

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning



Ontario
Postsecondary
Education
Strategy
Submission

NOVEMBER
2009

Stability through Reaching Higher

Introduction

Courage, bravery and sheer determination have been leading characteristics of the recent actions undertaken by decision-makers and postsecondary education (PSE) leaders that have brought us through Reaching Higher (RH). Principled upon creating stability within the PSE environment, RH has soothed some anxiety over the long-term state of Ontario higher education. Now the time has come to discuss what shall happen after RH expires.

Before enhancements can ever be created in any system, the responsibility of a blueprint's author is to lay down a foundation where success can be better guaranteed and failure is flouted. The bedrock of the previous plan consisted of a valiant effort to expand the accessibility of Ontario PSE and increase supports to those gaining access to the system. What will differentiate RH from post-RH is the added sensitivity necessary towards the realities produced by a shaken economy.

Consensual Plan

The College Student Alliance (CSA) firmly believes that any long-term strategy for Ontario PSE must be resilient under the strictest of all scrutiny from varying philosophical and ideological perspectives. Likewise, the long-term strategy must make sense for government, institutions and students: undertaking actions that seek to achieve our mutually desirable goals.

In *Strength and Prosperity: The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning*, it will be asserted that in a post-RH system, a commitment must be made towards expanding the accessibility of the college system. Likewise, government, colleges and universities will and must work together to develop intra-systemic accessibility that functions with structured purpose, an effective mission and efficient operation.

Student Access

Accessibility ought to continue to be the leading force in Ontario PSE policy. Logically speaking, the greater the number of students accessing programs, the greater the number of students completing a diploma or degree. In the long term, this means greater salaries for those who completed a PSE credential, more tax revenues for government and a stronger, more responsive economy.

Expanding access to education so that a far greater number of students are entering colleges means that government must also be willing to follow it with more funding towards colleges. Per-student funding in Ontario has not adequately covered a fair share of operating costs.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

Given this, Ontario tuition rates have skyrocketed throughout the last decade in order to maintain revenue. A new, long-term strategy for Ontario PSE must counter forces that currently drive up the cost of delivering and receiving a college education. This will be argued as being necessary to maintain with a mindset that suggests increases in funding must result in increased improvement and growth by colleges.

As per-student funding addresses the affordability of delivering education to students, students must be capable of enjoying an affordable education. At the very centre of this topic is the discussion surrounding student financial aid. The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) is the central nervous system of financial aid in Ontario. Ensuring that OSAP addresses the current day needs of students is critical in supporting the accessibility and completion of diplomas and degrees.

Understanding what constitutes a diploma or degree by defining and measuring quality is an equally important step for our PSE system to take throughout the 21st century. Defining quality as the fulfillment of college purpose and supporting a system that also defines quality as continuously improving at an institutional level is important. In developing a quality college system comes the ability to better create seamless pathways in and between systems.

Student mobility between colleges and universities has been hindered by a piecemeal transferability framework of collaborative arrangements between these two types of institutions. Student mobility and seamless system design should easily result from the transparency produced by a quality college system and added government focus.

Lastly, the maintenance of accountability and its processes is critical for the public service and the upholding of public interest. Maintaining and enhancing arrangements for funding based on performance is an excellent way for students and government alike to better understand the value received from their investments. In the spirit of true accessibility, however, performance indicators will have to ensure that colleges are not penalised for matters beyond their control.

The time has come to raise the bar of performance while reaffirming our internalised value of education. Applied learning provides an advantage to its students and society. The 21st century has already shown the increased strength of this contributive force to PSE. This government is well positioned to map out a strategy conducive to capturing this value and practicing it through a reasonable, prudent, long-term strategy for prosperity.

Cost of Education

Student Mobility and Transferability

Mapping Out A Strategy

“Improving access to postsecondary education is one way our government is helping to build a highly skilled and educated workforce. It’s part of our plan to foster opportunity and to help ensure that every Ontarian has a fair shot at success.”

- Premier Dalton McGuinty,
February 2006

Access

The provincial government must maintain accessibility as a core value of the postsecondary education system by ensuring the system adequately supports true accessibility and better ensures program completion.

What needs to be done:

1. Expand on the existing understanding of accessibility to include preparedness for PSE, internalised value of PSE and ability for student to see program through to completion
2. Re-affirm the Student Access Guarantee

Accessibility must not just be a college system value but also a province-wide practice. Ensuring that college programs are accessible to all Ontario citizens has been a long-standing PSE value first established by, then Minister of Education, Bill Davis¹ and reiterated during the movement towards mandate renewal by the Ontario Council of Regent’s Vision 2000 in 1991.² Also included in the discussion of accessibility were notions of flexibility and sensitivity to students.³ There is both justification for celebration and reason for review of current practice regarding accessibility.

According to the McGuinty Government in 2007, 40% of citizens⁴ aged 18-24 years old were participating in PSE.⁵ With most expecting that PSE attainment will soon need to reach somewhere around 70% in order to keep up with manpower demands, swift action by government is needed. What compounds this issue, however, is expanding access needs thorough investments in a time when government deficits restrict many worthy and noble pursuits. Paradoxically, a lack of investment into PSE and PSE accessibility specifically will have Ontario driving away from one storm and heading towards another.

Accessibility first requires that secondary school students are adequately prepared for PSE. While not finding fault with the secondary school curriculum, there are many students, particularly within underrepresented groups, who lack the skills and confidence necessary to be prepared for higher learning.

¹ Sean Woodhead, *Roadmap to Excellence: Understanding Quality Through Learning and Continual Improvement* (Toronto: College Student Alliance), 3.

² Ibid, 5.

³ Ibid, 6.

⁴ *Nota bene*: This is a jump from 35% in 2002-03.

⁵ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), ‘Government of Ontario, Canada – News,’ Government of Ontario

http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2007/06/07/c2040.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html (accessed August 31, 2009).

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

The use of a province-wide early outreach initiative with an approach that is sensitive to particular community nuances and needs is vital to combating this issue.⁶

This submission also asserts the need for expanding accessibility by creating more supports for those from underrepresented groups to apply for admission. Likewise, the submission also later suggests that ongoing financial supports and a stronger understanding of why students prematurely exit programs are critical for understanding current completion rates and finding ways to improve them.

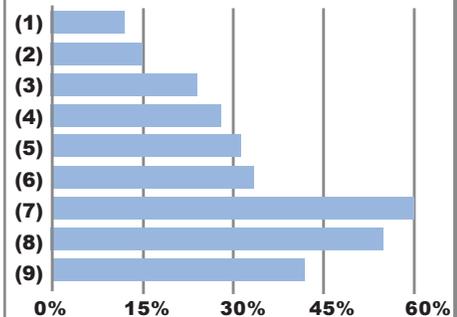
The expression of accessibility as a systemic value and necessary pursuit of government has also been illustrated through the Student Access Guarantee (SAG) and the inclusion of access agendas into college nomenclature, policy and culture. A post-Reaching Higher Ontario should re-establish the value of accessible education, just as it was done subsequent to Vision 2000 and through the SAG. In order to use this value as the foundation to sound practice, the Ontario government will have to seek further improvements in terms of accessibility.

This all being said, participation and completion are the two greatest facets of accessibility that government must consider. The assurance that all willing and academically capable students are given the opportunity to enter PSE, along with the necessary supports to sustain their access and ensure completion of their programs, is critical for the future success of Ontario colleges.

“The government must address the barriers to access for Ontario’s fastest growing population, Aboriginal Ontarians, in its long-term postsecondary education strategy.”

**- Patrick Hunter,
President, Native Student
Council, Sault College**

Education of under-represented groups, ages 25-54, 2001

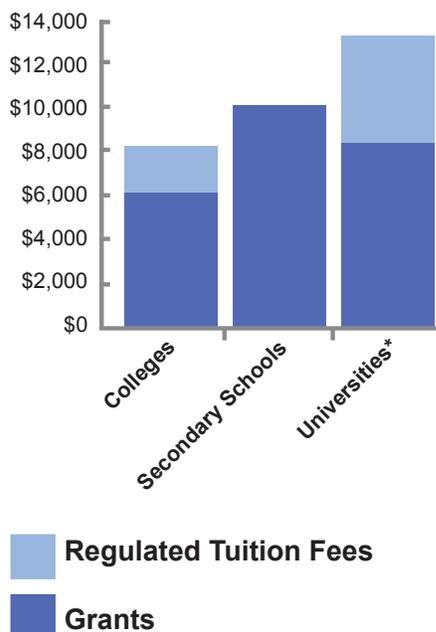


- (1) University: Canada-Aboriginal (12%)
- (2) University: Ontario-disabilities (15%)
- (3) University: Ontario Population (24%)
- (4) College: Canada-Aboriginal (28%)
- (5) College: Ontario-disabilities (31%)
- (6) College: Ontario Population (33%)
- (7) No PSE: Canada-Aboriginal (60%)
- (8) No PSE: Ontario-disabilities (55%)
- (9) No PSE: Ontario Population (42%)

Source: Statistics Canada 282-004 and Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (2001); Sharpe (2007); Colleges Ontario.

⁶ Pathways to Education is an excellent example of an early outreach initiative, albeit with a more standardised approach.

Operating Funding and Regulated Tuition Fees Per Student Ontario Education Sectors, 2008-2009



Note: Figures for colleges exclude the tuition set aside, Collaborative Nursing and Clinical Education.

* Estimates prepared by Colleges Ontario based on information received from MTCU.

“People remain Ontario’s number one asset. The economic benefits of a highly educated and skilled workforce are clear.”

**- Dwight Duncan,
Minister of Finance,
2009 Ontario Budget**

Per-Student Funding

The provincial government must further strengthen college per-student funding with the goal of achieving national per-student funding median by 2015-16.

The provincial government must continue to regulate college tuition fees by capping tuition rate increases at rate of inflation, while also introducing an annual cap on international tuition fee increases.

What needs to be done:

1. Establish a goal to bring per-student funding to the national median by 2015-16
2. Continue the regulation of tuition fees, capping such fees at rate of inflation
3. Institute a capping of international tuition fee increases

College revenues in Ontario are broken down into two dominant groupings: operating grants and tuition fees. Operating grants exist as the significant financial support provided by government to colleges. Tuition fees exist as the payment for services rendered, delivered by the client—the student—to the college.

College per-student funding in 2007-08 was \$8,159, which is the lowest amongst all provinces.⁷ In regards to revenue from operating grants and tuition fees, colleges are far behind per-student funding received from secondary schools and universities.⁸ Operating funding per-student is 6% lower than in 1993-94, while also, in real terms, per-student funding inclusive of both operating funds and tuition fees is 4% lower than it was in 1993-94.⁹ In the 2009 budget, the Ontario government recognised the current fiscal challenges of the colleges and provided \$150 million in one-time funding to ease the deficits facing the college system.

While this government has notably been supportive of the college system, tuition fees have been keeping the college system afloat. When taking into account college revenues, inclusive of both operating grants and tuition fees, real per-student revenue has risen by 4%.¹⁰ With government investments are lower than they were 15 years ago, this goes to show that indeed tuition fees have played an increasing role in college revenues. Moving forward, any increase in tuition fees must be tied to quality improvements, while increases in operating funding should go to the government’s access agenda. This suggestion is a derivative of the belief that since tuition fees are payments for services rendered, increases in fees should be for increases in service.

⁷ Colleges Ontario, ‘2009 Environmental Scan: An Analysis of Trends and Issues Affecting Ontario,’ (Toronto: Colleges Ontario), 54.

⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁹ Ibid, 53.

¹⁰ Ibid, 53.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

A system-wide cap must also be placed on international tuition fees. International students comprise a market of prospective students that colleges and government will more greatly rely on for sustained enrollment and qualified labour. If Ontario seeks to attract international students, a positive education experience should be provided as incentive for the student to stay after graduation.

Highlighted in the CSA December 2008 submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs was that increases in per-student funding should be based on two underlying principles: fairness and economic value. Maintaining responsible per-student funding levels on a principle of fairness means recognising that government and students both are benefactors of the college system.

It is fair to expect that if either stakeholder eventually was expected to provide means for the system that are far too cumbersome and unreasonable for their budgets, than the system would begin to collapse. It is important to prop up the system with equitable support¹¹ on all sides. A long-term strategy on per-student funding will require a fair assessment of what government and students are capable of financially investing.

Such an assessment can be subjected to competing demands for finite monetary resources, for both government and students. To assist in making fair investments, consideration ought to be given to the economic value of the college system. Government is a benefactor from college outputs, given the taxpayer return on college investments of 15.9% with a payback period of 8.7 years.¹² For students, every year of college completed will equate to an additional \$3,800 in earnings per year.¹³ Students will receive a rate of return of approximately 15.1%.¹⁴

Society as a whole receives a slew of benefits from these investments. Many of the benefits received by society include greater amount of higher income earners, higher tax revenues for government, healthier population, lower crime rates and an overall higher rate of quality of life satisfaction. A catalyst that exists and refuses to go away, however, is the great expense of the system. While not denying the economic and social value associated with supporting PSE, the entire PSE system will have to move forward focusing on ways to become more prudent with the money received from government and students.

“Ontario’s public colleges provide the education, training and re-training that graduates need to succeed in a changing economy. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that Ontario will need an additional 360,000 skilled workers by 2025 to achieve strong growth. Also, the Canadian Federation for Independent Business reports employers will need six college graduates to every university graduate to fill shortages in areas requiring advanced skills.

To meet these needs, the government must ensure more people can access postsecondary education. For Ontario to remain globally competitive, more of our population will need postsecondary credentials, especially women and underrepresented groups.”

**- Linda Franklin,
President and CEO,
Colleges Ontario**

¹¹ Equitable in terms of the purchasing power and access to capital enjoyed by each benefactor/participant.

¹² Association of Canadian Community Colleges, *The Economic Contribution of Canada’s Colleges and Institutes* (Moscow, ID: Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated), May 2008.

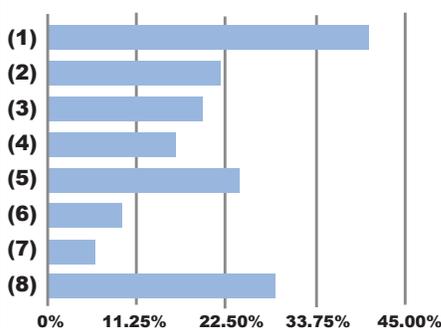
¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

“Ontario has promised to reduce the poverty rate in the province, but for some students on OSAP, they are forced to live below the poverty line.”

- John-Paul Chusroskie,
Student, St. Lawrence
College

Reasons for Premature Exit of System



- (1) Insufficient Funds (40.8%)
- (2) Time conflict with work (22%)
- (3) Time conflict with family/personal (19.6%)
- (4) Academic difficulties (16.1%)
- (5) Change of program (24.3%)
- (6) Moved (9.5%)
- (7) Family/friends were not supportive (5.4%)
- (8) Other (28.5%)

Note: Multiple answers were allowed, so sum is greater than 100%

Source: CSS, 2006

Student Affordability

The provincial government absolutely must revise the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), while also promoting additional sources of grants and loans for students.

What needs to be done:

1. Continue supplementation of loans with more grants
2. Expand targeted access grants
3. Review OSAP in the context of modernising the program and what it provides to students
4. Determine either to provide full amount of cost of study and living through OSAP to each eligible student or allow students the ability to earn income without deductions to their financial aid
5. Provide true interest relief to all OSAP recipients during the six months after exiting their program

While tuition in and of itself is not a direct barrier to accessing education,¹⁵ the cost of attending college remains a serious factor for dropout. According to the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF), 40% of college students who exit their program prior to completion do so because of ‘insufficient funds’.¹⁶ Without a doubt, the cost of study and living for students has dramatically risen throughout Ontario.

Student assistance exists because most students are not expected to have the disposable income or savings necessary to pay for PSE up-front. Hypothetically, such a system would see first-time entry students who were predominantly in middle adulthood. However, students still do have a responsibility to pay for their education. The responsibility to contribute to such costs comes from the benefactor-based principle of fairness, discussed in the previous section.

Available assistance to students should be broken down into two classifications: grants and loans. Grants exist as a centralised way for government to alleviate the burdens on the student associated with the high cost of completing a PSE program. Grants can be either targeted or universal. Targeted grants traditionally seek to support students who have the least financial means to pay for college and/or come from families with the lowest income earnings. Universal grants, on the other hand, provide wide-spread support and do not differentiate between students with, or without, adequate income to support their PSE experience.

¹⁵ Alex Usher, Presentation at Partners Conference *Federal Policy Development*, Edmonton, Alberta (August 10, 2009).

¹⁶ Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF), ‘The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada,’ Third Edition (Montreal: CMSF), 89.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

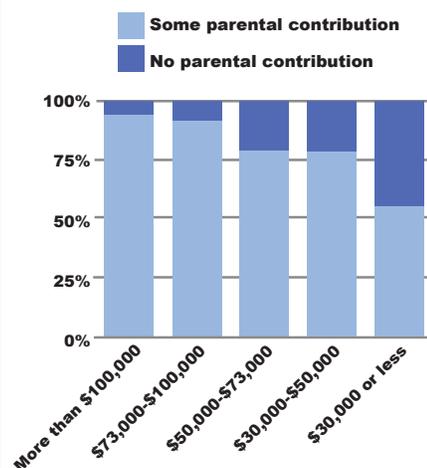
The existence of grants within the Ontario PSE system is of insurmountable importance and of particular interest to underrepresented groups,¹⁷ who are traditionally debt-averse. Praiseworthy, Ontario is currently a leader in providing non-repayable financial aid to students. In 2008 grants accounted for 32% of financial aid in Ontario.¹⁸

An excellent example of targeted access grants in Ontario is the Ontario Access Grant (OAG). The OAG provides 25%-50% of tuition costs in financial aid to eligible students, up to \$3,000. This grant is provided to eligible second-year students who are in their first entry of the system. In a post-Reaching Higher Ontario, the OAG should cover all years of first-entry college program study, while also providing assistance reflective of the entire cost of study and living.

The CSA also recommends that 40% of total financial aid be in the form of grants by 2011-12. If this government fulfills its previous campaign promise of replacing the tuition and education tax credits with up-front grants, this goal will be easily achievable. The government must remove existing educational tax credits, which traditionally support higher income earners or the high-income-earning families of dependents. Since tax credits often require that income tax is owed, the tax credits cannot fully be used by low income earners, nor do they assist in educational planning. Likewise, research has shown that tax credits will, over time, cost government more money,¹⁹ as opposed to targeting assistance to those that need it most.

Moving away from universal grants and towards more targeted access and success grants is in keeping with the axiom that government and students alike must financially contribute based on their budget and based on return on investment. That being said, grants should focus more on those with far fewer financial resources, while some assistance should still be provided to those who come from middle-income earning families to avoid a 'middle class crunch'. Expecting parental contributions from middle-income families is not a safe assumption. CMSF research does show that parental contributions are received by almost 70% of college students.²⁰ However, 21% of dependents from middle-income-earning families and 45% of those from families earning \$30,000 or less per year did not receive contributions from parents.²¹ Complementing grants in PSE financial assistance must also be the existence and wide-spread availability of loans.

Parental Contribution by Family Income (Dependent Full-Time Students With Public Loans)



Source: Canadian Post-Secondary Student Financial Survey, 2003-04

¹⁷ Those of Aboriginal descent, with a permanent disability, first-generation students, mature students, low-income independents and dependents from low-income families.

¹⁸ CMSF, 'Ten Things You Need to Know about Financial Support for Post-Secondary Students in Canada' (presented at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, Ontario on October 22, 2008).

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ CMSF, The Price of Knowledge, 85.

²¹ Ibid, 86.

“On-campus employment for students is a proven measure of student retention and helps reduce the heavy financial burden of attending postsecondary education.”

**- Jamie Palahnuk,
President, Cambrian
Students' Administrative
Council**

Student loans are an integral component of the student assistance framework in Ontario. With about 43% of full-time college students receiving OSAP in 2007-08,²² there is no doubt that OSAP is a program valued and depended upon by a multitude of Ontario students. However, significant reforms are now due for a program that has gradually become less effective in its ability to effectively serve all those needing assistance.

Currently, loan aid is capped at \$11,900.²³ While it is undeniable that there is only a limited amount of resources within OSAP to accommodate students, the amount of eligible financial aid per student does not sufficiently cover the cost of living. In 2003, the average cost of living for a single, PSE student living in Ontario was \$14,512 per year.²⁴

Without OSAP funding to support the student cost of study and living, students are then forced to do part-time or full-time work. Actually, working during college is a valuable element to the college experience. While some research has suggested that part-time work while in school can improve academic performance, working over 20 hours per week has been shown to have an adverse effect on performance.²⁵ Supporting students working part-time would be an excellent initiative of this government, as long as students do not see significant deductions to their financial assistance.

Unfortunately, current government policy supports the claw-back effect, whereby students who earn money to supplement their student assistance receive deductions from their financial assistance. Reasonably, the OSAP system must either provide students with the financial means to adequately cover cost of study and living, or OSAP must permit students to work without a deduction of aid. It would be beneficial to students to incrementally release these claw backs; for example, students could earn \$200 per week without penalty in 2010-11, and then \$300 in 2011-12, and incrementally move to no earnings limitation at all.²⁶

²² Colleges Ontario, 56.

²³ MTCU, 'Getting Started – OSAP Basics,' *Government of Ontario*, http://accesswindow.osap.gov.on.ca/aw/ENG/not_secure/OSAP1011.htm (accessed November 26, 2008).

²⁴ Runzheimer Canada, *Student Cost of Living Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto), 2003.

²⁵ CMSF, 81.

²⁶ As of 2004-05, CMSF says that students earned approximately \$9.60 per hour with half of all Canadian students working during the academic year.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

Quality

The government must firmly define quality in learning-centred terms of continual improvement. Continued support of the existing quality assurance system is necessary while more firmly etching out what quality control system accompanies assurance.

What needs to be done:

1. Create a clear and explicit definition of quality and the distinction between quality assurance and quality control
2. Create a provincial data set that accumulates information on beginning characteristics of the student, systemic inputs, learning outcomes and end outcomes
3. Mandate that HEQCO conduct the very arduous task of studying which correlates exist amongst the four phases
4. Develop a mission for all colleges that they be learning-centred and focus on quality in terms of developing deep learners

In fulfilling the goal of developing an exceptional education in Ontario, perhaps the most important objective to see completed is the defining, measuring and improving of quality in Ontario PSE. There is indeed a vast array of opinions regarding what constitutes quality in the PSE system, and the CSA has recently attempted to guide the direction of discourse around quality.

In the research paper *Roadmap to Excellence: Understanding Quality Through Learning and Continual Improvement*, the CSA outlines a number of critical recommendations in order to finally achieve some understanding of quality. Firstly, the development of a data set that archives data regarding beginning characteristics of students, inputs into the system, learning outcomes and resultant end outcomes is vital to better understanding the system.²⁷ Having a data set would allow researchers the ability to better study which significant correlates exist amongst beginning characteristics, inputs, learning outcomes and end outcomes. Likewise, the existence of a strong data set would assist government in making sound policy decisions.

“Defining, measuring and improving quality is a critical task for all higher education institutions and a legitimate concern of the student and governments who fund them.”

**– Hon. Bob Rae,
Ontario: A Leader in
Learning**

“A new system aimed at defining, measuring, and improving quality can better support the strategic position of Ontario’s postsecondary institutions and their need to attract new learners.”

**- Justin Fox,
President,
College Student Alliance**

²⁷ While the paper does not suggest that the framework be used to understand learning-centred quality, its development is critical for studying the existence of correlates between the four phases of the student experience identified in the Finnie-Usher conceptual framework.

“Ontario must use evidence-based quality assurance mechanisms that are developed and implemented by and for Ontario colleges. It is important that any quality assurance/quality management system be a combination of internally-administered and externally-validated processes. This combination is vitally important for colleges to tell their ‘quality story’. Supporting Ontario colleges in becoming leaders of their own determination and growth is a necessary and important undertaking in supporting a level of PSE that is on a journey of continuous improvement.”

**- Tim Klassen,
Manager, Ontario College
Quality Assurance Service**

Secondly, in order to better understand beginning characteristics of students, the Ontario Education Number (OEN) must be able to travel beyond secondary school and into the college in which the student has enrolled. In the future, it would be expected that agreements could be made with other jurisdictions to receive similar information on incoming students from other provinces and/or countries. However, greater trust must first be developed with these other jurisdictions, which requires transparency in quality.

Ontario must continue the use of the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) for credential validation and external quality assurance reviews. A consistent expectation must be placed across the province that quality ought to be defined as the continual process towards achieving a standard of excellence: excellent learning outcomes. This standard of excellence and excellent learning outcomes is the development of deep learners capable of driving their own, independent learning.

Quality management—of which includes quality assurance, control and improvement—does already exist within some capacity. A distinction must be made within the system between quality assurance—the prevention of error—and quality control—the detection of error. Currently, literature and documents regarding quality management in Ontario is inundated with the prior term with very little mention of the latter. The distinction is important because both components are needed.

With this all said, it is extremely important that colleges focus on fulfilling their mandate in learning-centred terms. While some Ontario colleges already put this in practice to some degree, learning-centred mission statements should drive college program design and delivery across the province. Learning-centred education has shown to be an advantage to students in learning outcomes achievement and the development of independent, lifelong learning.²⁸

²⁸ Christopher Knapper, “Changing Teaching Practice: Strategies and Barriers,” (Kingston: Queens University), 4.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

System Design

The provincial government must commit to making a flexible and effective transfer system in Ontario by introducing reforms and increasing investments to develop a province-wide accreditation system and mechanisms that expand the scope of the current recognition criteria.

The provincial government must also create a transfer agency that will take a lead role in developing system integration between colleges and universities while also providing a fair assessment of the value of college and university credits for the purposes of transferability.

What needs to be done:

1. Create institutional transparency to promote trust and clear understanding of what constitutes a certificate, diploma and degree from each institution
2. Through the establishment of expected learning outcomes, develop linkages between college learning outcomes and determine at what stage the same outcomes could be expected in a university environment (and vice versa)
3. Develop a provincial accreditation system that facilitates college program standards and program standards of each university and assesses what value can be prescribed to programs based on their standards
4. Creation of a transfer agency that would take over continued responsibility from previous recommendation in becoming the assessment body for transferability of credits and prior learning and assessment recognition

It is quite fitting that a discussion on system design follow one of quality. The current system design promotes the visibility of seams between colleges and universities. While colleges were not created to emulate their American feeder model counterparts, there exists a significant need to support the desires of college graduates who seek to continue studies into university.

Supporting the mobility of students through transferability of credits is imperative for our future prosperity. The more credits college graduates receive to transfer into university, the more likely they are to complete the university program once enrolled. By itself, this is not a justification to enhance transferability. However, if there was a means to properly assess the value of college credits and prior learning, then the unnecessary extension of program completion becomes distasteful and more expensive for OSAP.

“As a soon to be graduate of Niagara’s Applied Bachelors Degree of International Commerce and Global Development, it is hard to believe that universities outside of Ontario and Canada are more than willing to accept Ontario college graduates then universities within Ontario.”

- Michael Poynton,
Student, Niagara College

“As much as I would have liked to attend a university in Ontario, the process was tedious and the universities were not willing to accept a reward number of transfer credits. Two universities sent rejection letters and one accepted me into the first year of their program with zero transfer credits.”

- Jenn Howarth,
College Graduate

“Ontario is losing too many of its best and brightest to other jurisdictions in Canada, US and the Globe. Given the current economic challenges facing the province; Ontario must now be ensuring all Ontarians stay in Ontario to live and learn.”

**- Tyler Charlebois,
Director of Advocacy,
College Student Alliance**

Eighteen percent of college students intend to complete a university degree, while an additional 12% intend to pursue a postgraduate university degree.²⁹ In 2006-07, only 7% of graduates had enrolled in a university degree program.³⁰ While the number of college graduates going to university has increased in recent years, this is still a far cry from the 30% of college students who intend to go onto university after graduation.

Slight increases in college-to-university pathways for students can be inferred from increases in articulation and collaboration agreements between individual colleges and universities. However, since collaboration between colleges and universities is mostly limited to the sparing existence of regional agreements among institutions, purposeful change must be created within PSE structure and culture. Promoting the full development of students in a system that supports their mobility is critical to the success of Ontario PSE.

The value in promoting seamless system design is twofold. As already mentioned, making transferability easier for college graduates ensures that their continued dedication to learning is satisfied by the system. Secondly, there is great financial value to government in supporting this initiative. The less time it takes for students to complete their learning experience in PSE, the less money it will cost government in terms of loans and grants.

This entire section does not try to undermine or ignore the value of PSE credentials. Simply, the CSA seeks to ignite the desire of government to develop a system that fairly and accurately assesses the knowledge and learning outcomes acquired by graduates and how this translates to university credits.

²⁹ Colleges Ontario, 35.

³⁰ Ibid, 41.

Strength and Prosperity:

The Social and Economic Advantage of Access to Applied Learning

Accountability

The provincial government must provide continual multi-year accountability agreements (MYAAs) that are student-centric and support a learning experience which produces measurable accountability for government.

What needs to be done:

1. Maintain multi-year accountability agreements with increased accountability between institutions and students
2. Use data on existing collaboration between universities and colleges and each institution's procedures to support credit transfer
3. Ensure that completion rate targets take into account all reasons that the student exits the system prematurely
4. Ensure that all institutions have means to allow students the ability to evaluate instructors and courses throughout their program

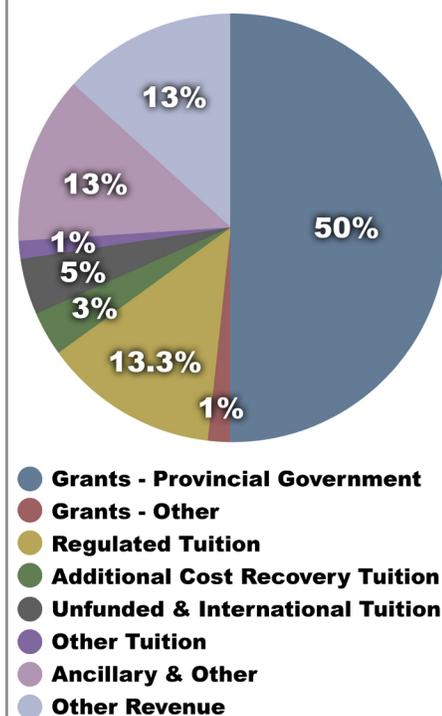
While accountability is the last item discussed in this submission, it surely is not least important. With over 50% of college revenues coming from provincial government in the form of grants,³¹ government has an extremely large stake in the direction and performance of the college system. Also, since tuition makes up roughly 22% of college revenues,³² colleges also have a responsibility to provide students good value for their investments.

There exists a plethora of accountability processes that colleges must satisfy in receiving public funds each year. These processes include strategic planning, business plans, annual audits and reports, program advisory committees, program standards, program review and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).³³

The use of MYAAs was founded after former Premier Bob Rae called for breaking away from the 'tyranny' of single-year funding arrangements.³⁴ The use of MYAAs tied expectations to funding while granting colleges the ability to anticipate incoming revenues, so long as performance was satisfactory. While MYAAs are vital to preserving accountability, it is absolutely imperative that students be brought into MYAA discussions during planning. As students invest a considerable amount of money into the system, it is only fitting that their stake be recognised in identifying appropriate core indicators and reviewing college performance benchmarked on those core indicators.

Ontario College System Revenues, 2007-2008

Total Revenue =
\$2,861,258,772



Source: Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, CFIS 2007-2008.

³¹ Ibid, 53.

³² Ibid, 52.

³³ Ibid, 62.

³⁴ The Honourable Bob Rae, 'Ontario: A Leader in Learning,' (Toronto: Government of Ontario), 20.

“More must be done to ensure students persist through to completion, all while understanding the pressures and reasons that cause students to withdraw from their program.”

**- Sheena Sonser, President,
Conestoga Students Inc.**

“With an increase in accountability there must also be an increased level of communication and transparency between institutions and students.”

**- Omar Jackson,
Vice President,
College Student Alliance**

Graduation rates are also a significant measure of college performance. Graduation rates are the highest in the decade at almost 65%.³⁵ However, there are a multitude of reasons that the other 35% of students do not graduate.³⁶ Government must not penalise colleges when a student does not complete a program without first understanding the reasons exactly why the students are leaving. Universalising the OEN will better ensure students can be tracked through the system from entry to exit.

Since students provide a sizeable amount of college revenue, it is fitting to expect these students to provide evaluation of instructor and course performance. While students participate in the student satisfaction surveys, it is critical to permit students to provide feedback throughout the duration of a course. This information is necessary for college administrators to better understand how their courses are being delivered and received, while the information could also be helpful during program audits. The reason for continuous, or at least continual, feedback throughout a course is so that feedback can be used to resolve student issues. End of course feedback may be helpful for prospective students but does nothing for the current student's issue(s).

³⁵ Colleges Ontario, 62.

³⁶ The data is slightly inaccurate based on the fact that college students who transfer out of the institution and into a new college are recorded as 'drop-outs'. This would be a resolvable issue if the OEN were universalised.

Conclusion

The value of improving both participation in, and completion of, applied learning is tantamount to the success of the education system, social progress and economic recovery. As this submission has demonstrated, a piecemeal approach to enhancing the PSE system is not appropriate or conducive to valuable investments and greatest returns. For a long-term strategy on PSE, the adoption of numerous endeavours from many different facets of the student experience is necessary.

Any strategy regarding the long-term sustainability and future growth of the college system must definitively define true accessibility. Allowing PSE to be simply approachable or available will not suffice to meet government expectations for the system. Supporting students, and college performance, by providing the necessary investments that will permit all students the ability to complete their programs is needed. Expanding access to education must be paid for using enhancements in operating funding, while improving quality should be paid for with the use of revenues accumulated through regulated tuition fees.

It is fair not to expect government to be the sole contributor to college revenue. Students have a responsibility to contribute to the cost of their education as they, like government, are benefactors of student and system success. Moving away from universalised grants, while moving more closely to targeted access grants, is an important step in addressing the lack of accessibility felt by those who do not receive assistance suitable for their study and living costs.

Ontario is truly a leader in non-repayable financial aid, and is well positioned to continue this trend. Also very important is the provision of loans (i.e., OSAP), as long as these loans adequately cover the real costs of students in the system today. Without this vital feature of student assistance, government can expect students to find themselves in a great quagmire: having to choose between working to supplement limited student assistance while receiving financial deductions to their OSAP, or refusing to work and not having the appropriate means to study and live.

It is important to understand the quality of colleges as a learning-centred concept focused around institutions' and programs' continuous improvement. Ensuring college commitment to the learning-centred approach, which focuses on the learner as being central to the institution, is critical to success. Much research has been done on how learning-centred education produces students who more easily accomplish expected learning outcomes while also becoming deep learners.

**Access, Success
and Progress**

Targeted Aid

**Continuous Quality
Improvements**

Stronger Accountability

Producing a quality system that is transparent will more easily produce seamless system design. Students who go through college and wish to pursue learning in university must be supported by government. This also means that greater comprehension of how learning outcomes in college translate into university credits is critical to effective and practical transferability that will support student success after college.

All the recommendations contained in the paper must be implemented within some framework of accountability. Accountability must be maintained in order for Ontario to exercise good governance and maintain confidence in college programs and services central to public interest. MYAAs, a valuable tool worth maintaining, must better incorporate students into both planning and performance review.

Vision and Prosperity

Expanding the access to applied learning is vital to meeting upcoming labour market demands. Interestingly, this is the very same reason colleges were created as a new level of PSE in 1965. The long-term strategy for Ontario will have to be committed to providing significant resources and investments to accommodate enrollment growth and supporting completion.

Global Leader

Colleges are an engine capable of driving this economy forward and becoming a global leader. Again, government is required to exercise vision and strength to chart the course towards renewed success. What we sow we shall reap, and it is in the interest of all Ontarians that we plant these seeds today for a prosperous tomorrow.

List of Recommendations

- 1.** The provincial government must maintain accessibility as a core value of the postsecondary education system by ensuring the system adequately supports true accessibility and better ensures program completion.
- 2.** The provincial government must further strengthen college per-student funding with the goal of achieving national per-student funding median by 2015-16.
- 3.** The provincial government must continue to regulate college tuition fees by capping tuition rate increases at rate of inflation, while also introducing an annual cap on international tuition fee increases.
- 4.** The provincial government absolutely must revise the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), while also promoting additional sources of grants and loans for students.
- 5.** The government must firmly define quality in learning-centred terms of continual improvement. Continued support of the existing quality assurance system is necessary while more firmly etching out what quality control system accompanies assurance.
- 6.** The provincial government must commit to making a flexible and effective transfer system in Ontario by introducing reforms and increasing investments to develop a province-wide accreditation system and mechanisms that expand the scope of the current recognition criteria.
- 7.** The provincial government must also create a transfer agency that will take a lead role in developing system integration between colleges and universities while also providing a fair assessment of the value of college and university credits for the purposes of transferability.
- 8.** The provincial government must provide continual multi-year accountability agreements (MYAAs) that are student-centric and support a learning experience which produces measurable accountability for government.

PROUD MEMBERS

Cambrian Students' Administrative Council
Canadore Students Representative Council
Centennial College Student Association Inc
Conestoga Students Inc
Student Union of Confederation College Inc
Fanshawe Student Union
Fleming College Student Administrative Council
Fleming College Student Association
Georgian College Student Administrative Council – Orillia
Georgian College Student Administrative Council – Owen Sound
Humber Students Federation
Mohawk Student Association
Niagara College Student Administrative Council Inc
Northern College Student Association – Haileybury
Northern College Student Association – Kirkland Lake
Northern College Student Association – South Porcupine
St. Clair College Student Representative Council
St. Clair College Thames Students Inc
St. Lawrence College – Brockville Student Administrative Council
Student Association of St. Lawrence College – Kingston
Sault College Student Union
Sheridan Student Union Inc

www.collegestudentalliance.ca

301-372 Richmond Street West
Toronto, Ontario, M5V 1X6

