



MAKING POLICY IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, 1990-2007

A research project by Paul Axelrod, Roopa Desai-Trilokekar, Theresa Shanahan Richard Wellen

Introduction

Who makes university policy in Canada? How do governments allocate resources for post-secondary education? Education is a provincial responsibility, and yet historically the federal government has been deeply engaged in higher education. Why? Can the mysteries of decision-making in the public sector be unravelled and explained?

The Project

This SSHRC-funded project addresses these and other questions related to the making of public policy in Canadian post-secondary education through the period 1990 to 2007. This was a turbulent time featuring educational expansion, growing globalization and intense fiscal pressures. It was also a period of unprecedented federal initiatives in Canada higher education, including the creation of the Canada Foundation on Innovation, the Canada Research Chairs, and the Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Ontario eliminated grade 13, established a new university, and implemented the “Reaching Higher” program.

The study explores how such post-secondary educational policies were imagined, developed and implemented during this era in Ottawa and Ontario. It concentrates on five themes: funding structures and processes; research and development; accessibility and student assistance; labour market preparation; and internationalization. Through documentary research and dozens of interviews with individuals involved directly in the policy-making process, the study explores the nuts and bolts of policy development in the context of significant changes in the political and economic environment provincially, nationally and internationally.

As well as making an original scholarly contribution to the study of Canadian higher education, the study intends to shed light on federal-provincial relations.

- Were policies shaping research and development created in jurisdictional silos, did they overlap, or were they integrated and reconciled?
- Did these policies achieve their objectives?
- What were the interests underlying each of the policy areas and how did these compete with or complement each other?

Answers to these questions will contribute to the literature on policy analysis by offering an empirical basis for understanding the processes, determinants, and consequences of key policy choices in Canadian higher education. The project, we hope, will both enrich the historical record and offer insights to those engaged in educational planning for the future.

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