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*Table ronde. Deux systèmes comparés :
les cégeps et les collèges communautaires*

Ontario Colleges and the Economy

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ONTARIO COLLEGES AND THE ECONOMY

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I should like to thank my colleague Phillippe Ricard for the invitation to participate in this round table. Phillippe has asked me to address the relationship of the college system in Ontario to the economy and I shall arrange my remarks in four sections. I am sure that you will realise that I am not very proficient in the French language and would ask that you forgive me if I continue in English.

I will first identify some of the factors which make the Ontario college system different from the others in Canada and the United States, and which relate to the economic effects of these institutions. Secondly, I will describe how members of the colleges' communities can influence the programming decisions in their institutions. I will then describe an Ontario initiative that is designed to improve productivity by sponsoring the development of training courses that update the workforce, and in closing, I will comment on the effects that the economy is having on the colleges.

The system in Ontario consists of twenty-three colleges, and is twenty-five years old, having been developed in the late 1960s following the introduction of the enabling legislation in 1965. To some extent, it represented an evolution from the small system of technical and vocational institutes that were already in existence in Ontario at that time. In the founding legislation, the Ontario colleges were described as "a new kind of institution" with more autonomy than the institutes and with a different mandate. Different from the institutes of technology, and different from the universities in the province.

The colleges were intended to provide for the personal development of "all who did not *wish to go to university*", and to provide for the training and retraining needs of adults as well as for the needs of high school graduates. The colleges have the mandate to offer a broad range of programming that is occupation-oriented, and designed to meet the needs of their local communities.

Although this original mandate is now being reviewed, it is important to note that there are few institutions across Canada that have a mandate like the one that has guided the Ontario system for a quarter-century. These colleges were designed for high-school leavers,

and for adults; for vocationally-focused education, for training and for retraining. They offer two- and three-year diploma programs, one-year certificate programs and a variety of post-diploma certificates. A very significant part of the programming delivered by the colleges is through continuing education.

Ontario colleges were not intended to facilitate the transfer students, or graduates, from college to university. While some universities do provide advanced standing in their programs, this is rarely given except in individual cases. Indeed, an Ontario college graduate who applied to enter a university risked being told to return to high school to meet the university's entrance requirements. We expect that this will change. As a result of the strategic planning process for the Ontario system called "Vision 2000" the matter of articulation with universities will be specifically addressed.

The community is involved in many ways in shaping the activities of the Ontario colleges. Each college has its own board of governors which is responsible for approving, and reviewing, the programs of study. For diploma programs, and for some certificate programs as well, the board's approval and the program advisory committee's support must be given in order for the college to receive the authority from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to award the related credential. Ministry approval is also necessary for the college to receive the provincial grant to support the student enrolment in the program!

Program advisory committee members are volunteers drawn from the types of organization that would be expected to hire the graduates. Typically they include both senior managers, who provide the context for the program, and first-line managers who would hire and supervise the graduates. These members represent the community of employers that the program serves. This community is usually from the local area, but in the case of unusual programs, the related community may extend over the entire province.

Until now, each college program has been approved individually by the ministry following the receipt a formal proposal from the college's board of governors. Proposals for new programs must demonstrate that the program is vocationally oriented and that there is a

need for graduates with the skills that would be learned. The ministry has access to vocational needs-analysis data, and looks for general consistency among the programs offered throughout the province. However, the involvement and support of the advisory committee at the college in the design of the program is an essential part of the approvals process.

Once a program has been approved, the responsibility for keeping it up to date, so that its graduates are familiar with current techniques and procedures rests with the college's board of governors. However, on a month-by-month basis, this task is shared between the program chair and his or her faculty members, and the members of the advisory committee. It is *expected* that programs will evolve in order to continue to meet the objectives for which they were designed.

The initiative to modify a program by changing the course outlines, or even dropping courses and substituting new ones, may come from the professors who teach the courses, the students who take them, the graduates, the employers, or from the members of the advisory committee. The initiative may also come from the college's administration - for example as a periodic review by the board of governors to assure that the program continues to be relevant and up to date, or as the result of a decision to cut costs by reducing program hours.

The level of consultation and approval required before a change can be made and implemented will vary from college to college, but typically a department chair will approve minor modifications in a course. Major modifications, especially the deletion and substitution of courses, requires the approval of the dean of the faculty and the advisory committee. Indeed, the advisory committee members often participate in making these strategic decisions.

Should a program be changed to the extent that the vocational learning outcomes are different, then an application for an official modification to the program must be filed with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. For example, if a general electronics program was modified so that it became a computer electronics program, official ministry approval would be required. At present this would arise because the college would probably wish to change the official name of the program.

Before leaving this subject, I should mention two new developments. The first is a proposal that some programs which appear to be needed in every college

area (for example, Business Administration, Office Administration, Early Childhood Education, Recreational Leadership, Civil Engineering Technology, Electronics Engineering Technology, Pharmacy Assistant and Nursing) can be offered by any college without an explicit ministry approval. These would be called "system-wide programs".

The second is a current, and controversial, initiative on College Standards and Accreditation that will result in more similarity among programs that are offered at different colleges. Consequently, graduates from a given program will have similar skills - these are called the "vocational learning outcomes". It will also assure that the requisite amount of "generic skills" are taught and that the programs contain the stipulated, and contentious, "general education". However, I am sure that this will not result in a common process through which these skills are acquired, nor will it mean that students can transfer credits easily between colleges.

If, and when, these standards are developed, the boards of governors and the program advisory committees will have a metre stick against which to measure their programs. They will also provide the populations of potential students and employers a much-needed clearer vision of the Ontario colleges. I am often reminded that, even after twenty-five years, the Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology are one of the province's best-kept secrets.

I would now like to turn to another initiative that will enhance the college's contribution to the province's economy. In 1988 the Ontario Ministry of Skills Development announced a program to update the skills of graduate technicians and technologists to improve the province's competitiveness. Called the *Technicians and Technologists Skills Updating Program*, it was designed to provide the Ontario colleges with the special funds, and hence the opportunity to develop and deliver new "high-tech" courses.

The phrase "technological change" is one that we all know. I expect that how we feel about it depends to a large extent on how it affects us. In colleges without adequate resources for buying new equipment, and developing new courses, technological change means that programs in general, and laboratory skills in particular, become outdated. As I have already implied, this is of concern to the faculty, the advisory committees and, especially, to the students. To say that "the only constant is change" is to restate the obvious, but to *recognize* a problem is very different from being able to do something about it. Fortunately

the Skills Updating program is available to provide some small, but tangible, assistance.

Since the program started in 1989, some nine million dollars have been allocated, seven hundred courses have been developed and some eighteen thousand graduate technicians, technologists or engineers trained in a variety of subjects. These range from a course in the latest version of AutoCAD through geographic information systems (GIS) to a course on how to troubleshoot Local Area Networks. Funding is available to develop new training materials, lease equipment, and to advertise the courses. The development also includes one or two test deliveries of the courses which are typically from 20 to 60 hours in length. In every case, the training materials that are developed, and tested, in the program are made available to any of the other colleges in Ontario.

College personnel collaborate with trainers and managers in industry to identify the training needs. They often work together to develop and teach the resulting courses for the first time. The new course materials can then be used in full-time college programs and in continuing education. Currently, experiments are taking place in which groups of colleges pool their resources and work cooperatively in tackling larger projects. As the cost of all these activities is covered under the program, the copyright on the course materials is held by the Queen's Printer. Anyone interested in knowing what materials are available, and how to access them, should contact the program coordinator at the ministry in Toronto.

Unfortunately I must end on a less-optimistic note and I suspect it will sound all too familiar to you, wherever you come from. There is another link between the Ontario economy and the province's college system. Both are in very poor shape. The total financial resources available to any particular college are in the form of a global budget which is decided by a mixture of factors. These factors are determined both locally and centrally. *Locally*, because the total allocation to the entire college system is shared between the colleges on the basis of their activity, and centrally as the total amount of the resources available to the system (known as the "operating grant") is determined through the political process. The amount allocated by the Ontario government depends on a number of factors. These include the projected cost of operating the college system in the coming year, the competing demands for funding from other parts of the public sector, and projected government revenues. As we all know, there are many competing demands and government

revenues are down. Not just lower than predicted, but (and for the first time in Ontario) actually lower than last year.

The rationale for basing the funding on activity is that *instruction* is the primary mandate of the colleges and the amount of activity can be quantified accurately and objectively. The result is that each year, each college is placed in competition with the others for the allocation. A commonly-stated enrolment objective is to "grow at the projected system average". This results in a college maintaining its share of the total revenue allocation.

This is a concern because the operating grant from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (eight hundred and forty million dollars for 1992-93) and, at one percent above the 1991-92 allocation, is significantly below the actual increase in enrolment. So, as colleges strive to strike a balanced budget, they are being forced into staff reductions because their costs increase faster than their revenues. When this is coupled with the expanding student population and the dysfunctional effects of ever-increasing pressure for efficiency, (for example fewer hours per week in students' programs, fewer faculty, and fewer administrative staff in support of the teaching function) it is not difficult to predict that a crisis is imminent.

I must now confess that, as one who has been part of the Ontario college system for twenty-four of its twenty-five years, I am a firm believer in its strengths and painfully aware of at least some of its shortcomings. There is no doubt that we have a wonderful pool of talent and technical expertise. That, at our best, we offer excellent programs in very appropriate facilities. That our students and their employers derive significant benefits from the programs we provide, and that through them, we make a major contribution to the social and economic well-being of our province. The systems are in place to assure that the programs are appropriate, relevant and current. However, as we have suffered chronic underfunding for years, our average performance falls far short of our best.

The difference now is that, having been gradually weakened over several years, we now face traumatic cuts in our per-student operating grants. We also know that, for at least the next two years, the situation will not improve. Now is the time to re-think our approach to this education business. I believe it is a time for change, for example to review our strong points and to forge partnerships based on these

strengths which will mitigate the effects of our dependence on inadequate government funding. It is also the time to put aside differences within the colleges; for union members and managers to recognize their inter-dependence and to work together cooperatively in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

In addition to the strengths - indeed as a result of the strengths - that I have identified, the credentials offered by colleges are highly regarded in our communities. It is also clear that the colleges interact with an enormous number of students, especially when their continuing education registrations are considered. These are some of the assets that we offer.

When we look around, we can already find examples of outstanding innovation. Our potential partners include business, industry, and organized labour. Ironically, in many cases this is because they too are suffering the consequences of the same economic factors that are hurting the colleges. The challenge is to recognize our common interests, make the required investments of time and other resources, and to lift our gaze so that we can see beyond the immediate problems.

Unfortunately, acquiring and implementing such a vision is much easier said than done. There have been some spectacular business failures recently which show that even those who are skilled and practised in developing and implementing corporate strategies can make serious mistakes. As educators naïve in the affairs of business, our challenge is to succeed where they have failed.

In summary, the Ontario colleges have a mandate which is quite different from the Cégeps, and the other colleges in Canada. They have the flexibility to work with their communities to offer, and modify, their programs to reflect local needs. Ontario's colleges are being assisted by the Skills Updating program which allows "high tech" courses to be developed. This is a tremendous asset in these times of severe fiscal restraint - times which present great threats and, I am sure, tremendous opportunities. Our challenge is to find those opportunities and to emerge stronger and wiser from the experience.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the opportunity of sharing these observations with you.