integration (Chen, 2008; Mayuzumi, Motobayashi, Nagayama, & Takeuchi, 2007). The policies have been aimed at profiting local communities, but there have been key challenges for these students, including the lack of mechanisms to help them fight off isolation and racism and to better integrate into their communities (Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Scott et al. 2015).

Universities have fallen short in providing support for this student group due to a lack of understanding of their unique positioning, which Natalee Popadiuk and Nancy Arthur (2004) frame as being at the intersection of issues faced by all students, issues faced by sojourners in another country, and issues often faced by racialized students (pp. 126–127). The emphasis is on “measures of preparedness” to mitigate challenges associated with “language barriers, cultural differences and discrimination,” while the specific needs of a diverse student body with varying degrees of cultural and linguistic proximity to the mainstream are not addressed (Poteet & Gomez, 2015, p. 84). Besides emphasizing access to on-campus support programs to facilitate integration into the local community, career development activities are also seen as successful tools for integrating these students into local labour markets, especially after graduation (Andrade, 2006; Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Kenyon, Frohard-Dourlent, & Roth, 2012).

## Producing Spaces on Campuses

Even if the spatiality of specific challenges in recruiting Indigenous and international students is apparent, such as their moving away from traditional social support systems to study, there has been less explicit focus on the spatiality of service delivery on university campuses. From a Lefebvrian perspective, the location of the service is just as significant as the service offered because it reflects planning discussions, assumptions about student needs and expectations, and ways in which universities work as transmission belts between broader structural processes and students' daily lives.

In light of Lefebvre's work on the production of space (1984, pp. 38–39), the ways in which university service delivery is organized for both Indigenous and international students is a spatial practice that is defined by the interactions between three dimensions of what makes a place: the conceived, perceived, and lived spaces. The conceived space relates to the elite understandings of a location, such as through what is portrayed in statistics and strategic documents, while the perceived space refers to the various ways in which communities and groups embody and utilize a space, including for official events and partnerships. The lived space comes from people's daily experiences of the location, including how the place fits into one's sense of belonging.

Even if these three dimensions are sometimes hard to distinguish, it is in the interactions between dominant ideas, social practices, and individual experiences that the frame, potential, and limits of a location can be best understood (Massey, 1993). For both Indigenous and international students, their access to service delivery is mediated through specific locations, produced at the intersections of institutional designs, a history of social activities and presence, and students' lived experiences. Despite a common goal to support student success, these locations are spatially different because of distinct assumptions about student needs, different histories of interactions and activities, and the unique lived experiences of students who had used and contributed to these places.

Moreover, the organization of service delivery in space is heavily influenced by dominant ideological parameters, and Lefebvre has documented the effects of neo-liberalism in the production of space. Understood as a political rationality that favours the privatization and technocratic management of public concerns, the ideology of neo-liberalism sees that social progress is best achieved through unregulated markets and individual competition (Merrifield, 2005; Ong, 2006). Neo-liberal strategies for post-secondary institutions include international market expansion; innovation in delivery methods to individual learners; and better synchronization between university programs, labour market needs, and government priorities (Cameron, 2002). One strategy has been to increase the roles given to administrative units and to collaboration with non-academic partners (Amey, 2010; Burnett & Huisman, 2010).

In a concrete sense, universities have privileged the creation of information hubs as on-the-ground means to provide targeted and direct support to niche, non-traditional student markets (Edwards & Usher, 2000; Guo, 2012). These hubs, which are not specific to the neo-liberalization of universities per se, offer dedicated transition services to mediate between students' particular needs, the overall university requirements, and the broader social processes affecting students (Knight, 2011, p. 222). Under neo-liberalism, the integration of Indigenous and international students through these information hubs

is done by flattening out students' distinct experiences and reducing their challenges to individual, surmountable obstacles, such as cultural and linguistic differences, which are also framed as potential competitive advantages (Merrifield, 2011, p. 469). These hubs provide the information, programming, and support needed to do these things. They are a mechanism that can be spatialized differently, depending on the targeted student group.

### **Methodological Note**

In order to investigate how information hubs are organized differently to deliver services to Indigenous and international students, Lefebvre's methodology is helpful, as he developed a "method of problematizing everyday life...based on small clues and hunches" (Montsion, 2012, p. 935). In this section, I discuss the inductive approach utilized in this study as well as some of the methodological choices made. The intent of using a Lefebvrian methodology is to link up banal, daily moments to broader social processes, which started here with participant observations and 12 semi-structured interviews with students and university staff inhabiting the dedicated information hubs for Indigenous and international students in three southern Ontario universities.

Conducted from December 2014 to February 2015, this qualitative fieldwork first involved walking around the three university campuses in order to put up recruitment posters and become familiarized with the locations where service delivery is given to targeted student groups. These three universities were selected based on their proximity to the researcher and the institutions' public reputations in their recent efforts to meet the needs of either Indigenous or international students. The information obtained from the interviews and observations was used to draw out the various designs, practices, and feelings students and university staffers had toward these locations. The information was corroborated with searches on university websites and through formal communications.

In a Lefebvrian fashion, I see my role as a researcher as one of juxtaposing events, narratives, and designs to provide insights into the best ways to describe the observed landscapes. Although my explanations are not meant to be exhaustive or all-encompassing, my aim is for them to shed light on under-explored connections and synchronicities between banal daily activities and broader processes. As I embrace a subjective stance on research, my role is to offer structured observations, notably in the shape of archetypes or models (Entrinkin & Berdoulay, 2005, pp. 141–144). This study makes no claim to any objective or representative significance, including the voices of the participants presented, which are not generalizable to the experiences of all staffers of these universities or all Indigenous and international students utilizing these services.

Two caveats should be noted. First, the determination of who is an Indigenous or international student was made through self-identification and voluntary participation in this study. Although the word "Indigenous" is preferred here, because it reflects the various debates about Indigeneity in Canada and offers grounds for comparison within the global education context, this choice is not meant to diminish the plurality of experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students, and terms such as "Aboriginal," "Native," and "First Nations" will be used when participants use them to represent their perspectives. Similarly, the category of international students is not meant to reduce the plurality of this group's experiences, but it is chosen to reflect current debates in the Canadian and global contexts on international education.

Second, the presentation and discussion of two information hubs—namely the resource centre and the experience desk—are not meant to be fixed explanations, exhaustive descriptions, or exclusive categories of how service delivery is organized. They are, rather, a starting point to grasping key differences in the spatial organization of services. The intent is to make sense of the clues found through fieldwork to contribute inductively to the understanding of why and how different types of information hubs are created. This study will also offer possible avenues for future research on the spatial organization of service delivery mechanisms on university campuses.

### **Spatializing Service Delivery**

The three southern Ontario universities profiled in this study have designed distinct ways to integrate Indigenous and international student groups into academic life. While I will not discuss each university individually, I will explore similarities in how they have opted for a resource centre model for Indigenous students and an experience desk for international students. Whereas the resource centre comes from a combination of assumptions about Indigenous students' cultural well-being, activities celebrating Indigeneity, and students using the space to navigate their Indigenous identity, the experience desk is created out of assumptions about the will of international students to integrate quickly into the mainstream, programs focused on language and cultural training, and student success stories of finding employment in Canada after graduation.

#### **The Resource Centre**

The creation of a resource centre or similarly named spaces, such as a “house” or an “education centre,” begins from the institutional assumption that the targeted student population has specific needs that can be addressed only through a mediating actor supporting the multi-dimensional context of these students' lives. The resource centre to support Indigenous students is a physically independent cluster of resources offering information and services to help the targeted students navigate universities' policies and requirements, while serving as an advocate for and representative of that student population vis-à-vis various administrative and academic bodies of the university.

As a conceived space, the resource centre is framed as a first-contact platform for Indigenous students, a safe environment for learning and mediating with non-Indigenous actors, and a place to fight the feeling of isolation within the university community (Cameron, 2009; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Pidgeon et al., 2014). As a culturally sensitive space, it allows dedicated staff and faculty members to interact with and advocate on behalf of Indigenous students within the university context. It also offers linkages to initiatives and groups that may support Indigenous students off campus (Madden et al., 2013). This design reflects a belief that Indigenous students will better integrate into university life if Indigeneity is made visible.

As a perceived space or as a social practice, this information hub supports the academic success of Indigenous students by addressing the various challenges they face in various dimensions of their lives. Such challenges include financial and policy-related barriers, as well as cultural, religious, family, and community responsibilities (Cherubini et al., 2010; Rawana et al., 2015). It also coordinates with university actors to host events,

initiate discussions, and offer advice about representing, liaising, celebrating, and integrating indigeneity into campus activities and in service delivery. Speaking of this space as social practice, one student states:

There are pretty frequent emails about a workshop going on, or here's a talk that you might be interested in or a scholarship for you. They have meetings once in a while.... Your student ID card gives you access to the Aboriginal student lounge, which is a nice little retreat.... There's a Native woman there who is available as a counsellor. You can come to her basically at any time.

Referring to a broadly defined Indigenous space rather than catering to one specific Indigenous nation (Poliandri, 2011),<sup>1</sup> the resource centre hosts events and rituals, such as powwows and smudging, as it is meant as a physically separate cultural space for Indigenous students on campus, with a dedicated resource person and distinct activities.

There is a continuous dialogue within the resource centre as to making a strong link between its purpose and the activities it offers, and it can make adjustments based on specific social developments. In one university, the resource centre used to serve as a cultural centre for Indigenous students in the 1990s, but has now become a resource on Indigeneity for all students. One staff member states:

I think there was a very strong component around cultural types of activities because they were probably at that point very absent.... It has changed because of a lot of reasons: a different student base, and there's more accessibility to things in the community now.

This resource centre has evolved to reflect new interactions between the conceived and perceived spaces. It adapted its mandate and services based on what else is offered on and off campus, and how its university evolved in conceptualizing Indigeneity.

As a lived space, the resource centre offers a balance between academic learning, Indigenous teachings, and identity-formation practices. In all three universities, students shared how their resource centre helped them to bridge the various dimensions of their lives. Activities associated with the perceived space, such as Elders-in-residence programs, have had a direct impact on Indigenous students' experiences. A recent graduate explains the multiple roles his university's resource centre played for him:

When I was in first year, it was nice to know that it was there and that there were other students around so I can have that kind of camaraderie and collegial kind of togetherness, and also allow me to be proud of who I am, and not be afraid of who I am, because it is kind of intimidating of being like, "I'm Métis and I don't know what that really means and I am not fully Native."

This sentiment echoes the findings of various studies about the importance of being connected to other Indigenous peoples for Indigenous students' academic success (Cameron, 2009; Hades, 2013; Pidgeon et al., 2014).

As an archetypical information hub, the resource centre emerges in the interactions between the assumed needs of Indigenous students, related activities and initiatives, and student experiences. In this view, the resource centre is produced as a cultural space that



is physically separate from the mainstream, where distinct events and partnerships are celebrated and where Indigenous students, staff, and faculty members are given room to understand their place at the intersection of Indigeneity and academia.

### **The Experience Desk**

The experience desk facilitates the dissemination of information about programs available to a given student group (Andrade, 2006; Robertson, Holleran, & Samuels, 2015). In this model, the assumption is that targeted students have many of the academic abilities they need to succeed, and that they possess the will to integrate quickly, even if they may require some language and cultural training. For international students, the aim of the experience desk is twofold: effective integration into academia, and efficient adaptation into on- and off-campus student life (Andrade, 2006; Otten, 2003).

As a conceived space, the experience desk is meant to support the synchronization of international students' skills and expectations with university standards. Services to international students are designed to redirect students to the already available resources and services offered to all students. They also connect with these students prior to their arrival in the country to convey key messages about their transition. Such a design is reflected in the structure of the desk, which is usually composed of two branches: international advisors, who help students with visas, medical coverage, financial aid, and post-graduation work permits; and an international student team, which organizes activities and events for incoming international students.

As a social practice, the experience desk complements the services offered to all students with its focus on immigration and integration services and disseminating information that helps international students navigate the university landscape more easily. The experience desk coordinates several programs, including an orientation for newcomers, English conversational activities, skills workshops, counselling, and tutoring services. While there are some similarities with the resource centre in the services they offer, the intent of the international desk is different in that it focuses on student integration into mainstream society. As one international student remarks:

Every university has international services. It's very good [here]. They offer a bunch of information. Once, I asked them to help me to apply to an extended visa. It's kind of important and I can make an appointment and discuss anything happening with that.... It's a very good place to ask questions.... You ask, [you] visit here and join their activities and meet some friends, meet people.

As perceived space, the experience desk supports international students with documented challenges and expectations, notably in navigating Canada's immigration programs (Andrade, 2006; Otten, 2003; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Poteet & Gomez, 2015).

Found at the intersection of the conceived and perceived spaces, the experience desk takes shape through the volunteering and mentorship activities in which various students participate, as the experience desk does not necessarily have a dedicated physical space. The student-led, peer-support programs fit the design of efficient integration into the mainstream student body to surpass what Matthias Otten (2003) calls "exchange without encounter" by promoting specific mentoring programs (p. 14). A staff member at her institution's experience desk discusses this issue:

The power of the programs as they exist, these peer-to-peer programs, when we are able to recruit student participants who understand [what] the goal of the program is and who are engaged in it fully, we see some really great outcomes in terms of the benefits to them and transitioning to campus and community.

The experience desk utilizes student volunteers to meet various goals, as peer-led mentoring supports social integration, helps to reduce the gap between university standards and student expectations, and forces newcomers to inhabit mainstream campus spaces.

As a lived space, the experience desk is confronted with the frustration of some international students. For instance, one association representing international students has criticized its university's lack of a dedicated physical space. It advocates for distinct spaces to fight isolation and highlights the need to address some of the academic and social pressures experienced by its membership. A member of the executive states:

There's this huge pressure to perform because our fees are really high; usually, our parents are paying a lot of money. You're in a new system, you have little to no friends, and...it's all bottled up and you don't know how to get it out.

Referring to a blind spot in the design of the experience desk and its focus on rapid integration, this association's request for spaces dedicated to international students, including living quarters, is based on its membership's past and current lived experiences.

The experience desk produced in the interactions between the assumed will of international students to integrate into mainstream student life; activities focusing on transcending their cultural, social, and language barriers; and lived experiences revealing some frustration with the limited services received are a mechanism aimed at lessening the gap between international students' expectations and the reality of student life in Ontario.

### **The Spatial Politics of Information Hubs**

The resource centre and the experience desk have three interconnected features that Jane Knight (2011) associates with an information hub: interactions at different levels of activity, a targeted audience, and a preferred impact of its activities (p. 222). The resource centre supports the needs of Indigenous students by creating a safe place for dialogue and action with on- and off-campus partners. In contrast, the experience desk disseminates information and facilitates networking activities for international students as the best way to ease their transition. In this section, I use Lefebvre's insights to compare these two information hubs. The distinct spatiality sheds light on the ways in which Indigenous and international students are seen differently, how their academic life unfolds, and how service delivery shapes their experiences.

Both types of information hubs originate first from interactions between conceived and perceived spaces. These interactions reveal how their design and practice emerged from ongoing debates within academic and practitioner circles. The resource centre has taken shape through decades of advocacy for separate mediating spaces for Indigenous students, a recognition of the importance of supporting their access to post-secondary education, and the integration of indigeneity into university campuses (Battiste et al., 2002; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002). In contrast, experience desks are the result of administrative decisions to provide services to an increasingly significant segment of univer-

sity students. With the tendency to frame international students as revenue-generating, practitioners rely on and share “best practices” about their needs, challenges, and desires (Chen, 2008; Guo, 2012; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Here, the difference is not the type of service offered, but rather *how* it is offered and organized in space. Dominant ideas about education as they relate to either group take the form of distinct social practices. This is noticed in how mentoring is used in both cases. Indigenous Studies scholars emphasize the importance of Indigenous students connecting with other Indigenous people to support their academic success, and this notion translates into a mentoring practice among Indigenous peoples, sometimes involving off-campus partners and occurring in the dedicated space for Indigenous students (Harden, 2013; Pidgeon et al., 2014). In contrast, international education research advocates for the integration of international students through cross-cultural experiences, which results in a mentoring practice conducted in mainstream spaces and with domestic students (Andrade, 2006; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Similarly, the interactions between perceived and lived spaces, or where activities meet student experiences, reveal how a distinct spatiality impacts students differently. Whereas Indigenous students connect to indigeneity within the context of higher education through a mediating space, international students are self-identifying through various interactions on campus. Indigenous and international students are asked to incorporate their cultural backgrounds into university life in diametrically opposite ways: the former are asked to celebrate their identity as part of their academic practice, while the latter are encouraged to relegate it to their lives outside of academia (Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Wendt & Gone, 2011).

Moreover, the interactions between conceived and lived spaces highlight some of the tensions at play in both instances, as institutional assumptions and designs may contrast with the unpredictability of lived experiences. The resource centre organizes support by creating a safe environment on campus (St. Denis, 2007). Such a design meets different lived experiences, including the ones of students who feel that their participation in the resource centre is in tension with the academic extra-curricular activities that are necessary for them to succeed in competitive programs such as engineering. Meanwhile, the experience desk’s design emphasizes international students’ need to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers quickly, which does not apply to American students who tend to feel overlooked (Poteet & Gomez, 2015).

In the interactions between the three dimensions of space, information hubs can be understood as different spatial practices, highlighting the distinct assumptions, activities, and experiences of the targeted student groups. Whereas Indigenous students are trained to give back to their communities and become a support to other students and to the resource centre, international students are pushed toward naturalization and transition programs that will allow them to obtain skilled employment after their studies (Harden, 2013; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). Both student groups are groomed through pre-determined assumptions about their future contributions; a set of activities, events, and social networks; and experiences of other students before them.

## Conclusion

The three southern Ontario universities that were the site for this research have spatialized their service delivery in similar ways in order to cater to Indigenous or international students. The resource centre and experience desk are information hubs with distinct spatiality. The resource centre is a physically separate cultural space due to assumptions about the holistic needs of Indigenous students, related activities and partnerships with Indigenous organizations, and students having benefited from this type of support. In contrast, the experience desk is designed to address international students' assumed drive for academic success, emphasize integration into the mainstream society, and highlight success stories of employment and naturalization after graduation.

It is important to note that this study has some limitations in the ways in which it can be interpreted. For instance, the case selection of three southern Ontario universities limits our understanding of how all Canadian universities engage with international and Indigenous students. With different attention given to a specific student group in various Canadian universities, the finding that universities tend to favour international students and pay less attention to Indigenous students cannot be generalized. Moreover, participant voices presented in this study cannot be understood as representative of the experiences of other students identifying with the same category.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the contribution of applying a Lefebvrian lens to examine university service delivery can be found in problematizing seemingly banal spatial practices. In addition to an investigation of the two highlighted models, calling into question the spatiality of service delivery on university campuses helps us grasp the relationship between institutional assumptions about students, activities and events, and students' lived experiences. In a context in which non-traditional student groups are increasing in number, comparing service delivery helps to map out the parameters and effects of various student spaces on their experiences.

Moreover, the study of information hubs as spatial practices reveals not only how Indigenous and international students are thought to become contributors to Ontario society, but also raises questions about the framing of traditional and mainstream students. Whereas Indigenous students are framed in contrast to non-Indigenous students and their unspoken relationship to their settler identity, international students are framed in contrast to domestic students and their unquestioned ability to have unproblematic cross-cultural encounters. Such assumptions must be problematized, and questioning how spaces are produced to deliver services to various student groups may be a first step. ♣

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