



COLLEGES | COLLÈGES
ONTARIO | ONTARIO

**EXPANDING DEGREE OPPORTUNITIES
TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE NEW ECONOMY**

A Proposal from Ontario's Colleges

August 2009

Summary

The problem

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in consultation with the universities has estimated that 53,000 to 86,000 more university spaces will be needed by 2021 to meet student demand. There will be special pressures in the GTA. Universities' enrolment plans will not be sufficient to meet this demand.

The opportunity

With the government's support, Ontario's colleges could provide space for tens of thousands of students in high-quality, career-oriented baccalaureate programs over the coming decade and beyond.

Why colleges?

Ontario's colleges have the experience, capacity and willingness to help meet the growing demand for career-oriented baccalaureate education.

Colleges are offering high-quality baccalaureate degrees today. More than 50 baccalaureate programs are offered at Ontario colleges, and another 65 degree programs are offered in partnership with universities.

Colleges produce highly educated graduates who have both theoretical and hands-on knowledge demanded by growing sectors of the economy.

Colleges can make degrees accessible to students where demand warrants – in major urban centres, and in smaller communities where there is no university campus.

Colleges have a strong track record in serving students who are not well-served by other institutions. Low- and middle-income students, aboriginal students and students with disabilities are all more likely to attend college than university.

College education is cost-effective for government and for students. The costs are comparable to those for university undergraduate programs, without the expense of graduate studies and basic research.

Joining with other leading jurisdictions

Around the world, governments are focusing on how to offer education to a growing share of their populations in ways that are focused and cost-effective.

Expanding the role of colleges in the U.S. is seen as a way to create four-year institutions focusing on degrees that have a clear link to how local economies can thrive in a global economy. British Columbia and Alberta have both moved to permit colleges to offer high-quality, four-year baccalaureates.

What is wrong with current policies?

The former government introduced college degrees in 2000 as an alternative to university degrees. The fundamental flaw with this policy has been to establish two types of baccalaureate degrees – one offered by universities, and another offered by colleges. Inevitably this situation has been misunderstood as creating two tiers of degrees.

What the Ontario government can do

The Ontario government should make college degree programs a part of its plan for meeting the growing demand for baccalaureate education.

The government should recognize that there is a single high standard of quality for baccalaureate degrees, offered by either universities or colleges. The Ontario Qualifications Framework confirms that a single standard of quality is in place.

The naming of the degree should reflect the single quality of baccalaureate degree and should not artificially distinguish between colleges and universities.

Opportunities for colleges to contribute more fully to Ontario's human resources needs should be expanded by lifting the ban on college degree programs that compete with career-related programs at universities.

To protect the quality of students' programs, the government should review and adjust the funding parameters for college degree programs to bring them in line with actual costs.

For colleges to play a substantial role in meeting the future demand for baccalaureate degrees, the timeliness of the approval process should be improved.

What colleges will do

Colleges want to work with the government to plan how many college degree spaces for students are needed and how they will be accommodated.

Colleges will work with the government to ensure that all degree programs provide a high-quality experience for students.

Colleges will take responsibility for marketing their programs to prospective students. Once programs have become well-established, they will gain stronger acceptance with employers and become recognized as a pathway for admission to university graduate programs.

Colleges will continue to create pathways so students in diploma programs can proceed to degree programs at a college or university. Colleges will also create pathways so students can transfer from their college degree program to a similar university program if they so choose.

EXPANDING DEGREE OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE NEW ECONOMY

A proposal from Ontario's colleges

Building on the success of "Reaching Higher"

The "Reaching Higher" plan has re-energized the partnership between Ontario's colleges and the provincial government after a long period of neglect. The decline in resources is being reversed, and more students are seeking admission to college than ever before.

"Reaching Higher" is making it possible for Ontario's colleges to contribute to meeting three great imperatives:

- keeping pace with other jurisdictions that are investing in improving the education of their workforce
- providing access to every student who has the potential to benefit from higher education
- preparing workers with skills that will be urgently needed in the new workforce.

The heart of Ontario's economic development strategy is strengthening the knowledge and skills of the workforce. In good times and bad, employers seek workers whose advanced education prepares them to make a substantial contribution to economic prosperity and competitiveness.

Young people increasingly recognize that higher education is essential if they are to have a chance at a stable and well-paying career. The number of Ontario students who want to attend higher education is continuing to grow. Students from groups that have been under-represented in higher education should be an important part of future growth.

The Problem

Students are demanding baccalaureate degrees that will prepare them for successful careers. Employers increasingly use the baccalaureate degree as a minimum entry requirement. First-year university enrolments have grown 40 per cent since 2001 – four times as fast as the growth in the number of 18 year olds in the population.

MTCU in consultation with the universities has estimated that 53,000 to 86,000 more undergraduate university spaces will be needed by 2021 to meet student demand.¹ This projection is based on the long-term trend towards higher postsecondary participation rates, taking into account expected changes in the population age 18 to 24.

¹ MTCU, "Presentation to the Long-term Capital Planning Technical Advisory Group (Universities)," October 16, 2008, and "Presentation to the Long-term Capital Planning Technical Advisory Group (Colleges)," November 21, 2008.

The GTA will experience special pressures. Some universities have undertaken projections showing the growth to be as high as 40,000 to 75,000 spaces in the GTA alone.² There is growing evidence that recent immigrants are more likely than the Canadian-born population to want their children to earn a degree and that they are willing to make significant financial sacrifices for this purpose.³ As well, middle-income and low-income students are less likely than the traditional university population to be able to afford to attend out-of-town universities.

Universities' enrolment plans will not be sufficient to meet this demand. Some universities, including the three Toronto universities, have grown substantially in the past decade and have limited interest in further undergraduate expansion relative to the expected demand. There may also be a mismatch between universities' traditional program offerings and the province's need for graduates who are well-prepared to launch careers in new areas of the economy.

The opportunity

The time is right for the Ontario government to work with colleges to expand the colleges' role in offering career-related baccalaureate degrees.

With the government's support, Ontario's colleges could provide space for tens of thousands of students in high-quality, career-oriented baccalaureate programs over the coming decade and beyond.

These programs would:

- Attract qualified students who are not well-served by traditional baccalaureate programs
- Improve student success by educating students in a teaching-focused environment
- Prepare graduates for careers in growing sectors of Ontario's economy
- Meet national and international standards for quality so that students can be considered for graduate or professional education if they so choose
- Draw on colleges' strength in providing student-focused education that is cost-effective for both the government and the student.

The expansion of college degrees will expand the breadth of opportunities available at colleges. The colleges' core mission will continue to be to offer postsecondary certificate and diploma programs as well as baccalaureate degrees, apprenticeship training, contract training and continuing education. More than 90 per cent of college graduates find work within six months and 93 per cent of employers are satisfied or very satisfied with the graduates they have hired in the past six months.

² The Globe and Mail, July 30, 2007.

³ Teresa Abada, Feng Hou and Bali Ram, "Group Differences in Educational Attainment among the Children of Immigrants" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008); Robert Sweet, Paul Anisef and David Walters, "Immigrant Parents' Investments in Their Children's Post-Secondary Education" (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2008).

Why colleges?

Ontario's colleges have the experience, capacity and willingness to help meet the growing demand for career-oriented baccalaureate education.

Colleges are offering high-quality baccalaureate degrees today

In 2000, the former government authorized colleges to offer four-year baccalaureate degrees in applied fields of study, subject to a number of restrictions. There are over 50 baccalaureate programs being offered by 15 Ontario colleges:

- Each of the programs has been rigorously reviewed by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), an arms-length agency appointed by the government, using detailed degree standards that are similar to those of baccalaureate programs in the universities
- Each degree requires eight semesters of study plus a 14-week period of paid work experience.

Despite the restrictions on these programs, about 4,400 FTE students were enrolled in 2007-08 – accounting for about 1.5 per cent of all of Ontario's baccalaureate students. Almost 12,000 applications were received for admission in 2008.

In addition, college faculty are providing degree-level instruction in 65 degree programs offered in partnership with a university. These programs confirm that colleges have the strength to offer degree-level education today.

Colleges respond to labour market needs

College degrees are meeting employers' needs in the new economy. A recent report prepared for the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto found that:

"Colleges arguably contribute more to the creative economy than universities in some occupational categories

"Many of the career pathways for 'super creative core' occupations that are the hallmarks of creativity and innovation, such as fashion, interior, and industrial design, digital and multi-media, and contemporary film and music production, are provided in colleges rather than universities

"Colleges offer a wide range of programs in arts, applied sciences, engineering, and many aspects of design; they produce not only more than their fair share of painters, musicians, writers, and actors, they also train civil and chemical engineers, photonics and bioinformatics specialists, and urban planners and industrial designers...

"[I]t is possible that colleges may make an even greater contribution than universities in some creative class occupations because they produce highly educated graduates with four-year bachelor's degrees, who have both theoretical and applied knowledge of new, industry-specific technologies."⁴

Colleges offer degrees in sectors as diverse as financial services, tourism, manufacturing, fashion, advertising, biotechnology, construction, information technology, policing and entertainment.

Students who graduate from college degree programs are in demand:

- Ninety-one per cent of the first cohort of degree graduates who sought employment were working within six months after graduation
- Students and employers report levels of satisfaction that are comparable to or higher than those for non-degree programs. Ninety-four per cent of employers said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the degree students they hired.

⁴ Allison Bramwell, "Ontario Community Colleges in the Creative Age: Bohemians, Bioinformatics, and the Built Environment" (Toronto: Martin Prosperity Institute, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, February 2009), 2, 17. http://martinprosperity.org/media/pdfs/Ontarios_Community_Colleges-ABramwell.pdf

DEGREES OFFERED BY ONTARIO COLLEGES TODAY

Degree	Specializations
Bachelor of Applied Business	Automotive Management E-Business Supply Chain Management E-Business Marketing Fashion Management Financial Services Hospitality Operations Management Golf Management Human Resources Management Human Resources Strategy and Technology International Accounting and Finance International Business International Commerce and Global Development Municipal and Corporate Administration Tourism Management
Bachelor of Applied Arts	Animation Behavioural Psychology Child Development Creative Advertising Criminal Justice Film and Media Production Illustration Indigenous Leadership and Community Development Integrated Land Planning Technologies Interior Design Paralegal Studies
Bachelor of Applied Technology	Architecture – Project and Facility Management Biotechnology Computer and Communications Networking Construction and Environment Construction Science and Management Control Systems Technology Environmental Site Remediation Flight Industrial Design Informatics and Security Integrated Advanced Manufacturing Integrated Telecommunication and Computer Technologies Photonics Software Development

Bachelor of Applied
Information Sciences

Computer and Communication Networking
Information Systems Security
Software Systems – Design,
Development and Management

Bachelor of Applied
Health Sciences

Athletic Therapy
Exercise Science and Health Promotion
Health Informatics Management

Bachelor of Applied Human Services

Police Studies

Bachelor of Applied Music

Contemporary Music

Colleges can make degrees accessible to students where demand warrants

Ontario colleges are already proving that they can offer programs in communities where the demand for baccalaureate education is growing.

The growth in student demand has been especially strong in major urban centres and is expected to remain so, fuelled in part by high levels of immigration. Colleges in the GTA are providing almost 3,000 seats in baccalaureate programs today. Many more seats are being offered in Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and other urban centres.

Yet the need is not confined to urban centres. Research shows that students who live more than 80 kilometres from a university are significantly less likely to attend⁵ – contributing to the loss of economic opportunities in smaller cities and rural areas. Students from middle-class and lower-income families are especially likely to be left out. Students who leave their communities to attend university often do not return after graduation:

- Introducing college baccalaureate programs that are targeted to regional needs is a cost-effective way of making degrees accessible to these students
- College baccalaureate degrees are a cost-effective alternative to creating new universities or new university campuses in smaller communities.

⁵ Marc Frenette, "Access to college and university: Does distance matter?" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

Colleges provide access for students

Colleges have a strong record in serving students who are not well served by other institutions. Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes the need to prepare every young person for college, university, training and work. Studies in the United States and Canada have consistently shown that colleges succeed in reaching out to students who are reluctant or unable to attend a traditional university:

- Colleges are more likely than universities to serve low- and middle-income students. Statistics Canada has found that university attendance is heavily skewed to the upper half of the family income scale. Colleges draw about equally from all four quartiles of family income⁶
- Colleges are more likely to serve aboriginal students. Twenty-three per cent of Ontario's aboriginal population have successfully completed a program at a college, compared with nine per cent who have completed a university degree⁷
- Colleges are more likely to serve students with disabilities. Nine per cent of first-year students in Canadian colleges and five per cent of those in Canadian universities reported a disability.⁸

The primary explanation for these successes is that colleges have a long history of strong faculty engagement with students. A growing body of literature suggests that interaction with faculty and other students is a key determinant of whether at-risk students succeed in higher education.⁹

College education is cost-effective for government and for students

Colleges provide a model of education that is cost-effective for government and for students. The primary role of college faculty is to teach students and to help them succeed.

Colleges play an important role in conducting applied research that supports economic development, but they do not seek high-cost pure research missions. Nor do colleges seek to extend their degree offerings into expensive research-based graduate programs.

The government operating grant for a degree student at a college is approximately \$5,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student — \$800 less than the median for university undergraduate programs¹⁰. Tuition fees for students in college degree programs are competitive with regulated university tuition fees.

6 Miles Corak, Garth Lipps, and John Zhao, "Family income and participation in post-secondary education" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003).

7 Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Second Annual Review and Research Plan (Toronto: The Council, February 2009), 39, 42. See also Colleges Ontario, Environmental Scan (Toronto, 2008), 37, and Hon. Bob Rae, Ontario: A leader in learning (Toronto, 2005), 64.

8 Colleges Ontario, Environmental Scan (Toronto, 2008), 37. See also Ontario: A leader in learning, 69.

9 See for example Kay M. McClenney, "Research Update: The Community College Survey of Student Engagement", Community College Review 35:2, (2007), 137-146.

10 Source: Estimates based upon MTCU data. Data exclude collaborative college-university degree programs.

Joining with other leading jurisdictions

Governments around the world have adopted higher education as a centrepiece of their economic development strategies. China has added 10 million spaces to its higher education system in only five years.¹⁰ Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, and other newly industrialized countries have embarked on expansions of their higher education systems. Closer to home, California, Florida, Texas, Arizona and other states – recognizing the challenge from other jurisdictions – have adopted targets for increasing the number of degree-holders in their workforces.

Degree education that is focused, cost-competitive and results-oriented

With limited resources, all of these governments are focusing on how to offer education to a growing share of their populations in ways that are focused, cost-effective and results-oriented.

Ontario is unusual in trying to meet almost all of the demand for baccalaureate degrees through publicly supported research universities.¹¹ Full-time college faculty are primarily responsible for teaching and student support, while full-time faculty at research universities divide their responsibilities approximately equally between teaching and research. Research universities provide a relatively high-cost model for undergraduate instruction.

Unlike Ontario, which has essentially two types of postsecondary institutions, most U.S. states have a mix of institutions that is more varied. British Columbia and Alberta are also moving to a greater variety of institutional types. Two trends are especially pertinent for Ontario:

- Creating four-year degree-granting institutions that focus on teaching, with limited research missions
- Encouraging the creation of degrees that have a clear link to careers that meet the needs of the economy.

Many U.S. states have a second tier of universities that have few or no doctoral programs and only a small role in research.

While some four-year institutions in the U.S. focus on traditional degrees, others are focusing on degrees that are oriented to meeting labour market shortages and supplying graduates for newer fields that have developed as a result of new technologies and global pressures.¹²

To encourage the rapid expansion of career-related baccalaureate degrees – without the cost of creating new institutions – there is a growing trend to authorize colleges to grant baccalaureate degrees.

Expanding the role of colleges is seen as a way to create four-year institutions focusing on degrees that have a clear link to local and regional economies.

10 Qiang Zha and Jing Lin, "China's Move to Mass Higher Education: The Policy Process." Presentation to the 52nd Comparative and International Education Society Annual Meeting, New York, March 20, 2008. <http://chinesehighereducation.org/indexrd.htm>

11 Glen Jones and Michael Skolnik, *Degrees of Opportunity: Broadening Student Access by Increasing Institutional Differentiation in Ontario Higher Education* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2009), 4-9.

12 The trend towards more institutional diversification and a greater focus on career-oriented education can be found in many OECD countries. See Paulo Santiago et al., *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* (Paris: OECD, 2008), volume 1, 96-99.

Twenty-nine public community colleges¹³ in the United States award baccalaureate degrees, including colleges in Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Vermont and Washington. In some states, the community college baccalaureate is offered on a limited basis, often in areas that are selected for their strategic economic or regional importance.

Florida: Creating college baccalaureate degrees that meet the needs of the economy

Florida is a leader in recognizing colleges' potential to contribute to meeting the economy's need for degree-level graduates.

In June 2008, Florida enacted legislation¹⁴ establishing a new college system in Florida. The creation of the "Florida College System" is intended to stimulate baccalaureate degree production at a lower cost to the state and would-be students.

This legislation came after a decade of experimentation with college degree-granting on a limited basis. Seven colleges have experience in granting baccalaureate degrees, authorized by ad hoc legislation passed over the years. The legislation has authorized four-year college degrees to meet areas of pressing economic need, including:

- Nursing
- Teacher education, especially in math and sciences
- Business
- Paralegal Studies
- Public Safety Administration
- Dental Hygiene
- Veterinary Technology
- Orthotics and Prosthetics
- Technology Management
- Banking
- International Business
- Interdisciplinary Health and Human Studies
- Management and Organizational Leadership.

Florida authorized colleges to grant degrees because the need for degree graduates exceeded what the state's universities could supply. A 2007 external review of higher education¹⁵

13 American Association of Community Colleges, <http://www2.aacc.nche.edu/research/index.htm>

14 Laws of Florida, Ch. 2008-52.

15 Pappas Consulting Group Inc., Proposing a Blueprint for Higher Education in Florida: Outlining the Way to a Long-Term Master Plan for Higher Education in Florida. Submitted to the Board of Governors, State University System of Florida, January 15, 2007.

recommended that the state consider creating a separate category of institutions that would focus solely on undergraduate education, with community colleges being part of this system. The review found that:

- Florida ranked 43rd in the nation for bachelor's degrees awarded per 1,000 residents between the ages of 18 and 44
- Universities in Florida have increasingly focused on graduate degree production, even amid calls for increased emphasis on undergraduate education. Florida increased bachelor's degree production by 42 per cent between 1993 and 2003. At the same time, however, Florida's master's degree production went up by 59 per cent, and doctorates increased by 56 per cent.

With the passage of the new legislation in 2008, nine of Florida's 28 community colleges will become pilot "state colleges," with potentially more to follow. Some colleges have said they prefer to keep their current status due to their close working relationships with nearby universities.

An external review of community college degree granting in 2008 found that:

"The expansion of the community college mission to include a baccalaureate degree option paves the way for specific populations served by these institutions to access further education in a cost-effective manner to meet the needs of today's workforce and to more readily compete in an increasingly globalized market...

"Higher education must adapt to the changing landscape of the state's economic and workforce needs to prepare its citizens for an increasingly globalized market. For this, Florida should continue to consider the role of the community college as a viable source to provide a baccalaureate education to non-traditional students."¹⁶

The likely outcome of Florida's new legislation will be a postsecondary system with a greater variety of institutions and more pathways for students to pursue degrees. There will continue to be 11 research universities (of which one, the University of Florida, is highly placed in national and international research rankings). There will also be a set of state colleges offering a wide variety of programs ranging from one-year certificates to four-year baccalaureate degrees, and a set of community colleges that have chosen to focus on certificates and diplomas and to partner with nearby universities in offering degree programs, with the option of seeking to become state colleges in future.

British Columbia: Multiple institutions, a single standard of quality

British Columbia restructured its higher education system in 2008 and now has 11 universities, 11 colleges, and three specialized institutes. Since 2005, all of the colleges have had legal authority to offer their own four-year baccalaureate degrees.

The legislation governing colleges in British Columbia authorizes the minister to designate any college to offer an applied baccalaureate degree and to specify the name for the degree. The name need not include the word "applied."¹⁷

16 Florida Department of Education, "Baccalaureate Programs in Community Colleges: A Program Review," March 2008, 1, 12. <http://www.fldoe.org/CC/pdf/history.pdf>

17 B.C. College and Institution Act, section 5.1.

Prior to ministerial approval, the proposed degree is reviewed by the Degree Quality Assessment Board, a panel of public and private sector experts. All new degrees, including those at universities, are approved through this process. British Columbia applies a single level of quality standards to all baccalaureate degrees, while recognizing that degrees may have different purposes (such as general education, academic, applied, or professional).¹⁸

Institutions that have at least 10 years of experience in offering quality degrees may be granted exempt status. This means the institution has demonstrated that it has rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external. When an institution has been granted exempt status at a certain degree level, proposals submitted for new degree programs at that level go directly to the minister for approval following the 30-day public review period on the ministry's website. The Degree Quality Assessment Board does not review the proposal unless the minister has concerns about it and refers it to the board.

Six of British Columbia's 11 colleges now offer their own four-year degrees: Camosun College, Douglas College, North Island College, Okanagan College, Selkirk College and Vancouver Community College. Degrees are offered in these fields:

- Bachelor of Business Administration (with specializations in Accounting, Human Resource Management, and Marketing Communications Management)
- Bachelor of Physical Education and Coaching
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing
- Bachelor of Science in Psychiatric Nursing
- Bachelor of Therapeutic Recreation
- Bachelor of Child and Youth Care
- Bachelor of Computer Information Systems
- Bachelor of Hospitality Management
- Bachelor of Applied Music
- Bachelor of Geographic Information Systems.

With the 2008 restructuring in place, British Columbia students can access baccalaureate degrees from a university, from one of the five colleges offering baccalaureate degrees, or by transferring from a college diploma program to a degree program at a college or university.

18 B.C. Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, "Degree Program Review Criteria and Guidelines," April 2008. <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/documents/degree-program-criteria.pdf>

Alberta: Moving beyond “applied” degrees

Alberta has introduced measures to allow two colleges and two technical institutes – Grant McEwan College, Mount Royal College, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and Southern Alberta Institute of Technology – to offer the same types of baccalaureates as the universities. The degrees will be reviewed for quality by the Campus Alberta Quality Council – an arms-length quality assurance agency that also reviews proposals from the universities for new degree programs. These four institutions will offer baccalaureate degrees in specified areas, as well as certificate and diploma programs. They will conduct applied research and have a more limited role in pure research.¹⁹

Alberta’s decision comes after a decade-long experiment in allowing colleges to offer “applied” degrees. These are three-year programs supplemented by a one-year supervised work experience. Alberta’s applied degrees were not widely recognized by universities in Canada for admission to graduate programs, because they involved only three years of academic study.

Grant McEwan College in Edmonton now offers its own degrees in these fields:

- Bachelor of Child and Youth Care
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing
- Bachelor of Commerce
- Bachelor of Arts.

Mount Royal College in Calgary now offers its own degrees in these fields:

- Bachelor of Arts — Anthropology, English, History, Policy Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Spanish
- Bachelor of Arts - Criminal Justice
- Bachelor of Business Administration — Accounting, General Management, Human Resources, Marketing
- Bachelor of Communication — Information Design, Journalism, Public Relations
- Bachelor of Computer Information Systems
- Bachelor of Nursing
- Bachelor of Science — Cellular and Molecular Biology, General Science, Geology, Health Science.

Alberta’s new policy framework allows other colleges to apply to offer baccalaureate degrees on a selected basis.

¹⁹ Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, “Roles and Mandates Policy Framework for Alberta’s Publicly Funded Advanced Education System,” November 2007.
<http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/reading/policy/roleframework/Roles%20and%20Mandates%20Policy%20Framework%20FINAL.pdf>

What is wrong with Ontario's current policies?

Ontario has the opportunity to create new degree programs at colleges that match or exceed the calibre of those being created elsewhere. To make this vision a reality, the Ontario government needs to re-think current policies so they serve students and employers better.

The former government introduced college degrees in 2000 as an alternative to university degrees. The fundamental flaw with this policy has been to establish two types of baccalaureate degrees – one offered by universities, and another offered by colleges. The college degree is restricted by statute to “applied area[s] of study,”²⁰ but it was quickly (and erroneously) labelled as an “applied degree.” Inevitably this situation has been represented by some as creating two tiers of degrees.

The perception that there are two tiers of baccalaureate degrees has hurt students and employers:

- Employers have difficulty understanding the college degree credential. While employers who hire college degree graduates express high levels of satisfaction, the credential remains little-known after nine years. Employers who operate nationally confuse Ontario college degrees – which require four years of in-class study plus a work placement – with Alberta colleges’ “applied degrees,” which are three-year degrees with a supervised year of employment
- Prospective students are often deterred by the term “applied,” because it means different things in the K-12 system and in the postsecondary system. In the Ontario secondary school system, students choose between the “applied” and “academic” streams. “Applied” courses are directed at students who are unlikely to seek a postsecondary degree
- Universities have raised doubts about whether graduates from college degree programs will receive full consideration for admission to graduate programs.²¹ In introducing applied degrees in 2000, the government was silent about whether the degrees would prepare students for graduate study. Officially, the universities have promised that “[e]ach applicant is considered on his or her own merits, according to standards set by each institution, program by program.”²² Establishing a single standard should facilitate the transition of college degree graduates into university graduate schools

20 Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, s. 4(5).

21 Caroline Alphonso, “What’s a college degree worth?”, *The Globe and Mail*, May 13, 2006.

22 Council of Ontario Universities, “COU Statement on Advanced Study at Provincially Assisted Ontario Universities,” December 7, 2006.

- Some regulated professions have attempted to draw artificial distinctions between degrees from college and universities. Since 2005, the College of Nurses of Ontario has specified that new nurses must hold a “baccalaureate degree in nursing granted by a university” – excluding the possibility that colleges could offer high-quality degrees in nursing.²³ Colleges and universities have gone to great lengths to form and maintain partnerships whose sole purpose is to meet this College of Nurses requirement.²⁴ The new revisions to the Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade – which will require Ontario to accept the qualifications of professionals certified in other provinces who wish to work in Ontario²⁵ – makes it timely for Ontario to review artificial distinctions that are not found in other provinces.

23 Ontario Regulation 275/94.

24 A recent academic study suggests that the argument against college degrees in nursing is primarily political, warning that advocates for college nursing degrees “risk a schism in nursing education that could fall short of advancing earlier goals of advancing the nursing profession through knowledge development and academic scholarship.” See Leigh Chapman and Dale Kirby, “A critical analysis of the benefits and limitations of an applied degree in undergraduate nursing education,” *Nursing leadership* 21:4 (2008), 82.

25 The amendment permits exceptions to full labour mobility only if these are “clearly identified and justified as required to meet a legitimate public policy objective such as public security and safety.” “First Ministers’ Declaration Regarding the Agreement on Internal Trade,” Ottawa, January 16, 2009.
http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/EN_Internal%20Trade%20Agreement.pdf

What the Ontario government can do

The Ontario government should support colleges in offering degree-level studies in career-related programs.

The most important step that the Ontario government can take is to make college degree programs a part of its plan for meeting the growing demand for baccalaureate education.

Colleges' primary mission is career-related postsecondary education. With employers demanding more advanced education for entry-level jobs, degree-level studies are a natural evolution in the colleges' mission. In planning for the future expansion of the higher education system, Ontario should recognize the colleges' capacity to offer baccalaureate degrees. The government's planning for capital and operating investments should make colleges a partner in meeting the needs of future students and employers.

Colleges do not seek to offer degrees in traditional academic disciplines. Colleges seek to offer degrees that build on our strengths while providing students with the advanced education needed for future careers.

College degrees can be a credible option for students and employers. To make them so, the government should change current policies that have embedded the perception that there are two tiers of baccalaureate degrees. These include policies with respect to:

- Quality standards
- The naming of degrees
- Protection of universities from competition
- Regulation
- Funding.

The government should recognize that there is a single high standard of quality for baccalaureate degrees, offered by either universities or colleges.

Ontario has adopted two documents – the 2007 Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance in Degree Education in Canada²⁶ and the Ontario Qualifications Framework²⁷ – that confirm that a single standard of quality is in place.

²⁶ <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/95/QA-Statement-2007.en.pdf>

²⁷ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/postsec/oqf.pdf>

The 2007 Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance in Degree Education in Canada underscores the importance of “strengthening... recognition of qualifications schemes at both national and international levels.” The ministerial statement sets out a single level of degree standards for all baccalaureate degrees in Canada, regardless of whether the degree is offered by a university or a college.

The ministerial statement affirms that baccalaureate degrees should have a single standard of quality, even though they may have different purposes:

“Some bachelor’s-degree programs are intended to provide a wide exposure to several disciplines, others to provide an in-depth education in one or more disciplines (often as preparation for graduate study), and still others to provide a blend of theory and practice that equips students for entry into an occupation or profession. Despite that diversity, each bachelor’s-degree program must meet a substantial and common set of competency outcomes ... to justify use of the bachelor’s-degree label.”²⁶

The ministerial statement specifically recognizes baccalaureate programs with an applied focus, defined as programs that:

“blend theory and practice, with content selected to ensure mastery of the field of practice rather than to deepen knowledge in the discipline/disciplines for their own sake or as preparation for further study in the discipline. Even so, they may prepare students for further study depending upon the field and length and depth of the program...”²⁶

The principles of the ministerial statement have been incorporated in the Ontario Qualifications Framework. This framework describes the main purpose of each type of postsecondary credential, typical admission requirements, typical duration, and the knowledge and skills expected of graduates for each qualification. The Qualifications Framework describes a single quality standard for the honours baccalaureate degree, while noting that the degree may be “academically oriented, profession-oriented, [or] in an applied area of study.” Regardless of type, all honours baccalaureate degrees are deemed to prepare students for graduate studies or for employment.²⁸

Acknowledging a single quality standard for all baccalaureate degrees provides a basis for erasing unnecessary distinctions between university and college baccalaureates.

28 Ontario Qualifications Framework, 1. The Framework confirms the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board’s description that “An honours baccalaureate program in an applied area of study is normally designed to require a level of conceptual sophistication, specialized knowledge, and intellectual autonomy similar to that in an honours or specialist degree program but with the disciplinary content oriented to an occupational field of practice.” (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, Handbook for Ontario Colleges, February 2006, 14.)

The naming of baccalaureate degrees at universities and colleges should reflect the single high standard of quality for baccalaureate degrees.

The naming of the degree should reflect the single quality of baccalaureate degree and should not artificially distinguish between colleges and universities.

At present, colleges are required to incorporate the word "Applied" in the name of their degrees. This has led to anomalous names like "Bachelor of Applied Music" and "Bachelor of Applied Business" – degrees that are almost unheard of outside Canada.

A student who has completed a four-year baccalaureate that meets recognized quality standards should receive a degree whose name accurately represents the content of the degree and is widely recognized, such as Bachelor of Music or Bachelor of Business Administration. In some cases it may be appropriate to include the field of specialization, such as Bachelor of Computer Science (Informatics and Security).

The ban on offering programs that compete with career-related programs at universities should be lifted.

At present, colleges are prohibited from offering programs that duplicate programs normally offered by Ontario universities.

By contrast, universities have great flexibility to introduce new baccalaureate programs without regard to competing programs at other universities or colleges.

To avoid the charge of duplicating university programs, colleges have in some cases felt obligated to design programs that are more narrowly specialized than they would otherwise be. This practice in turn has limited the attractiveness of college degree programs for students, since many young people do not wish to commit to a single area of specialization. Excellent programs that should have large numbers of students may in fact have only a few dozen because the college has been forced to design the program more narrowly than students want.

With the rising demand for baccalaureate degrees and the projected shortage of university spaces, there is no merit in the current policy.

A better approach would be to support colleges that wish to offer career-related programs at a level of specialization that is appropriate to baccalaureate study. Colleges have processes in place to assess labour market demand and to monitor whether graduates are finding careers related to their studies. Students will benefit from baccalaureate programs that open doors to a vocational field without limiting them to a single specialization.

Opportunities for colleges to contribute more fully to health human resources should be reviewed.

The requirement that new nurses educated in Ontario must hold a “university degree” prevents colleges from doing all that they can to meet Ontario’s health human resource needs.

Governments in British Columbia, Alberta and Florida have all recognized the colleges’ capacity to address the shortage of qualified nurses. Until 2005, the majority of Ontario’s nurses were educated at colleges. Ontario’s colleges have the experience, capacity and willingness to help meet the growing need for registered nurses.

Other professions have already moved to recognize the quality of college degrees. The Ontario College of Teachers has changed its entry requirements so that new teachers must hold a baccalaureate from “an acceptable postsecondary institution” in addition to a baccalaureate in Education. The Society of Management Accountants of Ontario (CMA Ontario) requires prospective CMAs to hold a “university or applied degree” that includes courses in designated subjects.

The regulatory process should be more focused and timely.

The Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) plays an important role by setting a high standard for quality. Colleges value the high standards that are being maintained. Colleges recognize that the approval process has been improved based on experience.

For colleges to play a substantial role in meeting the future demand for baccalaureate degrees, the timeliness of the approval process must be improved. At present, it typically requires three years from the time a program is conceived until the time the first students enter the classroom:

- Colleges normally take about one year to prepare the necessary application materials. Applications typically involve 150 to 350 pages of material (with exceptions at both ends of this range)
- The review and approval process typically takes one year (from date of college application to date of minister’s letter of approval)
- The prime season for marketing baccalaureate degree programs to secondary school students is from September to January. This is when the major recruitment events are held and students are deciding where to apply
- Between January and August, colleges assess applications, and then students consider their offers of admission and choose which program they will enter.

A sampling of college applications shows that the length of the process is approximately the same for both new programs and renewals of established programs.

While each step in this process may have value, the three-year gap between concept and delivery makes it difficult for colleges to respond promptly to emerging needs in the economy. Colleges are prepared to work with MTCU and PEQAB to focus the process so that it requires less paper and less time while maintaining high quality standards.

In addition, colleges urge the government to adopt British Columbia's approach of providing an exemption for institutions that have shown over a period of time that, through their internal processes, they have the capacity to develop and offer high-quality baccalaureate programs.

To protect the quality of students' programs, the government should review and adjust the funding parameters for degree programs to bring them in line with actual costs.

College degree programs provide good value for government and for students.

Creating and sustaining these high-quality degree programs imposes costs that are higher than those for similar diploma-level programs:

- Students in degree programs are required to gain experience in research in an area of their discipline
- At least half of the faculty in the program must hold a PhD or similar research degree in the field of study
- Learning and information resources (such as libraries, databases, computing, equipment and laboratory facilities) must be upgraded to meet the needs of degree-level students.²⁹

To protect the quality of students' programs, adequate operating funding needs to be provided to recognize the cost of instruction in all degree-level programs. In addition, the allocation of capital funding needs to take into account the growing number of students in college programs.

Doing so will ensure that colleges can continue to provide education to large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds with a high level of faculty-student engagement.

²⁹ These requirements are specified in: Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, Handbook for Colleges, February 2006, 14, 18, 19.

What colleges will do

Work with government to plan for more degree students

Colleges want to work with the government to plan how many college degree spaces for students are needed and how they will be accommodated. Colleges have proven that they can be effective partners in planning to meet the growing demand for higher education.

Different colleges will play different roles in meeting this demand. As in other jurisdictions, individual colleges will adopt approaches that reflect student demand and local economic needs.

Ensure a high standard of quality

Colleges recognize the value of offering high-quality degrees and will work with the government to ensure that all baccalaureate degree programs provide a high-quality experience for students.

Market college degree programs widely, including to under-represented groups

Colleges will take responsibility for marketing their programs to prospective students, including those in under-represented groups. Once programs have become well established, they will gain stronger acceptance with employers and as a pathway for admission to university graduate programs. This acceptance in turn will strengthen student demand. The best advertisements for a program will be graduates who have found successful careers.

Establish stronger pathways for students based on credential recognition and credit recognition to meet the government's agenda

Colleges will create more pathways so students in diploma programs can continue in degree programs, at a college or university. A degree program at a college can serve:

- Diploma graduates from the same college
- Diploma graduates from other colleges
- Working adults who have completed a college credential in the past
- Working adults who hold credits from a university or college and would like to complete a degree.

Colleges will also create pathways so students can transfer from their college degree program to a similar university program if they so choose, based on a single high standard of quality for baccalaureate education.

Continue to pursue joint college-university programs

Many colleges have developed effective partnerships with universities in selected program areas. In some communities, this college-university relationship has proven more viable than stand-alone college degree programs. Colleges will continue to pursue these relationships where they meet student needs.

Continue to offer a full range of non-degree programs

The core mission of every college will continue to be to offer postsecondary certificate and diploma programs as well as baccalaureate degrees, apprenticeship training, contract training and continuing education. Experience in British Columbia, Alberta, Florida and elsewhere shows that it is entirely feasible for a college to offer a wide range of programs, from one-year certificates to four-year degrees, without loss of focus.

Now is the time

The growth in demand from students is imminent. Now is the time to develop plans for serving them.

Secondary school students who want to pursue a degree typically make their application decisions in the fall of their Grade 12 year. A decision now to expand college degree-granting means that the first wave of new programs can be approved before September 2010 – in time to market them to students who will start classes in September 2011. More new programs can be introduced in each subsequent year.

2009 - August 2010	September 2010	September 2011
Colleges develop new programs, gain ministerial approval	Colleges begin marketing new programs to prospective students	First students begin classes in new programs More new programs developed annually
Colleges and government work on expanded facilities and operating funding (ongoing).		

A decision to make colleges part of the government's plan for meeting the demand for baccalaureate education will require minimal expense in the short term. Students will benefit as high-quality degree programs are developed and put into place.



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