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From Community College to University: A Personal Commentary on the Evolution of an Institution

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents the development of a unique institution in Canadian higher education, the university college in British Columbia. From its roots as a comprehensive community college, the university college was confronted with numerous legislative and policy changes which culminated in its current claim to be called a regional university. In support of this assertion, a number of issues are addressed, including the role and mandate of the university college, academic freedom and tenure, governance, administration, and the legal status under which it was constituted. Over a period of 15 years the university college underwent an organizational evolution as remarkable as it was unprecedented.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article porte sur l'histoire du développement d'une institution unique dans l'enseignement supérieur canadien, le collège universitaire de la Colombie-Britannique. Après ses début en tant que collège communautaire compréhensif, le collège universitaire a été confronté à de nombreux changements dans la législation et les politiques publiques. La revendication du vocable « université régionale » par le collège universitaire est le point culminant de cette évolution. Le présent article discute du rôle et du mandat du collège universitaire ainsi que des enjeux relatifs à la liberté académique, à la permanence, à la gouvernance, à l'administration et au cadre juridique au sein duquel cette institution s'est constituée. En quinze ans, le collège universitaire a connu une évolution organisationnelle remarquable et sans-précédent.

In this paper, I describe the evolution of a unique experiment in higher education – the university college – in the province of British Columbia, Canada. In many respects an innovation, the university college attempted to integrate two distinctly different cultures, those of the comprehensive community college and the traditional values of the conventional university (Dennison, 1992). The institution which emerged in the process then sought to establish an identity of its own and in doing so passed through a series of stages, each involving challenges, some anticipated, others less so.

Before beginning the dialogue it is necessary to describe the context from which the community college emerged. The most distinguishing feature of higher education in Canada is its diversity (Skolnik 1986). Although the 10 provinces and three territories share many common values, they embrace very different historical, religious, socio-economic and linguistic traditions. The Constitution, enacted in 1867 and revised in 1982, places jurisdiction over education under the authority of the various provincial legislatures. As a consequence, the structure, management, and organization of post-secondary education vary considerably throughout the nation.

Canadian universities, of which all but a few are public, are modeled largely on values drawn from British and French traditions (Axelrod 1995, Jones 1997). They all place a strong emphasis on academic and institutional autonomy, selectivity in student admissions, a curriculum planned on a largely theoretical basis, participatory governance in a bicameral format, and their role as critics of conventional wisdom. In recent years, however, these values have been tempered by characteristics more common in the United States, such as closer attention to government priorities, response to corporate interests, and policies designed to widen student access, without compromising academic standards.

Conversely, the non-university sector, which includes community colleges, technical institutes, and a variety of special purpose institutions, vary in numerous respects according to the province in which they developed (Gallagher,1990). Most colleges were founded in the second half of the twentieth century and are closely regulated by the governments that created them. Their relationship to the university sector also varies from close cooperative arrangements to a status akin to two solitudes.

The community colleges in British Columbia, established largely between 1960 and 1975, were modeled almost entirely on their counterparts in California (Dennison & Gallagher 1986). Although their original primary function was to widen access to university degrees by offering two-year "academic transfer" programs, they also developed a number of technical diplomas and certificates in response to local employment opportunities. In a very short period, however, the colleges became more fully comprehensive in their curricular offerings by incorporating vocational and trades training, adult upgrading, language training and apprenticeship programs. Although the primary mandate of the colleges was to serve community and regional needs for post high school

education, they soon began to attract provincial, national, and in many cases, international clienteles.

To the surprise of some critics, the community colleges attained a level of success beyond expectations. In particular, the academic transfer programs attracted a diverse student population who, confronted with financial, geographic, and academic barriers, had previously been unable to enrol in the universities. The opportunity afforded by the colleges to earn university degree "credits" proved to be an attractive option for those seeking advanced educational credentials as a pathway to a better economic future. Further, from the perspective of the colleges, students paid lower tuition fees, experienced smaller classes, and were taught by instructors fully committed to teaching. Despite some initial skepticism, university personnel responded to the aspirations of the new colleges by negotiating transfer policies and practices which ensured the academic credits earned would be fully recognized if and when college graduates elected to complete their degrees at the universities (Dennison, 2000).

One major access problem remained. The colleges were located primarily in the rural regions of the province. Conversely, the universities were constructed in the major urban centres of population. College students, having successfully completed one or two years of degree studies, then faced the problem of expensive relocation to the universities if they were to complete their degrees. Although some students chose this option, many found that family responsibilities, financial costs, or the challenges associated with relocation precluded the decision to continue their studies.

Furthermore, a political issue arose. Statistics generated by the national government indicated that the proportion of degree graduates in British Columbia, particularly in regions outside of Vancouver and Victoria, fell well short of the national average and placed the province at the lower end of the provincial order. Accurately or not, blame for the situation was directed at the government of British Columbia (B.C.) and its policies regarding postsecondary education. Action was indicated, and in 1988 the first phase in the latest evolution of the postsecondary educational system in B.C. began (Report of the Provincial Access Committee, 1988).

Phase 1: The University College Idea

As an attempt to widen access to degree programs and in lieu of creating new institutions, the government elected to legislate that three (later five) community colleges could offer baccalaureate degrees under the auspices of existing universities. Four of the five "university colleges" were located in large rural centres while the fifth was in suburban Vancouver.

In a politically charged environment, and with understandable haste to meet anticipated demands for degree studies, the university colleges became a reality before any extensive consideration of their mandate and the role

within the postsecondary system. Conventional wisdom dictates that "form" should follow "function," but the university college experience tended to defy convention. The result was a measure of confusion among some whose understanding of the university college concept was essential to its success. Part of this problem lay in the lack of specificity in legislative direction which led to years of institutional drift.

One example of the lack of clarity in the mandate of the new institution was to be found in the expectations of several "chamber of commerce" representatives in the community who anticipated that a certain status was to be gained by having a "university" in their region. Somewhat confused by the university college concept, some community leaders (and a certain number of newly appointed faculty members) envisioned that a separate university would emerge in time. These aspirations proved to be a destabilizing factor in some institutions.

The idea that a comprehensive community college would offer baccalaureate degrees defied a long held opinion that had existed in the United States among postsecondary educational theorists. The general opinion was that the introduction of university level programs would inevitably undermine the essential values of the community college, such as comprehensiveness of curriculum (how could a university degree granting institution co-exist with adult basic education?), open access, a focus on teaching rather than research, and a strong community orientation.

Nevertheless, the process of evolution of the university college concept began with negotiations with administrators and departments at the established universities to determine which degrees the university colleges could offer in conjunction with the senior institutions (Wynn, 1997). These negotiations included a search for additional qualified faculty members. These searches were conducted jointly with university and college representation. It soon became evident that some differences of opinion existed as to what role new appointees would be required to play. The university perspective was that they be "scholar teachers" with a present or planned research agenda to complement their classroom responsibilities. Conversely, the college representatives took the view that teaching was to be the primary function of all faculty with scholarly activity as an additional optional responsibility. Given that the new degrees would initially be under the auspices of the universities, the views of the former tended to prevail. Needless to say, the requirement to fill reasonably heavy teaching loads, a deficiency of library and technical resources, and a general lack of emphasis upon research by both the administration and government proved to be discouraging for new faculty members, many of whom had come from a university environment. However, in several cases faculty who were required to teach senior level courses were assigned lower instructional loads.

While "joint degrees" were first offered in conventional disciplines such as Arts, Science, Education, Commerce, and Nursing, over time the university colleges took advantage of their legislated authority to offer advanced studies

by planning a number of "applied" degrees in areas such as Business, Computer Systems, Environmental Studies and Aviation Technology – all subjects outside usual university traditions. Applied degrees were planned with the cooperation of the newly formed Education Councils, senate-like bodies that gave faculty considerable authority in curriculum issues[1] .

Acceptance and success of the university college rested largely upon creating a clear and unambiguous mandate which was understood by all – government, board, administration, faculty, students and the wider community. As noted earlier, once the *function* of the organization is clear, its *form*, as reflected in curriculum, governance and administrative structure, should follow.

In an effort to focus on the issue of mandate, three ways of defining the university college model are offered. Each definition places a different emphasis upon its role and purpose.

Option 1

"A university college is a comprehensive four year degree granting institution that also offers a range of vocational, technical, general education and adult upgrading programs."

This option places the primary focus upon the university or degree granting aspect of the curriculum. It implies that in university colleges, while not initially mandated to offer graduate degrees, their university function is foremost. Nevertheless, it also acknowledges the comprehensive design of the curriculum.

Option 2

"A university college is a comprehensive post-secondary institution that offers a range of programs normally found in the community college with the addition of a selected number of four year degrees, both conventional and applied."

In this option, the community college component remains as the central focus. The degree programs are to be regarded as "additions" to the curriculum but their presence is somewhat downplayed.

Option 3

"A university college is a comprehensive post-secondary institution that offers a range of academic and applied programs, including vocational and technical education and training, and a variety of associate and four year degrees."

This option attempts to present the university college as a "new" institution in which neither the university nor the community college component is predominant. All programs collectively contribute to the character of the university college, all adding to its unique culture.

Which option is preferred rests largely upon each stakeholder's aspirations as to which direction the university college will evolve and how it will be perceived by potential students and community organizations. There is one view which sees the comprehensive community college concept in jeopardy as the degree component grows in stature. Conversely, another perception often held by academic faculty and "chamber of commerce" activists is that the high profile of the university will (and probably should) eventually dominate at the expense of the non degree elements of the curriculum.

From my point of view, the university college should be perceived as *neither* nor *both* of its antecedents, but as a new and unique institution of postsecondary education. Given the long held perceptions of the traditional university and the community college, this concept of uniqueness will be difficult to promote.

Phase 2: Academic Independence

The "joint" degrees proved to be a successful innovation in the university college curriculum. A plan to sever the university connection came to fruition and eventually the new institutions assumed full responsibility for both conventional academic and applied degrees, although the difference between the two was not absolutely clear. Essentially, the basis for the difference centered upon the predominance of "academic" and "applied" knowledge, although their distinction remained debatable. However, given their new role, another matter arose which was eventually to become a critical issue for the university colleges.

In the light of their acquired status as degree granting institutions, recognition of their credentials, both nationally and internationally, became an important consideration for university colleges. Normally, degree recognition is a function of institutional accreditation. Unlike in the United States there is no formal accreditation of public institutions of higher education in Canada. However, the equivalent of accreditation is to seek membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Membership provides instant recognition to the baccalaureate degrees awarded by the institution. Four of the five university colleges in B.C. sought membership in AUCC and, after a visit by the "accrediting" team from AUCC, were admitted. Although thought of as a routine procedure at the time, AUCC membership proved to be of considerable significance, as will be demonstrated later in this paper.

Phase 3: Expansion of Degree Granting Authority

The legislated power to grant degrees, both academic and applied, certainly bestowed an elevated status on the university colleges, a fact not ignored by the other components of the non university sector (i.e., the remaining community colleges and specialized technical institutes.) Pressure upon the provincial government by these institutions to also attain degree granting status increased. Eventually, legislation was amended to allow the remaining colleges and

institutes to plan for degrees, albeit restricted to the "applied" category. At the same time the university colleges, BC Institute of Technology, and Emily Carr College of Art and Design gained the authority to offer graduate degrees, again under the rubric of "applied," rather than conventional "academic." Thus another important step in the evolution of the university colleges was accomplished.

With their broad degree granting powers, the university colleges perceived themselves as equivalent to conventional undergraduate universities and sought to formalize their status by seeking a legislated change in their title. Part of the motivation for this change was rooted in increasing dissatisfaction with the title "university college." For example, potential international students had little understanding of the term. A renamed "regional university" would be viewed as a more understandable and attractive option for both national and international students.

Further, as a regional university, the ability to attract important donors to underwrite new facilities and resources would be enhanced. In the area of research the primary source of research funding, federal granting councils, might be more inclined to treat grant applications by faculty more equitably with those from conventional universities. The change of name would constitute another phase in the evolution of the university college. In fact, a fourth phase has already been partially accomplished.

Phase 4: Diversity

As noted above, five university colleges were well established. Each continued to offer a comprehensive range of curricula that included vocational, technical, and adult development programs in addition to baccalaureate degrees. However, each of the institutions was moving in a distinctive direction depending, in part, upon its history, location and political connections. The university college in suburban Vancouver, Kwantlen, established in close proximity to two major public universities, was constrained as to the kind of degrees that it could develop. All five university colleges, while offering degrees, chose specialties in different areas of study, but all demonstrated their ability to attract impressive student enrolments in each program.

At this stage, a somewhat unexpected turn of events occurred. The government announced that one university college, Okanagan, in the central interior was to become a satellite of the major university in the province, the University of British Columbia (UBC). The plan was to incorporate the academic degree granting component of the institution with the major university and designate a separate community college from the "applied" component. The reasons given for the decision were somewhat obscure – some were viewed as financial, while others suggested that increased status and program enhancement would be associated with the connection with a higher prestige university. In any event, the decision was received with mixed responses both within and beyond the regional institution.

Another announcement by the provincial government, while not entirely unexpected, also generated wide ranging discussion. A second university college, Cariboo, also located in a large rural region was, by government edict, granted university status and chose the name Thompson Rivers University. With the firm intention of retaining the "non academic" components of its curriculum, it was to be a comprehensive university – a model unique in Canada. As a culmination of concerted efforts within the university college, and with the support of the community to attain the status of a university, many new opportunities for advanced studies were expected to evolve. Certainly the fourth phase of the evolution of this institution had been attained.

A Choice of Futures

At this stage in their evolution, the university colleges face an uncertain future. The newly created branch campus of the major university quickly began the process of adaptation to the norms of its senior partner. Issues such as admission policy, governance, and administrative procedures were resolved by following the format at the major campus. Curriculum and program decisions were addressed by locating "non-university" applied diplomas and degrees at the community college which was now completely separated from the university.

However, the future direction of the remaining three university colleges and newly created university are not as apparent. In the case of the latter, much of the speculation was prompted by the legislation that followed its designation as a university. While comparable in many respects to the Acts that defined the established universities in the province, the new legislation also included some interesting differences. For example, in addition to its mandate to offer baccalaureate and masters degrees, the institution was "to offer postsecondary and adult basic education and training." There was also specific reference to a requirement to "maintain research and scholarly activities" and to promote "teaching excellence." It should also be noted that the new university was assigned responsibility for "open learning" in the province, a task formerly held by the Open Learning Agency and recently disbanded by the provincial government. With respect to governance, the academic governing body of the new university was designated as the "university council," with powers generally equivalent to a traditional senate. The reasons for the distinction are not apparent.

From a Canadian perspective, this new institution might be seen as an unconventional university with the inclusion of academic as well as applied programs together with adult basic education. Although the intent of both government and administration is to maintain the comprehensiveness of the curriculum, some more sceptical observers will question whether the current situation can continue. Conventional universities in Canada are essentially academic in their program orientation and undoubtedly there will be some pressures to conform to this model. For the remaining three university colleges, the challenges will be no less demanding.

If these three university colleges are successful in their efforts to be renamed either as “comprehensive” or “regional” universities or simply as “universities,” a number of policy issues will arise. It is possible that future planning options will be constrained by requirements to conform to the legislated directions under which they will operate. Nevertheless, the primary challenge will be to define and defend the model of university which they decide to promote. Given the broad perception of what defines a university in Canada, any attempt to “break the mould” will not be easy. Presumably, the new university model will attempt to capitalize upon its comprehensive curricular structure by offering innovative programs whereby academic and applied components will be further integrated. As a result, expanded opportunities will be extended to students who wish to seek careers in new professional and technical fields that are the products of a knowledge-based economy. Faculty members will pursue scholarly activity in emerging fields of study relating to applied knowledge and emphasize factors that influence performance in the workplace.

Whatever model the university chooses to develop, whether it be traditional or radical, its defenders will invariably be confronted with a range of issues which relate to its credibility as a legitimate degree granting institution with a claim on the title of “university.” These issues may include accreditation, academic freedom and tenure, governance, and administrative and faculty credentials. Whatever is included in the legislation which will codify the new universities it is useful to address the practical implications of these issues.

Accreditation

The question of accreditation is directly related to the formal recognition of degrees, provincially, nationally and internationally. However, while being “accredited” by no means guarantees excellence in program quality and competence of graduates, it does smooth the path for those students who wish to continue their education in established institutions by earning full credit for their initial credentials.

In this regard, reference was made earlier in this paper to the role of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) as an unofficial instrument of accreditation. This organization neither assumed nor had been awarded the role of accrediting agency, but in the vacuum created by having no formal body in Canada assigned to the task of awarding institutional accreditation (program accreditation was another matter), quasi accreditation rested upon AUCC membership. Unfortunately, certain unanticipated consequences arose from this policy. With regard to the recognition of degree programs, certain Ontario universities decided that full recognition of degrees from graduates seeking transfer into advanced studies would be extended only to those who had completed their baccalaureate degrees from institutions holding membership in AUCC. The motivation for this action arose from issues of an essentially provincial (Ontario) nature, but the restriction also extended to institutions outside the province. The problems for those institutions that

were non-AUCC members were exacerbated by a decision by AUCC to raise its criteria for membership. The overall outcome of these actions was the creation of two categories of institutions and a consequent level of dissatisfaction within some elements of the postsecondary educational sector.

The issue of accreditation, however, also received attention at the provincial level. The government of British Columbia embarked upon a set of policies centred on a goal of "choice and quality" among all postsecondary institutions, both public and private. A new quasi government organization was established (Degree Qualification Assessment Committee) to examine the quality of degrees proposed by both public and private colleges and universities before these degrees would be approved. While the DQAB was not a formal accrediting agency, it did represent the public interest in the expansion of degree programs in the province. Although there were certain exceptions (established universities were excluded from the process), this policy placed private institutions on a "level playing field" with their public counterparts.

To return to the primary topic of this paper, the university colleges of British Columbia, the current situation is confused at best. Of the original five, one has been assumed under the orbit of a major university (UBC), a second has been re-designated as a "regional" university, while the future status of the three remaining institutions is unclear. One of the three has yet to attain AUCC membership which, for reasons explained earlier in this paper, remains a potential problem for its graduates. For all of the university colleges, a primary objective is to be designated as universities, possibly with the term "regional" or "comprehensive" before their name. There is a certain logic behind this goal. The term "university" conveys an image with national and international implications. Many characteristics of the university colleges – the academic level and scope of the curriculum, the research productivity of faculty, the governing structure, and the wide representation of the student body – are comparable to recognized universities in Canada. Designation as universities would simply clarify their mandate, role and status.

While the foregoing is acknowledged, the issue is not without difficulties. The university community in Canada is rather conservative in how it perceives a "university." The notion that the term would include institutions that offer trades and technical training, adult basic education upgrading, or apprenticeship programs, is not easily accepted by some traditional academics. Time, as usual, will tell if the university colleges are to be fully recognized as universities but, inevitably, it will be the performance and productivity of the faculty and the quality of graduates which will play a major role in defining the reputation of these institutions.

The long term future of the original university colleges is unclear. Some observers may argue that ultimately a division will occur between the "academic" and the "applied" components of the curriculum. The university will develop under its new status, probably with the addition of more graduate (masters and doctoral) programs, while the "applied" programs will relocate in reestablished

community colleges. (This has occurred in the amalgamated UBC – Okanagan university college model). Although this bifurcation may appear obvious, a clear definition of "academic" and "applied" has become complicated with the development of many "applied" degree programs which could be subsumed under either category (McArthur, 1997).

Two other issues relating to the potential change in title (and in status) from university college to "comprehensive" or "regional" university are worthy of careful consideration. The first issue relates to the traditional importance of academic freedom and tenure in the university context. The second issue is also of importance in the university culture. It is the matter of administration of the organization. In Canada, as in most developed countries, there is an abundant literature on the university as an organization (Cameron, 1991; Gregor & Jasmin, 1992; Harris, 1976; Jones, 1997; Ross, 1976). There is also a limited, but growing body of knowledge regarding the community college (Dennsion, 1995; Gallagher, 1990; Konrad,1974; Levin 1996,1999, 2003, 2004). However, due partly to its short history and partly due to lack of concurrence about its purpose, there is only limited literature concerned specifically with the university college.

Academic Freedom and Tenure

Not unrelated to the issue of governance are policies respecting academic freedom and tenure. Although these terms are well recognized and understood in universities in Canada, they are rarely used in the context of community colleges. However, as virtually all colleges in Canada operate under collective agreements with unionized instructional staff there are provisions for continuing contracts, that, while having a somewhat different connotation from tenure, do provide faculty with a measure of economic security and protection from arbitrary dismissal.

How do the concepts of academic freedom and tenure apply in university colleges? With respect to academic freedom it is useful to note the views of Ross (1976). "There are two main areas of import, (1) the freedom of the institution to function without undue control or influence by external forces or agencies, and (2) the freedom of the individual to pursue study and to teach without restraint or inhibition" (p.191).

As noted earlier in this paper, universities in this country have enjoyed a remarkable measure of institutional freedom and independence, although currently public policy initiatives to ensure greater accountability have placed constraints upon their fiscal, and other forms of independence. Community colleges, depending upon the province in which they are located, operate under much more direct government control (Dennison, 1995). If, as argued earlier, university colleges deserve increased budgetary and curricular flexibility if they are to (1) develop innovative programs in accord with demonstrated need, (2) respond to regional, national, and international initiatives, and (3) encourage faculty members, whether they be in the applied or academic areas, to engage

in both teaching and other forms of scholarly activity. They need to operate at a level of autonomy comparable to universities. It is essential to the success of the university colleges that governments recognize and respond to this necessity.

With regard to academic freedom and tenure as applied to individual faculty members, the two concepts are really two sides of the same coin. If faculty in university colleges are expected to be scholar-teachers, to assume professional leadership roles in their communities, and exercise a responsible position in academic governance, they are entitled to the freedom to teach and research on subjects which may be viewed by some as controversial. This comment may apply particularly to those involved in "new" applied degrees where it is inevitable that the status quo will be challenged. An instructor in environmental technology, for example, may well be critical of current sources of industrial pollution. Another may question established practices in delivery of health care services. In all cases, faculty members would be subject to public scrutiny and possible sanction. All need to be assured of the freedom to teach, to study, and to write without unreasonable restraint. These circumstances result in the need for an unambiguous policy respecting academic freedom and tenure in a university college. Faculty in all areas of the curriculum expect and deserve no less.

Governance

The subject of management (i.e., how, when, and by whom decisions are made) is an important issue in educational institutions. Governance of universities, certainly for the last fifty years, has, with few exceptions, been based upon the principle of bicameral management (Duff & Berdahl, 1966; Murray, 1992). Under this arrangement, in theory at least, financial decisions are under the aegis of the board, while academic governance is the purview of senate (the inescapable fact that such decisions are rarely, if ever, independent of each other, must be acknowledged). University boards are widely representative, including faculty, staff, and student members, while senates, also broadly inclusive, are predominantly composed of faculty members.

Community colleges in Canada have a very different history of management. Although faculty members are often consulted formally, their voice is essentially advisory. In British Columbia in the 1990s, however, legislation was introduced which resulted in a fundamental change in the governance of colleges, university colleges and institutes. Boards were made broadly representative in a format comparable to universities with the inclusion of faculty, staff, and student members. A second body, the previously mentioned Education Council, was also created with powers similar to, but not identical with, university senates. The Education Council, of which half its members were faculty, was granted both statutory and advisory responsibilities. Policy respecting curriculum, student admissions, and requirements for graduation, for example, were assigned to the council. This governing structure remains unique in Canada with respect to non-university institutions.

Regarding governance, there is considerable comparability between university colleges and universities. While university senates have additional powers and wider representation, the education councils exercise a good deal of authority over academic decision making. While there is provision for liaison between the two governing bodies in both institutions, the role of the president in maintaining an effective relationship is critical. Presumably a new legislative act specific to university colleges would address the issue of governance in a more comprehensive fashion.

Administration

Over time the administrative cultures of universities and university colleges have developed distinctive characteristics. Except for those in financial management, administrators in universities are either seconded from faculty positions or are hired with the assurance that they have an academic "home" and are always concurrently appointed to the appropriate department in their discipline area. The intent of this policy is to recognize that administrators are essentially academics and will return to that role after serving a period of time in an administrative position. Terms of office are usually limited to two, each being of five or six years. The same principle applies to the office of the president, but although they no longer serve for unlimited periods at one university, some particularly gifted (or courageous) presidents do continue their presidency in other institutions.

In the university college sector, administration has usually become a career choice. Although most administrators have been drawn from the ranks of faculty, others have come from business or industry, from government or civil service, or from other educational environments. In this process administration has become a "class" distinct and separate from faculty. In his report on university colleges in British Columbia, Petch (1998) noted that at several institutions concerns were expressed that related to the nature of appointments held by Deans, Vice-Presidents and Presidents. Complaints were made about the difficulties encountered when an incumbent wishes to give up the appointment and return to being a regular faculty member. Others feel that a gulf is developing between faculty members and those in administrative positions. They say that after years of service in administrative positions, incumbents lose touch with the needs of faculty and students and become absorbed in budgetary and other administrative tasks at the expense of their interest in academic matters. (p. 9)

What then would be the most appropriate policy respecting administration in a university college? As is the case with most policies in the new institution, neither the community college nor the university suggests itself as a suitable model. Stated once more, form will follow only after the function of the organization is determined. With respect to the academic or degree components of the curriculum, two qualities in academic administrators are indicated. The first is that academic leadership, to be fully credible, will be viewed as having a reasonable "track record" of scholarly activity and a desire to maintain

sufficient contact with his or her discipline, which would allow for a return to scholarship after a period in administration. University colleges are committed to encouragement of scholarly activity, including research, and it seems critical that those in leadership positions be active in, as well as supportive of scholarship. This quality was neither expected of, nor required from those maintaining administrative positions in community colleges.

The second quality expected of administrators relates more specifically to the new and innovative programs generally referred to as "applied" degrees. In this area it is crucial that close contact be maintained with the appropriate business or industry for which the degree is relevant. Many administrators of applied programs have been hired or seconded from industry where they have demonstrated a lengthy and ongoing familiarity with the requirements of the marketplace. Again it seems vital that such administrators (as well as faculty) maintain close contact with their professions and enjoy the opportunity to return to active participation in their field at regular intervals.

In summary, I suggest that in every aspect of the university college curriculum program quality largely depends upon leaders who maintain contact with their respective academic discipline, profession or trade. One logical approach to ensuring relevance is, in the case of faculty, to provide for regular periods devoted to professional development, and in the case of administration to provide for term appointments, which allow for the opportunity to return to the practice of their discipline, profession or trade either in the classroom or in an industrial setting.

This policy respecting administration would be new to university colleges and in several respects, largely because of the nature of applied programs, different from universities. For incumbent administrators, it would present an undeniable challenge and would probably have to be phased in over time. The policy would also unquestionably introduce additional stress on budgets. Nevertheless, if university colleges are to honour the task they have set themselves as new, innovative, responsive institutions, dedicated to quality in all aspects of their operation, they are going to have to take risks and explore avenues which other post-secondary institutions have not traveled. Credibility is not earned easily in an environment where established organizations have set certain standards of performance over time. Innovative approaches to both governance and administration by new institutions are consistent with the character of an innovative model of post-secondary education and, in spite of attendant risks, are vitally necessary.

Legislation

One other obstacle to the achievement of university status is the current legislation which defines the role and mandate of university colleges as postsecondary institutions. From their first entity, the university colleges have been subsumed under the College and Institute Act, a legislative authority which embodies all public non-university institutions in the province. In contrast to

the University Act, the College and Institute Act provides for direct intervention, by the minister responsible for postsecondary education into policies respecting programs offered by institutions covered by the act. For example, under the College and Institute Act the minister has the power to "establish, in consultation with the boards, policy or directions for postsecondary education and training in British Columbia" (p.3). Conversely, the University Act states that "the minister may not interfere in the exercise of powers conferred on a university" (p.5). It must be acknowledged that the powers of the minister with respect to the university colleges have rarely, if ever, been exercised, but the provision remains.

Although the potential consequences of the current legislation may be viewed as perceptual rather than real, it is evident that the university colleges do not enjoy the same level of autonomy as the universities and it is difficult to argue that they deserve the title of university. Even the legislated roles of faculty members in the two institutions are not comparable. The University Act acknowledges the responsibilities of faculty in the area of research. The College and Institute Act is silent on this task for faculty, and although research productivity is considerable in the university colleges, the primary implication is to be found in the difference in funding policy respecting the two institutions. University funding is based partly upon the assumption that all faculty members will engage in research in addition to their teaching duties. Hence, teaching loads in universities are considerably less than in university colleges where research is not officially regarded as a requirement (although many instructors have impressive records of research and scholarly activity). It seems reasonable that if university colleges are to become universities they should be funded as universities. Undoubtedly governments are not unaware of this argument and its fiscal consequences.

It is apparent that if the task of conversion from "university college" to "regional university" is to be completed satisfactorily, the former will have to be incorporated either under new legislation, as in the case of Thompson Rivers University, or under the University Act. So far, government has been reluctant to take this step, possibly because of potential budgetary consequences. Nevertheless, if the 15 year evolution from community college to university is to be completed, the importance of legislative reality, symbolic or not, will have to be recognized. The final phase of this saga remains uncompleted.

SUMMARY

To return to the primary subject of this paper, the scenario unfolding for the university colleges in British Columbia is by no means unique. In England and Australia, for example, the Polytechnics and the Colleges of Advanced Education were each granted university status (Maskell & Robinson, 2001). In many US jurisdictions, state colleges became universities in the 1960s. However, a legislative decision did not assign a new status to these institutions. Each one then faced the task of earning credibility in a competitive environment. Many

are still trying. None maintained a curriculum structure as comprehensive as in British Columbia.

If and when the three university colleges in British Columbia are assigned the title of "university," the challenge they face will be to earn credibility within an essentially conservative group of institutions which carry that designation. An attempt to emulate the characteristics of established universities is unlikely to succeed. The task will be to demonstrate that an innovative approach to curriculum design, organization and management, instructional technology, or workplace oriented practices may be conducted without compromising quality. Each "new" university will adopt a model that best accommodates the needs of its particular students, its community and the reputation it hopes to build. Credibility in academia is not awarded by changing the name of the institution, nor by investing in public relations, but by ensuring excellence in its graduates and the performance of its instructional faculty.

The transition from university college to university is but the first step in the challenging pathway to the future. In their plans to develop a different kind of university, it is probable that the university colleges will not adopt a conventional approach to the issues raised in this paper, but they must be prepared to defend their decisions to find new ways to protect both the academic and performance integrity of faculty, students and administration.

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NOTES

1 There is an interesting use of terminology when describing degrees. University Colleges offer academic and applied degrees whereas universities offer academic, graduate and professional degrees. Some might argue that Medicine, Dentistry or Applied Science may well fit equally under the category of "applied" degrees.

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