



For immediate release

## Media Release

# Websites targeting potential immigrants to Ontario misleading, says researcher

## Websites aimed at recruiting immigrants don't paint realistic picture of life

**ST CATHARINES, Ontario — May 26, 2014** — T A Trent University doctoral student says small Ontario cities looking to attract immigrants focus their campaigns almost entirely on the economic advantages those immigrants can bring to the community.

Her study also raises the question of how much attitudes toward race and gender remain an underlying element of immigrant attraction initiatives.

Melissa Sharpe-Harrigan is a PhD student in Canadian studies who has analyzed the content of websites created by small Ontario cities to attract immigrants. She is presenting the results of her analysis at the 2014 Congress of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Sharpe-Harrigan grew up in southwestern Ontario, in a region without much ethnic diversity. Today, she says, many small cities like those in her native region are facing a declining population and are being encouraged to recruit immigrants to make up for the decline.

To that end, she says, the Ontario government has created the Municipal Immigrant Information Online Program, which provides funding for communities that want to create websites to attract immigrants. It is a sample of those websites she has reviewed.

Sharpe-Harrigan says those websites invariably tout the economic advantages of immigration more than anything else, and often target wealthier potential immigrants – particularly those who have money to invest and could create jobs.

For example, she says, one community's website might feature a local business for sale and invite immigrant investors to purchase it.





But she says there are racial and gender implications to targeting that kind of immigrant.

For example, she says, immigrants with money are very often male.

And she says the websites often present a false view of what life will be like for immigrants arriving in small cities. The websites may feature people of different ethnic backgrounds, but she says the people profiled often are not representative of the ethnic composition of the communities being featured.

“What’s important about my study is that it is very much in the present,” she says.

For example, she says there are often incidents of racism all across the province, yet the websites don’t talk about them. Nor do they give an accurate picture of what it would be like to be, for example, the only Sikh family or the only Jewish family in a small town.

“Those websites don’t reflect those experiences, especially in smaller communities,” she says.

“Those websites are in some ways misleading in the picture the community presents of what it’s like to live in those communities.”

— 30 —

### **About the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences**

Organized by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Congress is the largest interdisciplinary conference in Canada, and one of the largest in the world. Congress brings together 75 academic associations that represent a rich spectrum of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including literature, history, theatre, film studies, education, music, sociology, geography, social work and many others. For more information, go to [www.congress2014.ca](http://www.congress2014.ca)

#### **For more information, or to schedule an interview, please contact:**

Nicola Katz  
Communications Manager  
Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
C: 613-282-3489  
[nkatz@ideas-idees.ca](mailto:nkatz@ideas-idees.ca)

Mélanie Béchard  
Communications Officer  
Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences  
C: 613-894-7635  
[mbechard@ideas-idees.ca](mailto:mbechard@ideas-idees.ca)

