

Investing in our future

From the Bargaining Team

Early in 2004, the government of Ontario mandated former Premier Bob Rae to examine post-secondary education and training in Ontario. Rae met with interested individuals, community groups, and experts in every corner of the province and released his Report in February 2005. This was arguably the most thorough and comprehensive study of our post-secondary structures and practices ever undertaken.

Rae was forthright in his assessment of the colleges. The colleges have realized “a diminished ability to deliver the educational services Ontario and Ontarians badly need.” The colleges, Rae noted, have not fulfilled their potential but have been distracted by financial concerns and a pursuit of “efficiency gains during the past decade.”

Premier McGuinty and Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in response to Rae’s recommendations for change announced on November 29, 2005 additional funding to the colleges of \$87.3 million – the Quality Improvement Fund. That represents a 4 percent addition to budget in this year alone over and above the 4.5 percent budget increase already granted to the colleges. The government of Ontario is making a serious investment in quality in the college system.

“Our government is committed to providing a high-quality education for our students, who must compete with the best in the world,” said Bentley. “This new fund will make improvements that students will see and will benefit from immediately – and accountability agreements will ensure that the extra money produces results.” The government’s first principle tied to the funding is that the college must: “Hire more support staff and faculty so that students have better access to their instructors.”

College faculty wholeheartedly endorse and support this investment in the colleges. We believe every penny of that \$87.3 must be spent on quality improvements for students today and in the future. It would be appalling and inexcusable to squander the work of the Rae Review.

When the faculty negotiating team asked college management negotiators this December how the colleges proposed to spend the allocations from the Quality Improvement Fund, they replied that some of it would be spent on hiring new faculty, but only for additional enrollment. None of the allocation would be spent on improving current student/teacher contact hours or on reducing class size, they informed us.

Rae reported that the college system, “suffers from serious quality issues – teacher contact time, class size, deferred maintenance.”

The faculty union has tabled bargaining demands that directly address the quality issues identified by Rae in his final report. Faculty have tabled proposals to increase the time teachers have to prepare for and to spend with their students. Remarkably, management has refused to respond to these proposals other than to say “No, too expensive.”

The workload proposals which management has tabled are to use averaging to increase current faculty teaching hours during high-load periods, and for pilot projects that eliminate workload limits. There is nothing in these proposals to improve quality. They are solely designed to increase efficiency. Accepting these proposals would violate the spirit and principles of the Rae Report and the commitment of Ontario’s government to invest now in its post-secondary students.

Using the Quality Improvement Funds to hire more college teachers only so that the colleges can increase student intake does nothing to address the quality deficit identified by Rae.

There have been other government-mandated studies of the College system that are useful and illustrative in understanding today’s situation. The 1995 Report of an Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Post-Secondary Education chaired by David Smith reviews briefly all of those various studies and reports.

With respect to contract negotiations, The Panel found that there were historically a number of issues that made collective bargaining troublesome. They wrote:

A number of these issues came to a head during the 18 day province-wide strike of the academic employees in 1984 which caused a major disruption in the college system. Subsequent bargaining resulted in a workload formula. The colleges faced another 20 day strike in 1989. One of the significant decisions flowing from that strike involved the establishment of a wages and benefits task force, chaired by William Marcotte, to ensure the existence of mutually agreed upon data for collective bargaining purposes

The key issue in the college faculty 18-day strike in 1984 was workload. That strike was brought to an end by back-to-work legislation. The legislation included a provision that amendments to instructional assignment language were excluded from the jurisdiction of the arbitrator. A special committee was established to undertake a comprehensive study of workload in the colleges. The government engaged Michael L. Skolnik to chair the Instructional Assignment Review Committee [IARC]. Other committee members were William Marcotte and Brian Sharples.

The Report of that committee, entitled *Survival or Excellence*, was released in July 1985. The workload formula, based in large part on that report, became a part of the next faculty contract 1985-87. The provincial government provided additional funding to support the revisions to workload and within the next few following years approximately 1000 additional regular college faculty were hired.

Twenty year later, many of the observations and conclusions of Skolnik and his colleagues again ring true. It was on the basis of the work of the IARC that the workload formula was adopted to address the quality issues. The Instructional Assignment Review Committee wrote: "The issue of quality is inextricably linked with that of workload." Similar to Rae's findings 20 years later, the IARC found there were quality problems in the college system. Skolnik: "About half the chairmen felt that quality had deteriorated

significantly and that ‘students were not getting the education for which they were paying.’” The committee found that “a substantial proportion of faculty workloads are unreasonable and excessive.”

The IARC made a number of recommendations directly based on quality concerns. They recommended:

- doing away with averaging
- limiting weekly and annual hours of instruction
- limitations on class size varying for different types of courses with some explicit student/teacher ratios
- provisions for minimum professional and curriculum development time
- acknowledgement of the full value of clinical, field placement and co-op education as teaching hours
- limitations on the number of different courses, with further limitations on assignments to new faculty; and
- limits on both weekly teaching hours and class size, with class size limits recognizing the needs of different students.

As you can see, the existing formula did capture some of the variables cited by the IARC as necessary to ensure quality. But not all were accounted for in the formula that was adopted.

Skolnik recognized that many variables needed to be controlled if the colleges were to eliminate existing and avoid future workloads that were, to use his terms, “unreasonable and excessive.”

There were no limits placed on class size in the formula which became part of the Collective Agreement in 1985, and there were no limits placed on total weekly or annual student/teacher contact hours [teaching hours x the number of students in each class].

The result has been that over the last 20 years college management has steadily increased class size and total student/teacher contract hours.

This increase in average total student/teacher contact hours was realized even as students' weekly course hours in many courses and programs were being cut back. Commonly, while such cutbacks represented a decrease in student contact hours, there was often no attendant decrease in curriculum or content. Accordingly, many faculty, in addition to rising student/teacher contact hours a great many college faculty have been forced into speed-up in the delivery of their courses and programs.

Further, and at the same time, many colleges have reduced the length of each semester from 16 weeks to 14 weeks in order to maximize the number of teaching weeks assigned to faculty. At some colleges this has been called a 7-1-7 model wherein the professor is assigned for five seven-week blocks of teaching. While students' hours are cut, the effect of this maximization of teaching weeks for faculty has been a reduction of the time available for curriculum and program development. That, in turn, has increased workload during the teaching periods.

The IARC found that in 1983-84, post-secondary teachers averaged just over 440 student/teacher contact hours per week. After the introduction of the formula, measured in 1990, weekly student/teacher contact hours were at a more manageable and, for post-secondary institutions, more educationally sound 360 hours per week. By 2003, [the most recent available data] the weekly student contact hours had risen to over 415, approaching the 1980's levels again.

Both Skolnik in 1985 and Rae in 2005 identified senior management's pursuit of efficiencies as a contributing factor in the college's quality deficiencies.

Skolnik:

The excessive preoccupation with efficiency, almost to the exclusion of other social or educational values, may be threatening the viability of the college system. There is a need for a more appropriate balance, at

higher levels of decision-making, between the advocacy of efficiency and the advocacy of other values.

And,

Efficiency has become the dominant value in the system, and managers are judged primarily on the pecuniary efficiencies which they can achieve... We accept the sincerity of statements of senior academic officers and presidents when they say that they do not believe that there are serious problems. We question, however, the information base upon which they are drawing such conclusions, and we suspect that many administrators, in their preoccupation with efficiency, may be out of touch with the realities of the educational experiences of students and faculty.

Rae:

Colleges have also been distracted from fulfilling their potential by chronic financial concerns. They grew precisely at a time when there was no funding to sustain that growth. Between 1992-93 and 2002-03 full-time enrolment grew by 31%, while the value of operating grants in constant 2004-04 dollars decreased by \$211 million.

As a result, colleges have been Ontario's "poster child" for public efficiency gains during the past decade. Per unit costs of delivering services have been dramatically reduced. The reward for this

achievement is a diminished is a diminished ability to deliver the educational services that Ontario and Ontarians badly need.

Of further interest are the findings of Walter Pitman on this same matter which are cited in Smith's report, mentioned previously. [Pitman was commissioned to do a study of college governance in 1987.] "Pitman condemned the tendency in the recent past to view the colleges as industrial organizations rather than as learning institutes, which in turn placed too great an emphasis on the 'bottom line,' entrepreneurship, immediate response to market needs and on bureaucratic models that contributed to a high level of friction between faculty and administrators. Pitman advocated greater emphasis on the quality of teaching, decision-making and encouraged collegiality."

The first decade following the Skolnik Report saw commitments to and improvements in quality education in Ontario's colleges – additional necessary funding, hiring of more faculty, educationally sound workload assignments. The second decade, post-1995, as noted by Rae, has been one marked by the re-emergence of an organizational culture focused once again on efficiencies at the expense of quality.

The Rae Report made clear that an additional financial commitment to the college system would be one of the keys to restoring quality. The provincial government has responded by providing the first installment of the funding called for by Rae.

The government has begun what will be a \$6.2 billion investment in post-secondary education over the next five years. That investment is for the students of Ontario's post-secondary institutions, the colleges and universities, and it is an investment in quality improvements. But that investment will be misspent if it is not properly directed to improving the quality of educational services. That investment will be misspent if it is directed to expanded enrolment, new programs and new physical structures.

In 1984 and 1985, it was college faculty and students who recognized the need for quality improvements in the colleges. It was the work of Michael Skolnik and his Instructional Assignment Review Committee members who researched, identified, and articulated that

need. In 2005, it was Bob Rae and his colleagues who found once again and who articulated in “Ontario A Leader in Learning,” the need for quality improvements at this time. Both Skolnik and Rae acknowledged that this would require additional funding. Following 1985 the provincial government provided that funding surge to create the conditions that enabled quality to return to college programs, via workloads that were no longer “unreasonable and excessive.” The McGuinty government has, in the same way, responded to Rae’s findings and recommendations by providing funding -- \$87.3 million – to the colleges as a part of its Quality Improvement Fund. (All three leading federal parties have also pledged increased funding for post-secondary education and training.)

In the decade that followed 1985, college students reaped the benefit of the quality improvements. Unfortunately, the next decade 1995-2005, saw a gradual but steady return to the conditions and concerns of the early 1980’s. Those concerns led to the faculty strike in 1984 which, in turn, led to the amended system of instructional assignments that captured a part of the Skolnik recommendations. The similarities with today are unmistakable and indisputable. There is however one exceedingly important distinction.

In 1984, the government of the day had not yet had the report of Skolnik’s IARC. Only in 1985, with that report in hand was funding made available to finance the quality improvements, additional funding that allowed the parties to adopt the workload formula. In 2005, the Rae Report is already available. Its findings and recommendations are there for all to see. The government has responded with a total funding increase to the colleges this year of 8.5%, four percent of which is exclusively earmarked for quality improvements.

It is for all of these reasons that management’s negotiations stance is ill-considered and destructive.

The visits of the Workload Task Force heard the message at every college in visits during 2005, that workload and quality were critical issues and that changes had to be made. The Task Force heard faculty voices express the same concerns that Skolnik heard 20 years ago – increasing class sizes, insufficient time and recognition for preparation, de-

mands to change marking methodologies to achieve efficiencies, etc. As Skolnik put it, “The importance that faculty attach to the apparent lack of recognition of time required to undertake work related to actual instruction cannot be underestimated.” This, Skolnik reported, was heard at all colleges. The Workload Task Force heard the same message. The union engaged the research firm, CPOL, to conduct a comprehensive on-line survey to better understand and quantify the time spent on out-of-class work. The findings of that study form the basis for the faculty union’s workload demands.

College faculty have known about the decline in quality for some time. They have struggled to maintain quality in their classrooms, labs, studios, clinics, field placement settings, counseling offices, libraries and learning centers, and everywhere our educational services are delivered. But that struggle has not been easy. And, ultimately, as in 1984, faculty will do what they must to see that college students do receive the educational services they need. The McGuinty government has stepped forward by making a real investment in quality. College faculty have stepped forward. Faculty too have made an investment in college students and in the colleges. It is our time, energies, intellect, skills, learning, and more. Neither of these investments can be allowed to be squandered, wasted, or misspent. The investment is a sound and worthwhile one. It is time for college management to step forward also and make the commitment to quality that Ontario college students need and deserve.

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