

Report on Education in Ontario Colleges

Summary



Overview

This report examines Ontario’s community colleges from the perspective of the faculty who deliver their public service – high quality post-secondary education and job training. The report was commissioned by the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology – Academic (CAAT-A) division of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). Research for this study involved conversations with over 600 faculty at all 24 colleges, along with historical research and present-day inquiry into the sector’s financing, management, and operations. The report is focused primarily on perceptions by college faculty that there is a crisis of quality within the college system today. The report examines challenges to quality, and advocates for system reforms that would properly resource Ontario’s colleges, and that would establish an equal partnership between faculty, government, and administration.

History

The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) were founded in 1965 as a vehicle to increase access to post-secondary education, to address the needs of learners not served by the university system, and to meet local economic and community development needs. The CAATs have been highly successful at fulfilling their mandate, with 24 institutions currently serving 220,000 full-time and 300,000 part-time students. This level of enrolment represents a 100% increase over the past 28 years.¹

Since their founding there have been many changes to the mandate of the CAATs, as subsequent governments have sought to update and even re-make the system based on changing economic conditions and political ideologies. The ability of the colleges to adapt to these changes, and to main-

ON \$10,390

PE \$11,390

PQ \$12,455

BC \$13,901

NB \$13,979

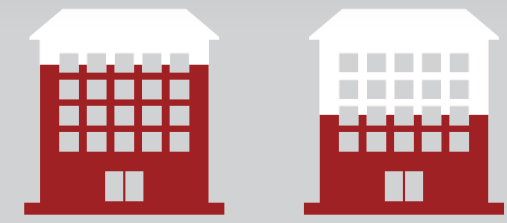
MB \$15,161

NL \$16,118

NS \$16,218

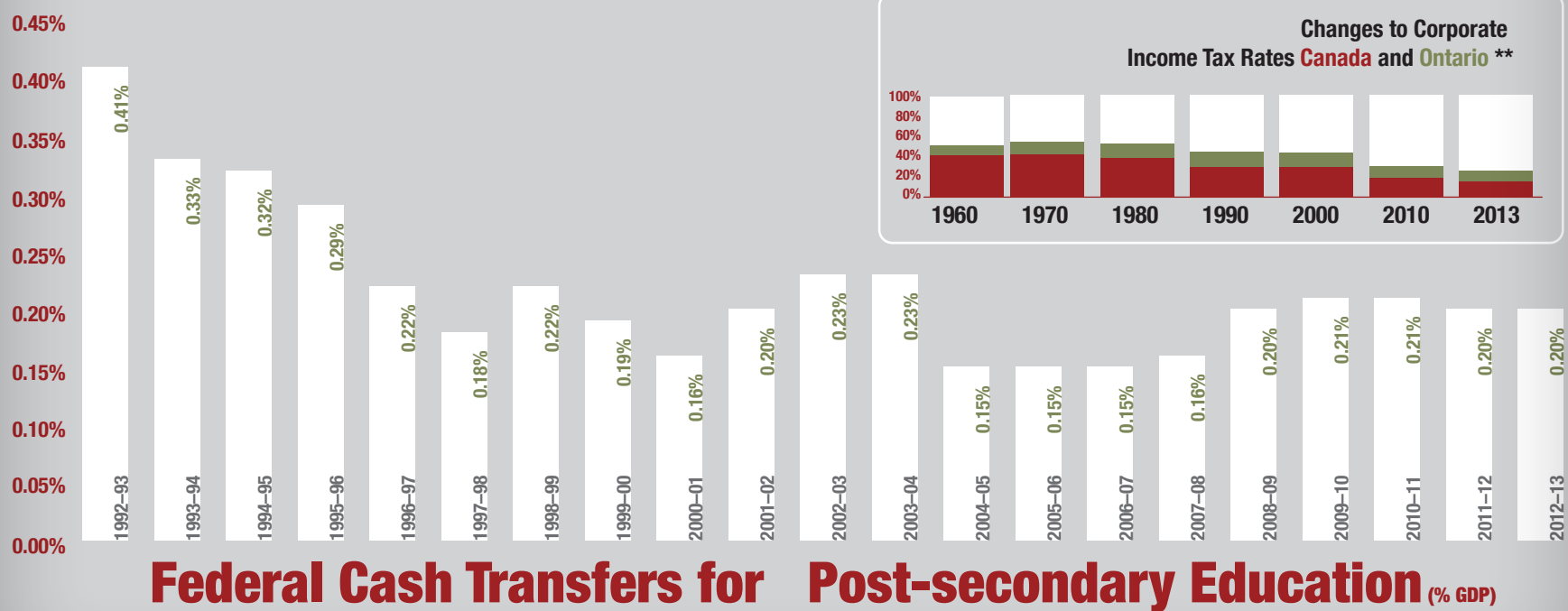
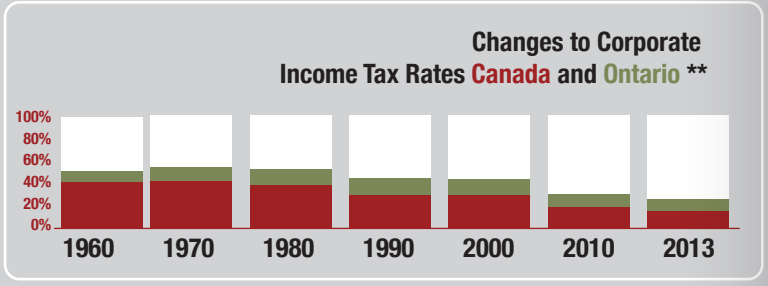
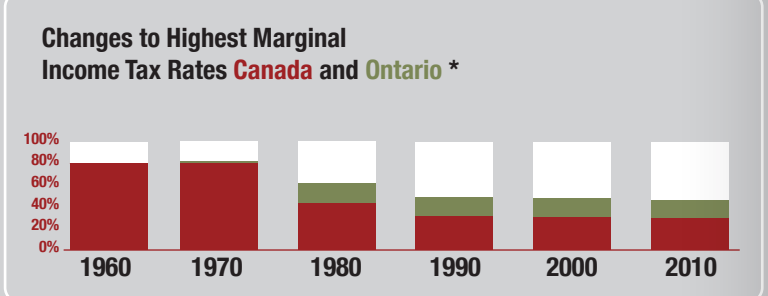
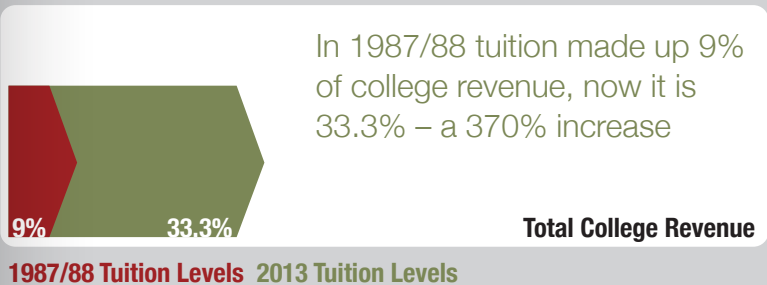
SK \$24,482

AB \$25,674



Colleges were once 75% funded by government, now government funding makes up less than 50% of their operating revenue†

Today Ontario spends the **least amount** per full time PSE student



tain quality education, has been impaired by insufficient government funding, and by recurring tensions between the need for a strong academic and innovative culture, and the presence of an autocratic, “industrial” management system.

Changes to Government Funding

Since their founding, the colleges have been significantly impacted by cuts to government funding. In the mid 1980s, a Progressive Conservative federal government began enacting neoliberal policies that cut funding to the provinces for post-secondary education, and that caused a resource crisis within the colleges.² Insufficient funding, coupled with faculty-management conflicts over workload and academic decision-making, led to a 1984 faculty strike. The resolution of this strike brought needed changes to the process of assigning faculty work, and also brought increased provincial funding. In addition, several reports on the college system, commissioned by the provincial government, advocated for a more collegial, collaborative approach to management.³

Despite a temporary influx of resources and improved workload formula, financial pressure on the colleges soon intensified. The election in 1995 of a Conservative provincial government, along with a succession of fiscally conservative governments federally, led to further cuts to post-secondary funding. Decreased funding was directly linked to a drastic reduction in government revenue caused by cuts to federal and provincial corporate taxes, and to the highest brackets of personal income tax. Over the past 15 years these cuts have reduced the government’s tax revenue as a percentage of GDP by 4%, leading to an approximately \$80 billion deficit in income.⁴

* (Brown & Mintz 2012:26) ** (Brown & Mintz 2012:28)† (CFS-O 2013a, Impact of Underfunding on Students)§ (Colleges Ontario 2005 Environmental Scan, p. 71)‡ (CAUT Almanac 2013 p. 3)§ (CFS-O 2013a, Impact of Underfunding on Students)¶

The Neoliberal College

In addition to cutting financial support for post-secondary education, provincial governments have also sought to re-make the colleges within a neoliberal framework. Changes have included the proliferation of private career colleges, a mandate to globalize college operations in terms of student recruitment and for-profit foreign partnerships, creation of a competitive domestic environment between colleges and universities, mass layoffs of full time faculty and reliance on part time workers, and increasing student tuition and corporate sponsorship as percentages of total college operating revenues. Most recently, changes to the colleges have included a massive push to expand online course delivery, a rapid increase in numbers of administration, and in administration salaries, and a mandate to “differentiate” the college sector to avoid “program duplication”.

Collective Bargaining

College faculty have adapted to the sweeping changes of the past 20 years as best they can, while maintaining their professional focus on student success. Through 19 rounds of collective bargaining, faculty have made key gains in their ability to maintain quality education, while only resorting to job action three times. However, despite faculty’s commitment to resolving concerns through negotiations, the lack of academic freedom in the faculty collective agreement has made maintaining standards increasingly difficult. Other challenges to quality include unsustainable workloads, the increasing use of non-full-time faculty, the expansion of college administration, and the proliferation of online course delivery.

Challenges Facing Quality Education

Unsustainable Workload

Excessive faculty workloads have a direct impact on the quality of education, as they reduce the time faculty have to interact with students and support their learning. In 2009, a government-appointed Task Force on Workload studied the daily activities of faculty, and concluded that the current formula for assigning faculty work does not account for the extra time associated with a high technology workplace, larger classes, and fewer full-time faculty.¹²

Today, other prevalent workload concerns include:

- insufficient time for developing, preparing and delivering online and blended courses
- growing expectations that faculty volunteer time for college promotional events
- increasing time spent mentoring part-time faculty
- unsustainable teaching loads for librarians
- unsustainable caseloads for counselors

Increase in Non-Full-Time Faculty

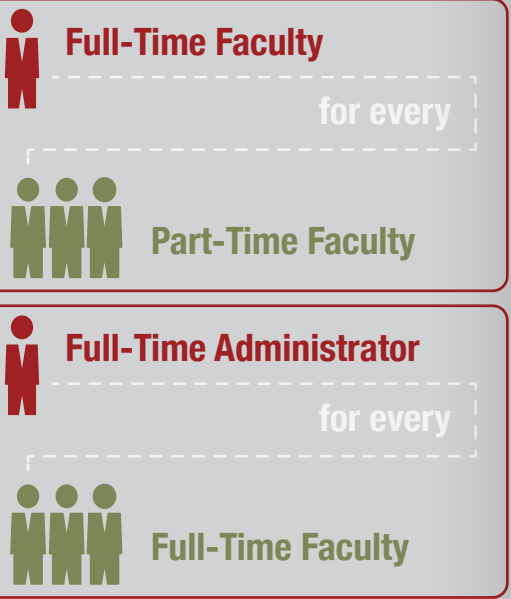
In the colleges today the ratio of full-time to part-time faculty is approximately 1 to 3. The lack of full-time faculty means less time for dealing with students, less time for course and program development, and a greater challenge to maintain academic standards. In addition, partial load faculty (teaching between 7 and 12 hours per week) are precarious workers who have no job security or seniority when it comes to applying for full-time jobs.

2012 Salary	
Algonquin +10.13%	\$333,497
Boréal +8.23%	\$242,925
Cambrian +6.30%	\$257,031
Canadore +8.32%	\$213,310
Centennial +11.57%	\$319,045
Confederation +16.07%	\$226,922
Conestoga +14.42%	\$409,900
Durham +20.17%	\$277,324
Fanshawe +9.51%	\$275,515
George Brown +10.69%	\$358,700
Georgian +10.67%	\$159,821
Humber +13.73%	\$427,916
La Cité +14.02%	\$256,229
Lambton +14.03%	\$249,786
Loyalist +8.53%	\$274,387
Mohawk +16.81%	\$275,515
Niagara +7.94%	\$329,224
Northern +11.18%	\$256,640
St. Clair +6.58%	\$300,124
St. Lawrence +8.07%	\$228,873
Sault +14.12%	\$284,181
Seneca +32.09%	\$396,173
Sheridan +19.91%	\$353,908
Sir Sandford Fleming +5.44%	\$279,313

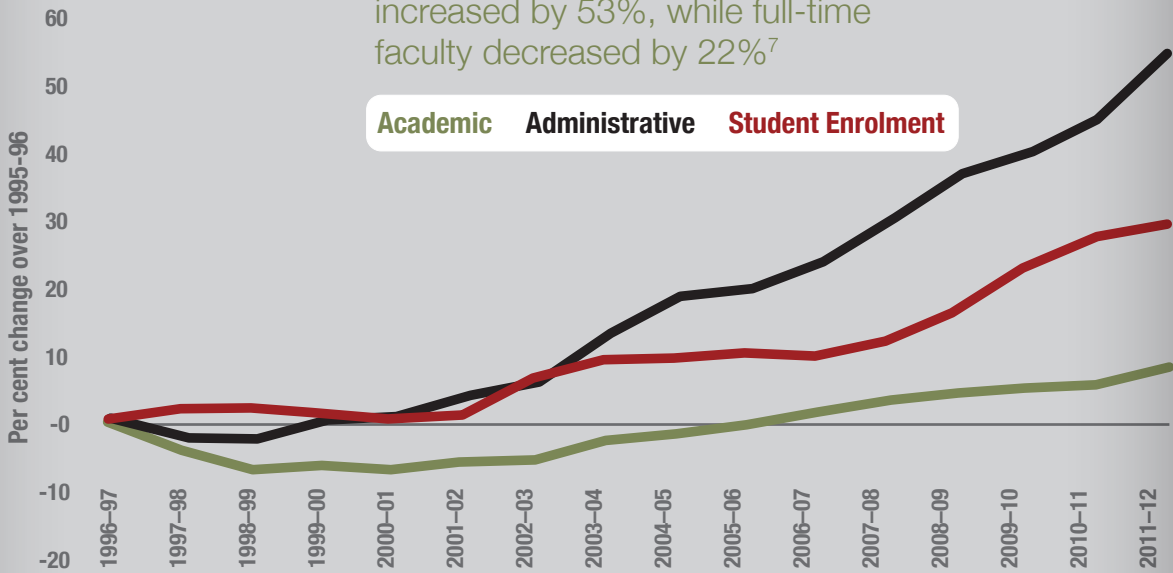
College Presidents' Average Yearly Salary Increase

based on 1996 through 2012 Sunshine Lists

In the college system today there is...



Between 1988/89 and 2004/05, full-time student enrolment increased by 53%, while full-time faculty decreased by 22%⁷



Changes in full-time college staff and full-time student enrolment

Sources: College Employer Council, Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and Colleges Ontario.

Expanding Administration

While overall government funding for the colleges is far below sustainable levels, what resources have been coming into the system have increasingly gone toward expanding full-time administration and increasing administration salaries. Between 1996/97 and 2011/12, the number of full-time college administrative staff has increased by 55% (Colleges Ontario 2013).¹³ In the colleges today there is now one full-time administrator for every three full-time faculty.¹⁴

Autocratic Management and Low Faculty Morale

In his 1985 report on work assignment in the CAATs, professor Michael Skolnik was struck by the poor morale of college faculty, and the incompatibility of an academic environment with an industrial management style. He noted:

What is perhaps most at issue here is the extent to which faculty are viewed and treated as responsible professionals whose judgment in academic matters is valued and whose opinions are sought. Faculty should not be seen as educational technicians who must be told in detail what to do. Effective management of the colleges does not require clocking faculty time as much as it does motivating, supporting, and involving faculty, and assessing educational outcomes, rather than inputs of time.¹⁵

Skolnik recommended a much more collegial approach to faculty-management relations; however, little change has been made in this direction. Today’s college faculty continue to feel undervalued, micro-managed, and marginalized from academic decisions. In addition, faculty who voice concerns about educational standards are being bullied, disciplined, and even having their employment terminated. The poor

state of faculty morale is evidenced by the growing number of grievances being filed against managers under the new discrimination/bullying/psychological harassment article in the collective agreement.

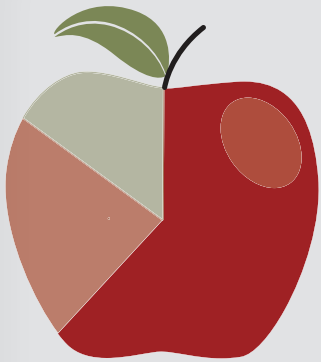
Public Opinion on College Faculty and Academic Freedom

For this research, two public opinion polls were commissioned through Vector Marketing. Both polls show strong public trust for college faculty in providing quality education, as well as support for faculty academic freedom and faculty control over online learning.

Online Course Delivery

In 2012 the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) published *Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Innovation, and Knowledge*, a "discussion paper" on "post-secondary differentiation".¹⁶ This report suggests sweeping reforms to Ontario's post-secondary system, designed to account for continued financial austerity. In order to cut costs, colleges are being encouraged to increase their online course offerings. Although faculty see a definite place for online classes in post-secondary, they also believe this delivery method is not an adequate replacement for face-to-face instruction, and that its use needs to be based on pedagogical criteria, not on budgetary considerations.

In addition, at each of the 24 CAATs, faculty identified a significant number of student complaints concerning on-line courses. Faculty report that many students are unable to learn effectively online, and that they feel they are being "ripped off" by required courses either being offered only online, or in "blended" format, in which a certain percentage of a course's face-to-face instruction time is replaced with online time.



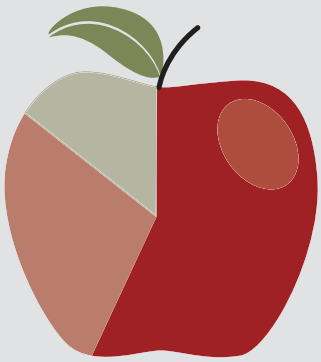
62% - College Professors
23% - College Administrators
15% - Ontario Government

College Professors most trusted to ensure quality

When asked who they trust the most to ensure that students at Ontario colleges get a high quality education, Ontarians chose college professors over administration or government.

Of particular note, among Ontarians aged 18 to 24, 76% chose college professors as most trusted to ensure quality of education.

When asked who they trust to decide when a course or program should be offered online, or in a traditional classroom, Ontarians again trust college professors over administration or government.



57% - College Professors
29% - College Administrators
14% - Ontario Government

83%

of Ontarians think that college professors, in defense of academic standards, should have the right to criticize college administration without fear of being punished or fired. 91% of Ontarians aged 18 to 24 think professors should have this right.

of Ontarians think that it is very important or important for college professors to determine what they teach in their classroom, what teaching methods they use, how students are graded, what textbooks and assignments are used, and other course requirements. Among Ontarians aged 18 to 24, 92% affirm the importance of faculty academic freedom.

74%

of Ontarians think that having a full-time professor is either very important or important for quality of education. Among Ontarians aged 18 to 24, the number preferring full-time professors is 83%.

81%

Cost Cutting and Commodification

Online classes are widely cited as a means to cut costs. Cost savings generally come through reducing the number of faculty, using part-time or less skilled faculty in course delivery, increasing class sizes, and reducing "program duplication" between colleges. As college professors have no academic freedom or intellectual property protection, all curriculum they develop can be sold by their employers to whatever third party the employer chooses – be it a publishing company, a private, for-profit college, or a technology company. In documents on the web site of Contact North, the consortium of Ontario colleges and universities that runs online courses through Ontario Learn, it is clear that online classes are seen as a means of reducing faculty and utilizing less qualified faculty.¹⁷ It is also clear that forming partnerships with massive educational corporations to provide content and delivery is one of Contact North's goals.¹⁸

Online is Not a Replacement for Face-to-Face Learning

The debate about the effectiveness of online and hybrid (blended) delivery in relation to face-to-face delivery is hotly contested. Two extensive studies performed by the Community College Research Centre (CCRC) at Columbia University showed that online and hybrid classes at Virginia and Washington State community colleges were less effective than face-to-face instruction. Both studies followed tens of thousands of students and hundreds of thousands of courses over four years.¹⁹ When considering the research on online learning's effectiveness, the following firm conclusions can be drawn:

- First, it is scientifically and empirically invalid to claim that, in community colleges, online and hybrid courses provide comparable or superior quality of education in relation to face-to-face courses.
- Second, it is clear that the deficits of online and hybrid courses in community colleges are greater for students who are male, low-socio-economic status, from minority groups, or less academically prepared.

Given these conclusions, two practices in relation to online and hybrid learning seem of primary importance:

- First, it is imperative that the use of online and hybrid courses be determined by pedagogical criteria and student success, not by simple "one size fits all", cost-cutting imperatives. These delivery methods can be effective for certain students and courses, and significantly detrimental to others. The use of non-face-to-face delivery should be assessed on a course by course and program by program basis, with academic faculty determining when and how they are used.
- Second, it is imperative that rigorous studies of comparative educational outcomes in online, hybrid, and face-to-face courses be conducted in Ontario colleges. This research should deal with the concerns raised by the significant critical literature on online education.

Academic Freedom

Ontario college faculty currently have no guaranteed academic freedom, and no ability to defend academic standards in the face of budget cuts and austerity. The lack of academic freedom threatens quality in several ways:

Lack of Faculty Control over Academic Decisions

Academic freedom includes the ability of faculty to determine what they teach, how they teach it, what materials they use, and how they evaluate students. In the colleges today all of these decisions are being increasingly made by management and by educational corporations.

Inability to Criticize Management Decisions and Advocate for Student Success

With no guaranteed academic freedom, faculty can't publicly criticize management decisions that compromise student learning or student safety. Faculty face management retaliation when speaking up for students who clearly don't want online learning, or who are otherwise being underserved by the college due to large class sizes, changes to curriculum, requirements to purchase expensive learning technologies, cancellation of popular, but less profitable programs, classroom health and safety, and increasing tuition fees.

No Intellectual Property Protection

It is widely noted that without intellectual property protection (IPP) there is a profound disincentive for intellectual workers to innovate, create, and develop new knowledge. The lack of faculty IPP places a chill on innovation in the college system, and creates a disincentive for faculty to bring their best knowledge, skill and experience to the courses that they teach.

Recommendations to Establish an Equal Partnership

Faculty need to be equal partners in order to meet the challenges facing college education today, and to ensure

that the CAATs continue to fulfill their original mandate of access, quality, and service to diverse communities. Being equal partners with college administration and the provincial government means faculty having a strong voice within the classroom, within the governance of each institution, and when setting priorities for the system as a whole. To this end, the report makes the following recommendations.

1. All-party Select Committee on Ontario Post-secondary Education

The first recommendation is for the provincial government to convene an all-party select committee to examine the present and future sustainability of the post-secondary system in Ontario, and to work closely with college faculty, university faculty, and students to address issues of funding, tuition, and student debt. The committee needs to consider the following proposed changes:

Commitment to Adequate Funding

- At the federal level, implement a Post-Secondary Education Act, as endorsed by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).²⁰ This Act would be modeled after the Canada Health Transfer, and would bring federal funding for post-secondary education back to 1992 levels, or 0.4% of GDP.
- At the provincial level, bring government funding per full-time post-secondary student up to the national average.

Commitment to Affordable Education

- As endorsed by the CFS and CFS-O, reduce college tuition fees to 1992 levels.²¹
- As endorsed by the CFS and CFS-O, cap college administrator salaries .²²

- As endorsed by the CFS and CFS-O, enact a program of federal student loan debt reduction intended to cut the amount of Canadian student debt in half.²³
- Reintroduce a comprehensive, need-based tuition grant program.²⁴

Commitment to Community-Centered Public Education

- End public-private campuses, and ensure that all new CAAT campuses in Ontario are fully publicly funded and staffed with CAAT-A faculty covered under the collective agreement.
- Give equal standing to faculty, along with colleges and the MTCU, in decisions affecting the development of the community college system. Immediately establish the Joint Task Force, as required under the faculty collective agreement whenever changes to college mandates occur, to deal with the issue of differentiation, and to discuss the recommendations in this report.
- Ensure that program and course offering diversity is maintained at the local level, and that individual colleges are able to determine how best to meet the educational needs of their community.
- Ensure continued funding and support for the unique needs of Northern and Francophone colleges. Evaluate the specific impact on these colleges from any mandate change proposed by the MTCU.
- Affirm federal and provincial funding sufficient to maintain appropriate statistics on the college system, including financing, operations, staffing, enrolment, student tuitions and student debt, and educational outcomes.

2. Academic Freedom, Staffing, and Workload in Faculty Collective Agreement

The second recommendation is that articles on academic freedom and intellectual property protection be included in the college faculty collective agreement. In addition, provisions to ensure adequate numbers of full-time faculty, and sustainable workloads must also be included.

Commitment to Faculty Academic Freedom

- Include academic freedom in the college faculty collective agreement, specifying faculty control over academic decisions related to course design, content, delivery, and evaluation.
- Include intellectual property protection in the faculty collective agreement.
- Affirm faculty control over how, where, and when online course delivery is utilized.

Commitment to Full-Time Staffing

- Plan to increase numbers of full-time faculty and maintain a minimum ratio within each college of full-time to part-time.
- Introduce into the collective agreement seniority for partial load faculty in terms of work assignments and hiring preference for full-time jobs.
- Introduce conversion language into the faculty collective agreement for part-time faculty.
- Ensure that all non-full-time faculty are allowed to organize into a union without interference and opposition from management or the provincial government.

Commitment to Sustainable Workload

Modify the faculty collective agreement to account for the additional workload implications of email communications, learning management system maintenance, developing, preparing and delivering courses through alternative methods (including online and blended delivery), and mentoring part-time faculty

3. Task Force on College Co-Governance

The third recommendation is that the province appoint a Task Force on College Co-Governance, including representatives from the college faculty union, the College Employer’s Council, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), and university administration. This task force would examine a process to establish institutional co-governance in the colleges.

- Examine the possibility of a bicameral governance structure in the CAATs province-wide. Each institution will have an Academic Senate as well as a Board of Governors, with the Senate responsible for academic decision-making.
- Bicameral governance will enable colleges to better determine institutional priorities, and to ensure that academic standards are not sacrificed in pursuit of cost-cutting imperatives.



Faculty and students are at the heart of college education; it’s time they played a greater role in determining the system’s future...

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