

**The New Generation University  
In Canada**

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## The New Generation University in Canada

As little as 25 years ago the typical Canadian post-secondary spectrum consisted primarily of two ends with little in the middle. At one end was the traditional university with a research and teaching mandate. At the other end, was the traditional technical, career or community college with a focused teaching role. While there were some anomalies and some inter-provincial differences in approaches taken to the role of colleges and the development of new universities, the common public perception in Canada was of a two-sector system of post-secondary education (Skolnik, 2003; Marshall, 2004). However, as early as the 1980s, (but most assuredly by the 1990s), there was growing public discontent with aspects of this two sector, post-secondary system. At the college level, many parents, students and employers were concerned that some of the traditional college credentials were no longer sufficient for entry to the workplace. Efforts to increase transfer arrangements to universities, a renewed focus on “learner centered” organizations and even the introduction of applied degrees in several provinces were all examples of an evolving college system responding to these concerns.

This discontent was more publicly and urgently presented at the university level. On one side of the university role, the intense lobby to enhance the research capability of Canadian universities (as a key to Canadian competitiveness in a new “knowledge” economy) resulted in increased investment in the research agenda at all Canadian universities. This has motivated even the smallest of Canadian universities to increase graduate offerings and to focus on the traditional university research and scholarly mission. In many instances, this enhanced research focus has stretched the gap between the college and university sectors.

At the other end of the university mission or role, there continues to be growing discontent with the instructional, and/or undergraduate environment at most Canadian universities. For example, a 1990 federal “Commission on Post-secondary Education” criticized Canadian universities for their disregard for both teaching and the undergraduate student (Smith, 1991). Pocklington and Tupper’s 2002 book, *“No Place to Learn: Why Universities Aren’t Working”*, repeated much of Smith’s observations on the poor state of undergraduate education in Canadian universities (Pocklington and Tupper, 2002). Derok Bok’s recent book on the state of undergraduate education in the United States suggests there is similar discontent in that country (Bok, 2006).

This dissatisfaction at both the college and the university sectors stemmed from the growing awareness that the traditional role or values of neither sector could meet the needs of growing number of students and employers who were looking for a new kind of undergraduate education. The unfilled gap appeared to be a post-secondary education that combined the college approach which focused upon instruction, community and industry response, open access, use of advisory groups, and work experience with the university scholarly environment and collegial governance (and funding!). While there have been attempts across the country over the past decade or so to blend the university and college missions, finding the right mix has not be easy.

At the college level, such initiatives include the development of applied degrees in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario colleges as well as the pending introduction of foundational degrees at Alberta’s colleges and technical institutes (Skolnik, 2004). In the United States

there is a growing movement to explore the delivery of baccalaureates at community colleges, mostly through establishing university “centres” on college campuses.

At the university level, these initiatives would include the growing recognition of the quality of the student experience at undergraduate-focused universities. For example, in Ontario the implementation of university Key Performance Indicators (KPI) has shown that the smaller undergraduate universities rank highest in terms of employment rate of graduates (Government of Ontario, 2004). The 2004 MacLean’s magazine ranking of graduate satisfaction (previously done by the *Globe and Mail*) showed that the smaller, undergraduate-focused universities dominated the top of the rankings. In addition, the establishment of university colleges in British Columbia and some new, unique universities such as Ryerson, Thompson River, and University of Ontario Institute of Technology represent initiatives to address the idea of combined missions.

These varied initiatives at both the university and college levels are at various stages of implementation and assessment, but all speak to one issue: the filling of the emerging and growing gap between the traditional university model and the traditional college/institute model. It is the group of institutions attempting to “fill the gap” that are the New Generation “Universities” of Canada. However, establishing a role and identity for a new institutional characterization in Canada is not an easy path. This current paper discusses the challenges and the promises of the “New Generation University” in Canada.

### **Challenges in defining the NGU in Canada**

There are several factors that make it challenging for new types of institutions to evolve in Canada. These factors include: federal-provincial relationships, the bifurcated nature of the Canadian post-secondary system, and institutional accreditation in Canada.

#### *Provincial-federal relations and post-secondary development*

The Canadian constitution provides the ten provinces and three territories with control over their educational systems, from pre-school through the highest graduate levels. All provinces and territories have resisted any attempt by the federal government to become more involved in educational decisions, despite the fact that transfer payments to the provinces from federally-collected taxes are intended, at least partially, to support post-secondary education. Consequently, common national elements in post-secondary education have only derived from accepted or common standards of practice in post-secondary education rather than a conscious intent on the part of the provinces to respond to an issue such as degree accreditation in a homogenous fashion.

For example, over the years, each province has developed unique procedures with regard to the approval of new institutions and credentials. There are inter-provincial differences regarding the recognition of non-public institutions or credentials, the right of different institutions to grant different credentials, and the relationship between the various types of post-secondary institutions. Historically, these differences have been mostly on the margin. That is, while there are identifiable provincial differences and approaches to these issues, the differences have not historically been significant enough to disrupt the tacitly accepted framework of Canadian degree-granting post-secondary education. However, provincial-level changes in response to unprecedented demands over the past

decade for degree-levels credentials are now threatening to disrupt the traditional inter-provincial harmony. The result is that it is increasingly difficult to identify a “Canadian” approach to post-secondary education, and particularly a national approach to “new generation” institutions.

Confusing the issue of the characterization of institutions is the growing proliferation in Canada of different types of degrees (Marshall, 2004). Fifteen years ago, degrees were primarily the domain of the established university system. In fact, the ability to offer degrees was the dividing line between the college and the university sector (Skolnik, 2004). Today, a variety of different degrees are delivered by a variety of institutions, many of which are not public universities. Both the new types of institutions and the new types of degrees are not yet well understood in Canada. For example, applied degrees in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario all have different curriculum configurations, and are even differently configured between institutions in individual provinces. There is currently no standard description of the various Bachelor of Technology degrees emerging in at least two provinces. While there are ongoing attempts at the national level to establish some national degree outcomes standards, at the current time, provincial autonomy in post-secondary education in Canada has resulted in a relatively uncoordinated range of degrees and degree-granting institutions.

Table 1 outlines the various groups of degree granting institutions in Canada and the types of undergraduate degrees that they offer. The Canadian NGUs (New Generation Universities) are likely to be those in the highlighted columns.

Table 1

Undergraduate Bachelors Degree Type	Institution Type <sup>1</sup>							
	Medical/Research University (15)	Comprehensive University (11)	Undergraduate University (21)	Baccalaureate College or University College (5)	Community College (54)	Polytechnics (7)	Private Not-for-Profit Universities or University-Colleges (9)	Private for Profit Universities (3)
Honours Degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Four-year General (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)	X	X	X	X			X	
Three-year General (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)	X	X	X	X			X	
Professional (e.g. Nursing, Education)	X	X	X	X			X	
Four-year Applied Professional (e.g. Interior Design)	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Applied Vocational or Technical (e.g. Bachelor of Applied xxx)				X	X	X		X
Technology (e.g. BTech)				X		X		
Associated Degree (e.g. Associated Arts) British Columbia Only				X				

### *The bifurcation of Canada's post-secondary system*

A persistent characteristic of the Canadian post-secondary education system is the bifurcation into college (community, technical, vocational) and university systems. While a number of institutions are pushing the edges of this two-system model (mostly institutions represented by the two shaded columns in Table 1) this “two sector” perception persists in Canada and is reinforced by issues such as:

- All provincial post-secondary organizations and some ministry departments are organized by “college” or “university.”
- In provinces with centralized application processes there are separate application processes for colleges and universities.
- There are different funding mechanisms and allocations for colleges and universities, even for the same course or program.
- There are separate national associations for colleges (Association of Canadian Community Colleges [ACCC]) and for universities (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC]).

<sup>1</sup> Not all institutions in a category offer all degrees noted. For example, at this time only one community college has approval to offer foundational degrees.

- Media ranking exercises (e.g. MacLean's) separate the two sectors or exclude one sector.
- Corporate donors have different giving formulas for colleges and for universities.

In addition, both institutions and governments, appear intent on maintaining at least the perception of a two-sector post-secondary system in Canada.

At the provincial government level, while several provinces have been willing to allow new types of institutions and degrees to evolve, the motive has largely been to provide university-level degrees within a college-type funding and operational model (Dennison and Scheutze, 2004). In general, while there is political sympathy for a new kind of "instructionally focused" university, there is continued resistance to the establishment of the more costly and "uncontrollable" university model. Consequently, there have only been seven new universities established in Canada in the past 35 years. This lack of motivation of governments to either establish new types of universities in Canada or to assist colleges to evolve into universities makes it very difficult to be an NGU in Canada.

At the institutional level, institutions that attempt to identify themselves with both the college and university sectors face isolation and opposition from all sides. Colleges resent a colleague that wants to be more "university like." Universities resent any additional strain on the available funding, especially research. Other than the university colleges in British Columbia and perhaps Ryerson in Ontario, institutions in Canada that want to combine the instructional and scholarly missions are forced to do so either from isolation, or from either the college or the university platform. An institution that decides to be a degree-granting "college" will be seen as a groundbreaking hero in the college system, while an undergraduate institution that aspires to the traditional research values of the university system will be seen as exemplar by the universities (and the media ranking exercises). An institution that tries to straddle the two solitudes will be disdained by both.

The strongly entrenched bifurcated post-secondary system in Canada mitigates against the establishment of new generation universities.

#### *Institutional accreditation in Canada: identifying a university*

The traditional dividing line between the university and non-university sector in Canada was the ability to grant degrees. With the expansion of degree granting to a wider range of institutional types, the system has looked for other means to draw the line between university and non-universities (Skolnik, 2004). This is a critical issue for the NGU since institutional recognition as a university can affect a range of issues from eligibility of the institution for research grants to eligibility of graduates for further study. While there is no federal system of education in Canada, there is a process to identify institutions as universities. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) has established membership requirements that mirror the commonly held attributes of a university-level institution and, as such, has become the "de facto" university accreditation process in Canada (Marshall, 2004).

The challenge for the NGU is that in the absence of any national politically based accreditation system, each province has established its own rules in this regard. For

example, several provinces have degree quality councils, but none of these processes are aligned with AUCC. Consequently, provincial agencies have approved degrees for offering by institutions not recognized by AUCC as university-level institutions. This provincial government-AUCC squabble poses challenges to institutions wanting recognition by both.

Can there be an NGU that does not meet AUCC requirements? In Canada, polytechnics will never be members under current AUCC criteria, and most colleges do not aspire to meet these criteria. Only two public institutions that would fit the NGU label are not in AUCC at the current time, and both are either applying or aspiring to membership. Membership or a realistic plan for membership, in AUCC could be a starting point for defining the NGU in Canada.

Federal-provincial relationships, the strong centrifugal forces in the Canadian post-secondary system, and the growing disharmony between provincial-level and AUCC-level accreditation all pose challenges in identifying and evolving the NGU in Canada. Perhaps they are most easily identified as the places that bump up against the edges of the two sectors. Some are universities, some are still called colleges. Most are in AUCC while a couple are not there yet. Some have a blend of credentials, and some offer only degrees. Some are special mission baccalaureate colleges and some are similar mission universities. Some are new institutions, and some are almost 100 years old. What they all have in common is membership (or a plan for membership) in AUCC and a commitment to a special relationship between instruction and scholarship that gives instruction the top billing. In Canada at the current time this list could include the university colleges in British Columbia, Mount Royal College in Alberta, Ryerson in Ontario, the 22 small, primarily undergraduate universities spread across Canada and a number of AUCC institutions affiliated or federated with larger universities. What will distinguish the NGU in Canada, however, is how it implements the instruction focussed mission within the university environment.

### **Promises and potential for the Canadian NGU**

Despite the opposing forces and pitfalls of trying to carve out a new NGU role in Canada, several existing universities and several new ones are pursuing the promises of the new characterization of “instructionally focuses and scholarly informed.” While there have been a several ‘green field’ efforts in Canada over the past two decades, most initiatives are institutional transformation exercises. Mount Royal in Calgary is in the middle of one such transition exercise. Over 12 task forces are planning and guiding this transition (<http://www.mtroyal.ca/president/index.shtml>). The following are some of the more promising and exciting changes inherent in the transition to an NGU model. Other than AUCC membership, and regardless of age, how an institution defines itself on these issues will distinguish it as a “new” type of institution within Canada.

#### *Governance*

Perhaps nothing symbolizes more the ‘two solitudes’ in Canadian post-secondary education than the issue of institutional governance. Governance models for colleges and universities in Canada are established through provincial-level legislation and are traditionally very different. Universities are mostly established through individual

legislation (an act or a regulation), and while all are unique in some ways, almost all share bicameral governance principles, with decision making shared between a publicly appointed board of governors and an academic body comprised primarily of elected faculty. Or, as stated in the AUCC membership criteria, the applying institution must have “a governance and administrative structure appropriate to a university including: authority vested in academic staff for decisions affecting academic programs including admissions, content, graduation requirements/standards, and related policies and procedures through membership on an elected academic senate or other appropriate elected body representative of academic staff.” Colleges, on the other hand, both by legislation and practice are distinctly unicameral, with boards of governors clearly assigned all decision making powers that are then usually delegated to the president. Academic bodies are delegated recommendation powers only.

It is reflective of their histories and their missions that each of the university and college sectors insists that their unique governance model is the “best.” Universities will defend the importance of shared governance in general and specifically the appropriateness of academic decisions resting with academic units, while colleges will insist that their president-centred decision model is necessary for quick program response to vocational or industry changes. The challenge for the NGU has been to find a governance model that incorporates elements of both governance models. For example, many small undergraduate universities in Canada have individual acts that establish governance models that are different than their research focussed counterparts. The university colleges in British Columbia have a unique governance model by legislation.

The Alberta government recently passed legislation to allow colleges to have a governance model (through regulation) that would be more aligned with the bi-cameralism of the university sector in Canada than the community college model (Government of Alberta, 2003). Consequently, Mount Royal has proposed an academic decision making body that will fit a bi-cameral model appropriate for an institution that will be undergraduate and instructional focussed. It is intended that this model be implemented through government regulation in time for the 2006/2007 academic year. While the outcomes of current discussion regarding shared governance in the college sector are not clear, the conversation to this point reinforces the notion that colleges are adamantly opposed to any governance model that increases the role or power of faculty in academic decision making. This reinforces the challenge faced within its own system by any college such as Mount Royal that wants to reinvent itself as a new generation baccalaureate institution.

### *The faculty role*

New Generation Universities will face the issues of defining the faculty job description and the extent to which it can be different from existing patterns. Central to this issue will be the balance between teaching and research.

In Canada, universities and colleges have different patterns of faculty responsibilities, but the institutions in each system do not vary much among each other. College workload formulas are almost exclusively defined in variations of instructional terms. Some colleges refer to the number of hours of classroom contact per week combined with a maximum number of students. Typically in Alberta these workload numbers would be 27 hours of classroom time (i.e. 13.5 hours per week per semester) and a maximum total of

435 students per year. Others refer to the number of “courses” taught in a semester or year. But whatever the measure used, it is intended to reflect a teaching load that represents the full role and responsibility for faculty.

The universities, on the other hand, adhere to what is described as the “40/40/20” pattern. That is, a faculty member’s workload is divided roughly between 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration and service. Within the constraints of collective agreements, chairs and deans may have the latitude to adjust these rates somewhat and, in particular, faculty members with strong records of research funding can be bought out of teaching. In some cases such faculty may do very little teaching. Federal and other funding for research has shifted the balance between teaching and research in Canadian universities over the last ten years or so, but there is no corresponding system to increase teaching levels for those not so heavily involved in research. Resisting the research culture and the money that it can bring in requires determination. The emphasis on research as the primary route to career progress also rests on the belief that research is easier to evaluate than teaching. Somehow counting entries on a Curriculum Vitae seems less fraught as a measure of scholarship than the vagaries of student evaluations in assessing the quality of learning. This emphasis on research at the expense of teaching has led to a good deal of criticism of Canadian universities (Smith, 1990; Pocklington, 2002). There are some universities, such as Nipissing and Acadia, that place a strong emphasis on undergraduate teaching, but, while they have few graduate enrolments, research is still a strong component of faculty responsibilities. The University of Northern British Columbia began in 1994 with a vision that emphasised teaching, but was very quickly describing itself as a small, research-intensive university. In Canadian colleges, on the other hand, faculty are responsible only, or at least primarily, for teaching, and institutions pride themselves on their commitment to their students’ learning experience at a variety of levels. The hybrid university colleges have introduced research into faculty responsibilities, but not at the expense of teaching, which remains the major component of faculty workload. So at the opposite ends of the Canadian spectrum are the universities, particularly the large universities, where research is said to be paramount and the community colleges where the commitment is to student learning.

A question for New Generation Universities is can they develop a faculty job description that is different from both of these extremes? Is it possible, in the Canadian context, to develop a set of faculty responsibilities that involves less than 40% research and, from a College perspective, increase the level of scholarship without devaluing teaching? As Mount Royal transforms to an undergraduate degree granting institution, it would like to become an institution that focuses on student learning that is informed by scholarship. A joint faculty-administration task force is currently deliberating on this issue and will report to the community in the fall of 2006. This principle, however, could translate into a faculty job description that is roughly 70% teaching, 20% research and 10% service for those involved in teaching university level courses. At any rate, defining faculty workload will be the most important distinguishing characteristic of Mount Royal as a NGU.

### *Research and scholarship*

Having raised the question of whether a New Generation University can change the traditional balance between teaching and research, there is the related question of whether the nature of that research can be redefined. Canadian research universities still place a good deal of emphasis on “pure” as opposed to “applied” research. It is true that

the distinction between the two is not absolute and, as sources of research money diversify from the traditional tri-council funding, universities are broadening the nature of their research. In professional programs and in burgeoning areas such as community health, faculty are doing much more applied research. At the same time, in the traditional arts and sciences there is still a great commitment to research for its own sake rather than its social applicability. Faculty will also, quite rightly, appeal to the principle of academic freedom to preserve the right to choose their own areas of research in the face of any attempt by administrators to provide direction. Though peer review is still a fundamental principle, many universities have acknowledged in their documents outlining the criteria for tenure and promotion that the products of scholarship may be much more varied than the traditional books and articles. Yet, while acknowledging that scholarship may take a greater variety of forms, our sense is that universities in Canada have not really grappled with the notion of “the scholarship of teaching.” (Boyer, 1990) This reluctance may arise from the concern that, working with a 40% teaching/40% research job description, university peer review committees do not want colleagues to get credit for the same work in both areas.

So another question for New Generation Universities may have to do with changing the nature of scholarship as well as the level of scholarship. Can New Generation Universities place more emphasis on applied scholarship and emphasise the connection between scholarship and teaching? If the focus is to be on undergraduate learning informed by scholarship, how does a place like Mount Royal apply the idea of the scholarship of instruction?

#### *Niche or breadth*

Academic planning bodies at New Generation Universities are likely to face the issue that can be summarised, or oversimplified, as niche or breadth. The standard pattern in most Canadian universities is to offer a wide range of academic programs. Indeed, breadth of programming is one measure of the strength of an institution, and it is also a criterion for AUCC membership. Universities in Canada, more or less, accept the notion that it is important to maintain programs that are less profitable financially (such as fine arts) or are seen to be less in demand (such as some languages and classics) because these programs are among the hallmarks of a broad education as that is understood both nationally and internationally. Some areas within universities, particularly in Faculties of Arts, will argue that their discipline is valuable for its own sake regardless of the employability of their graduates. This commitment to breadth means that universities are perhaps slower to change their program mix in response to social and regional demands. New, regionally-based and smaller universities, such as the University of Northern British Columbia when it opened in 1994, can be exceptions to this generalization. Community colleges, on the other hand, are always proud of that name as it reflects their nimbleness in developing programs that respond to local pressures. In the United States many smaller undergraduate institutions attribute their success to establishing a particular niche and attracting students committed to “making a difference” (Weinstein, 2005).

New Generation Universities may, once again, want to position themselves somewhere between these two approaches with a greater range of programs than either. A range of arts and science programs will be necessary to support other, more specialized, professional and applied degree programs, but, if they are to be the stewards of their communities, NGUs will also have to develop programs that serve community needs.

Students, and even more so, parents are much more keenly interested in employability upon graduation than they were twenty years ago and most students will seek employment close to where they graduate. So NGUs are likely to have more applied degrees that respond to the needs of local economies than do traditional universities. This mix of academic programs would also fit with a greater emphasis on applied scholarship.

### *Student diversity*

Diversity of academic programming will also be demanded by increasingly diverse groups of students in the future. In Canada, as in many parts of the world, the traditional high school leaver market is declining. Even in a growing city like Calgary, the intake of high-school leavers into Mount Royal is less than one third of the total student intake. In provinces like Saskatchewan, where the total population is not increasing significantly, there is a very fundamental demographic shift happening. In provinces and cities where the population is increasing much of that increase comes from off shore immigration and/or higher birth rates among Aboriginal populations. Both new immigrants and Aboriginal people are interested in finding a better place for themselves within the Canadian society and economy, and they see education as the key that will unlock doors that are otherwise closed to them. They are also groups that require programs that are directed to their particular needs and are sensitive to their cultural backgrounds. Such programs are, therefore, also more expensive to deliver. Another source of increased student numbers in New Generation Universities may well be life-long and place-bound learners. These students will require programs that are delivered all or in part by distance, and we know, though some governments seem not to understand, that distance education is more expensive than face-to-face delivery. The difficulties faced by the fledgling University of the Arctic provide examples of the challenges of delivering programs to small and widely dispersed northern communities with insufficient government funding.

Many New Generation Universities, particularly if they emphasise local accessibility over competing nationally and internationally for the best students, will be faced with delivering programs to a much more diverse population of students than most traditional universities. All of these programs will require higher levels of funding than traditional university programs for high school graduates. These students and programs will also require greater flexibility of workload and attitude on the part of faculty.

### **Observations and conclusions**

The concept of a new type of post-secondary institution that combines aspects of college and university traditions is not well articulated in Canada. There are a number of institutions, colleges and universities that have drifted to the instructionally focussed - scholarly informed mission characteristic of the "NGU" but there are considerable system barriers to institutions that try and ply this middle ground between the traditional sectors in Canada (Wynn, 1997). Despite these challenges, the opportunity to define in a new way the dimensions of governance, faculty roles, institutional research and academic mission are growing. But perhaps most importantly for Canadian institutions attempting to forge this new ground are the emerging organizations or institutional groupings around the world that demonstrate two things. First, there is the recognition that the notion of a new (instructionally focussed - scholarly informed) generation institution is not something that any one institution has thought up to serve their own aspirations, but a worldwide

movement. Secondly, the most pervasive argument against establishing new types of instructionally focussed universities in Canada has been the fear of mission drift. That is, while an institution might start with an instructionally focussed mission, the natural forces of faculty and scholarship will cause it to drift to the performance of a traditional university. Organizations like ANAC (Associated New American Colleges) in the United States and the NGU (New Generation Universities) movement assist with the argument that the NGU mission is a goal, not a place along the way to a traditional university platform.

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