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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates the community college bachelor's degree (BA). The author presents the Canadian system as a possible model for the emerging United States trend toward community college BA programs. He argues that the U.S. binary educational system is vertical, separating institutions according to levels of learning, while the European and Canadian systems are horizontal, separating technical from academic institutions. The move toward a community college BA can be seen as a move away from a binary system. Most of the BA programs in Canadian two-year schools have been technical in nature, while those offered in the United States have been academic. There is fear that the new degree offering would divert U.S. community colleges from their mission of access to and equity in education, especially if the transfer function is eliminated. Yet the author suggests that the mission of the community college is always changing, and will continue to do so in its attempt to offer what learners need. He argues that in an era when nontraditional degrees and distance learning are commonplace, it makes no sense to deny community colleges the right to offer baccalaureate programs. (NB)

The Community College Baccalaureate: Its Meaning and Implications for the Organization of Postsecondary Education, the Mission and Character of the Community College, and the Bachelor's Degree

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The Community College Baccalaureate: Its Meaning and Implications for the Organization of Postsecondary Education, the Mission and Character of the Community College, and the Bachelor's Degree

A major new development in education like the community college baccalaureate warrants serious examination and reflection. In this connection, I wish to applaud Dr. Kenneth Walker for his vision and initiative in founding the Community College Baccalaureate Association and in taking the lead to organize this First Annual Conference of the Association. I feel honoured to be speaking at what I believe will turn out to have been such an historic event.

There are many interesting and important lines of inquiry which can be pursued in studying the community college baccalaureate movement, such as identifying factors which have led to this development; articulating the arguments for and against it; implementation issues; and case studies of early initiatives, to name just a few. I note that all of these lines of inquiry and others are represented in the program for this conference. What I would like to do in my remarks is to step back from the immediate issues in the implementation of the community college baccalaureate and reflect on the implications of the community college baccalaureate with respect to (1) the organization of postsecondary education; (2) the mission and character of the community college and; (3) the Bachelor's Degree

In regard to this agenda, my intention is not to give equal time to these three areas, but to concentrate mostly on the first. In so doing I would like to look at the community college baccalaureate within a postsecondary system framework. I will also refer a lot to the Canadian experience, because I believe that there have been some interesting developments in Canada related to the theme of this conference.

The Binary Organization of Postsecondary Education

Although it may have started a little earlier in some states, and a little later in some Western countries, the 1960s was a key period worldwide for organizing the disparate collections of postsecondary institutions which had existed previously and the new ones that were rapidly being created into highly structured systems and subsystems. A fundamental characteristic of the way that these systems of postsecondary education were being defined was the segmentation or stratification of apparently like institutions into sets with prescribed common mandates and centralized governance mechanisms which had as one of their main functions to keep each institution within its corresponding prescribed mandate.

The most common type of organization introduced was the binary system. Binary systems were defined a little differently in various countries. Canada had among the most pure and unambiguous binary systems in the world. In Canada, postsecondary institutions were divided into two sets with distinct mandates, funding, and governance arrangements. One was the universities, and the other was what Statistics Canada, the national statistical agency, refers to as Non-University Postsecondary Institutions (NUPS). What determined which set an institution belonged to was whether it had the authority to grant a baccalaureate degree. In Canada, with almost no exception, all institutions which had that authority have been called universities. And in fact, in Canada, the majority of institutions which can grant a baccalaureate - until recently - have fit the commonly held notion of a university. They have graduate programs and at least one professional school.

The NUPS sector in Canada has been - and is - very heterogeneous. Sometimes, community college has been used as an umbrella term to describe it, but most people agree that many of the NUPS do not fit the commonly held idea of a community college. When the college system was established in Ontario, a very explicit decision was made not to call the institutions community colleges, instead to call them colleges of applied arts and technology. The term college, without a modifier, is widely used in Canada to refer to NUPS, including even those whose proper name is Institute of Technology. As an aside, in Canada, "going to college" means something quite different than 'going to university", a reflection of our strict binary system.

In relation to universities, two characteristics of the NUPS should be noted. One is the strong emphasis on applied, or hands-on, training in a wide range of career fields most of which are not offered at universities. This is the predominant mission of most NUPS in Canada (except for some in British Columbia and Alberta) and for some it is their exclusive mission. In many fields the career training is quite advanced and sophisticated and the programs are three years duration. The other characteristic of note is that some NUPS - again, mainly in British Columbia and Alberta, and under a structure that is unique in North America in Quebec - have a substantial role in providing the first two years of an arts and science curriculum for transfer to a university. These exceptions notwithstanding, the most fundamental distinction in the Canadian binary system has been that between the academic orientation of the universities and the more applied, hands-on orientation of the NUPS - however difficult it has been to explain just what this distinction really means in practice.

This distinction between the academic and applied has also been the basis of the binary divides that existed in many countries outside North America, particularly in Europe. However, there has been one major distinction between the way that the binary principle has been employed in

Europe and Canada. In many European countries, the NUPS (or second sector institutions, as they are often called there) have been allowed to grant the baccalaureate degree, and even graduate degrees. This European practice reflected a view of academic and applied education as parallel, and thus the idea that each should have a comparable ladder of achievement credentials. Of course, in a Euclidian world parallel lines don't meet, and crossover between the two streams has been a major problem with the European model.

A common variant of the binary system has been the ternary system in which three, rather than two, sectors are differentiated from on another by mandate and governance. Usually this arises when one or the other of the binary sectors is segmented. For example, the NUPS sector may be divided on the basis of the level of sophistication and duration of training into higher and lower levels. The old structure in the United Kingdom was a good example of this with the universities, the polytechnics, and the colleges of further education. Or it may be the university sector which is segmented as in the California model.

In the European pattern, which has been the predominant pattern in Canada, the basis of the binary system is what might be called horizontal differentiation. In fact, when the college system was established in Ontario, the founders of the system described its relationship to the universities as "distinct but equal". Of course they never have been equal in regard to prestige or income potential for graduates, but they were *not* aligned hierarchically when it came to curriculum.

In contrast to the European and Canadian models, the original basis for the binary system in postsecondary education in the United States was vertical. The curriculum of the two-year institutions was hierarchically aligned with that of the four-year institutions. Over the past several decades, of course, with the growth of enrolment in a wide range of career programs, the binary system in the United States has acquired a significant horizontal dimension too. At the same time, in order to better facilitate crossover from the NUPS to the universities, the Canadian system has acquired more vertical differentiation.

Binary Systems under Fire

Binary systems have always been subject to criticism on two grounds: the difficulty of moving between sectors and the restrictions on innovation and initiative that are necessary to maintain the binary divide. By the end of the 1980s, there were strong challenges to the binary system in many jurisdictions, and its apparent demise in two countries was widely heralded. In the United Kingdom, the polytechnics were converted into (or renamed, if you will) universities, and in Australia, the colleges of advanced education were merged with universities, creating what was called a "Unified National

System"[1]. Of course there were third sectors in each of these countries, so elements of binary-ism have reappeared.

Perhaps the most interesting assault on the binary system has occurred in British Columbia. In recent years, British Columbia has made a number of changes in its postsecondary system which have had the effect of doing away with the former binary structure and replacing it with a highly differentiated network of different kinds of institutions which meet different needs. For purposes of this conference, the most significant of these changes was the conversion in 1989 of one-third of the community colleges into university-colleges. Concerned about the barriers to transfer for students living outside the Vancouver and Victoria areas where the universities were, the university-colleges were authorized to add the third and fourth years of programs in which they had been offering the first two years. Beyond that the goal of this reform was to "create a new type of institution that offered the best of both university and college programs and services to the region"[2].

There has as yet been no definitive study that pinpoints the reasons why binary structures in so many jurisdictions have come to be regarded as obsolete. However, my examination suggests the following as important factors: a concern that the barriers between sectors limit personal growth and development with adverse consequences for both the individual and society; and a belief that the binary structure inhibits the ability of postsecondary systems to adapt to changes in economic and occupational structures, and changes in societal values and goals pertaining to education. The binary model was more fitting in an earlier era when the pace of change in the economy was slower and social stratification was more accepted. A third factor - evident especially in the U.K. and Australia - was the belief that greater competition in postsecondary education would be a stimulus to greater efficiency, innovation, and excellence. This led to the idea in those countries that what institutions could achieve should be determined by their creative energy and ability in relation to their environment rather than by their government specified mandate.

The Community College Baccalaureate and the Binary Structure of Postsecondary Education

In the context of the foregoing remarks, the community college baccalaureate movement in North America can be seen as a manifestation of the worldwide move away from binary structures in postsecondary education. The nature and strength of this move will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction depending upon the specific characteristics of their binary structures and the pressures upon it.

In much of Canada there is a highly developed sector of applied career education which was differentiated from the university sector by the

absence of a baccalaureate degree and the great difficulty for students in those applied programs to obtain a degree, among other reasons because so many of the college programs had no counterpart in the universities. So borrowing a concept from Europe, one obvious solution to this problem was to authorize colleges to grant applied degrees in certain career fields. Alberta was the first province to do this, and I believe the first jurisdiction in North America in which community college like institutions have awarded the baccalaureate.

The names of the first four applied degree programs, which began in 1995, are indicative of their orientation toward meeting the needs of industry: Bachelor of Applied Integrated Environmental Management; Bachelor of Applied Conservation Enforcement; Bachelor of Applied Information Systems Technology; and Bachelor of Applied Horticultural Technology. Building upon previously offered three year diploma programs, these programs all have six semesters of formal classroom learning and two semesters of supervised work experience. In 1998, the experience of the first two sets of applied baccalaureate programs was reviewed by a provincial committee which pronounced the initiative a success and recommended that it be extended. Of course the birth of a new kind of degree on this continent has not been without difficulty. Graduates have experienced problems with some kinds of professional registration, and entry into master's programs is an uphill battle.

Subsequently to Alberta's initiative, both British Columbia and Ontario have followed suit. Although the enabling legislation in Ontario, which was passed just at the end of December, 2000, would appear to allow for conversion of a college into a university-college, or something similar, outside of British Columbia, the avowed policy of governments in Canada is to confine college baccalaureate granting to applied degrees. That is, the degrees will respond to the issue of horizontal differentiation that I referred to earlier, not vertical differentiation.

By contrast, from what I had been able to find out prior to this conference, in the United States many of the first community college baccalaureates have been of an academic rather than applied nature. If this observation is accurate it would be consistent with my earlier observation that the predominant differentiation in American binary structures is vertical rather than horizontal. On the other hand, in their 1995 article in *Community College Journal*, Burke and Garmon suggest that the "primary strength of the community college baccalaureate would be its promise to provide specialized career-focused education that could train specialists for a new age of "knowledge workers" ...".[3] This would be consistent with the dominant policy thrust in Canada. In any event, whether we are talking about horizontal or vertical differentiation underlying binary systems, to me an exciting thing about the community college baccalaureate movement is that it reflects a recognition that the binary structure of postsecondary

education which got formalized and codified in the 1960s is no longer meeting the needs of learners so well, and we are now - in both Canada and the United States - beginning to grope our way toward some new structures.

* *

Now I would like to turn briefly to two other issues, the mission and character of the community college and the Bachelor's Degree.

The Community College Baccalaureate and the Mission and Character of the Community College

The operative question here is how the community college baccalaureate fits within accepted ideas about the mission and character of the community college. Whether offering some baccalaureates will change the character of a community college likely depends upon the relative magnitude of its baccalaureate activity. Critics of this movement worry that even a modest involvement in baccalaureate provision would have a significant steering effect - and considering the effect that a modest move into graduate studies has had on some liberal arts colleges tends to support this viewpoint. If I am right about the imminent weakening of the binary model, then the threshold level of baccalaureate activity for it to have a transforming effect on the institution may be within easy reach for many community colleges. If, as seems likely, offering the baccalaureate will change the college, we have to ask whether those changes are consistent with our notion of what a community college is - and of course whether those changes are, on balance, for good or for ill.

The fear that a new preoccupation with the baccalaureate will divert colleges from their access and equity mission is understandable. Ironically, it was this type of fear that led the architects of the Ontario college system to reject the transfer function completely. The result of having a transfer function would be, as the civil servant in the key role put it, that a new college would become "a fourth rate liberal arts college with a few long haired pedants strutting around with a handful of students".[4] Others, however, argued that without a transfer function, the Ontario colleges would not be perceived as real academic institutions, and this perception has plagued them since their founding.[5] Community colleges in the United States have often faced a similar perception that they are marginal to postsecondary education[6], and the community college baccalaureate would certainly counter that perception.

Trying to decide whether one is for or against the community college baccalaureate by juxtaposing competing arguments about whether the baccalaureate would change the college assumes that the mission and

character of the college should be fixed for all time. This assumption, however, flies in the face of what has been the most enduring characteristic of the community college. It has constantly changed and adapted in response to new societal needs and the discovery of new ways of addressing those needs. With any evolutionary process, there are always those who declare at some point in the process, "this is where we want the process to stop". But it doesn't stop. Within the framework of the community college's historical evolution, one possible reaction to the community college baccalaureate movement is, "there it goes again, responding to societal needs".

Community Colleges and the Bachelor's Degree

Now I'd like to shift the focus from what the baccalaureate means for the community college to what the community college means for the baccalaureate. Specifically, does the idea of a community college offering a baccalaureate conflict with the idea of what a Bachelor's Degree is?

The system of academic degrees that we use today originated in the second half of the twelfth century. The degree was originally nothing more than a license to teach. The term Bachelor generally indicated an apprentice and was used in the mediaeval university to refer to a student who had ceased to be a pupil but had not yet become a teacher. As Lyte has noted, "The degree of Bachelor was in fact an important step on the way to the higher degree of Master, or Doctor"[7] (as, one might add, Associate is now a step on the way to Bachelor).

The Bachelor's Degree, or baccalaureate, has evolved considerably from the twelfth century, and the concept has proven remarkably adaptable and elastic. Almost every major change in the conditions surrounding the baccalaureate has been the subject of controversy and dire warnings of adverse consequences. For example, a report at Yale College in 1828 warned that "Should Greek and Latin ever be given a "secondary place" in the curriculum," the College's "degrees would become valueless".[8] Today with nontraditional degrees being offered by a variety of special mission institutions, business corporations having their own degree programs, and a plethora of distance degree programs available on the Internet, it is difficult to see the grounds for denying any credible institution the opportunity to *apply* for the right to offer a baccalaureate program - especially an institution that already has much of the foundation for such a program.

It is relevant to note here that a shift in thinking that is associated with the weakening of allegiance to the binary model is that what should determine the credibility of any proposed degree program is not the historic mandate of the institution which proposes to offer it, but the apparent coherence, quality, integrity, and fitness of purpose of the program itself. This principle is by no means universally accepted, but I believe that in an

era when learners are already putting together their own degree programs from a combination of sources, it is on the way to becoming part of the way that we view the degree. And as that happens, the terms community college and baccalaureate will cease to jar the ear when uttered in the same breath.

Notes

1. David Mahony, "Governments and the Universities: The "New Mutuality" in Australian Higher Education - A National Case Study," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 65(2), 1994, p. 124.
2. University College Consortium, "An Exploration of Issues Facing the University Colleges of British Columbia," A Discussion Paper Presented to the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, Vancouver, February, 2000, p. 3.
3. Thomas Burke and John Garmon, "The Community College Baccalaureate," *Community College Journal* (August/September), 1995, p. 36.
4. Cited in W.G. Fleming, *Ontario's Educative Society, Vol. 4, Postsecondary and Adult Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1971, p. 516.
5. Michael Skolnik, "The Evolution of Relations between Community Colleges and Universities in Ontario," *The Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 19(5), 1995, pp. 437-452.
6. Darrel Clowes and Bernard Levin, "Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges: Are They Leaving Higher Education?," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 60(3), 1989, pp. 349-355.
7. H.C. Maxwell Lyte, *A History of the University of Oxford* (London: MacMillan and Co.), 1886, pp. 5-7.
8. Cited in Lawrence Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1996, p. 38.

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