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## **Thawing the Tuition Freeze: The Politics of Policy Change in Comparative Perspective**

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**Abstract:** This comparative study of two cases draws upon alternative theories of policy change to explore the dynamics of tuition policy formation in Canada. The research examined five key dimensions in the policy episodes: (a) goals of policy change, (b) the politics of policy formation, (c) policy coalitions and their stability over time, (d) influence of elected officials and non-elected policy actors, and (e) the effects of environmental conditions such as changing public opinion, change in government, and provincial fiscal climate. Analysis revealed important agenda-setting activities, as well as insights into how policy coalitions influence decision-making in this policy arena.

**Keywords:** tuition, comparative policy analysis

**Resumé:** Cette étude comparative de deux cas de changement de politique en matière de droits de scolarité s'appuie sur de nouvelles théories de changement de politique pour explorer la dynamique du changement de politique en matière de droits de scolarité. La recherche portait sur cinq aspects clés des périodes politiques : (a) les objectifs du changement de politique (b) la politique de l'élaboration de la politique (c) les coalitions politiques et leur stabilité au fil des années (d) l'influence des représentants élus et des acteurs politiques non élus (e) les effets des conditions environnementales comme un changement dans l'opinion publique, un changement de gouvernement et le climat fiscal provincial. L'analyse a révélé d'importantes activités d'élaboration d'ordre du jour de même que des idées sur la façon dont les coalitions politiques influencent la prise de décision dans le domaine politique.

**Mots-Clés:** droits de scolarité; politique comparative

In the shift from elite to mass post-secondary education since World War II (Kirby, 2009; Jones, 1997; Trow, 2011), policy-makers have sought to achieve optimal cost-sharing arrangements for post-secondary education institutions and students. In the struggle over ideas of accessibility and affordability, tuition fee policy is possibly the most visibly active and contested policy area in Canadian post-secondary policy-making. Provincial tuition fee policies over the past two decades have ranged from complete deregulation of tuition fees to complete regulation through the tuition “freeze” (Rexe, 2014). Episodes of major tuition policy change have attracted significant attention and emerging literature (Boggs, 2009; Jones, 2004; Rexe, 2012, 2015). Significant interest mobilization on tuition fee policy, including Canada’s largest and longest student demonstration in Quebec in 2012 (Begin-Caouette and Jones, 2014), raises important questions about post-secondary policy-making process, and illustrates how little is known about provincial post-secondary policy agenda-setting and decision making. This study contributes further understanding of how and with what effect interests are articulated and mobilized within the post-secondary policy-making arena.

Tuition is an increasingly important structural component of the financing of higher education in Canada. There are a number of arguments as to why this is so. Jones and Young (2004) argue that the complexities of market economics as well as federal-provincial relations in Canada assert influence over higher education policy, while Fisher et al. (2006) observe a general trend toward funding individuals rather than institutions. Quirke and Davies (2002) examine tuition in light of new market-

orientation and entrepreneurial activities at the institutional level. Kirby (2007) and Fisher et al. (2006) attribute tuition increases in Canada to reductions in federal government transfer. Conlon (2006) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2004) trace the decline of federal funding and related tuition impacts. It has been observed elsewhere that institutions historically “backed into” tuition to meet the difference between the costs of providing educational services and declining government grants (McKeown, 1982). The result of this shift has resulted in price increases for students; the national average for full-time undergraduate student tuition in 2013/2014 was \$5,772—an increase of 3.3 per cent over the previous year, during which time the CPI was 1.3% (Statistics Canada, September 12, 2013). Government funding constitutes a decreasing proportion of university revenue, and tuition an increasing proportion; in 2009, 58.3 per cent of university operating revenue was covered by government funding and tuition covered 35.3 per cent (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2010). Table 1 shows the relative differences between provinces in level of tuition as a per cent of university operating revenues, with Ontario the highest at 44.5% and Newfoundland and Labrador the lowest at 15.9 per cent.

**Table 1. Tuition as a per cent of university operating revenue, by province**

Province	2009
Newfoundland and Labrador	15.9
Prince Edward Island	27.4
Nova Scotia	41.3
New Brunswick	37.3
Quebec	21.1
Ontario	44.5

Manitoba	25.1
Saskatchewan	25.2
Alberta	28.9
<u>British Columbia</u>	<u>40.3</u>

Source: CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education 2011-12

For some policy stakeholders, highly subsidized public education is an important part of the Canadian bargain (Mackenzie, 2005) and tuition fees were once only tolerated as a “necessary evil” (Quirke and Davies, 2002). In that light, increases in tuition fees are viewed as a lost entitlement (Ward, 2007). For others, tuition brings to post-secondary education some of the virtues of the market, including the presumption of greater efficiency, equity, producer responsiveness, and timelier student progress to degree completion (Johnstone, 2003). Within the public policy-making process, there is a gap in scholarly attention to how governments are influenced in their decisions to make major changes to tuition policy. This gap has been referred to as a “blind spot” in post-secondary education policy studies (Enders, 2004), which have tended to focus on policy effects to the neglect of the “input side” of policy formation. There is a growing interest on the influence of political factors on decision-making on post-secondary education policy. As a result, scholars have called for expanded empirical research into the policy and politics of higher education (Bastedo, 2007; Jones, 1998; McLendon, 2003; McLendon and Hearn, 2003; St. John and Parsons, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2008), particularly important given the impact on educational outcomes, and the particularly complex array of political forces and interests that are brought to bear on

formation of education policy. Recent international efforts include examination of political variables in higher education policy and state financing decisions in particular (Dougherty, Nienhusser, and Vega, 2010; Dar, 2012; Doyle, 2012; McLendon, Mokher, and Doyle, 2008; Neill, 2009; Sponsler, 2009; Tandberg, 2008); American state government funding and tuition have been found to depend on political as well as economic factors (Fethke, 2005; Griswold and Marine, 1996; Lowry, 2001; Tandberg, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). It has been suggested that political contests around tuition policy are related to resource scarcity and political competition (Johnstone, 2004); in his study of American financial aid policy, Hearn (2001) found that social and political considerations and dynamics in the policy process have greater influence on decision-making than rational analysis. Actors identified as influencing decision-making in the United States include interest groups, coordinating bodies, institutional boards, legislature and legislative committees, and the state governor (Layzel and Lyddon, 1990; Lowry, 2001; Pusser, 2000). Canadian scholars have examined the influence of federal policy on post-secondary education (Fisher et al., 2006; Fisher, Rubenson, Jones and Shanahan, 2009; Shanahan and Jones, 2007; Wellen, Axelrod, Desai-Trilokekar and Shanahan, 2012) as well as forces influencing policymaking in different Canadian provinces (Axelrod, Desai-Trilokekar, Shanahan and Wellen, 2011; Axelrod, Shanahan, Wellen and Desai-Trilokekar, 2012; Jones, 1997; Padure and Jones, 2009). This study contributes to a small body of work internationally on tuition policy and politics (Sponsler, 2009; Warne, 2008) and of the Canadian politics of higher education finance and policy formation

(Boggs, 2009; Jones, 1998; Rounce, 2010; Smith, 2010; Trick, 2005), increasingly of essential interest to scholars as well as advocates, practitioners, and policy makers.

Policy-making can be best understood as a political process (Brewer and DeLeon, 1983; Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; Pal, 2006). As a result, the political dimensions and dynamics are one of the most important considerations in the study of the policy formation process. Agenda-setting is the means by which an issue or a set of political controversies within a community becomes a concern warranting attention of the polity (Cobb and Elder, 1972); agenda-setting is a political and contingent process, emerging from ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain attention over substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Dearing and Rogers, 1996). Generally, the literature has identified three distinct agendas, their interactions, and reciprocal relationships: the media agenda, or the coverage of issues or problems; the public agenda, including public mood or opinion; and the policy agenda, or those issues under active debate (Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Kingdon, 2003; Soroka, 2002). Different means or modes of agenda-setting have been identified, including interest mobilization, problem definition, and issue framing (Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). The international higher education policy and finance literature has noted a need to empirically examine the impact of interest groups on policy and finance of higher education (Gove & Carpenter, 1977; Lowry, 2001; Zumeta, 2004). Relatively little scholarship has been undertaken to assess whether and to what extent Canadian interest groups influence post-secondary

policy. Jones (1998) notes that surprising little attention has been given to how provincial governments make policy decisions concerning higher education. An understudied area in policy studies more generally, Smith and Larimer (2009) have called for more systemic, empirical, and comparative analysis of decision-making of policy-makers. The policy process literature in Canada has greater coverage in examination of federal policy making than provincial policy making, and these gaps have been noted in the analysis of provincial-level policy processes (Howlett, 2009; Imbeau, 2000).

### **Conceptual Framework**

A key question is how governments respond to social, economic, and political factors by making significant changes to post-secondary policy, and tuition policy in particular. Of particular importance is how and with what effect are interests articulated and mobilized within post-secondary policy-making arenas, and why certain issues rise to the agenda of decision-making and by what means does this occur. Given the substantive tuition policy experiments undertaken in Canada, the role organized interests and politics play in the decision-making process has not been given sufficient scholarly investigation considering its impact on individuals, families, communities, and institutions.

This study employs an analytical framework informed by two alternative theories of policy change, based on research undertaken by Ness (2008), developed from Kingdon (2003) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), and consistent with recommendations of McLendon (2003). The analytical framework has five key dimensions and operationalized sub-

questions for both within-case and cross-case comparative case analysis. These key dimensions were indicated in the policy literature as important elements in understanding major policy change, and are (a) program goals and their clarity, (b) the politics of policy formation, (c) policy coalitions and their stability over time, (d) influence of elected officials and non-elected policy actors, (e) the effects of external influences such as change in public opinion on related issues, change in government, and the provincial fiscal condition. The analytical framework was applied given the type of policy issue under investigation, the types of variables and data available and collected, and the context in which the policy was situated. The full framework is listed in Appendix 1.

A significant and growing amount of empirical research has combined two or more theoretical models to examine aspects of the policy process, including these two models in particular (Dougherty, Nienhusser, and Vega, 2010; McLendon, Heller, and Young, 2005; Mintrom, 2000; Ness, 2008), which have been used in both Canadian and American policy contexts. Drawing on the conceptual body of literature on the policy process, these two theoretical models were selected due to their predicted contributions to this study, and are complementary by providing alternative lenses on the policy formulation process). Kingdon's comprehensive framework for understanding agenda-setting and alternatives is a critical vehicle for analyzing public policy development and change. The multiple streams model (MSM) (Kingdon, 2003) uses the stages typology of the policy cycle, and contemplates the interactions between three largely independent streams which influence policy-making. The

problem stream is comprised of information about various policy problems and the proponents of various issue definitions, including media coverage, events and other factors that shape opinion about policy problems; the policy stream involves the proponents of solutions to policy problems, the factors affecting ideas, and the identification and formulation of alternatives; and the politics stream consists of factors which influence elections and the behaviours of legislators. Key events merge the politics, problem, and policy streams and therefore the opening of the policy window, which occurs in a short period of time when conditions are favourable to policy change. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, 1999) considers that policy change can be explained through two primary causes: the endogenous variable of beliefs and values of the coalition, and exogenous changes in the policy arena. Policy change as result of changes in beliefs in a subsystem arise from a number of factors, including policy-oriented learning, changes in actors, or changes in the external environment, including changes in socio-economic conditions, public opinion, systemic governing coalition, or spillage from other policy domains.

### **Objective and Approach**

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to the descriptive and conceptual understanding of provincial post-secondary policy formation processes in Canadian provinces. This study is situated within the broader study of Canadian policy formation and within the post-secondary policy arena, where there is a need for more theoretically informed, empirical, and comparative analysis of decision making of policy-

makers. The specific objective of this study was to identify the factors contributing to government decisions to change existing tuition freeze policy. The research question guiding this study is: Why and how does tuition policy land on provincial government decision agendas? Theoretical frameworks from political science are increasingly used in educational policy research (Conner and Rabovsky, 2011). This study employs two alternative theories of the policy process, the multiple streams model (MSM) (Kingdon, 2003) and the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), to develop two provincial case studies for comparative analysis, where a long-term policy of frozen tuition was changed. Comparative case approaches are highly applicable to studies of policy formation in post-secondary education (Shaw and Heller, 2007).

The two policy episodes for study were selected using purposive sampling. British Columbia in 2002/03 shifted from a policy of tuition reduction to deregulated tuition, and Manitoba, after many years of frozen tuition, moved to a policy of restricted tuition increases in 2009/10. These episodes occurred in different economic conditions as well as different antecedent policy histories, political histories, political parties, and system characteristics and size. The variation in these characteristics contributes insights into questions about Canadian tuition policy formation dynamics. Data were collected for each case through systematic investigation, employing two key research tools: content analysis of relevant documentary materials and interviews. Historical and qualitative methods were used, employing content analysis of relevant documentary materials (systematic review of documentary evidence, including scholarly

literature, policy documents, government reports, legislative records, and media records) and interviews of policy actors.

Interviews were chosen as an approach to data gathering given the theoretical frameworks being used; interviewing is most often useful when interviewees have shaped the world around them (Rathbun, 2008). In this study, participants were identified in two stages: (1) targeted individuals identified through archival documents, including review of government and organizational charts, and input from an expert panel, and (2) additional informants recommended through the research process by key informants, using snowball sampling. The identification of key actors in the policy process consisted of examining literature from interest groups, policy institutes, scholarly contributions and policy studies, policy documents, legislative records, and media coverage. The snowball sample built on insights and connections made by informants and in the document record. There were a total of 45 informant interviews conducted for this research, with a variety of policy actors including senior civil servants, elected officials, interest group representatives, institutional leaders, and researchers. To ensure consistency in the study's exploration and analysis of key themes, and to allow for follow-up questions, a semi-structured interview was used; in addition to open-ended questions, there were scaled questions on reasons for policy change and activities of policy actors. The questions focussed on five key areas: (a) program goals and their clarity, (b) the politics of policy formation, (c) policy coalitions and their stability over time, (d) influence of elected officials and non-elected policy actors, (e) the effects of external influences such as change in public opinion

on related issues, change in government, and the provincial fiscal condition. Member checking was employed to review the policy history for accuracy, confirming credibility of the account (Stake, 1995).

### Case of British Columbia

On February 11, 2002, the newly elected provincial government under Premier Gordon Campbell announced a radical policy change, completely deregulating post-secondary tuition in BC. The previous NDP government had maintained a tuition freeze policy from 1996/97 to 2000/01, with an additional reduction of 5% in 2001/02. While tuition policy in Canada has undergone

experimentation across most provinces, there are relatively few instances of governments forgoing formal regulatory control over prices at public colleges and universities (Rexe, 2011).

*Policy actors.* By 2001, there were a number of important policy stakeholders attempting to influence post-secondary policy in BC, summarized in Table 2. The post-secondary system in BC had 28 public post-secondary institutions, with six universities, five university colleges, 11 colleges, five institutes, and one agency, the Open Learning Agency. These institutions were represented by member organizations, as were faculty and student interests.

**Table 2. Summary of Interest Groups in BC Policy Episode**

Interest group	Resources, views, and influences
The University President's Council (TUPC)	Represented the presidents of the major research universities. Goals in 2001 were to fill the funding gap to increase access to degree programs, recruit and retain top quality faculty, build research, restore university core budgets to close the funding gap between BC universities and comparable institutions located elsewhere, and capital funding. Privately, individual presidents called for tuition deregulation as a method to achieve that. Influenced by internal analysis of the costs of the tuition freeze, feedback from key constituencies, and government expectations for unfunded growth.
Advanced Education Council of British Columbia (AECBC)	Represented the 22 publicly funded colleges, university colleges, and institutes. Established in 1990 with a multi-constituency character; internal conflict led to disbanding by 2002. Generally silent on tuition policy, but privately individual presidents called for tuition deregulation. Influenced by internal coalition distractions and prestige seeking.
Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC (CUFA)	Represented university academic staff in its member faculty associations, and formally incorporated in 1982. Has tended to emphasize the importance of overall levels of government funding, preferring to see tuition fees kept as low as possible. Influenced by membership views and generally progressive core values.
College and Institute Educators Association (CIEA)	A voluntary federation of faculty associations formed in 1980 representing approximately 7,000 faculty and staff in BC colleges and institutes. Very vocal opposition to tuition fees, and particularly to any fee increases, as student access was a top policy concern. Influenced by membership views and progressive core values.

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Canadian Federation of Students – BC (CFS-BC)	Represented the majority of student organizations in the BC public post-secondary system, about 100,000 students, and 16 locals. Tuition fees were the priority public policy issue for the federation, with policy goal to maintain the tuition and fee freeze, and establish a long-term plan for the reduction in tuition. Influenced by membership views, national coalition policy-making, and progressive core values.
Alma Mater Society – UBC (AMS)	Represented approximately 37,000 students, and intermittently affiliated with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), a national federation. AMS-UBC adopted a policy in favour of tuition fee increases, limited to the rate of inflation. Influenced internally by changes in organizational policy preferences.
BC Business Council (BCBC)	Represented approximately 250 companies, and was reconstituted in 1984. In the spring of 2000, recommended the removal of the tuition freeze. Influenced by membership views and economic development and competitiveness concerns.

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The dominant coalition in this policy episode was that of the universities. During the period prior to the tuition policy change, the TUPC gained momentum with the addition of influential new university presidents, a renewed and well-organized shared approach to achieving common goals, and changes to the organization's focus and resources dedicated to government relations. The universities developed strong common messaging, including a shared budget submission to government, based on common values (such as university autonomy) and common preferences on tuition policy, given the overall context of government funding and performance requirements.

*Antecedent tuition policy.* Until the mid-1990s, the universities enjoyed a “non-interventionist” policy environment, with autonomy in setting tuition fees and establishing academic priorities (Dennison, 1997). This approach changed when the NDP government was elected in 1991; the NDP campaigned with a commitment to education and promoted system-wide post-secondary policy development and coordination. With the change in

government, there were significant changes in the 1990s in BC's post-secondary education system (Schuetze and Day, 2001); these changes included system expansion, institutional differentiation, and introduction of applied degrees (Dennison and Schuetze, 2004). The post-secondary policy environment under the NDP from 1991 to 2001 focused on goals of access and affordability, which became formally embedded in the strategic plan for the university college, college, and institute sector, *Charting a New Course*. There was no such plan for the universities; the universities had traditionally been autonomous with statutory protection, which insulated them from formal government intrusion into their affairs (Schuetze and Day, 2001). A key element in the NDP's access and affordability platform was a political commitment to a tuition freeze, enacted through the *Tax and Consumer Rate Freeze Act* in 1996. The policy instrument of legislation indicated the political commitment of the government, which was renewed in both of the following five years and followed by one year of mandatory tuition reductions in 2001.



In political terms, the tuition freeze policy was seen by to be *owned* by the NDP, led by the influence of Premier Glen Clark. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives termed the tuition freeze “the hallmark” of the NDP government’s post-secondary funding policy (Malcolmson and Lee, 2004); a student leader described the policy of freezing tuition fees as one of the “key, hallmark, defining policies of the NDP” (Student leader D). It was also regarded as politically popular; as one party ally reported, “it was one of the areas where the NDP government polled well” (Faculty association leader A). As a result of its popularity, the tuition freeze policy formed a central plank of the NDP platform in the 1996 election and again in 2001.

The tuition freeze was not popular with the post-secondary institutions. It was accompanied in many years by increased FTE targets that were unfunded and, as a result, the impact of the freeze was amplified. As one senior civil servant observed: “the institutions had been saying for a long time the tuition freeze was killing them, it was strangling them” (Senior civil servant A). According to accounts of several research participants, the institutions had repeatedly made representations regarding negative impacts of institutional financing, productivity expectations, and the tuition fee policy from the time the tuition freeze was enacted. In spite of an espoused access policy agenda, many institutions felt that access was being compromised by the financial constraints placed on institutions; “The institutions had occupied the field with information about the real implications and about not what it meant for them, but what it meant for the students in the communities that they served” (University organization official A). Institutional representations of

the resultant issues included stories of increases in class sizes, capital and space problems on campus, inadequate teaching conditions, insufficient student-support services, and decline in accessibility of upper-level courses and consequent lengthening of time to degree completion and increase in student debt; “It was about libraries being open. It was about offering the courses students needed to graduate. It was about reducing degree completion times” (Student leader A). These representations were made by all types of institutions, but most notably by the universities:

by ignoring all those additional inflationary pressures, demand pressures, cost pressures that had arisen as a result of policy changes, the implication of the tuition freeze is that institutions were locked in a place where they could not meet legitimate and rising access demands, and were very much at risk of not being able to sustain quality in a business environment where quality ought to be at the very heart of what they’re about. (University organization official A)

In addition to general underfunding and its consequences, significant pressure was being brought to bear on the issues and aspirations of the professional schools and graduate studies at the universities. For UBC in particular, there was a perceived need for expansion of seats in medical education, and competition, funding, and quality issues in the law and business schools. Many of the funding and quality issues of the universities received significant media attention, with increasing coverage starting in 1999. These news stories focused on areas of public angst, particularly stories of increases in university GPA admission requirements. UBC President Martha Piper was quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* saying that stagnant funding was causing UBC to lose ground, forcing the university to increase class sizes,

reduce its range of offerings, fall behind in its library holdings, and not replace people who were retiring (Kane, 1999). The media also covered TUPC's collective budget submission to government for the 2000/01 year, which asserted a significant and growing cost in maintaining the tuition freeze and that the resultant gap in funding translated into higher class sizes, cancelled courses, and not enough spaces for qualified students, as well as the difficulty in competing with other North American universities in recruiting faculty. It also referred to lack of library and laboratory resources, losing trained faculty to other North American institutions, and longer degree-granting periods, calling it an "increasingly intolerable and unsustainable position."

Politically, the Liberals had a "very strong message that the NDP had micromanaged the broader public sector to its detriment" (Civil servant C), and it was felt that the "idea of lifting the freeze had great traction both in the general public and particularly among those who could be defined as our support group" (Cabinet Minister A). It also had the value of differentiating policy from the NDP, distancing from the previous government's "adherence to redistributive policies" (Civil servant E); in terms of the political strategy of the Liberals, "part of what they were doing was just seeking to distance and overturn any key NDP policies and show that there was a failure" (Student leader D). In the 2001 campaign, the Liberal party did not campaign on tuition policy change, in contrast to the NDP's platform commitment to the tuition freeze. However, it was clearly signaled within the policy community that policy change could be expected should the Liberals win the election.

Overall, the BC media were also very supportive of change in tuition fees policy. In a typical example, the *Vancouver Sun* ran an editorial supporting the proposed deregulation:

Victoria, in what we can only describe as a reasonable measure, is expected to allow universities to increase fees by an average of 25 per cent for the next school year... So the issue isn't to subsidize or not subsidize—it's how to share the burden. With the level of subsidy so high, and with the personal value of an education so substantial and tangible, we don't think it's unfair to ask students to pony up a little more. The tuition freeze over the past six years has deprived B.C.'s universities of the resources they need to provide a good education, and that's a disservice to both the students and the society that supports them. ("Given a degree's value, tuition fees should rise" 2002: A10)

*Process of policy change.* The BC Liberals were elected to an overwhelming majority government in 2001. Gordon Campbell was perceived to be a strong leader with a practice of centralized control of policy agendas and decisions (Bernier, Brownsey, and Howlett, 2005; Palmer, 2009). Once elected, members within Cabinet sought to reduce government regulation and red tape, and removing the tuition freeze was consistent with that overall agenda. As one Cabinet Minister described

it is fair to say that the notion that tuition fees would be deregulated was, to a certain extent, consistent with the general approach that you could say we had. But it wasn't so much about lifting the freeze on tuition as it was about empowering institutions to set their own course. (Cabinet Minister A)

With a new government and a new mandate, the Liberal's broad agenda focused on long-term economic improvement and fiscal balance, which involved stimulating growth and reducing spending; "they wanted expansion of post-secondary capacity on the

one hand, but on the other hand they wanted to restore fiscal balance” (Senior civil servant A).

The week after the election and before being sworn in as Premier, Liberal Leader Gordon Campbell appointed a Fiscal Review Panel to conduct an independent review of the province’s fiscal situation, which concluded a structural fiscal imbalance required significant action; Deputy Minister Brenda Eaton, Deputy Minister to the Premier, Corporate Planning and Restructuring, was appointed on June 5, 2001, to coordinate a Core Services Review (CSR). The necessary and intended outcome of the CSR was clear: any program and service that was deemed inappropriate or outside the scope of government was to be eliminated or phased out. Only programs and services considered “core” would continue to receive government funding, and the overall goal was interpreted to be deregulation, privatization, and decentralization (Vakil, 2009). The post-secondary system contribution to the review was uneven. Many advocacy groups in the post-secondary system viewed the CSR as a politically motivated process to eliminate programs that were ideologically inconsistent with the new governing party; its purpose was seen to be “gutting core services, getting rid of things they didn’t think were necessary” (Faculty association leader A). They feared the preference for smaller government and fewer regulatory mechanisms, and protested the need for the review. The universities, through TUPC, made a strong case linking the educational and research mandate of universities and the new government’s core objectives.

In its submission to the Core Services Review, TUPC set out five objectives: to establish BC as a national

leader in the awarding degrees; to bring national research and development funding to BC; to resolve the outstanding investment gap between BC universities and the sixteen most comparable universities located elsewhere in Canada by 2003/04; to recruit and retain the world-class faculty; and to establish and maintain necessary capital and technological infrastructure (TUPC, 2001: 2). Further, the TUPC submission suggested that one of these regulations, the tuition freeze, in combination with insufficient government funding, had led to significant challenges to BC universities, including having a direct impact on the availability of courses, university admissions, time to degree completion, student/faculty ratios, student supports and services. The submission spoke specifically to issues of government regulation:

Universities in British Columbia have been unreasonably constrained by government policy on several fronts and have been subject to excess regulation resulting in intrusion upon the roles and responsibilities of our governance structures. We want to work with the provincial government to change, eliminate or reduce these barriers. (TUPC, 2001: 1)

The result of the Core Services Review—or at least consistent with the spirit of the review, and as a result of the issues being directed to Cabinet—was that there were significant changes in the approach government took to post-secondary education. On tuition policy, the CSR recommended, “major strategic changes need to be made around tuition. This is a matter for Cabinet” (Senior civil servant G). In advance of the Cabinet taking the final decision on tuition policy, on October 18, 2001, Minister Bond announced stakeholder consultations “to receive their views on the fiscal impact of the extended fee freeze”

(personal communication, March 27, 2012). The government met with a mix of invited student representatives, some with quite favourable views of tuition policy change. The CFS-BC representatives were shocked to find other student representatives at the table, after many years of exclusive representation of student interests at provincial policy consultations. There were strong criticisms that the meetings were highly orchestrated events, designed merely to soften up the inevitable policy announcement of tuition increases; “it was definitely a very managed process” (Student leader A). Both faculty and student unions had demonstrated little ability to exert influence over policy decisions with the new government.

It is reported that briefing notes with different policy alternatives on how to make the “tuition freeze less constraining and more efficient...went back to Cabinet then three times” (Senior civil servant G). Within government, the level of consensus about lifting the tuition freeze was relatively high; the institutions were friendly to policy change, having lobbied so actively for so long, and there were few alternatives given the financial constraints and need for increased seats. Tuition was the identified policy lever to support these goals. The cabinet leadership on the policy was strong and centralized leadership under the Premier, as was typically the case. There was sufficient support for the decision to deregulate tuition fees entirely rather than set a format for controlled increases. On February 11, 2002, Minister Bond announced the tuition policy change, framed in terms of new policy support of institutional autonomy.

### **Case of Manitoba**

Manitoba had a relatively small post-secondary system at the time of the policy episode, including seven public post-secondary institutions. The University of Manitoba was established in 1877, with a federation of several denominational colleges. In 1967, Manitoba expanded the one university system to three major universities: the University of Manitoba, focusing on a broad array of undergraduate, graduate, and professional education; Brandon University in western Manitoba; and the University of Winnipeg, focusing on general undergraduate education, as well as one special-purpose French-language institution, the Université de Saint-Boniface (Smith, 2011). The legacy of the one university system policy was that the University of Manitoba remained the centre for professional and graduate studies within the province for many years (Gregor, 1995). The province’s original technical-training institutes became consolidated as institutions in the community college system in 1969, including Red River College, Assiniboine Community College, and Keewatin Community College, which became the University College of the North in 2004. These institutions were operated directly by the government, until the introduction of the 1993 *Colleges Act*, which established independent board governance (Gregor, 1995).

By 2009, there were a number of important policy stakeholders attempting to influence post-secondary policy in the province, summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Summary of Interest Groups in Manitoba Policy Episode**

Interest group	Resources, views, and influences
Public institutions	The primary actors were the three presidents of the public universities, and to a lesser extent, the college presidents. Emphasized institutional underfunding, the negative impacts of constraints on tuition fee revenue, and the failure of the tuition freeze as social policy. Options included setting tuition at the national average; use of a HEPI to set annual changes. Institutional autonomy was a key value. Influenced by financial, competitive, and performance pressures from key constituencies.
Manitoba Organization of Faculty Associations (MOFA)	Represented approximately 1,850 academic staff at the four universities, and affiliated with CAUT. Favoured low tuition, and had previously endorsed a tuition freeze, but that position had shifted over time. Tuition fee policy was not a top priority, with more focus on securing appropriate public funding. Influenced by membership views and generally progressive values.
Canadian Federation of Students – MB (CFS-MB)	Represented 42,000 students in the public post-secondary system, including the university students. Tuition fees were the priority public policy issue for the federation, with a policy goal to maintain the tuition freeze. Influenced by membership views, national coalition policy-making, and core progressive values.
Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL)	Chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956 to represent the interests of CLC affiliated unions in Manitoba, with a combined membership of 95,000 workers in private and public sectors. At the 2008 NDP convention, members of the MFL voted against the continuation of the tuition freeze as constrained institutional funding was affecting members' working conditions. Influenced by membership views and bargaining conditions, and progressive values.
Business Council of Manitoba (BCM)	Formed in 1998, consisted of 65 CEOs of Manitoba companies. Had a negative view of tuition freeze; preferred shared investment between students and government, and competitive institutions. Concerned about educational quality. Influenced by membership views and economic development concerns.
Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce (WCC)	Incorporated in 1873, with over 2,000 members in 2008. Goal was to initiate and effect change in government policy and practices to support a growing and thriving business community Against the tuition freeze and in favour of high tuition/high aid solutions. Concerned about educational quality. Influenced by membership views and economic development concerns.
<p>Within the civil service, the Council on Post-Secondary Education (COPSE) was the crown agency accountable to the Minister with authorities for accountability requirements, program approval, credit transfer and articulation, allocation of funds to the province's seven public post-</p>	<p>secondary institutions, and a range of policy-related authorities, including tuition regulation. Within the Premier's office, the Policy Management Secretariat was seen to be central and highly influential, and primarily served the Premier's policy agenda; it was responsible for issues</p>

management and longer term overall strategy and was staffed by senior “political staff appointments that support public policy development from the political lens” (Senior civil servant M). A challenge with the intermediary agency was the tension between Council and government, as there was “always a degree of friction between the government and the Council” (Senior civil servant L). In practice, the tuition question had “always sat at the centre of government here, not with COPSE” (Elected official B). The role of COPSE to provide analysis on budget and planning for institutions, given policy parameters set by government, was advisory only; in truth, the Minister “has the ability to do anything he or she feels like doing in the best interests of the province” (Elected official B).

*Antecedent policy:* Until the late 1990s, higher education was not a typical or significant political issue in the province (Jones, 1996). However, this political environment changed significantly by that time; “if Manitoba’s post-secondary system between 1967 and 1997 was characterized by stability, the system since 1997 has been characterized by considerable structural change” (Smith, 2011: 52). In this period, issues of post-secondary access and affordability emerged as key political issues for the provincial government. After 11 years of Progressive Conservative government, the NDP were elected in the 1999 general election. At that time, post-secondary participation rates were of particular concern, as was both post-secondary affordability and accessibility, in light of increasing tuition fees (Saunders, 2006). The NDP’s 1999 election platform included an election commitment to freeze tuition, both as a commitment to make post-

secondary education “more accessible and more affordable” (Senior civil servant M) and as an electoral strategy. In addition to political strategy, there were serious concerns about post-secondary accessibility; there was “a genuine commitment to ensuring that there were opportunities for education...that that access was not limited to certain socioeconomic strata” (Senior civil servant O).

In other words, in both coalition politics and to the public, freezing tuition was seen to be “one way to send a signal on affordability for students” (Cabinet Minister D). As an electoral strategy, the tuition freeze was seen to be one of the NDP’s main planks in the election campaign (Kuxhaus, 2007), an election that afforded the NDP the opportunity to re-establish their social democratic image (Netherton, 2001). The tuition freeze had the advantage of being well understood by voters; “*tuition freeze* is a good bullet” (Senior civil servant O). This success in policy communication was important to the campaign; “the language of a *freeze* of course is very definitive, clear, as they would say in British Labour; *crunchy* language. It’s very tangible...that’s worth quite a bit in retail politics” (Cabinet Minister D). The *Winnipeg Free Press* described the tuition freeze as a “powerful political gambit” (“No to educare”, 2007, A12). In political terms, there was a sense that “the government, politically, the NDP, *owned* the issue of tuition” (Senior civil servant P); the tuition freeze had become “part of the government’s brand” (Cabinet Minister D). More important, beyond a cornerstone policy, for many in the NDP the importance of the tuition freeze became a political “article of faith” (Senior civil servant L).

While the original political commitment to the tuition freeze policy remained in place, government accepted some incremental changes to tuition fee levels, changes characterized as “safety valves” (Cabinet Minister D). These incremental changes began in 2003 and arose as concessions to institutions, based primarily upon representations from universities with professional schools. Further, ancillary fees and international-student tuition fees were not regulated under the tuition freeze. During this time, COPSE had an interest in policy change, and in particular, for a less political and more sustainable policy for institutional financing. The university representations were met with some sympathy; “the issue had been raised about the need or the desire on the part of department bureaucrats to lift that freeze” (Senior civil servant M). On tuition policy options, COPSE was “alive to the fact that the institutions need resources” and had put forward, “fairly consistently, options to get out of the freeze” as “the revenue issues at universities have a deleterious impact on quality at universities and colleges” (Senior civil servant Q). The Council had an increasing interest in depoliticizing the tuition policy decisions and developing an improved framework of principles or guidelines for decision-making in cases of appeal for tuition rate changes:

after we started getting a bevy of professional school applications for higher tuitions than might otherwise exist for regular arts and science students, that really we needed to start trying to depoliticize the tuition question and try to develop a principle-based approach to it...And I think we actually could have worked on those principles a little bit more and tried to depoliticize the question. Because it had become...such a political question. (Elected official B)

At the center of the tuition freeze debate was the question of its effectiveness as social policy in promoting access; in this light, the tuition freeze was characterized as a failure. The *Winnipeg Free Press* regularly made calls for the elimination of the freeze, suggesting that it had not made education any more accessible (see “Freezes failing”, 2007, February 15), a position shared by comments from both universities and research enterprises. In a particularly forceful editorial, the *Winnipeg Free Press* characterized the tuition freeze as the NDP’s “failed nine-year experiment in ‘educare’ and central planning” and called for “ending the muddle-headed thinking that has weakened the province’s post-secondary institutions, while providing none of the intended benefits” (“Failed experiment”, 2008, April 2, A12).

There were two major shifts in the progressive coalition prior to the policy change. First, prior to the 2000s, the Manitoba Organization of Faculty Associations (MOFA) and the CFS-MB generally had a high degree of cooperation and coordination of interests on post-secondary funding, with expressed similar general policy views on affordability and access and underlying values of the nature of public education. Coordination with the CFS-MB typically focused on these views, and there had been an understanding that faculty associations at most of the institutions did not “speak against” the student movement, a “political entente” (Senior civil servant O). During the period prior to the policy change, the established position of MOFA on tuition fee policy shifted, from firm to less support; “the position on that by the Manitoba Organization of Faculty Associations

became much more muddy [and]... actually at some point supported tuition increases” (Faculty association leader D). Second, a significant change occurred leading up to and during the NDP convention in 2008. Organized labour had been a significant early supporter of the tuition freeze policy; “for the first part of the Manitoba NDP government, [labour] was one of the big backers and pushers of the tuition freeze” (Student leader I). During that time, organized labour was a confirmed ally of the CFS-MB and the NDP, and the tuition freeze position was considered “a coalition politics issue” (Senior civil servant O). However, over time some labour leaders saw a negative impact of the tuition freeze on their membership; a position paper was written and a “couple of Labour leaders supported coming off of the tuition freeze” (Cabinet Minister D). This position was directly related to the financial well-being of institutions and their employees: “Labour saw the impact in terms of their membership, in terms of whether it was university staff or physical plant staff or whatever, that the salaries of their members were being impacted by the overall financial health and sustainability of the policy” (Senior civil servant O).

Given the previous solidarity on the policy, the student leaders found this to be a “shocking position for labour to take” (Student leader I). By many accounts, this was the first occasion when labour was “at distance from the student movement on that policy” (Senior civil servant O). These tensions manifested in a specific incident on the floor of the NDP convention, in which the youth representatives reportedly lost the vote by a narrow margin “because of the labour delegates” (Student leader I). This schism within the coalition had a few fault

lines. First, the fracture on the convention floor indicated CFS-MB’s alienation from labour; the students appeared to fail to understand the policy impacts, or “what the policy meant in a larger picture and not just an individual pocketbook type of perspective...the students made a fatal error by not understanding what it meant for labour” (Senior civil servant O). Second, youth delegates at the convention appeared to be divided. The proposed change to tuition policy saw a “split” in both organizations and within “fractured” the overall younger convention participants (Student leader I); the Young New Democrats “didn’t feel as strongly about it as the people who were part of the Federation of Students. So there were sort of varying degrees of objection [to the motion]” (Cabinet Minister D).

*Process of policy change:* In January 2007, an op-ed titled, “NDP’s tuition freeze is downgrading value of education” written by James Blatz of the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Manitoba was published in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He outlined how the number of elective courses offered by the Faculty of Engineering had steadily declined, negatively impacting the quality of programming compared to other universities. The article placed the blame on the tuition freeze policy, arguing that since 1999 it had steadily weakened the competitive position of Manitoba’s universities, both nationally and internationally, and threatened the ability of the university to provide enough engineers for the province (Blatz, 2007, B4). Further concerns arose that the engineering program’s professional accreditation might be downgraded by the national body that



inspects engineering programs across Canada, the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (Welch, 2007, February 8); it was reported that Manitoba's largest university was "so stretched for cash" that the engineering faculty's accreditation could be jeopardized ("No to educare", 2007, A12).

In response to the financial and accreditation crisis, in March 2007 the University of Manitoba engineering students voted by referendum to increase fees for engineering courses from \$104 per credit hour to \$144, specifically to address aging laboratories, insufficient equipment, and the number of teaching assistants. The *Winnipeg Free Press* ran an editorial on March 9, 2007, calling on the Minister to "butt out" and remove the number of "hurdles" and "meddlesome conditions" in the way of the students' bid to raise money for their faculty ("With respect, butt out", 2007, A10). By June, the proposed engineering fees were approved by COPSE and the Minister, in part due to the students' overwhelming support for them ("Students hike their own fees", 2007). The engineering accreditation crisis and subsequent student fee referendum both signaled and facilitated a turning point and a change in mood around the tuition freeze policy; "there was a growing sense that something had to be done" (Senior civil servant Q). Within government quarters, attention was focused as a result; "it had been on some people's agenda for some time, and I think it was just finally recognized that to maintain it further would have negative impacts on the system" (Senior civil servant O).

Heading into a spring general election in 2007, the NDP's overall popularity was down; the public mood was described as "a little bit restless" and the

government was "on the defensive" ("They've got fever", 2007, A11). During the election, the NDP carefully controlled its messaging on a tuition freeze commitment, with the overall intention of avoiding a platform promise. The NDP was sensitive to criticisms that they were "failing Manitobans and the university sector" and did not want the tuition freeze policy to become "the defining issue of the election" (Student leader I). Despite the public mood, "post-secondary education didn't get a whole lot of play" (Senior civil servant M) and on May 22, 2007, the election returned the NDP to a third consecutive majority.

During the development of the first budget after the election, 2008/09, the universities forecasted major budget problems and called for major funding increases to maintain programs under the continued tuition freeze. In preliminary forecasts filed with COPSE, the University of Manitoba asked for a 10.7 per cent operating grant increase of \$25.4 million, and Brandon University for 10 per cent, or \$2.6 million more (Martin, 2007, October 1); further, it was revealed that the University of Manitoba had accumulated \$211 million of deferred maintenance (Doer, 2007, November 28). By this time "revenues started to tank" (Senior civil servant L) and the economic recession started to directly influence government planning: "there was that realization that they couldn't continue indefinitely with the tuition freeze, so it was part of an overall look at the financial climate" (Senior civil servant M). Within government, there was a change in attention on tuition policy; "there was a growing sense that there needed to be some more revenue generated through tuition. Also, 10 years is a long time so there was a sense that it was time for that kind of change" (Senior

civil servant Q). The fiscal pressure on government was increasing, as was the pressing need to fill the gap between revenue and expenses in post-secondary education. Members of the civil service had long held a skeptical view of the tuition freeze and were supportive of the changing climate; “lots of people in the bureaucracy knew that that was bad public policy” (Senior university administrator C). While there was a lack of consensus within both Cabinet and the NDP caucus, there had been a gradual shift in many MLAs’ commitment to the tuition freeze:

There wasn’t a sudden turning point or conversion on the issue. I think Cabinet always recognized that you need to switch to a different kind of policy at some point. There was several years of debate whether this was the time, and obviously the answer had been no in those years. And then finally it was just thought this is now [the time] to come off it and start to allow some modest increases...It was just the time to move off it. (Cabinet Minister D)

Prior to a formal government announcement, there were two different media stories that foreshadowed policy change, provoking stakeholder responses. The first signal was a newspaper article in December 2007, in which the immutability of the tuition freeze policy was called into question (Welch, 2007, December 30, A1), and the second speculated on government plans to allow tuition fee increases at colleges and universities beginning in fall 2009, published the day before the planned budget speech, (Martin, 2008, April 1, A3). This second story caught many off guard, including the student unions; some were unconvinced that the government was seriously considering an increase (Martin, 2008, April 1, A3) and others felt that the idea was leaked to the press to “engage feedback” or “float” the idea to gauge

student reaction (Student leader I). The CFS-MB reacted to the April 1, 2008, news report by mobilizing its members and put pressure on the provincial government to delay, and extend the freeze for a year. Key to this pressure was the matter of interpreting campaign promises from the 2007 election. The CFS-MB found a campaign brochure from NDP MLA Sharon Blady describing “extending the tuition freeze” as a party priority (Martin, 2008, April 2, A4) and subsequently criticized the government for “engaging in some fancy footwork” (Jacks, 2008, B4). Within the party itself, the Young New Democrats responded with pressure; a representative wrote a letter of congratulations to the government on “eight successful years of a tuition freeze”, and looking forward “to the continued priority of affordable post-secondary education in Manitoba” (“Have your say”, 2008, April 5, A16). University interests including President Szathmary and Terry Hidichuk, Chair, Board of Regents of the University of Winnipeg, reiterated their observation there was no election promise of an indefinite tuition freeze. The *Winnipeg Free Press* wrote in favour of the policy change (“Failed experiment”, 2008, April 2) and the Certified General Accountants Association of Manitoba reported a positive calculation for the net cost of education to Manitoba students, even with tuition unfreezing (Martin, 2008, April 3).

The government quickly backed away from the anticipated schedule for policy change generating further speculation. With the budget announcements on April 7, 2008, Minister McGifford announced that the tuition freeze was extended for the 2008/09 budget year while allowing tuition to gradually return to 1999 levels beginning the following year. In order

to accommodate the extension of the tuition freeze, operating grants to universities and colleges were increased. Minister McGifford said it was the desire to give students a transition year, rather than a fear of student protests or the negative optics of breaking an election promise, which prompted the delayed implementation of the tuition thaw by a year (Welch and Martin, 2008). Others thought it was the effect of the CFS-MB; James A. Blatz observed in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on April 13, 2008: “Political posturing and ‘optics’ have again taken precedence over sustainability and good governance. Has the provincial government been bullied by student activists into arbitrarily maintaining the current tuition freeze policy for yet another year?” (Welch and Martin, 2008, April 81, A4). However, many in the policy community attributed the delay to the pressure of the Young New Democrats rather than the CFS-MB; they were “strong advocates for not lifting the freeze, and so they were a strong voice that ultimately I believe delayed that one year” (Senior civil servant M). The Young New Democrats held some authority within the party given their contributions to the elections; they “worked as party staffers, who worked in the constituency offices, who were the ones who won a bunch of the seats for them because they worked so hard on his campaigns” (Student leader I).

In the same announcement on April 7, 2008, Minister McGifford also announced a one-person commission to review the province’s policy on affordability, accessibility, and excellence. In announcing the Commission on Tuition Fees and Accessibility to Post-Secondary Education, the Minister noted that this work was part of the government’s desire and commitment to “ensure post-secondary education in

Manitoba is accessible and affordable” and its scope was to review the province’s policy on affordability and accessibility, and on the relationship between tuition fees, student aid, and accessibility to post-secondary education in Manitoba. Overseen by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Literacy, Dr. Benjamin Levin was appointed commissioner on July 28, 2008. The official terms of reference for the Commission were established by government, and provided a clear and limited mandate, focusing on accessibility; the Commission was not a general inquiry into post-secondary education, its operations, governance, or financing (Levin, 2009: iv). The Commissioner’s primary focus was the question of accessibility, not tuition policy per se, and the approach emphasized public stakeholder engagement over lobbying. The consultations were facilitated in several formal events in September 2008. The CFS-MB was highly critical of the management of the process, from the stakeholders invited to the lack of public hearings.

The report was submitted March 31, 2009, and released to the public on April 2, 2009. After receiving the report, government officials met with representatives of primary stakeholder groups, including university administrations and students, to discuss tuition fee policy and future access initiatives. In the final report, the Commission was careful to respond to the policy arguments in favour of a free- or low-tuition policy. On tuition policy specifically, the Commission argued that students ought to pay a share of the cost of their post-secondary education, as individuals reap large benefits from post-secondary education: “there is no justification for this personal benefit to be subsidized completely given the many other pressures on public

expenditure...While current levels are arbitrary, there is no compelling reason to move to a very different fee structure” (Levin, 2009: v). As a result, the Commission recommended that Manitoba should allow moderate tuition increases.

With a continued divided caucus and some outspoken divisions within Cabinet, Premier Doer had made the decision to implement tuition policy change, with the understanding that “it was time for this to happen” (Senior civil servant M). The regulated nature of the decision was important, as a serious concern of policy-makers was to introduce more revenue to institutions without creating adverse conditions for students and for future political success. The capped increase approach was the compromise position that prevailed within Cabinet; “we were worried about the signal [tuition policy change] would send for all the same reasons that we introduced [the freeze]...we eventually decided we would come off the freeze but we would essentially move into a regulated environment” (Cabinet Minister D). On Wednesday, April 22, 2009, Minister McGifford announced a 4.5 per cent increase in tuition fees at universities, and a \$100 tuition increase at Manitoba’s colleges; even with these increases, Manitoba’s tuition fees were to remain far below those in neighbouring provincial jurisdictions and well below Canadian averages.

*Analysis of change factors in Manitoba:* Within the MSM framework a number of factors can be identified. In the policy stream there were well-organized policy entrepreneurs from the universities and business interests, with a clear policy options to address the financial conditions of institutions, and internal to the government

there were policy entrepreneurs interested in finding a more effective policy to achieve educational participation goals. In the problem stream, there was increasing lobbying and pressure arising from incremental policy decisions, revenue constraints in institutions, a changing fiscal climate for government, and the engineering accreditation problem at the University of Manitoba, which brought public attention to and business community comment on the problems of educational quality and competitiveness. In the politics stream, the government was secure in its new mandate with political capital in post-secondary education based on a history of popular policy decisions, and there was growing public awareness that the cost of post-secondary education was out of step with expectations and other provinces, and public receptivity to change. The Commission acted as the catalytic event that created the final policy window, and established the research basis for tuition policy change. Using the ACF lens, the break between the leaders of the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the CFS-MB had a significant effect on the policy episode. This break signified the degree of difference in beliefs, priorities, and perceptions in what was formerly seen to be a solid coalition, within groups and between groups, significant enough to cause a break, taking precedent over previous coalition agreements.

### **Discussion and cross-case analysis**

*Goals:* In both cases, government officials represented the same overall policy goal: the provision of quality and accessible post-secondary education. The political actors appear to agree on the notion of educational *quality*, which can be inferred through the various indicators the governments used to

monitor the policy area in these cases. These include a wide range of indicators of student and institutional performance, including teaching and learning conditions. On the matter of *accessibility*, however, the expressed policy goal carried slightly different connotations in terms of problem definition and desired action. Post-secondary accessibility can be defined in a number of ways, including the capacity available in an institution, a program, or a system; the degree to which institutions behave selectively or receptively; geographical proximity to educational opportunities; or in different measures of affordability for students. This overall policy goal, with its different connotations, was a successful choice for framing and interpreting political problems and policy alternatives (Cobb and Ross, 1997).

In BC, the government's public representation of the goal of policy change was to provide improved financial resources to the post-secondary education system within the financial constraints of the new provincial budget, an environment that required reductions in government spending and increasingly unfunded inflationary pressure within institutions. There was a desire to increase both post-secondary capacity and post-secondary participation to serve economic and human capital development agendas, as well as to address institutional problems resulting from the "hidden costs" (Civil servant B) of the tuition freeze, including decreased student access, increased waiting lists, and reduced course availability. Further, there was a political interest in solving the political problem of access to university seats, which "popped up in response to the increasing public pressure about not being able to get into particular institutions in the Lower

Mainland" (Civil servant C). This political issue eventually landed on the agenda of the Cabinet and the Premier. One Cabinet Minister reported that his constituents felt the tuition freeze policy was driving admissions thresholds "to levels that were causing lots of public angst" (Cabinet Minister A). It has been reported that the Premier himself expressed frustration to his colleagues about the increasingly high GPA threshold for admission into UBC, which had started to become a political problem because "nobody can get into UBC with a B anymore" (Civil servant C). In response to these pressures, tuition policy change was considered to accomplish both policy and political goals.

In Manitoba, the primary goal of government for the tuition policy change was to provide post-secondary institutions needed financial resources to ensure accessibility and quality education, in the context of constrained government finances. The purpose of the policy change was therefore financial; it was intended to "give some relief to the institutions" (Cabinet Minister D) or "put the financials of the institutions in better order" (Senior civil servant O). However, this financial reform was undertaken only with an understanding that it would redirect policy efforts to continue to support post-secondary accessibility:

I think in the government of the day's mind, this was not actually a move away from access or from fairness to students or from a commitment actually to students. It was an adjustment to be more refined in terms of having resources better targeted to those who needed it most and to at the same time find a way to ensure more fiscal sustainability for the institutions in the long run and so, in that way, to make a better linkage policy-wise between ensuring that access and excellence were mutually

reinforcing and not mutually competing objectives.  
(Senior civil servant O)

In BC, the framing and focus of the policy goal was capacity in the system and reduction of excessive selectivity for admission to the research universities; the language of accessibility was used to describe financial issues faced by institutions, and therefore raised questions of capacity, rather than issues faced by individuals. Further, economic development goals were directly informing post-secondary policy, a relationship found elsewhere in Canada (Lang et al., 2000). In Manitoba, where accessibility had previously been framed primarily in terms of a low tuition strategy, accessibility was reviewed in light of the technical information on student transitions and financial aid.

*Coalition stability and change.* The stability of policy coalitions is a key element of the ACF; policy change can arise from shocks internal to coalitions, or from external shocks to coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Both of the two cases of policy change illustrate a policy environment in which multiple active networks of organized interests coordinate activity, and in each case, these networks experienced significant internal and external shocks. This study found that changes in student coalitions are associated with tuition policy change. The student movement was somewhat unstable in both provinces, and nationally. In BC, the student coalition, while growing in strength in terms of membership and financial resources, had internal divisions and suffered from internal lack of focus. This attention shift within the student coalition, in combination with the relative disarray of the other politically

progressive organized interests, including the NDP, contributed to an atmosphere where the coalitions of overall progressive interests had been significantly weakened. In Manitoba, the one significant shock was the break between the leaders of the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the CFS-MB as a result of insufficient coordination between coalition members and diverging policy goals; these diverging goals proved significant enough to cause a break, taking precedent over previous coalition agreements.

*Softening up.* These cases show a range of agreement by decision-makers on tuition policy. In BC, within government there was a relatively high degree of consensus on the expressed goal, however, there were some divisions in Cabinet about the degree to which tuition should be deregulated. In Manitoba the Cabinet and caucus were divided; there was a high level of agreement on the problem, but little consensus on the policy decision to remove the tuition freeze. In two jurisdictions, a lack of consensus within Cabinet or government caucuses seems to have posed only a moderate impact on the process of tuition policy change; the lack of consensus appears to have triggered additional policy analysis prior to policy change. This additional analysis served the purpose of socializing legislators to the conflict (Schattschneider, 1960), an important aspect of *softening up*. *Softening up* processes (Kingdon, 2003) are evident and important in these cases of policy change. In BC, the government appointed and conducted in rapid succession a fiscal review, a core services review to examine all government programs and agencies, a budgeting and planning exercise, and a consultation on tuition policy, which served

to signal policy change and diffuse opposition. In Manitoba, the leaked story in the press served as a trial balloon, and having gauged public and coalition partners' reactions, government arranged for a commission to establish the rationale for policy change and socialize the new policy with those interests, including inside the party caucus. The establishment of the Manitoba commission was an institutional response, intended to bring objective evidence into a values-informed policy analysis, and satisfy the policy community that satisfactory consideration had been made on both questions. This was important, as for many in the caucus and in the party, accessibility was an important value as well as a policy goal, and future electoral success was an important consideration. This process is a widely used symbolic strategy that publicly accepts the reasonableness of a debate while it avoids immediate commitment; governments choose commissions as they can serve to broaden the base of political support and legitimate concerns (Cobb and Ross, 1997). The choice of commission is consistent with the role of *policy broker*; for Weible and Sabatier (2005), policy brokers often mediate between advocacy coalitions engaged in intense political conflict. Policy brokers "seek to find reasonable compromise among hostile coalitions" (Weible and Sabatier, 2005: 128); politicians, civil servants or courts can assume this role.

### **Conclusion**

This research found that each of the conceptual frameworks contributed unique and useful insights into factors influencing policy change. The MSM provides a helpful structure with which to develop and analyze accounts of policy dynamics. Given the

ways in which the policy window is contingent upon the convergent of the three streams, in these cases it was particularly helpful to focus on the decision to change policy as the unit of analysis as a technique to focus in on the dynamics of decision-making. In both of the cases in this study, the MSM provides a very strong framework for describing conditions of policy change. In BC, in the policy stream were several powerful and well-organized policy entrepreneurs with a clear agenda-setting, framing, and policy options, including a preferred option, and the government engaged in several softening up activities. In the problem stream, there were a number of highly salient issues within institutions, the post-secondary system, the business community, and the media, which were successfully framed as negative consequences of the tuition freeze. In the politics stream, the public mood shifted against the NDP and its policies, and the change in government provided the opportunity for policy change, given that the newly elected Liberal government received a resounding mandate for change. In Manitoba, in the policy stream there were well-organized policy entrepreneurs from the universities and business interests, with a clear policy options to address the financial conditions of institutions, and internal to the government there were policy entrepreneurs interested in finding a more effective policy to achieve educational participation goals. In the policy stream, the government engaged in a significant softening up activity by establishing a commission to undertake policy analysis and recommendations. In the problem stream, there was increasing lobbying and pressure arising from incremental policy decisions, revenue constraints in institutions, a changing fiscal

climate for government, and a few focusing events which brought public attention to and business community comment on the problems of educational quality and competitiveness. In the politics stream, the government was securely in its new mandate with political capital in post-secondary education based on a history of popular policy decisions, and there was growing public awareness that the cost of post-secondary education was out of step with expectations and other provinces, and public receptivity to change. The commission acted as the catalytic event that created the policy window, and established the basis for tuition policy change.

Further, the ACF provides an important, highly detailed conceptual lens to examine the specific dynamics of external shocks and internal subsystem conditions which result in policy change. Both of the cases of policy change in this study reflect the conceptual expectations of the ACF; that coalitions would experience significant internal and external shocks in the 10 year period prior to the policy change, as well as power and structural shifts or significant changes in the policy environment. In this regard, the ACF provides important and relevant conceptual insight into dynamics of policy change.

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**Appendix 1:**

**Analytical Framework**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Operationalized sub-questions</b>
1.1 Program goals and their clarity	1.1.1 What were the expressed goals of the policy? 1.1.2 Was there consensus on the goal? 1.1.3 How was the problem defined? 1.1.4 What indicators were used to identify and describe the policy problem(s)? 1.1.5 What alternatives were considered?
1.2 Politics of policy formation in this episode	1.2.1 Who were the policy actors? 1.2.2 Did policy actors have explicit goals toward which their activities were aligned? 1.2.3 What influenced the policy actors' policy preference? 1.2.4 To what extent were policy actors representing political party platforms? 1.2.5 Which issues were linked by policy actors to tuition policy? 1.2.6 What events or activities contributed to the problem being identified? 1.2.7 What is the temporal sequence of actor behaviour and events? 1.2.8 What were the key events that brought about a merging of the politics, problem and policy streams and therefore the opening of the policy window?
1.3 Stability of policy coalitions over time in this policy arena	1.3.1 Were policy actors grouped into coalitions based on core beliefs? What were those beliefs? 1.3.2 Were policy actors grouped in a more fluid manner based on issues? 1.3.3 To what extent were they "well organized" and resourced? 1.3.4 What conflicting positions were there within and between coalitions? 1.3.5 Was there evidence of information sharing between coalitions? 1.3.6 Is there evidence of internal or external shocks to the coalitions, policy learning, or negotiated agreements?
1.4 Influence of elected officials	1.4.1 Did elected officials dominate the policy process? How? 1.4.2 To what extent did non-elected policy actors influence the policy process? What strategies were used? 1.4.3 To what extent were non-elected policy actors involved with (or



and non-elected policy actors	invited to) generating policy alternatives? What strategies were used? 1.4.4 What was the effect of the political structure in each province? 1.4.5 To what extent did policy actors utilize technical information? Expert validators? 1.4.6 Was information on other jurisdictions/provincial tuition policies shared or used?
1.5 The effects of external influences	1.5.1 Did other post-secondary issues affect policy deliberations? 1.5.2 Did policy decisions from other arenas affect policy deliberations? 1.5.3 Did the fiscal climate or budgeting affect policy deliberations? 1.5.4 To what extent did public opinion influence policy deliberations?

Note: Policy = tuition policy  
Adapted from Ness (2008)