

**THE RAE REPORT IN
RETROSPECT:
A VIEW FROM THE COLLEGE SECTOR
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Report for OPSEU Local 110

Mary Catharine Lennon, Michael L. Skolnik and Glen A. Jones

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004, former Ontario Premier Bob Rae was invited to lead the Postsecondary Education Review to provide advice on the seemingly intractable job of reconciling the province' aspirations for a high quality, highly accessible and affordable postsecondary education system with the level of financial support that governments have felt able to provide for this endeavor. The report was considered extremely successful in providing 29 recommendations that were "sensitive to long-standing patterns of public opinion, articulated new public goals, [and] recognized the important role to be played by each major stakeholder."(Clark and Trick, 2006, p. 180).

As recommendations rather than policy initiatives, Rae's proposals were as likely to be disregarded or significantly modified as they were to be adopted as a strategy by the government. While it is impossible to consider the implications of having not done something, this report considers actions that were in different directions than those recommended in the report, as well as those that furthered the recommendations, in order to get a more complete picture of the impact of the report. For example, by design, omission or evolution, three agencies entered higher education landscape in the past decade: the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), a short-lived Research Council, and the recent emergence of Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), which have contributed to research in, and coordination of, Ontario's system, and perhaps influenced the direction of research.

The overall structure of the Ontario system has changed little since Rae was asked to provide his advice on system design. Along with calling for a new legislative framework, Rae recommended the reaffirmation of the College mandate to "to focus on occupational education and labour market needs, while continuing to allow applied degrees and institutional evolution" (Rae, 2005, p. 28). While neither of these recommendations were heeded, there have been modifications to the everyday activities of colleges, for example in apprenticeship programming, remedial education, bachelor's degree provision and research.

The most significant change to the college sector in the past 10 years is in the number of applications and enrollments. A key recommendation of Rae, and one that that was taken up by the

government, was to significantly increase participation. Adding approximately 50,000 students, expansion has essentially added the equivalent of a new Fanshawe College every two years in enrollments. In order to support the 21% increase of students (between 2004-2005 and 2012-2013), there has been a 29% increase in faculty – though nearly half of that is in part-time appointments.

Accountability and funding were the primary ways Rae recommended supporting the expansion of system. Multi-year Action Plans (MYAs) and the Multi-year Accountability Agreements (MYAAs) that were introduced as part of the Reaching Higher plan were a direct result of the Rae Report. By 2011, the MYAA had evolved into a data-collection tool, and a new more strategic instrument, the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) was introduced in 2012. While quality assurance was not an explicit concern for Rae, Ontario colleges today are responsible for complying with five different sets of binding accountability and quality assurance mechanisms managed by five different bodies.

On the topic of funding, the Rae Report recommended developing a new revenue framework. Noting that the Ontario system was underfunded compared to its Canadian and international peers, the report states “the goal should not focus on being first in spending...but on being first in quality” (p. 93). The government did not design a new funding framework, but did inject the system with additional money. Depending on which type of calculation is used, it seems college revenue per FTE is now below, or at the same level, as in 2005 when Rae called for a significant increase. Accordingly, Ontario has returned to last place amongst its Canadian peers in funding levels. Nonetheless, graduation rates have increased, and graduate and student satisfaction rates have improved, as have perceptions of educational and facility quality.

Many of the system challenges of 2005 remain significant issues in 2015. For example, without a clearly established legislative framework the system continues to revisit questions of governmental responsibility, expectations and long-term goals. Similarly, without an affirmation of the College mandate the colleges are increasingly responsible for a growing range of responsibilities. There are good and substantial reasons for the expanding role of the colleges. The problem is that they have occurred without a new funding framework to respect the financial requirements and implications, resulting in a college system with the same funding deficits Rae noted 10 years ago.

Report Findings and Questions of Particular Interest to the Union

1. The **2015 Retrospect Report** notes and charts a dramatic increase in part-time employment in the college system, an increase of 47% in this category since 2004/2005. The chief cause cited for this increase is ongoing funding constraints. **2015 Retrospect Report** authors note that per-student funding in Ontario has declined 16% since 2007-2008. The provincial government still has not developed a new funding framework recommended by the **2005 Rae Report**, and the crisis of underfunding in the colleges continues.
2. The **2005 Rae Report** repeated earlier calls for “significant improvements in college-to-university transfer,” and recommended that “if institutions cannot make progress under an umbrella of incentives, government should be prepared to mandate greater co-operation in the best interests of Ontario students.” Ten years later, there is little evidence of improvement in systemic transfer between colleges and universities, and we wonder whether the Ontario government’s failure to address this issue has not contributed to program duplication and competition between universities and colleges. The **2015 Retrospect Report** authors acknowledge that offering “baccalaureate degrees has led some colleges to compete directly with universities,” and they note that the Rae Report “gave no encouragement to these programs.”
3. The **2005 Rae Report** noted possible benefits of differentiation in the post-secondary system. The **2015 Retrospect Report** authors note that colleges, unlike universities, were “originally viewed as *local* institutions whose mission was to bring equivalent opportunities to the different communities and regions of the province,” This is arguably part of their differentiation, and the 2015 Retrospect Report recognizes that a possible focus of differentiation in the Ontario postsecondary system is recognizing distinctions between universities and colleges that have been undermined by “blurring the boundaries between sectors.”
4. The **2015 Retrospect Report** is critical of the duplication and multiplication of agencies responsible for regulating the college system. The authors identify five separate agencies currently regulating colleges with “little coordination and limited formal paths of communication between the agencies.” The authors further note that these agencies have so far been unable to address the issue of “[college programming] alignment with university programming.”
5. The **2015 Retrospect Report** summarizes the current situation for colleges as “expansions . . . without any consideration of their financial requirements.” We see the consequences of this lack of forward planning and regulatory coordination in the expansion of contingent employment among faculty, the confusion about our differentiation and mission, and the ongoing lack of coherence in transfer protocols between colleges and between colleges and universities.

