

ONTARIO'S FAIR ACCESS TO REGULATED PROFESSIONS ACT

Levelling the playing field for the internationally trained



The signing of Ontario's FARPA 2006 was the first response in Canada to address immigrant access to regulated professions

What you need to know

The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act (FARPA) is a law passed in Ontario in 2006. The goal of the legislation was to make sure that any person with recognized qualifications can register to practice his or her profession, no matter where he or she was trained. The law requires that registration must be transparent, objective, impartial and fair. By giving a set of rights to applicants and the responsibility to abide by clear practices to regulatory bodies, FARPA was a step to help immigrants get into regulated professions.

What is this research about?

This research looks at the debates running up to Ontario's FARPA, 2006 and the different interests that shaped the legislation. On one side, immigrant professionals and settlement service providers fought against the non-recognition of foreign credentials by regulated professions. On the other side, regulatory bodies argued the importance of skills and experience requirements, public protection, and professional autonomy. In the end, even though it was economically weaker, the first group was most successful with the Ontario government passing FARPA. This is because they framed their ideas well and were able to reach the public and policy-makers more effectively.

How was the research carried out?

The researcher analyzed two different interest parties that influenced and shaped FARPA. By looking at them through theories about institutions and their development, he brought more understanding of how different actors contributed to the passing of the law. With such an analysis at hand, he used critical dialogue to contribute to scholarly knowledge about institutional relations and their effect on society.

What have we learned from the research?

The Ontario provincial government's passing of FARPA was groundbreaking. With provincial jurisdiction over professional regulation versus federal jurisdiction over immigration, Ontario managed to develop a holistic legal approach to dealing with foreign trained professionals.

The ideas advocated by groups dedicated to the inclusion of foreign trained professionals greatly contributed to FARPA. But the coalition itself, mainly made up of immigrant professionals and service providers, was a defining factor. They initiated the efforts to draft and pass the law. On the other side, the profession regulators argued to maintain the status quo to protect uniquely Canadian standards and to allow the professional industries to regulate themselves.

The coalition highlighting the problem of non-recognition of foreign credentials won the public debate and succeeded in the passing of FARPA for a number of reasons. First, they were able to build a broad network of sympathetic influencers and decision-makers. Second, they successfully simplified the issue and communicated it as a public concern in a convincing way. Third, the presence of visibly well educated and trained young immigrants unable to access good jobs was generally accepted as a contemporary issue. Fourth, the coalition had a very concrete solution. They demonstrated that recognizing foreign credentials would be far better for society than doing the opposite and keeping highly skilled professionals out of their industries.

How can you use this research?

This example of how ideas and a coalition of considerably less powerful players contributed to passing FARPA shows that change is possible depending on how actors use discourse to advocate policy development. Communities, advocates, and practitioners should take note of this case and also understand theories of institutional development that help to explain such positive outcomes for immigrants and newcomers.

Scholars and researchers working on new and discursive institutionalism and exploring ideas and public policy can benefit from this contribution. This research builds upon existing literature and theoretical frameworks and fills in current knowledge gaps by using a well-documented, real-world example.

Who is leading this research?

Adnan Türegün is the Director of CERIS and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Sociology at York University.

Learn more

For more on this study, read the full article titled "Ideas and Interests Embedded in the Making of Ontario's Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006," in *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, May 2017, Volume 18, Issue 2, pp 405-418.

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