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McMASTER UNIVERSITY

MOHAWK COLLEGE



[BUILDING SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS]

Mohawk College and McMaster University have a long, proven history of successful collaborative academic programs. This paper identifies current and future initiatives, identifies best practices and challenges and makes recommendations to ensure future success.

I. Introduction

On January 17, 2011 the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Honourable John Milloy, announced a significant initiative to revamp the credit transfer system sector-wide. One significant component of this effort, also announced on January 17, was the creation of a Credit Transfer Innovation Fund with investment of about \$74 million over the next five years. This fund intends to speed the creation of a sector-wide system facilitating student course credit transfer from colleges to universities.

Mohawk College and McMaster University applaud the new initiative of the Ministry and see it as aligned with the long history of support for post-secondary education that has been a major thrust of the McGuinty government. Further, we understand that credit transfer issues have become quite important to Ontario students, as demonstrated, for example, by inclusion in the advocacy agenda of the Ontario Union of Student Associations (OUSA).

We agree with the Ministry that the mobility between post-secondary institutions is a systemic issue. Indeed, the ability to move from a college program to a university program involves some broad and complex issues, such as the readiness of the individual student to make the transition, the ability to map learning objectives from specific college courses to specific university courses, and the strong desire among all participants in this process to minimize the delay in obtaining a degree caused by the transition.

Ontario colleges and universities have a long history of academic collaboration. However, these collaborations can be difficult to create and nurture, at times resulting in tense relationships and disputes over academic authority. This has not been our experience with the McMaster University and Mohawk College partnership, which has been forged across a wide range of disciplines and has thrived despite changing Presidential leadership at both institutions. Further, the partnership continues to gain strength as new programs are created and more established programs are revised for curricular improvement.

The recently announced credit transfer initiative to establish broader consortia and facilitate transfer of students from multiple colleges to universities will introduce new challenges for college/university relationships. Indeed, given that one-to-one college/university partnerships have proven difficult in Ontario, we are concerned that the engagement of a larger set of partners with greater geographic distribution and potentially less in common with one another could lead to an unmanageable system. Our main concern is that a credit transfer system that is expanded too quickly will result in college students transferring to universities with skills, abilities and training that are

not aligned with the degree program requirements. While it may be possible to develop general guidelines that will work at a system level for some general programs, it may be equally possible that a system-wide approach to credit transfer across a wide range of diverse programs could falter from lack of attention to specific programmatic and student needs.

The Mohawk/McMaster partnership has been cited by HEQCO and the Ministry as one of the best college/university partnership in Ontario. It is from this vantage point that we seek to describe our programs, explain what we have found to be the best practices and the most serious challenges, and consider how one might build upon our experience as the college/university partnership leader to craft a system-wide partnership that ensures student success. We also believe that the system would be greatly enhanced by diversifying the possibilities for university/college partnerships. We therefore also offer to utilize our expertise to pilot additional degree completion programs locally, for potential expansion to other communities once shown to be successful.

In the next section, we will describe ongoing and developing collaborative programs between Mohawk College and McMaster University. This context will permit us, in the third section, to discuss what we have found to be best practices in establishing such programs. We will then discuss the obstacles we have been able to overcome and additional challenges we can foresee for sector-wide credit transfer relationships. While these challenges might not preclude the creation of a successful sector-wide credit transfer system, they should be considered at this early stage of development to ensure that we maximize the likelihood of success for students seeking to move from colleges to universities in Ontario. Finally, we will conclude this paper with recommendations for actions that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and the College University Consortium Council (CUCC) might take to ensure that a sector-wide credit transfer system is effective and successful.

II. Partnerships between McMaster University and Mohawk College

Mohawk College and McMaster University academic programs span a wide range of disciplines and levels, from apprenticeship programs to PhD degrees. We intentionally keep one another well informed about academic initiatives so that each of us can serve as a single point of contact for the continuum of academic experiences for our students. This helps us in our interactions with the business and public sectors in our region, as they frequently need to engage post-secondary institutions at multiple levels. Through our integrated programs we facilitate such interactions - a win-win-win situation for students, potential employers and academic institutions. This is a proven advantage for economic development in partnership with local, regional and provincial governments.

In addition to the breadth of experience offered through Mohawk/McMaster collaborative programs, we are pleased that our partnership speaks to a number of issues of significant interest to the Ministry. For instance:

- Our partnership has permitted us to be very efficient in the use of equipment because we share major, expensive items rather than purchasing duplicate items for our two institutions. This is, for example, a key way to save costs associated with our innovative and capital intensive Medical Radiation Sciences program.
- We have found that our collaborative Nursing program is attractive to Aboriginal students and we are building on this experience to better draw underserved students to a post-secondary education and from undergraduate degrees to graduate degrees.

An important development under discussion is dual admission into our programs. Retention of students who are admitted to a university program at the same time that they are accepted into a college program is higher than that of students only admitted to a college program, regardless of whether they ultimately enroll in a degree program. We are currently investigating this opportunity for International students wanting to complete a Business degree. Another example of dual admission is a new program in which international students admitted to McMaster University for graduate degree programs who are not native speakers of English will be simultaneously admitted to English as a Second Language certificate program at Mohawk College. This builds on the strengths of both institutions, eliminates duplication of teaching and services, and leads to increased student success.

Below we briefly describe each of our partnership programs.

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) Degree Program

The McMaster University, Mohawk College and Conestoga College collaboration was built on a strong foundation and history of excellence in nursing education at all three institutions. This collaboration implemented the first program intake in 2000. In 2005, the minimum requirement in Ontario for entry to practice as a Registered Nurse (RN) became a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. In response to this requirement, a number of collaborative degree programs were established between colleges and universities across Ontario. The McMaster – Mohawk – Conestoga Collaboration is still considered the best in the province.

The McMaster, Mohawk and Conestoga model integrates college and university courses throughout all four years of the program. This complete integration not only maximizes each partner's strengths, but illustrates to students how to work within an integrated team model right from their first day in the BScN program. This is in contrast to "2+2" models where students complete two years at the college and then two years at the university, with limited integration of the college and university courses throughout the

program and where the use of the term collaborative in those partnerships is not reflective of program delivery.

The program is currently offered at three locations: McMaster University, the Mohawk-McMaster Institute for Applied Health Sciences and Conestoga College. The program is supported through a collaborative office which provides overall administrative support and coordination activities for the three sites.

The program governance model includes the BScN Steering Committee and has a number of sub-committees, including a standing curriculum committee. This governance model provides the ongoing structure for formal communication that allows the collaboration to succeed. There is a genuine recognition and respect of each partner's contribution to the overall goals of the program. As the first truly integrated program between McMaster University and Mohawk College, the BScN program has served as a model for more recent program integrations in other disciplines.

Students from all partner sites receive a degree from McMaster University at a common Nursing convocation ceremony.

The latest addition to the collaboration is a bridging program from Registered Practical Nurse (PN) to BScN and discussions are underway with Six Nations Polytechnic to add an aboriginal PN to BScN stream.

Medical Radiation Sciences

The first students were admitted into the joint McMaster/Mohawk Medical Radiation Sciences program in 2004.

The program is intensive, with the equivalent of 3.5 years of academic work interspersed with three 15-week clinical practicum sessions. After their common first year, students specialize in one of Radiography, Radiation Therapy, or Ultrasonography. After 4 years of study (including two summer terms), the students receive both an Ontario College Advanced Diploma in Medical Radiation Sciences from Mohawk, and a McMaster Bachelor of Medical Radiation Sciences degree.

The program is accredited by the Canadian Medical Association and graduates are certified to have passed the competencies set out by the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists. After writing the relevant professional exams, students are qualified to work in one of the fastest-growing fields in the Ontario health care sector.

This program was made possible by the construction of the McMaster/Mohawk Institute of Applied Health Sciences, physically located on the McMaster campus but run jointly by both institutions. Our state-of-the-art X-ray and ultrasound equipment suites

are located in this building, where students practice the necessary skills before participating in clinical placements.

The program is overseen by a Steering Committee that has members from both partner institutions.

The program has been highly successful, with an average 90%+ success rate of our graduates in passing their qualification exams and finding employment in these careers. This is due in great part to the close working relationship between the researchers in McMaster's Medical Physics and Applied Radiation Sciences department, the clinical faculty in Mohawk's School of Health Sciences, and the clinical supervisors at hospitals across the province.

Bachelor of Technology (BTech)

The Bachelor of Technology (BTech) programs were first developed in 1996 with one program in Manufacturing Technology as a partnership between Mohawk College and McMaster University to meet private-sector needs and to create explicit, transparent and consistent degree completion pathways for graduates from Mohawk's Advanced Technology programs. More recently, four-year programs were established with direct entry from high school.

The Bachelor of Technology (BTech) programs provide a degree-level technological education that is distinct from that offered in Bachelor of Engineering programs. These programs are more oriented to applications in specific technologies, with less emphasis on broader mathematical and scientific foundations than a corresponding engineering program. Graduates have considerably more breadth and depth in their area of technology than graduates of college Advanced Technology diploma programs. There are currently seven BTech programs, three of which offer high school graduates the opportunity to obtain both a college diploma and a university degree in four years, and four that were designed to provide pathways for students with Advanced Technology diplomas to obtain a McMaster University degree.

The BTech program is located primarily in the Engineering Technology Building at McMaster University, though students use other facilities elsewhere at McMaster and at Mohawk College.

The programs are overseen by the BTech Steering Committee, which includes members from both institutions.

The program has been very successful, with enrolments increasing every year. Graduates easily find employment in the private and public sectors, and many have become licensed Professional Engineers. Some have enrolled in Masters and PhD programs.

Music

The Music partnership between Mohawk and McMaster dates back more than 25 years and is meant to facilitate the movement of students between the institutions and provide greater opportunities for them.

Mohawk graduates, who have completed the Diploma in Applied Music, are admitted to McMaster without auditions. This has been an important retention tool for Mohawk. This ongoing partnership allows Mohawk's performers to further develop their academic background and to enjoy McMaster's wider range of ensemble opportunities: McMaster Chamber Orchestra, McMaster Concert Band, McMaster Percussion Ensemble, and McMaster Choir.

Students who have participated in the Mohawk/McMaster Music partnership have distinguished themselves as professional performers in the GTA and beyond. Many of the graduates are also admitted to Teachers' Colleges.

Professional Communication (new)

The proposed Mohawk-McMaster Bachelor in Professional Communication (BPC) will offer a problem-based, experiential curriculum that extends the classroom into the professional communication industry.

Students will benefit from the complementary strengths of the two institutions. Mohawk College's faculty members are steeped in the practical aspects of communications, with frontline practitioners with expertise in a variety of communications disciplines from new media production to communication arts. The BPC will capitalize upon Mohawk's existing strengths in related fields such as public relations, journalism and broadcasting. McMaster has many active research and academic initiatives, including a joint Master of Communications Management degree with the internationally-prominent S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication at Syracuse University, and the Communications Metrics Laboratory, a joint endeavour with Cormex Research, a leading media measurement and content analysis firm. In addition, McMaster houses the Journal of Professional Communication - Canada's first journal dedicated to bridging the gap between Academia and the working environment of professional communication.

The BPC curriculum will be designed to meet and exceed all of the targets for industry endorsement by relevant professional organizations such as the Canadian Public Relations Society's new Pathways to the Profession document. Students will graduate with a McMaster degree and a Mohawk diploma, as well as a significant portfolio of work.

Applied Ethics (new)

Mohawk College and McMaster University are in early discussions to establish a joint program in Applied Ethics, which will combine the theoretical strengths in McMaster's Department of Philosophy with the professional and applied orientation of Mohawk College.

The principal objective of the program will be to prepare graduates for an increasingly complex real-world environment where theoretical ethical concepts in law, business, health care and media often clash with realities and where boundaries of ethical behaviour can become blurred.

The program will allow graduates to pursue careers in the public and private sectors, as well as with non-governmental agencies.

Health and Community Services (new)

McMaster and Mohawk College are jointly developing a degree completion program in Health and Community Services.

The following are four interrelated goals for the program: (1) to provide career development opportunities for current and former diploma students studying/working in areas of health and social services; (2) to produce individuals capable of integrating and linking systems using both applied and theoretical knowledge; (3) to increase the knowledge, expertise and leadership potential across a range of local health and social community agencies and organizations, thereby increasing their capacity to work collaboratively to address the challenges facing communities with regard to health and social well-being; and, (4) to prepare students to pursue advanced professional or academic educational opportunities.

The program will graduate individuals who would have the knowledge and skills to help various health and social service sectors to engage with citizens, using knowledge about the social determinants of health and the mobilization of community resources, to promote health, well-being, and broader community issues of social justice.

Joint Social Sciences Degree/Diploma (new)

McMaster University is collaborating with Mohawk College to develop unique academic programs that integrate a university degree with an applied college certificate. The proposed collaborative programs will allow students to complete either a 3-year BA or 4-year Honours BA and an applied certificate at the same time and in an integrated way.

These 3- and 4-year undergraduate 'degree and certificate' programs are intended to give Social Sciences students at McMaster the opportunity to integrate their university program of study with an applied college certificate in a specific and complementary

field. Initially, students will have the opportunity to combine their chosen degree with one of three applied certificates: Public Relations, Business or Not-for-Profit Leadership.

These collaborative programs will accomplish three goals: (1) make graduates more 'job ready' and more capable of adapting to changes in the labour market; (2) help students make the connections between their conceptual and critical university education and the hands-on, skills-based learning associated with college curriculum and real world situations; and, (3) expand the range of academic and career pathways available to graduates.

ESL Preparation for Graduate Studies (new)

McMaster University and Mohawk College have begun a pilot program to provide international graduate student applicants who have been admitted to the Walter G. Booth School of Engineering Practice with remedial language skills.

The program consists of a series of courses that allows candidates to progressively master English language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing. An individualized program of study will be created for each student.

Upon completion of the program, candidates will be given a final exit assessment, which will be forwarded to McMaster and enable the student to continue with their graduate program.

General Arts and Sciences "2+2" Degree Program (new)

McMaster University and Mohawk College are in early discussions on an agreement where graduates of the General Arts and Sciences (GAS) program at Mohawk College will be granted direct admission to the third year of a four-year program in social science or humanities at McMaster University.

Mohawk College's two-year General Arts and Science program is designed to prepare graduates for successful transition to university. It serves as a good indicator of how well students will do once they have been accepted at university. It is expected that a significant majority of the seventy annual General Arts and Sciences graduates will take advantage of a formal "2+2" agreement between the two institutions.

Under the proposed agreement, Mohawk GAS graduates will go on to study social sciences or humanities at McMaster University in fields of Anthropology, History, Labour Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Sociology.

III. Best Practices

In the creation and nurturing of the Mohawk/McMaster collaborative programs, we have learned a considerable amount that can now be proposed as best practices.

Rate of Growth

Perhaps the most important lesson learned in the Mohawk/McMaster partnership is to start small and build on successes. The hallmark of the successful partnership is that everyone is engaged and motivations are aligned. Starting with one or two academic programs permitted our institutions to focus on student needs and learning, and on how to work well together. By consciously building trust and experience we have maintained harmony in our programs while expanding the offerings.

Impetus for Program

We have also learned that a successful partnership evolves from development of program concepts and course curriculum with teams of professors from both the college and the university, regardless of where the idea originated. Most of our collaborative programs have been established because faculty members from Mohawk and McMaster saw educational advantages for students in a unique program and invested their time and effort in its development. Our experience has been that programs are most stable and harmonious when faculty members who will be actively engaged in them drive their creation from the start. This avoids conflicts and allows the team to focus on the prime goal – maximizing student outcomes.

Infrastructure

Another lesson from the successful Mohawk/McMaster partnership programs is that it is critically important to provide infrastructure support for curriculum development at the start of a new partnership program. It is essential that partnership programs not duplicate programs already offered at one of our institutions. Thus, to achieve the real benefits of collaboration, it is important that time and effort be spent to fully develop curricula to distinguish new programs and meet academic goals. This is not achievable on a reasonable time scale without significant investment.

Governance

In well run, smoothly functioning academic departments there are occasional disagreements about appropriate curricula for programs. In programs that rely on instructors from multiple institutions, each with its own values and mission, the chance of academic disagreements rises significantly. In a successful academic program it is essential that such differences are voiced and resolved in a collaborative fashion. We have found that this is easiest to achieve by crafting steering committees for each academic program and ensuring that these committees meet regularly. These committees have mutually agreed upon terms of reference documents that are reviewed annually.

Models for Collaboration

There are many models of college/university collaborative programs and we have tried, several of these successfully. Programs vary from degree completion programs, in which students complete a college diploma and then are given advanced entry into an existing or customized degree program, to truly integrated programs in which curricula are jointly developed by the two institutions and students are largely unaware of which institution is responsible for any particular course. Our work has strongly indicated that integrated programs produce seamless and high quality student experiences. Integrated programs also forge the strongest partnerships as they engage both institutions in thinking about the whole program rather than their part of the program. It is important to note that there are good reasons to consider other sorts of programs, such as dual admission or 2+2 programs. In particular, we find it easy to imagine a 2+2 program as a prelude, a sort of pilot, for a truly integrated program that will require significant investment for curriculum development.

Building on Particular Strengths

As Mohawk/McMaster partnership programs have developed we have followed a simple rule that we view as best practice, namely, that we focus on programs where the strengths of each institution suggest that a partnership program would be better for students than the program that either institution could mount alone. Related to this philosophy is the practice of crafting programs in which each institution is responsible for the portions of the program which most relate to their strengths. This approach speaks of the mutual respect we have developed and our singular focus on meaningful partnership opportunities.

Geographic Proximity

Another lesson from Mohawk/McMaster collaborative programs is that it is extremely helpful to share space and, where appropriate, equipment. While the Mohawk/McMaster partnership has been hugely successful, it does not encompass all collaborations that McMaster University has with colleges. Among these other collaborations, many of which have been successful, geographic dispersion has been the single biggest challenge. It makes chance meetings infrequent and provides an impediment to casual conversation about the program. It also can make it impossible to share experimental facilities, creating unintended disparities between campuses (and students at those campuses) offering the same collaborative program.

Status of Students

We have treated students in collaborative programs as full-time student members of *both* institutions. This has proactively eliminated potential obstacles related to use of students services, although it has added to institutional expenses significantly.

Institutional Support

Collaborative programs are more difficult to establish and maintain than traditional programs controlled by a single institution. Although it is clear that they offer unique advantages to students by combining the strengths of each institution, the extra time and effort required of instructors and administrators is difficult to justify financially. We have found that it is absolutely critical for partnerships to be supported at multiple levels within each institution, ideally, starting from the Presidential level to the departmental/programmatic level. With aligned goals and support, it is far easier to press beyond impediments in establishing and maintaining/revising collaborative programs. The Mohawk/McMaster partnership has benefitted from very strong support from top levels down, with alignment of our value statements and goals at all levels of leadership and participants. Both partners have articulated clearly the importance of the partnership in their strategic plans.

Communication

We have learned that collaborative academic programs require communication and trust that extends well beyond academic issues. Mohawk and McMaster are routinely in communication about provincial post-secondary goals, our plans in Hamilton, and labour issues. Through this constant communication we build trust that creates a positive atmosphere for continuing improvements of programs and the partnership. This trust occasionally requires each partner to forego opportunities that might potentially damage the partnership – an action each institution has been willing to take.

Community Partnerships

Finally, among the important lessons from Mohawk/McMaster partnerships is that a strong partnership of two entities can encourage engagement with third parties in the local community – both the public sector and local businesses. We anticipate that this sort of broader partnership will be cemented as we fully develop and implement plans for a downtown Hamilton site for collaborative programs in the digital media area. These plans have engaged businesses new to Hamilton, both academic institutions, the City of Hamilton, and MTCU.

IV. Challenges in One-to-One Partnerships

The creation of collaborative academic programs between Mohawk College and McMaster University has required us to overcome significant challenges. Here we mention some obstacles that continue to impact our programs.

Transitions

Although both Mohawk College and McMaster University have been focused on student success as the key driver to academic programs, the transition from college to university

(or vice versa) can be difficult for any individual student for reasons both academic and social. The key measures of success in transitions from college to university should be student retention rates and degree completion rates. Ideally, students who have started at college and transitioned to university should have the same retention and degree completion rates as their peers who start and finish at university.

Support for Integration

Numerous transfer students encounter difficulty with social and academic integration, particularly if transfer is in the college to university direction, although the findings vary by jurisdiction, institution and student characteristics. Many experience “transfer shock” and difficulties adjusting to the nature and culture of the receiving institution. It appears that support services for transfer students are not as prevalent as those for direct entry students, and those services that do exist are in some instances unknown to or under-utilized by students. If transfer is to be made a priority, then the provision of adequate support services to ensure the success of transfer students must also be considered a priority, both at the sending institution to advise students about the process, prepare them for the transition and counsel them about potential post-graduation outcomes of their further education choices, and at the receiving institution to promote success in their pursuit of further higher education (Forging Pathways, HEQCO, November 2010). Changing this pattern will require investment in new transition services for students and careful monitoring. The fact that our collaborative students are able to make use of the services at both institutions is recognition of the difference that this makes in student retention and success.

Accreditation

We have encountered difficulties in obtaining accreditation of our some of our collaborative programs. For example, Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board has not been receptive to the accreditation of our BTech programs. This is in part due to the design of the BTech programs, which have different objectives from traditional Engineering programs, but is also a result of the different expectations at colleges and universities for instructor credentials. As a result, graduates of BTech programs do not have a clear pathway to achieving licensure. We continue to work on this problem, which we know will plague similar professional programs throughout Ontario. Our goal is to establish a pathway for students that will enable them to be licensed in fields in which licensure traditionally requires graduation from an accredited program. We further wish to accomplish this while maintaining efficient academic programs such as we now have rather than requiring students to effectively repeat courses at Mohawk and McMaster.

It is important to note that accreditation was not an issue with our collaborative Nursing degree. The directive for the development of this degree program came from the

Ministry, which was a direct benefit in this case. Perhaps accredited programs need to be considered separately from non-accredited programs in the credit transfer process.

Competition With Existing Programs

To date, the Mohawk/McMaster partnership has avoided conflicts arising from collaborative programs competing with existing programs at one of the partner institutions. However, as our joint programs mature and become more extensive, this issue could become more problematic. For example, we have already observed a significant number of the students transferring between the BTech programs and Engineering programs at McMaster University. While such opportunities may be desirable for the students, they could undermine the viability of some programs.

Start-up Funding

A key impediment to college/university partnerships has been the lack of provincial support for start-up costs including curriculum development and equipment. Our BTech programs, for example, were delayed by roughly three years until we were able to work out a start-up funding model with MTCU. Core to this issue is simply that our post-secondary education systems in Ontario were not designed to facilitate college/university partnerships. Funding within MTCU is separated for colleges and universities with no sustaining funding set aside to bridge between the two.

Compatibility of Information Technology Systems

A continuing problem for the Mohawk/McMaster partnership is that we have different information technology systems. Thus, we don't easily share student information, even something as rudimentary as student marks in courses in our collaborative programs. McMaster University is behind Mohawk College in terms of development of student-friendly systems. McMaster is now working to improve its systems, and communication with Mohawk systems is an important consideration. However, with no external support for this effort, we estimate that the transition will require 5-6 years to accomplish fully, a timeframe that threatens the expansion of our successful programs. For the next several years, students will continue to feel significant frustration with their inability to easily roam between our two institutions in terms of registration and financial tools and web presence.

V. Additional Challenges of a Sector-Wide Credit Transfer Initiative

The experience of the Mohawk/McMaster collaboration on academic programs provides insight into challenges that might become quite important in the development of a sector-wide credit transfer system. A huge challenge for a sector-wide credit transfer system will be presented simply by *geographic dispersion*. A Province-wide system will link institutions that are far from one another – possibly a very good

development for the sector. However, it will also make it extremely difficult to have frequent meetings, to share equipment, and to develop the necessary personal relationships upon which successful partnerships are based. Without these necessary conditions for success, we fear that there will be huge variations in academic programs that are meant to be the same, with a net result that students trying to transfer from some colleges will not be ready to go to some universities. Geographic dispersion will also make it much more difficult to resolve academic issues, as relationships will be between large groups and require formal meetings or teleconferences rather than frequent informal conversations between a couple of individuals.

Another problem we foresee in a sector-wide credit transfer system is that with increasing size will come *decreasing flexibility in curricula*. Fields of study necessarily change with time, as knowledge and practices in an area change. How does one accomplish curriculum revision when expectations are established sector-wide? If this problem is not resolved, the creation of a sector-wide credit transfer system could signal the beginning of an Ontario system which is increasingly less able to respond to change. This would rapidly cause the decay of the Ontario post-secondary education system.

Similar to the curricular change challenge is the issue of *student readiness*. Fundamentally, we assume that the goal of establishing a sector-wide credit transfer system is to facilitate student success. If the system forces or encourages student transfers when individual students are not ready for the transition, then the system must be able to respond appropriately. Each student has individual needs and requires individual attention. Unless the system is established with encouragement for gains in student success, there is a danger that partnering institutions will ignore student achievement or blame partners for problems. How we monitor and handle problems that arise in student readiness to transfer will be a telling measure of the chance of a sector-wide credit transfer system accomplishing its goals long term.

The initiative presented on January 17 is an important beginning for Ontario. However, it focuses on a single pathway – college to university transfer. Our recent experience includes growing university to college transfers and well as inter-college and inter-university transfers. At a minimum, it would be advisable for any system created for the college to university transfer to recognize the likelihood of enhancing the system later to include these *other transfer options*. This would save the Province from either creating duplicate systems or systems optimized for one pathway that are problematic for other transfer options.

An important component of academic programs worldwide is *quality assurance*. Indeed, Ontario universities have embarked on a new quality assurance process which guides the review of all academic programs – undergraduate and graduate. Ontario's universities and colleges do not use the same quality assurance process. As a consequence, it will be important to consider the impact of increasing college to university transfer student numbers on quality assurance processes. What body, for

instance, is responsible for ensuring the quality of courses for which we have established credit transfer and how are these reviewed? In the newly adopted university quality assurance framework, a credit transfer system between multiple colleges and multiple universities would require review of every college partner as part of each university partner's review.

In addition to the tension between the provincial priority of quality assurance and a sector-wide credit transfer system, there is also some discord between the provincial aim of *differentiation* and a sector-wide credit transfer system. Indeed, Mohawk College and McMaster University would argue that a key unique characteristic they have is their good partnership. It differentiates us from other college/university partnerships and enables us to occupy a unique niche in Ontario by building on the strengths of both institutions. Excellent college/university partnerships should be a differentiator and therefore encouraged only where it has been or is likely to be successful.

Finally, we note that the creation of a sector-wide credit transfer system will introduce issues around *educational intellectual property* that must be resolved. The current Mohawk/McMaster partnership has avoided this problem through clarity of purpose and intent as curricula were developed. However, on a sector-wide basis, a faculty member developing a curriculum might well insist that his/her property cannot be simply taken for use by everyone else. This issue has proven quite problematic worldwide and will require careful thought before a sector-wide system is implemented.

Although we have mentioned a few of the challenges we anticipate with a sector-wide credit transfer system, we must also note that there will almost certainly be serious issues we have not anticipated here. Some will be technical (such as the development of a system compatible with student information systems at all colleges and universities), while others will be academic, pedagogical, labour-related, or student-experience driven.

VI. Recommendations

We reiterate our support for the MTCU initiative to facilitate college to university transfers. However, we recognize that establishing a sector-wide credit transfer system will present thorny problems which must be resolved if the initiative is to accomplish the goal of seamless mobility for students and successful degree completion. Based on our analysis of the situation, we have four overarching recommendations to make.

First, we recommend that work begin now to *identify and remove impediments to the establishment of a sector-wide credit transfer system*. Some of these impediments have been identified in this paper but others that we have not discussed will certainly arise. It would be advisable to assemble a team of representatives from successful college/university partnerships to help identify these challenges and means of

overcoming them. It would also be useful to identify a collaborative and consultative process for resolving issues that arise as the system is established and after it has been in use for some time.

Second, we recommend that the current sector-wide credit transfer system initiative *define appropriate governance structures* to ensure that the system can operate effectively. The concept of sector-wide credit transfer sounds straightforward, but as in any initiative incorporating many partners; it will be exceedingly difficult to build a consensus and to make changes once the system is put in place. It will be critical that the structure anticipate the need for curriculum review and revision, and define a mechanism for accomplishing this effectively and efficiently.

Third, while we well understand the frustration of Provincial leaders and some students with the lack of a sector-wide system, we would urge MTCU to *move in a step-wise manner* on this program rather than moving quickly to develop a system that might ultimately increase frustrations rather than achieve stated goals. As a prudent measure, we strongly urge MTCU to first choose, support and study a small number of relevant pilot programs as defined in the Credit Transfer Innovation Fund document, for credit transfer sector-wide. This will permit MTCU to benefit from lessons learned in the pilot programs and alter plans before the system is fully developed.

Finally, we believe that student mobility goes well beyond college to university transfers, so we recommend that as a sector-wide college to university credit transfer system is developed, we *consider the eventual expansion to college to college, university to university, and university to college transfers*. This will create a system able to be applied universally in the sector, and enhance the Ministry's stated goals.

In summary, we find the Provincial focus on college/university partnerships exciting and long overdue. We are delighted to participate in discussions of the future of such partnerships and remain anxious to aid the Ministry in accomplishing their goals. We hope that this paper is helpful to those currently engaged in considering college/university relationships and look forward to continued dialogue.