

A CANADIAN JOURNEY

On the road from Medicine Hat to Lethbridge, and south-west to Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, travellers (even the jaded) find the traverse breathtaking. At highway speeds, the foothills are replaced abruptly by the Rockies, rising grey-blue from the valleys before them. If Canadian post-secondary education [PSE] wants a metaphor, then Canadian geography provides a useful (if incomplete) one.

Think of the complicated geography of eastern Canada, the shield, and the plains as the unpredictable development of Canadian higher education from its seventeenth and eighteenth century beginnings to 1945. That development featured parallel streams of private, religious PSE on one hand, and on the other, public, state-supported university education. There were, of course, confused borrowing, competition, and overlaps among and between the two streams. Where competition was unsustainable, the Canadian solution has been “federation,” in this case, the federation of religiously oriented colleges and faculties with larger, publicly-funded and publicly-accountable state institutions. Federation, in this specialized educational sense of the term, continues to this day.

The metaphor of vast spaces and steady development – as one travels through Canada’s eastern and central “regions” – is by no means perfect, but serves to describe the heady and happy days of institution-making (Laval, Dalhousie, McGill, Toronto and others before 1850, then the western provincial universities after 1870). Canadian PSE has passed through difficult periods, but in English and French Canada, colleges and universities have answered reasonably well to economic crises (the 1880s, the 1930s), to war (the Riel Rebellion, the Boer War, the Great War, World War II), and to great social change (the settling of the West, the growth of cities, the rise of the middle classes).

By the late 1940s and 1950s, to continue the geographic metaphor, the foothills have appeared. The veterans returned, welcomed in the nation’s colleges, institutes, and universities and financed by a grateful federal government. This was an unmistakable step toward universal accessibility. Politicians, parents, professors, and students began to see accessible PSE as in the national interest. For fifty years, the huts and “temporary” buildings that accommodated the vets dotted campuses across the country. By now, they’ve nearly gone, replaced during a 40-year building boom starting in the mid-60s. But we’re ahead of ourselves.

Still in the foothills: the Massey Royal Commission of 1949-50 recommended and encouraged systematic federal funding of research and development. Section 93 of the

Post-Secondary Education Since 1945

WILLIAM BRUNEAU

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One may argue that the 1950s and 1960s was the age of activist, “positive” government, of increasingly generous investment in education, research, and culture, and of broadening commitment to public access. It was the heyday of the Technical Institutes that remain central features of industrial training and development, in most cases now degree-granting. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, funding policies encouraged large “physical plants,” as well as the creation of new programmes. It was the era of the much-lamented transfer funds (the EPF, Established Programmes Financing Act),

Almost out of the foothills (and at the point where this metaphor has begun to fray at the edges), we have the secularization of nearly all university-level institutions run by religious denominations: Hamilton’s McMaster University left the Baptist fold in 1957, when it became obvious the University’s ambitions could not be funded by the Church, nor could the University raise tuition fees fast enough to solve its financial problems. In Nova Scotia, in Quebec City and Montreal, in Winnipeg, religious institutions – Protestant and Catholic alike – quickly came to the same conclusion.

We are at the mountains, beautiful but perilous.

Let’s stop to ask about the wider society that stood ready in the 1960s to build and to pay for a “system” of post-secondary education. What led Canadians to this point? What made Canadian society ready for mountainous change in the 1960s and after?

In one word, Canada “modernized.” A crushing majority of Canadians by 1970 lived in cities. Almost by virtue of that single fact – the movement of people from country to city – Canada was “modern” by the 60s. But the following list of factors also shaped Canada and Canadian PSE at this key moment – a list that rings surprisingly true in 2004.

Canadians were in the 1960s better off than ever before. They

could afford national and international travel (especially for those under 30), and they saw themselves internationally in new ways. (When I was a graduate student in 1970, my wife, two children, and I spent a year in France and England. Coming from remote agricultural villages in the prairies, we were clearly caught in – and benefited from – urbanization, general improvements in living standards, and the rising expectations of PSE that went with the times.)

For working-class and middle-class Canadians, the improvement of living standards opened up worlds of educational opportunity and held the promise of a fairer and more equitable society. These ideas have not faded with time.

Cultural production and consumption grew, partly because of market demand for Canadian art, music, and writing, and partly because of state support (through universities and colleges).

the mid-1960s, there were more people aged 18-24 than ever before. This post-war baby boom combined with economic factors to change Canadian ideas about entitlement. More than ever, high school graduates (a minority still, but a significant one) thought they would spend their early adult years in college or university.

The student movement of the 1960s began as an expression of antiwar sentiment, but quickly diverted to questions of equity and access. That movement, especially the Canadian Federation of Students, continues to this day, very much the product of the 1960s, but faced with new political crises in post-Thatcher/Reagan era – of that, more below.

The promise of feminism changed the student population. The women's movement gathered strength, and became a feature of everyday post-secondary life in the 1960s. From a practical standpoint, it's useful to mention a trio of statis-

The university transmits the sacred fire of learning from the past; its present ideal is to discipline the intelligence, to widen the sympathy and to quicken the imagination of its members; but all the while it knows that the supreme emphasis must be placed on the character. The highest intellectual brilliance will not atone for lack of the aspirations we call spiritual and the motives we call good.

H.J. Cody, President of the University of Toronto, 1934



With money came also the consumption of "material" and ephemeral goods, including such "goods" as television, and a range of powerful devices that promised to erase national boundaries – a prefiguring of the Internet. Overall, increased wealth and rising consumption had a double effect in Canadian post secondary education.

First, they intensified popular belief in the connection between economic growth and higher education/training. The Economic Council of Canada (long gone) announced in 1962 that for every dollar invested in higher education, \$2 or even \$3 of economic growth would result. It became a commonplace in the 1960s and 1970s to say that Canadians were well off, but would stay that way only if they increased massively their public investment in PSE, in teaching and in research. This message has varied only a little over the past 40 years.

Consider, for example, the rise of professional training. Between 1950 and the 1970s, Canada's small law schools, few medical faculties, and struggling departments of business accounting had become big, energetic institutions, sometimes running under public-private "sponsorship" – all promised because of Canada's sustained faith in the connection between PSE (teaching, research, and development included) and economic growth. The massive growth of community college and CEGEP instruction beginning in the 1960s was another manifestation of that faith.

Second, for a lucky minority, increased personal family income led young people, often for the first time in their family history, to expect high-quality post-secondary education. Government played a conspicuous and growing part in these matters, since it was provincial and federal government dollars that built the buildings and hired the professors. Dozens, if not hundreds, of new colleges and universities appeared in the 1960s.

Demography – the "people factor" – was a driving force. By

tics: in 1965, one-third of Canadian undergraduates were women; in 1984, just over one-half were women (the same proportion as the population as a whole). Finally, in 2000, of 720,000 undergraduates, women accounted for more than 57% of the total. The picture at the postgraduate level was similar in all periods. Canadian society as a whole had not provided an equal place for women (for instance, in industrial management), even by the end of the twentieth century. But underlying social forces, and the effects of the women's movement, were and are undeniable.

By the mid-1960s, there was substantial interest in, and commitment to equity for First Nations people. This factor acquired much greater importance after the ratification of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The impact on PSE was, once again, to be a long and cumulative one.

Canadian nationalism was growing. Despite the strong influence of the American example in higher education, and despite Canada's long colonial dependency on England and France, the nation moved quickly in the late 1960s to assert its educational independence. This was the high-water mark of the so-called "Canadianization movement."

Since then, of course, Canadian academic nationalism has run up against the demands of "globalization," global markets for professors, students, and funding. By 2004, it was not yet clear which force – nationalism or the interests of the global economy – would win out. For the purposes of argument, it's fair to say that modernization was tied to nationalism – for a decade, anyway.

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These seven factors of modernity helped shaped Canadian post-secondary education from the 1960s on. But something happened on the way to the twenty-first century. Political developments have made life "interesting" for Canadian PSE and threatened to knock the system off the course set more than 40 years ago.

A long-lasting financial crisis began with the oil price “scare” of 1973 and deepened with the so-called “fiscal crisis of the state” in 1983. By 1983, the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the United States (1980) had inaugurated a period of “radical reconsideration” in the field of public policy.

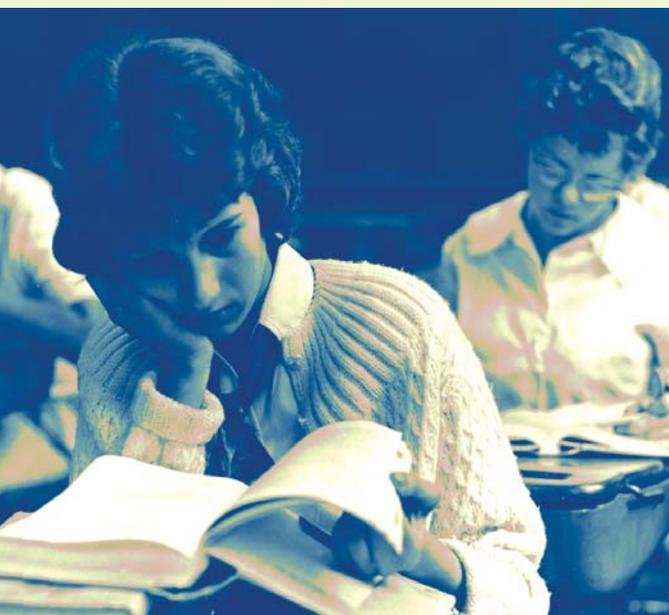
By the late 1980s, during the two Mulroney governments and the first Chrétien government, Canada, like most OECD countries, began to think the ambitions of the 1960s were out of financial reach. Furthermore, the idea of activist government, supported by graduated income taxation, looked somehow wrong and dated. It was suddenly popular to reduce state involvement in public life, to cut budgets, no longer to recognize or take seriously the factors that shaped PSE after 1945.

But some of those factors could be ignored only at a government’s peril – in particular, demography. In the entire 40-year period since 1964, demand for higher education in Canada has consistently increased. Immigration and ordinary population growth go far to explain rising demand. But at the same time, there is a whole new emphasis on PSE as Canadians have accepted the doctrine of “equal educational opportunity.” By the 1970s and 1980s, Canadians believed PSE was a scarce and precious resource. To be fair, everyone should have a share in it.

By 2000, federal and provincial governments, think-tanks, and opinion surveyors agreed that by 2010 at the latest, at least 50% of the cohort aged 18-24 should be in post-secondary education – whether it be technical training, university education, or community college. Colleges, institutes, and universities were faced immediately with a space crunch. Somebody would have to build classrooms and labs—and fast. One of Canada’s great educational building booms, therefore, occurred between 1994 and 2004. But who would pay for all those new buildings and the teachers and researchers to work in them?

After 1993, governments at all levels had refused to take up the burden. The solutions were to increase tuition fees, to pay for at least some research and development activity through new and mutually profitable relationships with industry, and to maintain public finance at the restrained levels achieved in the late 1990s.

In fact, nearly all universities have managed to increase their endowments in the past two decades, thus avoiding the trap of excessively high tuition fees and too-tight links with industry. The successes of Robert Prichard at Toronto and David Strangway at UBC come to mind.



EN BREF Le développement de l’enseignement postsecondaire au Canada est une réflexion des changements en cours dans nos priorités socio-économiques. À des débuts relativement calmes caractérisés par la construction des premières universités, ont suivi la période d’expansion de l’après-guerre et les grands changements des années 1960, pour aboutir enfin à l’environnement compétitif actuel basé sur la loi du marché. La révolution des années 1960 a mis l’accent sur l’égalité des chances, les arts libéraux et la transformation des universités en établissements ouverts et participatifs. Celle des années 1990 et 2000 est plutôt basée sur la bonne gestion des systèmes, sur les indicateurs de rendement et sur des programmes de recherche et de formation ayant des applications industrielles.

PSE has also become more client-centred, more competitive, more sympathetic to the idea of cost recovery.

- If students pay more, they must have a stronger voice in university programming and governance.
- If government stays in the funding game – even at reduced levels – there must be more accountability.
- If universities get more private or public funding, they must compete with one another for it.

These features are tied to still other novelties on the post-secondary landscape. For students, the 1990s and early 2000s were the era of the *MacLean’s* magazine survey of universities. For government, the 1990s and 2000s were the “right time” for performance indicators to tie outputs (graduate rates, student employment rates, grant acquisition) to inputs (how many public and/or private dollars go to produce each of those outputs).

If the 1960s marked the first revolution, the 1990’s and 2000’s marked the second. But this time the aims are different. The focus this time is not on open and participatory universities, equality of opportunity, and liberal education. Instead, it is on a well-managed PSE, on performance indicators, and on industrially useful training and research.

The grand aims of the 1960s (or the 1860s for that matter) have not gone away entirely. But the “second” revolution has given Canadian post-secondary education a new approach to governance and funding. In this second revolution, managers have come to matter as much as academic senators, or even as much as members of the Board of Governors (because managers assure accountability). The good will of great pharmaceutical firms (to take just one example) is important to an extent unimagined in 1964.

It will not do to exaggerate the extent to which the 1990s and early 2000s are different from the 1960s or the 1940s. After all, a typical alumnus or alumna of a Canadian college or university, visiting the *alma mater*, may see new buildings, yet still feel pretty much at home. The diversity, the sheer size, and the energy of the “new” PSE is, of course, striking—but so is the fact that the identities of colleges and universities have somehow remained intact.

It may be for another generation to decide just how “good” or “bad” these 40 years have been for Canadian post-secondary education. It is for us, in this generation, to take note of what has happened. Revolutions can be reversed, after all, and often are. ★

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