

Postsecondary System Design and Governance

**A Background Paper Prepared for the Ministry of Advanced Education
Campus 20/20 Project Regarding
The Future of British Columbia's Postsecondary Education System**

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Executive Summary

The design of a system of postsecondary education refers to the mix of different types of institutions in regard to institutional mission, highest academic credential awarded, programs offered, clientele served, and educational philosophy. The most fundamental design choice concerns the nature and extent of institutional differentiation. That is, whether to create postsecondary institutions that are quite similar to one another with respect to the characteristics just noted, or have institutions that are highly differentiated from one another. The prevailing view in the literature on this question is that postsecondary education systems that exhibit a considerable extent of institutional differentiation can respond more efficiently and effectively than can more homogeneous systems to variety and change in the demands on higher education.

The predominant design of postsecondary systems that emerged in North America and many other places in the second half of the 20th Century was the binary structure. A pure binary structure consists of two sectors where the institutions in each sector are relatively similar to one another in essential characteristics, but highly differentiated from those in the other sector. The institutions in the university sector all award baccalaureate and higher degrees, are substantially involved in research, and enjoy considerable institutional autonomy. The institutions in the other sector – which has gone by various names - offer vocational and career education programs of a few weeks to two or three years duration; and they may also offer first and second year university courses, and various types of remedial courses. Institutions in the second sector award certificates, diplomas, and in some cases, associate's degrees; they have a limited involvement if any in research; and they have much less autonomy than those in the university sector.

As postsecondary education systems began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s, some jurisdictions adhered more and others less to the pure binary model. This was most apparent in the second sector with the distinctions in some provinces between community colleges and technical institutes, and in some cases separate institutions that offered only short term vocational and remedial education. By the end of the 20th Century, the binary model was in considerable disarray in many jurisdictions, with many second sector institutions offering baccalaureate programs and getting more involved in research; universities offering more applied type programs; and the appearance of a variety of new types of postsecondary institutions that didn't fit the existing classifications.

British Columbia has been in the forefront of the developments in postsecondary education described in the preceding paragraph, particularly with the creation of a new type of postsecondary institution, the university college; institutions that emphasize an indigenous perspective and that focus on the needs of First Nations Communities; and new types of degree granting institutions with distinct missions. With its variety of postsecondary institutions oriented toward addressing different societal needs, the British Columbia system seems appropriately structured to meet the challenges of the next decade or two. Given that the ways that the various functions and activities of postsecondary education are combined to define institutional missions are in a state of flux worldwide, and that British Columbia is in the vanguard of this change movement, it is not obvious that there would be any benefit in trying to produce a typology of postsecondary institutions.

What would be helpful is some overall management of the postsecondary system to ensure that the missions and activities of such a diverse set of institutions mesh well

together and address all provincial needs efficiently and effectively, as well creatively. Before turning to the governance challenge implicit in the previous sentence, a few areas that merit attention might be noted. One is to ensure an efficient distribution of enrolment in baccalaureate programs among different types of postsecondary institutions, particularly between research universities and other institutions. Whatever their share of total undergraduate enrolment, it is important to ensure that the research universities retain both the capacity for and the emphasis on serving the broader intellectual, civic, and cultural goals of postsecondary education relative to the more instrumental (and commercial) economic ones. Another important consideration, especially in conjunction with giving most postsecondary institutions the opportunity to offer baccalaureate programs, is to ensure that the needs of underprepared learners are given a sufficiently high priority. As this is the most substantial and important societal need for which there tend not to be specialized postsecondary institutions, it must be a core responsibility of many postsecondary institutions, and reflected in funding and accountability policies. One other specialized mission that is discussed in the body of the paper is that of open learning where a suggestion is made for enlarging the role of TRU Open Learning.

While much effort in recent years has gone into measuring how well postsecondary institutions are doing at performing their present activities, it is important to appreciate that the performance of the postsecondary system is also dependent upon two other things that have received considerably less attention: whether each institution is doing the right things, as opposed to doing things right; and, as noted above, how well the activities of different institutions mesh together. In general, there are two quite distinct, but not mutually exclusive, approaches that can be taken to address the two latter

concerns. One is to rely on the decisions of individual institutions as they respond to market forces; the other is to employ some mechanism(s) for system planning and coordination at the provincial level. A concern that has been expressed about reliance upon the market-driven approach is that it may give greater emphasis to private benefits than to the public good. It is suggested in the paper, however, that what may be more important than the distinction between private and public is how the public good from higher education is defined, which is at least in part a function of who defines it.

In regard to system planning and coordination, a basic question is whether this role should be played by a government ministry or, as is recommended by many higher education experts who have written on the issue, by a somewhat independent agency. For the past two decades or more in British Columbia, this role has been played mainly by the Ministry, with the assistance of the British Columbia Council on Admission and Transfer in the area of student mobility. The accomplishments using this approach have included a number of significant innovations in system design and organization that appear to have made the system more responsive to provincial needs, and transfer arrangements that are among the most effective in North America. Still the question remains as to whether some type of provincial council for planning and coordination might be helpful as the size and complexity of the higher education system increase and its boundary with other sectors becomes more permeable. Such a council would provide a forum for public discussion and communication regarding the issues identified in this paper, including different interpretations of how higher education can best contribute to the public good.

Postsecondary System Design and Governance

I. System Design

The design of a system of postsecondary education is generally taken to mean the distribution of postsecondary institutions by type of institution, including size and location, and their relationships with one another. The most common ways of distinguishing among different institutional types are with respect to institutional mission, highest academic credential awarded, and programs offered.

Both because of its specificity and because of the significance attached to academic credentials, highest academic credential awarded has usually been an important parameter of system design. For example, in the binary structures that have dominated the design of postsecondary systems in North America since the mid 20th century, the key distinction in institutional types is between those that have the legal authority to award baccalaureate degrees and those that do not. The first major deviation from the binary design in North America in fact was the transformation of some community colleges into university colleges in British Columbia. The most famous example of a system design in which highest academic credential awarded is the defining characteristic is the California system. In the original Master Plan for the California postsecondary system, which dates back to 1960, only one sector had the authority to award doctoral degrees (the University of California); another could award bachelor's and master's degrees (California State University); and the third was restricted to associate's degrees (community colleges). A noteworthy feature of the California plan was that eligibility for admission to the University of California was restricted to the top one-eighth of graduating high school

classes; admission to California State University to the top one-third; and admission to community colleges was open to all who could benefit from them (Shulock, 2004, p. 2).

The range of programs offered is also important in defining institutional type. A comprehensive institution offers a broad range of programs in all or most recognized fields of study, whereas a specialized institution offers programs only in a specific area of study, such as engineering and technology; art and design; health sciences; or business. Institutional specialization may also be a function of predominant clientele served; method of program delivery; or educational philosophy.

All systems of postsecondary education perform the same functions, yet systems vary greatly in design from one jurisdiction to another. This suggests that there is probably not a universally best design, and that each jurisdiction should seek the design that best meets its needs and environmental circumstances in a particular period of time. Although all postsecondary education systems perform the same functions, the quantity and quality of performance of different functions varies considerably among different systems. This variation may be at least in part related to the design of the system. Or the causation may work in the opposite direction: a particular design may be chosen in order to give greater emphasis to particular functions, such as job preparation.

A fundamental characteristic of system design pertains to the extent and nature of institutional differentiation. What this choice involves can be illustrated by considering the extreme points along a continuum of institutional differentiation. At one end of the continuum is the situation where every postsecondary institution offers the full range of programs, credentials, and functions and has the same mission. This may be termed the Homogeneity Model. The only source of institutional differentiation in this model would

be location, which could give rise to some differences in the distribution of enrolment by program reflecting local needs and tastes. The other end of the continuum, the Differentiation Model, would be characterized by having institutions that are highly specialized – and hence differentiated from one another - by program area, function, type of credential, and targeted clientele.

The Differentiation Model may enable a system to respond more effectively to the diverse needs of learners than the Homogeneity Model. Differentiation allows the postsecondary system to reap the benefits of excellence and efficiency that result from specialization. On the other hand, it may not be as good at overcoming geographic barriers to accessibility or at providing equality of opportunity as the Homogeneity Model.

Where to locate along the Homogeneity-Differentiation continuum is one of the key decisions in system design. Although some jurisdictions have a few conglomerate institutions that cover a wide spectrum of activities from short term vocational training to graduate studies and research, none operate at the extreme Homogeneity end of the continuum. However, some jurisdictions adhere to a pure binary model in which the postsecondary system consists of two sectors where the institutions in each sector are relatively similar to one another in essential characteristics, but highly differentiated from those in the other sector. In contrast, many jurisdictions have some differentiation in mandates between institutions within either the university or non-university sectors, or within both sectors. For example, a common pattern within non-university sectors is for some institutions to concentrate on lower division university level courses and longer

term career training and others on short term vocational training and adult upgrading, as has been the case in Alberta.

Where there are sufficient numbers of institutions that have the same mandate, it is helpful to group them into sectors that operate within a common governance and financial framework. This may facilitate the development of institutional identity and sense of purpose, foster public understanding of the mission of the institutions and the needs that they serve, and make it easier to provide consistent provincial oversight of the institutions. Partitioning institutions into sectors may not be helpful when many are highly differentiated from one another and there are several different institutional types, as is the case in British Columbia.

The existing system design in any jurisdiction is the result of a combination of the interplay of historical and political forces, on the one hand, and on the other, deliberate attempts to alter the design through formal planning initiatives, where such initiatives have been undertaken. In Canada there were several planning initiatives during the expansionary period of the 1960s and early 1970s, the most comprehensive being the MacDonald Report in British Columbia, the Parent Commission in Quebec, and the Deutsch Commission in New Brunswick. Since those formative days, attention to system design has been sporadic if at all in most provinces and has focused mainly on altering the mission of some colleges and institutes (or in the case of Nova Scotia, catching up with other provinces by creating a system of colleges) and easing restrictions on the establishment of private degree granting institutions. British Columbia has given the most substantial and wide ranging attention to system design of any province, and the Campus 20/20 Project fits well within that tradition.

Although there have been some changes in the design of postsecondary systems in North America in recent years - perhaps nowhere more than in British Columbia - the essential design features of these systems date back to the 1960s. When one considers the enormous changes in society that have taken place since then, it is hardly surprising that structures put in place that long ago are “overwhelmed by today’s issues” (Shulock, 2004, p. 1). For example, when the California Master Plan for Higher Education was put in place, that state was regarded as a leader in higher education. In spite of five formal legislatively sponsored reviews of the Master Plan since then, there have been no significant changes in the 1960 Master Plan. By the year 2000, a state that once took pride in being a leader in higher education had fallen to 36th in the ratio of baccalaureate degrees to the number of high school graduates six years earlier, even though California ranked near the bottom in the proportion of the age specific population with a high school diploma (Hayward and others, 2004, p. 11, p. 90).

The durability of the California Master Plan is illustrative of the difficulty in making significant changes anywhere in system design once a design is well entrenched and many stakeholders have a strong interest in maintaining it. In this context, readers might consider doing a thought experiment. That is to imagine that you were creating the higher education system of British Columbia (or of some other province) from scratch unconstrained by existing institutions and structures. How much would it look like the existing system? Doing this exercise enables one to see how great the distance is between the existing design and one’s ideal and to get an idea of what the obstacles to moving closer to the ideal might be. My sense is that the current system in British Columbia is a

lot closer to what higher education experts would recommend if starting from scratch today than would be the case for other provinces, except perhaps for Alberta.

Judging from many recent commentaries on higher education, one concern that is common to many jurisdictions in North America (and elsewhere) is the difficulty of finding sufficient resources to accommodate all who want or need an education through the baccalaureate level. Accordingly, if leaders in these jurisdictions were designing their systems from scratch today, they would probably make provision for more undergraduates to study in a variety of institutions that are less costly than the research university. For example, last year the Board of Regents in Arizona observed that with 93% of the State's undergraduate enrolment being in research universities, Arizona relies too heavily on the most costly model for delivering undergraduate education. The Regents suggested that the State could not afford to increase enrolment in baccalaureate programs as much as it needed to while relying on "this inefficient university model" (Arizona Board of Regents, 2005, p. 16). Consequently, the Regents came up with a proposal to modify the system design so as to convert parts of the existing system into institutions whose mission would be primarily that of teaching undergraduates. As was the case in Arizona, when similar expressions of concern and suggestions for change have been voiced in Canada, they have been met with considerable opposition from the existing universities. Thus, rather than tampering with existing universities, many jurisdictions have confined their search for alternative models for the provision of undergraduate education to relaxing restrictions on private degree granting institutions; establishing or strengthening open universities; giving community colleges and technical institutes limited authority to offer baccalaureate programs, and establishing new

universities with somewhat more limited mandates than the institutions. British Columbia has pursued all of these strategies, and with more vigour than most provinces and states, and yet, the vast majority of undergraduate degrees in the Province are still awarded by the three research universities. Having different types of institutions that can provide baccalaureate programs is one thing; making substantial use of that capability is another.¹

Another important aspect of system design pertains to the relationships between institutions, particularly the way that these relationships enable students to move from one institution to another. In the extreme Homogeneity Model, where each institution offers every type of program, students would need to change institution only if, for some other reason, they had to change their location of residence. In general, the greater the differentiation among institutions, the greater the need to make provision for student mobility. The problem is that where institutional differentiation is greater it is also more difficult to build effective pathways between institutions. Institutions that are highly differentiated from one another often find it difficult to award academic credit for courses of other institutions because of differences in curriculum structures, types of programs, and educational philosophies. For example, an institution which itself offers little in the way of applied education may not understand applied education, and thus would not be inclined to give much advanced standing credit to a student who wishes to transfer from an institution that has a strong applied orientation. To some extent, provision for student mobility can be made in system design, for example, through common course numbering

¹ Based upon the enrolment figures that I have been able to obtain, the three research universities (UBC, SFU, and UVIC) account for 82.5% of undergraduate enrolment, excluding TRU, the colleges and institutes, and private institutions the figures for which I did not have time to obtain. This figure is not as high as the corresponding figure for Arizona, or for Ontario which would also be over 90%, but it still seems pretty high. Of course it is up to provincial policy makers to decide on what would be a desirable figure, and I suggest in the third section of this paper that this figure would be an important indicator for policy purposes and should be monitored.

among institutions, as exists in the state of Florida. However, the effectiveness of arrangements for student mobility is also a function of governance.

The authority to establish or modify the system design resides in the governance structure. The next section examines governance in postsecondary education and its relationship to system design.

II. Governance

The term, governance, has been used in at least three different ways in higher education literature: (i) as a generic term to refer to the structures and processes, both formal and informal, through which decisions are made; (ii) in reference specifically to the functions of formally constituted, representative bodies which have stipulated authority derived from statute, charter, and/or institutional by-laws, such as governing boards and academic senates; and (iii) to refer to the processes and structures through which *major* policies are established and other important decisions are made. Overlaying lens (ii) with lens (iii) reveals the extent to which important decisions are made outside the highest profile formally constituted bodies, for example by administrative officials acting on their own. In my discussion, I will concentrate on the overlap between the second and third meanings of the term with reference particularly to the highest level policy making bodies.

A very important distinction in governance is between internal and external governance. Internal governance refers to policies and decisions made at the level of the institution or campus, typically involving the governing board, faculty, and executive head, and possibly students and other staff as well. External governance refers to

decisions and policies made at the provincial or state level through the involvement of state policy actors. These include primarily the government and senior non-elected officials particularly of the relevant ministry or department, jurisdiction-wide boards or councils if such exist, and jurisdiction-wide organizations that represent different constituencies such as governing boards, senior executives, faculty, and students. In Canada, internal and external governance generally are referred to as institutional and system governance, respectively, and I will follow that convention.

In the literature on higher education governance, many different models of system governance have been depicted. The key factors that differentiate these models from one another are: (1) whether there is some type of government-appointed state or provincial board that serves as an intermediary between the government and individual institutions or campuses; (2) whether such boards have executive authority, and the range of such authority, or whether they have only an advisory or coordinating role; and (3) how different segments of higher education are combined or not under different types of boards, e.g. having a separate board for each segment, or having research universities under one board and all other postsecondary institutions under another board.²

In contrast to the United States where nearly every state has some type of intermediary body or bodies, in Canada system level intermediary bodies are rare, and the few that do exist have very limited authority. In many states, all or most of the public universities in the state are under the jurisdiction of a single governing board that has similar stature to the typical institutional board of governors of a university in Canada. In fact, about 80% of students in the United States are enrolled on campuses of a multi-

² Hamilton (2004) describes examples of these two and other models. The most comprehensive depiction of different models of system governance is in a paper by McGuinness, Jr. for the Education Commission of the States (2003).

campus system that is under a single governing board. As a general rule – though there certainly have been exceptions – governments themselves are less prone to intervene in the running of universities and colleges than are intermediary bodies that have been established expressly for that purpose. Hence, public institutions/campuses tend to have more autonomy from *external* actors in Canada than in the United States. Moreover, perhaps not surprisingly in view of the difference in governance structures between the two nations, a recurring theme in Canadian higher education has been the need for better coordination between institutions; while in the United States in recent years one hears much about alleged over-regulation of public universities and the purported benefits of devolving greater authority to the campus level (MacTaggart and Associates, 1998).

In Canada, calls for the establishment of provincial intermediary bodies for postsecondary education date back to the 1960s, and most, if not all, formal studies of the matter have recommended that provinces move in this direction (Royce, 1997). The most thorough analysis of system governance issues ever done in Canada was probably the 1970 Report of the Commission on Relations between Universities and Governments sponsored by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and two student organizations (Hurtubise and Rowat, 1970). The Commissioners, Hurtubise and Rowat, Law Professor and Vice-Rector of the University of Quebec, and Professor of Political Science at the Carleton University, respectively, recommended that provinces with three or more university campuses establish “a coordinating and planning commission with a statutory base, a semi-autonomous status and substantial powers” (p. 111). Although universities commissions or councils were at one time established in some provinces, including British Columbia,

none had anything close to the stature, scope, or authority (or durability) recommended by Hurtubise and Rowat. Cameron said of the Universities Council of British Columbia, which was established in 1974, that it “played a remarkably passive role” (Cameron, 1991). The Universities Council was abolished just over a decade later, having been unpopular with the universities which saw it “as an expensive additional level of bureaucracy” (Dennison, 1997, p. 43). Insofar as Hurtubise and Rowat viewed system planning as one of the core functions of an intermediary body, it is ironic that this intermediary body was abolished shortly before some major changes were made in the Province’s postsecondary system, i.e., the establishment of the university colleges and the University of Northern British Columbia, and an enlargement of the role of the Open University. Such changes demonstrated that in British Columbia, the Provincial Government has had the imagination and the will to significantly alter the design of the postsecondary system without the guidance of an intermediary body. This stands in contrast to the experience of other provinces, such as Ontario, where Provincial Governments have generally lacked the will to tackle system design. It remains to be seen, though, whether in the long run, matters of system design are addressed more effectively through occasional bursts of interest and activity directly by government, or through the ongoing vigilance and expertise of an intermediary body that has system planning as one of its primary responsibilities.

Thus far in this discussion of governance, I have concentrated on system level governance, and within system level governance on the planning function. The reason for doing so is that these aspects of governance are the ones that relate most closely to system design, the other primary focus of this paper, and the planning function is the

most neglected of system level governance functions in Canadian higher education.

However, it is important to remember that there are other functions of system governance, and another level of governance.

The other most critical functions of system level governance are allocation of funding, approval of programs, quality assurance, and providing for inter-institutional mobility of students.³ In carrying out any of these functions there are four possible vehicles which can be relied upon exclusively or in combination: government itself; an autonomous or semi-autonomous provincial agency for which I have used the generic term, intermediary body; individual institutions as they respond to market or quasi-market forces, which I will refer to for convenience as the market; and collective institutional self-governance. Through a detailed analysis - that is beyond the scope of this paper - it would be possible to show how we rely in Canada on different combinations of these vehicles for various system governance functions. For example, some of the matching grant schemes for federal and provincial research funding that now exist constitute a shift toward relying more on market forces in the allocation of research funding. The rapidly growing practice of tying a portion of operating funding to government-selected performance indicators is an example of funding allocation decisions being made directly by government. The quality assessment boards that have been established in some provinces are one of the few examples of reliance on an intermediary agency. Thus far, however, it appears that these agencies concentrate on degree programs of other institutions than the provincially chartered universities, i.e., private and out of province degree granting institutions and colleges and institutes.

³ Other possible system level functions are board and senior administrative appointments and compensation, human resources and staff relations, jurisdiction wide academic policies, and public information and advocacy.

Program quality assurance for provincial universities is handled through collective institutional self-governance or treated as a matter for institutions to deal with on their own. These examples show that in regard to quality, all possible vehicles of system governance are being used, each in relation to different pieces of the quality puzzle. It would be helpful to know if within the resulting *mélange* of quality-focused initiatives, there is any wasteful duplication or contradiction.

Although it may not often be presented as I have done, as one of several options for system governance, the increasing use of market mechanisms for resource allocation and other decisions is one of the most talked about issues in higher education today. In fact, one reviewer of a book on this subject said that books on markets in higher education were sprouting from the walls of academe like the ivy. The predominant explanation for this trend is that it reflects a shift toward neo-liberal ideology in public policy. However, given the great variety of political stripes of the governments that have followed this trend, other factors are likely involved. Steven Parker, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Monash University has suggested that reliance on market forces may be partly a substitute for “policy vision and imagination” (Parker, 2005, p. 26). Certainly the lack of intermediary agencies whose mission it is to produce and refine visions of system design contributes to the absence of vision that Parker notes. On the other hand, in some jurisdictions and/or segments of higher education, there is no shortage of visions, and the competition among them can be intense. Relying on seemingly anonymous market forces is a way to avoid making explicit choices among competing visions and thus avoid being blamed by those who don’t like the choices.

The increasing use of markets and market-like mechanisms in higher education is often equated with privatization, though some observers take pains to distinguish between marketization and privatization. The terms private and privatization are used in such a variety of ways that it is important to recognize the different meanings of the terms. These include reference to the legal form of an organization, to its sources of funding, to its arrangements for governance, and to the intended goals of its activities. For colleges, universities, and institutes that have been legally established as public institutions, major decisions in governance these days relate to the mix of different types of public and private funding, and the balance between serving public and private goals.

From the perspective of system design, a major issue is how legally private institutions are treated within the jurisdiction's postsecondary system and the policy stance that is adopted regarding the relationship between public and private institutions. Geiger has argued that the scale and nature of private higher education around the world is determined largely by the opportunities that are provided by the public sector (Geiger, 1986). If Geiger's thesis is correct, those who govern the public higher education sector can learn much about the needs that it is not meeting by looking to see where private providers of education are making investments and successfully recruiting students. In Canada today, it would appear that the need for research universities has been met adequately by the public sector, as the private sector is not rushing to enter that niche. On the other hand, there appears to be excess demand for occupation-specific programs that are delivered on a fast track to adults, in imaginative and flexible space-time configurations, employing learner-centered pedagogies, and using faculty who are not expected to do research.

An important system design decision for the public sector is whether it should seek to extend its activities into those niches presently filled by private providers, or leave that to the privates. Although there have been no explicit policy statements directing public institutions to move in this direction, one can infer that this is the implicit policy in most provinces. The chain of reasoning that leads to this conclusion is: (1) governments have made colleges and universities considerably more market-driven over the past two decades through a combination of specific initiatives to that end, and more so by reducing the share of institutional revenue that comes from public operating grants; and (2) in seeking to attract more students (and hence more tuition revenue), many public institutions have increasingly adopted characteristics outlined above that formerly were more associated with private institutions. Item (2) could hardly be regarded as an *unanticipated* consequence of item (1). Private institutions with the characteristics listed earlier can play a valuable role in addressing the needs of some learners. It may even be beneficial if *some* public institutions adopted more of this orientation. However, it is a serious problem if all public institutions are steered in the direction of behaving like private institutions. In that case, no institutions may be left to play the traditional role that public institutions have played.

Two concerns have been expressed about the consequences of relying mainly on institutional responses to market forces for determining patterns of resource allocation and changes in the shape of public higher education. The criticism that is heard most frequently is that a market-driven system will produce private benefits rather than serve the public good. For example, this is the theme of several of the contributions in the book, *Taking Public Universities Seriously*, which resulted from a conference held at the

University of Toronto in December, 2004 (Iacobucci and Tuohy, 2005). Another recent book that is devoted to making this argument is entitled *Higher Education for the Public Good* (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt, 2005; see also Texeira and others, 2004; Newman, Couturier, and Scurry, 2004). Tierney summarizes the position of many who make this argument when he says that “. . . the intellectual justification of a postsecondary education based on a particular view of the democratic state is being dropped in favor of a largely privatized, capitalist view of what a postsecondary education entails” (Tierney, 2004, p. xxiii). Assertions of this type have appeared recently with sufficient frequency to take note of them, but it must also be noted that it is not clear just what such statements actually mean.

A weakness in much of this literature is the failure to explain in concrete terms precisely what is meant by the alleged shift from serving the public good to providing private benefits. Personal benefit has always been the strongest motivator for most individuals to pursue higher education, but the education that personally motivated individuals obtain produces social benefits as well as personal benefits. If the use of a market model results in sufficient increases in tuition that are not adequately countered by corresponding improvements in student financial assistance, then some individuals may be denied higher education for financial reasons. However even in this case, *both* the public benefits and the private benefits for these individuals that would have resulted from their education are foregone. This scenario could alternatively be described as an inequitable distribution of the potential personal benefits of education, which of course has important societal implications.

The developments that have caused concern among many in the higher education community in recent years are perhaps not so much a shift from serving the public good to providing private benefits, but a change in the way that the public good is being defined. As nations and provinces have become concerned about their competitiveness in the global economy, there has been a tendency to redefine the public good that higher education serves almost exclusively in terms of its contribution to economic growth. In so doing, we may be losing sight of the important non-economic purposes of higher education (Wolf, 2002; Skolnik, 2005). The writer who has described this problem most eloquently is Alison Wolf, a Professor at the University of London Institute of Education:

The contribution of education to economic life ... is only one aspect of education, not the entirety, and it does not deserve the overwhelming emphasis which it now enjoys.... Our recent forebears, living in significantly poorer times, were occupied above all with the cultural, moral, and intellectual purposes of education. We impoverish ourselves by our indifference to these (Wolf, 2002, p. 254).⁴

Insofar as the critique of the market model is valid, the principal alternative to relying on market forces is to install some kind of system governance mechanism through which a vision of how higher education can serve the public good can be publicly articulated and implemented. However, it has proven difficult for higher education agencies to articulate such a vision let alone direct its implementation. In the United States, there has been a trend in multi-campus systems to devolve power to the campus

⁴ Although market forces could be implicated here, the tendency to undervalue the non-economic contributions of education is not necessarily or primarily due to reliance on markets. Indeed, this tendency could be prominent in a government controlled system, as was the case in the former Soviet Union. Markets may undervalue activities with large externalities, such as some types of higher education that are not oriented toward to producing labour market skills. On the other hand, some innovative higher education programs whose primary goal is self-actualization rather than economic benefit have been able to get started only through private funding.

level, and in Canada, system intermediary bodies have generally been unpopular, at least with the universities. Still, some combination of market forces and system governance must be sought, as the alternative of providing postsecondary institutions with abundant public funds without the constraint of the market *or* the guidance of a system governance mechanism is improbable and probably imprudent. As Ehrenberg observed, in such a situation, institutions have “an incentive to act in their own best interests, but less of an incentive to work toward the common good” (Ehrenberg, 2004, p. 276).

Also, institutional governance is not without its own problems. Discussions of institutional governance in Canadian higher education often start with the Duff-Berdahl Report (1966) which was a sort of companion piece for institutional governance to the Hurtubise-Rowat study for system governance. One of the themes of the Duff-Berdahl Report, which was co-sponsored by AUCC and CAUT, was to make institutional governance more democratic. A process of governance reform began across Canada shortly after the publication of the Duff-Berdahl Report and continued into the early Nineties, when changes were made in British Columbia to move the colleges and institutes in the direction of shared governance. For the most part, the democratization movement in Canadian higher education has leveled off since the early Nineties, and in some respects has suffered setbacks.

A common explanation for the leveling off or setback in the movement for democratic reform of governance is that as higher education is now subject to a globally competitive, market-driven environment, the participatory decision-making processes that evolved from the 1960s to the 1990s are a luxury that institutions can no longer afford (Sibley, 1993). If the spoils go to the institution that can give the quickest response

to new opportunities, then, it is often argued, responses must be made by senior administrators and executive committees, necessarily circumventing the full participatory process. A related but somewhat different explanation focuses on the increasingly competitive environment for academic career advancement, suggesting that faculty are simply too busy adding items to their curriculum vitae to have the time to participate in institutional governance. Though both are plausible arguments, often illustrated by gripping anecdotes, there is not a great deal of systematic empirical evidence to support (or refute) them.

A more sophisticated argument about the growing malaise of institutional governance that does have some empirical support has been produced by David Collis (2004) of the Harvard Business School. Collis argues that the traditional core of postsecondary institutions, particularly of the university, has been declining while activity at the periphery has been increasing. He provides data that show absolute or relative declines in what he regards as core elements of the university: full-time faculty, basic public operating grants, liberal arts and scientific education, student services and libraries. At the same time, there has been considerable expansion in things that Collis views as being on the periphery: part-time faculty, outsourcing of services, partnerships of various kinds, corporate training, vocational courses, contract research, license and patent activity, and arms-length research and product development centres (p. 34). Quoting a phrase coined by Clark Kerr, Collis describes the situation as one of governance having “less control over more things” (p. 58). He suggests that “the expanding periphery and contracting core” . . . stretches the . . . adaptive capability of governance structures to the breaking point” (p. 58). Governing bodies have limited

hierarchical authority or policy discretion over the periphery. Moreover, the resulting blurring of the institutional boundary creates ambiguity over the roles and responsibilities of participants in the governance process. Even without anyone making a deliberate attempt to weaken the role of faculty in decision making, faculty may feel confused about the scope of their authority and powerless to control things that are happening on the expanding and increasingly important periphery of the institution. An implication of the scenario depicted by Collis is that system governance may need to be enhanced in order to deal with phenomena that cannot be handled adequately by institutional governance, for example, relationships between institutions.⁵

III. Implications, Options, and Suggestions for British Columbia

The public postsecondary education system of British Columbia is characterized by the greatest institutional differentiation of any in Canada, and among the greatest in North America. Insofar as those who argue that postsecondary systems with a high level of institutional differentiation are best able to meet the diverse needs of learners (Birnbaum, 1983; Huisman, 1998; Meek and others, 1996), the British Columbia system is structured appropriately for the early 21st Century. In spite of the consensus of scholars who have studied institutional differentiation, readers should appreciate that it is difficult to demonstrate empirically the superiority of a particular system design, and that many other factors such as traditions, funding and governance interact with design, in complex ways that are not fully understood, to determine outcomes. That caveat notwithstanding, the

⁵ The institutional boundary spanning mechanisms and processes that would be needed are not just provincial ones, but also national and international.

variety of postsecondary institutions in British Columbia should be a considerable source of strength in an era of increasingly diverse demands on postsecondary education.

The present design of the British Columbia system is primarily the result of initiatives taken directly by the Provincial Government. Though the Provincial Government has often received input from various types of committees and task forces, except in 1962 when perhaps it largely reacted to the MacDonald Report, the Government appears to have been the driving force in the evolution of postsecondary system design. The idea that government by itself should play such a dominant role in system planning is looked upon somewhat skeptically in the postsecondary education governance literature where it is assumed that some type of system governance agency that is at arms-length from government is necessary. Of course, the governance literature that I am referring to is primarily American, and the difference in the form of government between Canada and the United States could mean that observations about system governance in the United States are not transferable to Canada (Skolnik and Jones, 1992). In any case, the first and in many ways most significant issue pertaining to system design and governance that is raised by the preceding discussion is that of the arrangements for system governance. Following some further comments on that issue, this section lists and discusses briefly other important issues for system design and governance.

1. Is There a Need for a New System Governance Agency?

The issue here is whether it would be helpful to have some type of provincial level body, perhaps a British Columbia Council on Higher Education, that would have a responsibility for ongoing monitoring of the postsecondary system, coordination, and

planning. Ideally, such a body would consist of individuals appointed for their expertise and understanding of postsecondary education and its environment and related societal needs, and not to represent particular constituencies or institutions. If there is to be a reform of this type, a compelling case can be made that there should be a single body with jurisdiction over the whole of postsecondary education broadly defined. Such a body could provide continuous oversight of important system design and development issues and provide advice on how the system could best evolve over time. Rather than duplicating the role of other agencies, it could play an integrative role with respect to the various issues and themes that are now being addressed by the Ministry and specific agencies, such as degree regulation, quality assurance, accountability, accessibility, technology, and inter-institutional relations. Indeed, if all it did was duplicate functions that are now being performed by others then there would be no point in establishing such a body. To a considerable extent, the Ministry itself has been doing an admirable job of performing much of work that elsewhere is done by intermediary bodies. However, it may become more difficult to ensure that these functions are performed in-house as the size and complexity of the postsecondary system increase, and there are benefits in having an independent body in this role. For example, such a body would be an ideal forum for discussion and promoting public awareness regarding the tensions between making institutions more market-driven and ensuring that they serve the public good as discussed earlier, and for developing policies to reconcile these opposing forces. Besides providing greater transparency, it could also provide a broader base than the Ministry for articulating a system vision that would provide the framework for guiding the evolution of institutional missions, as suggested below.

There is much to like about the idea of a provincial higher education council, and a review of system governance would be incomplete without giving the idea serious consideration. Still, the case for such a body is not a slam dunk. The nagging concern is that with the wrong people or the wrong dynamics, councils of this type can be a force for the status quo; and, as I have noted, British Columbia has been able to make innovative changes in the design of its postsecondary system without such a body.

2. Is a Typology of Postsecondary Institutions Needed?

At present British Columbia has a variety of types of institutions that have a substantial responsibility for offering degree programs and a variety of institutions that offer some degree programs but whose primary responsibilities involve other types of academic credentials. As well, increasing numbers of the Province's postsecondary institutions conduct research, but the extent and predominant types of their research efforts vary enormously. On the Canadian and larger world stage, the mix of functions and activities performed by various postsecondary institutions is in a state of flux with many existing institutions taking on new and different functions and the appearance of new types of providers of postsecondary education. Some have suggested that in the postmodern world what universities and colleges do is up for grabs (Bloland, 2005; Readings, 1996). In fact, taking note of these developments in higher education, Statistics Canada issued a discussion paper which argued that the existing classification system for postsecondary institutions in Canada no longer reflects the new reality, and the paper described the difficulties of producing a classification that would (Orton, 2003). British Columbia is at the forefront of the change movement in this aspect of postsecondary education, and as such, it can learn little about new models for postsecondary institutions from other

jurisdictions. More likely, they will look to British Columbia for lessons and guidance. Perhaps British Columbia will be among the first jurisdictions to have a truly postmodern postsecondary education system, in which public institutions, in negotiation with central authorities, define their own futures without statutory constraints, building upon their historic capabilities and strengths and serving the societal needs within their geographic and other relevant communities.

The main purpose that typologies of postsecondary institutions, like the California one described earlier, have served is to restrict an institution's activities to those that fit within the defining parameters of the respective categories. In what is expected to be an era of rapidly changing demands on higher education that may vary considerably by region and sector, it is hard to see how such hardening of the categories can be helpful. Moreover, typologies are most meaningful, valid, and useful when there are substantial numbers of institutions within each category, whereas in British Columbia today, some of these categories would contain only a few, in some cases perhaps only one, institution(s).

3. Integrating Accountability Reporting with System Development

The Ministry has produced what appears to be a state-of-the-art framework for institutional accountability reporting (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2005/06). Besides, or instead of their present use, performance indicators in the accountability framework could be used to monitor the progress of postsecondary institutions in fulfilling their specific institutional missions. These missions could be negotiated between institutions and the Ministry and/or a Higher Education Council within the framework of an integrated vision & plan for postsecondary education in the Province.

Such a process would provide a way to balance institutional interests with consensual interpretations of the common good.

The process that I have described would limit the substantive but not the procedural autonomy of postsecondary institutions. Procedural autonomy refers to the power of institutions to decide how they will perform their various activities. Substantive autonomy refers to an institution's power to decide on its own mission and major goals. In most jurisdictions it is accepted that the public, through government or an appropriately constituted system governance agency, should have a major say on the mission of public enterprises which are dependent upon public funding. As Berdahl has expressed it, the public interest is best served if the state "yields the broadest array of procedural freedoms to the institution", while it still retains "a partnership role in the substantive goals" of the institution in order to ensure that the public interest is served (Berdahl, 1998, p. 82).

Accountability reporting has tended to focus on simple indicators of institutional performance that are supposed proxies for quality. There are two weaknesses in this approach, one pertaining to institutional performance, the other to system performance. Regarding the first, it is important to keep in mind that the contributions that postsecondary institutions make to the public good depend not only upon doing things well, but at least as much and perhaps more so on doing the right things. The performance indicators used in British Columbia and other provinces concentrate almost exclusively on how well the institutions are doing things, not whether they are doing the right things. The development of indicators that could help policy makers address the latter question would assist in the process of negotiating and monitoring performance

with respect to institutional missions, as described earlier. An indicator that would be particularly helpful in this regard would be a measure of the distribution of institutional expenditures among different types of programmatic activity, for example showing how a college is allocating its resources between meeting the needs of under-prepared students on the one hand and baccalaureate ready students on the other.

The reason why we are interested in system design is that the effectiveness of a higher education system is a function not only of how well each institution does *its* job, but also how well the entire set of institutions performs as a *system*. The latter depends upon having an appropriate mix of different types of institutions and effective relationships among them. A simple indicator that would be helpful in considering whether the mix of institutions is appropriate is the distribution of enrolment in baccalaureate programs, or baccalaureate degrees awarded, among postsecondary institutions. Earlier I suggested that in some jurisdictions there is concern that too high a proportion of baccalaureate enrolment is accounted for by research universities, the most expensive way of providing baccalaureate programs, and that this may true also in British Columbia. Of course, there is no “correct” value for this system indicator or for the indicator of institutional performance that I suggested in the preceding paragraph – nor for any of the existing performance indicators for which data is presently collected. The indicators that I have suggested here would be useful additions to what is presently collected, as they would broaden the understanding of how well the postsecondary system is performing beyond the present focus on institutional quality. Informed discussion of such indicators in a council of the type that I have suggested would strengthen the foundation for higher education policy making in the Province.

Measures of student mobility between institutions are one indicator of the other dimension of system performance that I mentioned above, the effectiveness of relationships between institutions. One aspect of student mobility for which British Columbia has produced considerable data is that of transfer from colleges and institutes to universities and university colleges. Transfer rates can be calculated in myriad ways, and like almost any other performance indicator, their interpretation is fraught with limitations and difficulties. Still, they are generally deemed to be useful indicators. Through the work of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, British Columbia has been a leader both in the production of data on transfer and in fostering effective opportunities for transfer. Indeed, after studying the mechanisms for enhancing transfer opportunities in different provinces, colleagues and I concluded that the BCCAT was an exemplary model (Skolnik and Jones, 1993; Jones, Skolnik, and Soren, 1998). Transfer rates for British Columbia are the highest in Canada⁶ and on par with leading transfer states in the United States. However, as is the case in the United States, there is an enormous difference in transfer rates and in the ease of transfer between arts and sciences and career education programs.⁷ A lot more effort needs to be put into enhancing opportunities for college to university transfer for students in career education programs. Possibly adding the weight of a Higher Education Council to that of the BCCAT would help get greater movement toward this end.

4. Ensuring a Balance Among Different Types of Institutional Missions

⁶ The rate of progression from CEGEPs to universities in Quebec is much higher than the transfer rate from college to university anywhere in North America. However, because students enroll in the CEGEPs after Grade 11 and attendance at a CEGEP prior to attending university is mandatory, the CEGEP is generally regarded as part of the university preparation system, rather than as a transfer institution.

⁷ According to a recent comparative study, the transfer rate in British Columbia in 2003 was 41% for students in arts and sciences, and 8% for those in career programs. This discrepancy is comparable to that in the United States, for example the corresponding figures for Texas were 36% and 6%; Missouri, 41% and 9% (ACAATO, 2005, p. 17).

Among the important issues in institutional differentiation that should be part of the system vision within which specific institutional missions would be negotiated, none may be more important than the distinction between serving the short to medium term needs of the economy for workforce skills and applied knowledge as opposed to the broader goals of higher education, including especially the development of intellectual ability, the advancement of knowledge, and nurturing and protecting the capacity for critical analysis. Both sets of qualities are important to society, but as I argued earlier, in today's climate of globalization, the second set is the more fragile. It is also the least replaceable. Therefore, it is essential for the government, through system design and related funding policies, to ensure that some institutions specialize in the second set of qualities and are not forced to compromise that commitment by inadequate public funding. This does not mean an exclusive commitment on the part of these institutions to knowledge for the sake of knowledge, for there is a valuable synergy between pure and applied research, and between intellectual development and application of knowledge. The concern is about balance, and the need to ensure differentiation among institutions in the relative weight given to the different sets of qualities. As I have argued elsewhere, insofar as there has been some blurring of the boundaries between colleges/institutes and universities in recent years, it has not, as university leaders often maintain, come only or perhaps even primarily from colleges and institutes beginning to offer baccalaureate programs. A major contributing force has also been the increased movement into commercial and applied activity on the part of universities (Skolnik, 2005; see also Fisher and Rubenson, 1998).

As noted earlier, the British Columbia postsecondary education system is rich in diversity of institutional types. Besides traditional universities and community colleges,

the system includes an institute of technology; an open learning institution; a unique type of postsecondary institution, the university college; special mission universities; and institutions that are differentiated by field (art and design, justice related studies), and by emphasis on an indigenous perspective and addressing the needs of First Nations Communities. One type of institutional differentiation that does not appear to exist among postsecondary institutions is that involved with serving the needs of academically under-prepared learners. However, from their inception this has been a major function of community colleges, and according to some observers one of the defining characteristics of the community college (London, 1980). As colleges have started to offer baccalaureate programs, concerns have been expressed about the implications of that development for their commitment to under-prepared learners (Floyd, Skolnik, and Walker, 2005). Even before the community college baccalaureate, there have been concerns as to whether governments in Canada were doing enough to support college initiatives in this area. Given the substantial personal and social benefits of helping under-prepared learners succeed, and the great personal and societal cost of not doing so, it is important to ensure that there is a sufficient number of postsecondary institutions that give a priority to this role and that there is adequate financial and other support for them to perform the role.

5. Beyond the Open University

The idea of an open university is to improve access, particularly to create access to postsecondary study for individuals who are not able to access conventional universities. One possible barrier to access is geographic distance from the nearest university campus; thus several decades ago, postsecondary institutions that specialized in offering distance education sprung up in order to meet the needs of place-bound learners. However, it was

soon learned that distance is only one of many possible barriers to access. Others include inflexible admissions policies, inconvenient scheduling of courses, lack of credit transferability, insufficient support services for learners, and the unavailability of programs that meet students' needs. Postsecondary institutions that seek to eliminate all kinds of barriers to access and deliver their programs in flexible ways that foster student success are appropriately described as open universities. The hallmark of such institutions is not the instructional technology that they use, but their educational philosophy.

While embracing a different educational philosophy than a conventional university, an open university has in common with a conventional university one major characteristic: the major function of both is the provision of instruction. Both types of institutions are major providers of courses and programs for which they award their own academic credentials. However, there is reason to question whether the provision of instruction has to be combined with the formal recognition of academic accomplishment. Instruction and certification of learning are distinct activities which can be separated. In the 19th Century, there were several postsecondary institutions that specialized in certifying the academic accomplishment that students made through studying in other institutions. The most famous example of this phenomenon was the external degree awarded by the University of London.

In a digital age when learners have the opportunity to take courses over the internet in a variety of specialized fields from experts in those fields, and the population is highly mobile, many learners may wish to draw upon the resources of several postsecondary institutions, and to combine such study with internships, mentorships, and various forms of experiential learning. Brown and Duguid have suggested that there will

be a need for independent educational bodies to assess the efficacy of such combinations of learning experiences to determine their degree-worthiness and if appropriate award degrees. They referred to such bodies as Degree Granting Bodies, and explained in detail the characteristics that DGBs would have to satisfy (Brown and Duguid, 1996). DGBs could as well offer some courses of their own, largely to fill in gaps, but this would not necessarily be their main function.

A degree granting body of the type that Brown and Duguid described could be – and likely will be - a valuable addition to the postsecondary education systems of 2020. Although Brown and Duguid focused on the degree, such a body could perform the analogous function with respect to other academic credentials. The existence of an agency like this could do a lot to help bridge the gap between the enormous domain of adult education, for which learners generally receive no academic credit, and formal postsecondary education. It could also enable mobile postsecondary learners to surmount the considerable problems of credit transfer that exist within as well as between postsecondary sectors. Possibly the existence of an alternative approach for credit recognition would spur postsecondary institutions to reform their approaches to credit transfer. In all these ways, DGBs could play a major role in helping to make postsecondary and adult education more seamless for learners.

TRU Open Learning, in Thompson Rivers University, seems well poised to go beyond the model of an open university/college and become Canada's first DGB, along with providing its own courses. With one of the premier open universities in the world, Athabasca University, located in the neighbour province, already providing a plethora of university level distance education courses to learners across Canada, it would not seem

prudent for TRU Open Learning to attempt to duplicate courses and programs that are available from that source. There would still be university level courseware and programming to produce that is unique to British Columbia's needs, and perhaps greater needs in the non-university realm. In addition, building upon BCOU's expertise in program design and assessment, TRU Open Learning might well fill the niche that exists for a DGB and in so doing make a significant contribution to making postsecondary education in British Columbia - and Canada - a more seamless system.

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