

OPSEU SUBMISSION

on

**Increasing
DEGREE
OPPORTUNITIES
for Ontarians**

*A Consultation Paper
Of the
Ministry of Training,
Colleges & Universities*

June 14, 2000

The support and academic bargaining units of OPSEU thank you Minister Cunningham and staff for the opportunity to provide you with feedback on your document, “Increasing Degree Opportunities for Ontarians.”

First, we will respond to your questions, and then we will make some general remarks about the direction that we think the province should take in order to provide high quality education that gives students the best chance of success and which ensures the needs of the Ontario economy are best met.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

The Board and its Chair should all be academics, those who are actively involved in teaching. There should be a permanent core of three with an additional four members who are expert academics in the particular field or discipline that is being assessed or reviewed. Principles of equity should be observed when setting up the Board.

A Chair of a college Advisory Board from the appropriate applied discipline, a member of the appropriate professional group, a librarian, a co-op education consultant and an employer should participate as resources to the Board.

Since the mandate of the Board is to assess quality and advise the minister, we believe that educators are best suited to the mandate you have already decided upon. This collegial governance model is based on collegial models used in degree granting institutions throughout the Western world.

Conflict of interest should cause only those with opportunity for direct pecuniary gain to be excluded.

The Board should be empowered to call upon services such as University of Toronto based Comparative Education Services on an as-needed basis to assist in appraisal processes.

The academic standards should include:

- * total length of program (hours per week, weeks per year, numbers of years)*
- * Canadian content*
- * significant student professor interaction*
- * in-person testing*
- * adequate infrastructure (e.g. Libraries, support services)*
- * courses which develop writing skills and critical thinking skills*
- * mode of delivery*

While we support the idea that degrees should be limited to applied degrees, the reality is that if they are granted they will simply come to be called ‘degrees’. Adjectives get dropped over time.

We believe the degree must be identified with the institution where the education was received, and it should identify the program to assist employers in hiring.

It is difficult to completely separate questions 3 and 5, but we would offer these additional points:

** infrastructure (The institution must have an adequate library. Quality should be measured in terms of number of volumes in the discipline and in other disciplines the students is required to study and do research in, the number of professional librarians and the number of library technicians. Other examples would be adequate staffing in the registrar=s office, in student awards and in counselling.)*

** private institutions should be barred from relying on the infrastructure of the public colleges and universities*

** employees should pay taxes in Ontario*

** access must be guaranteed (No student should be denied because of disability, because of poverty, because they are francophone.)*

** faculty must be qualified (This does not necessarily mean credentials. For example, in graphics and animation, a reputation within one's field such as winning an Oscar may be a more appropriate measure than a PhD in any discipline. If the colleges are not to compete with the offerings of the universities, a concept we endorse, then what we can and should be offering are applied degrees. The reliance on credentials does not work in the colleges as it does in universities. Our faculty must be judged on their work product.)*

We would not support an appeals process. Rather, the Board should be required to provide detailed reasons for the denial, with directions for success. The applicant should be allowed to reapply in three years. An appeals process creates unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy.

There should be a reasonable time period for approvals. No regular review process is necessary because of the current Advisory Committee structure but there must be a review process to respond to complaints about a program.

APPLIED DEGREE PILOT PROJECTS

The Board should review the standards set at Ryerson for degrees offered in applied disciplines as well as elsewhere across Canada. However, having said that, we believe that there should be an absolute standard, not a relative standard set. We say this as a result of our concern with declining standards imposed by underfunding of the system for so many years. We would recommend that the CSAC documents be consulted in setting a

standard that will guarantee quality and reflect economic needs of industry.

As well as the standards set out in the section above, we would hope that the Board reviews the quality of existing graduates in the program field, the historical record of the institution, the links that the institution has to the community. As a matter of public policy, we would recommend that the Board give priority consideration to the Northern colleges and that a fair share of the pilots be placed in Francophone colleges. Further, pilots from communities without universities should receive priority consideration.

It is difficult to answer the question of whether the standards should be the same for new institutions when we do not know what standards will ultimately be selected, but in a general response, we would say yes.

In determining if there is an economic need for graduates from the program, the Board should analysis need first within the community, then within the region, then within the province, then within Canada and finally in the world.

In most circumstances, we would not recommend a work component but we do advocate for fully integrated applied elements within every course. Whether this takes the form of labs or fieldwork, the student must be in a position to receive feedback from the professor so that the experience is a genuine learning experience rather than a source of cheap labour. We recommend 8 semesters of 17 weeks with 25-28 hours per week of instruction per week by qualified faculty.

We strongly recommend that there be a diploma exit option since it protects the investment of student, the college and especially the taxpayer. We also recommend one year post graduate degrees. In order that previous college graduates or graduates from regions without an applied degree to have access, we recommend a bridging or make-up program be developed in conjunction with the applied degree to allow these students to upgrade.

No change is necessary to admission standards.

PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

We must respectfully disagree with the position taken by the ministry in its statement of intention to allow private institutions to offer degrees. It is our judgement based on our experience with privates offering diplomas that this decision would do harm to the universities, to students and to the Ontario taxpayer and economy. These institutions because they charge more, add to the increasing problem of student debt and attrition. The student default rate from private institutions is highest. In our experience the curriculum is either “borrowed” from the colleges or it is inferior, causing their

diplomas not to be able to pass challenge exams to have their credits recognized. They do not have an infrastructure of their own, and as a result, advise their students to use CAAT libraries putting an additional strain on a heavily used service. For the most part, their faculty are not qualified and are more transient than the faculty in public institutions.

It is not sufficient to merely deny them capital and operating grants to protect students. We recommend they not have access to any public funds, whether in the form of tax breaks to them directly or tax breaks to their charitable benefactors or monies through OSAP.

PROTECTION MEASURES

The best protection for students is the development and proper funding of a public system of universities and community colleges. However, that being said we would answer in the affirmative to questions 2&3 as long it is fully funded by the private institutions themselves. This should apply to institutions offering diplomas as well as degrees.

To provide protection to students, it will be necessary to modify the Privacy Act or to write in a section in a new act or regulations which bars violating the privacy rights of students and which imposes progressive consequences for those institutions that do. Under such a plan, it would be necessary to set up a central registry. This central registry is additional bureaucracy best avoided by a full and complete commitment to ensuring a comprehensive, adequately funded public system of community colleges and universities.

Simply and concisely put, we advocate public funds should only be available to public institutions.

CONCLUSION

The vast majority of Ontarians are committed to two public services that touch their lives directly: medicare and public education. They are in agreement that these services are a priority for their tax dollars.

What we have come to know as medicare is a system based on five principles enshrined in the Canada Health Act. We have learned lessons from this system and from the forces which threaten it.

Just as the Canada Health Act enshrined principles for medicare, we would ask you to adopt principles that would produce and enshrine an education system that meets the needs of students, their families, the taxpayers and the economy of Ontario.

We recommend the adoption of the following principles to education:

UNIVERSALITY

Post-secondary education should be available to students who qualify and desire the opportunity.

PORTABILITY

The diplomas and degrees earned should be of such a standard and reputation that they are accepted and recognized throughout Canada and the world. Students should be able to start a program at one institution in Canada and complete it elsewhere if their circumstances are changed.

COMPREHENSIVENESS

Education would involve sufficient resources to ensure adequate hours of instruction and adequate infrastructure to meet the goal of portability.

ADMINISTRATION

This should be a publicly run, publicly funded system.

ACCESSIBILITY

No student should be denied access because of poverty, family circumstances, language, or disability. The strategy of keeping the colleges and the programs community based is key to this objective.

These principles have guided us in our analysis of what would make the Ontario post secondary system best for the stakeholders.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the academic and support OPSEU members who are committed to achieving the best quality system for students and residents of Ontario,

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