

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

**ALBERTA'S PUBLIC COLLEGES 1992-2002:
RESPONDING TO THE CAMPUS ALBERTA POLICY FRAMEWORK**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
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in

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September 12, 2003.

To my mom, Elaine Barnes, who has always been and will always be the consummate educator: committed, creative and courageous . . . with love.

ABSTRACT

The decade 1992-2002 was a turbulent time for the Alberta public college system. As we look back at that decade, the vision of the Campus Alberta policy framework becomes an overarching theme that describes the various policy instruments that have been introduced and the institutional changes that have occurred. This study examined these changes through the voices of the vice presidents academic within the college system. This interview data were analyzed using two bodies of literature. The first was in the area of policy analysis. The work of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), Pal (1995), and Bleiklie (2000) guided interpretation of the data. Their focus on the role of the individual in policy formation and how policy networks interact within policy communities informed an understanding of the complex nature of this policy change. The model of Levin (2001) provided an understanding of the widespread nature of educational reform in the world today and how the Campus Alberta initiative was reflected in similar changes occurring elsewhere. Institutional theory was the second theoretical literature used to guide the data analysis. Scott's (1995) work on the three pillars of institutional change provided a framework in which to discuss the findings, while DiMaggio's (1997) work focused on the cognitive aspects of institutional change and the interaction of players within an institutional sector.

What emerged from the data was a description of the complex policy network in which the colleges operate as well as a number of tensions that exist within the system as a result of a decade of change. These included such tensions as competition versus collaboration, learner focus versus economic focus and a market versus regulated environment and academic autonomy versus centralized control.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Campus Alberta policy framework was introduced to the Alberta post-secondary system in the late 1990s. It came on the heels of a period of tremendous turbulence in the system that saw the publicly funded colleges and universities realize deep cuts to their operating budgets while absorbing changes to the way education was planned and delivered in the province. At the time many viewed Campus Alberta as government rhetoric meant to reflect a new emphasis on collaboration and system-wide thinking. Although Campus Alberta is not a policy per se, it has been used to promote policy change. It has become a 'slogan' meant to provide a vision for the future of the provincial learning system.

Policy change is a complex process that takes place over time and involves a number of players (Levin, 2001; Pal, 1995; Quinney, 1998; Sabatier, 1993). In this research, I argue that the Campus Alberta policy has been in development for almost a decade and is an example of new public management practice that sees governments pursue policy change through widespread consultation and the input of many stakeholders. This process, of multiple perspectives merging together to achieve a common outcome, either through coercion or normative processes, often creates tension for the stakeholders involved. These tensions exist because of the diversity of beliefs among stakeholders as well as contradictions within the policy changes themselves. As a policy change proceeds, stakeholders will experience policy learning that alters their attitudes towards the organizational structures in which they work.

A group of managers within the current Alberta post-secondary policy environment were interviewed for this research and asked to describe their role in

the development of the Campus Alberta policy framework. Two aspects of this role particularly interested me: how these managers perceived their role in the formation of the policy and how they described their need to reconcile any tension that might exist around this particular policy.

A second aspect of the research took a closer look at the Campus Alberta policy framework itself. By examining the documentation that has surrounded this policy framework, and the policy regulations and discussion that have occurred as a result of it, I have tried to summarize the changes that have occurred and are currently facing the learning system in Alberta. Using organization literature that looks at institutional change, I will attempt to explain the current changes occurring in the Alberta post-secondary system using Richard Scott's (1991, 1995) model of institutional processes.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The government of Alberta has invested considerable resources consulting with various stakeholders in the province to elicit input to the Campus Alberta policy framework initiative. One group that is affected by its development is the senior academic officers (most often the vice president academic) at the seventeen public colleges and technical institutes within the province. These individuals are responsible for interpreting and implementing any government policy that affects academic planning and delivery in their organizations. In this role they draw on existing structures within their organizations that offer successful frameworks for change. In many cases, the organizational culture of each college influences the

development and retention of these structures, and ensures new structures grow to be an appropriate 'fit'.

These managers, however, do not operate within a vacuum. Their colleges are embedded within a larger provincial learning system. In both rural and urban settings, colleges and technical institutes have a number of essential stakeholders they interact with regularly. These external actors strongly influence the nature of college programming in a number of ways. An example is industry or professional advisory groups and their influence on the content of programming. External to this immediate stakeholder group is the larger policy community of the entire college sector and beyond that the education and training sector in general. Each of these communities is embedded within larger communities that are in turn embedded in larger communities again. Similar pressures influence these different communities, such as the health of the economy or the political climate of the day. At the same time, unique local pressures have impact, such as the socio-economic demographic of the community (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Scharpf, 1997).

Mawhinney (1993) advocates for research that acknowledges complexity as follows:

Although a substantial body of research on educational policy change has accumulated during the past decades, much of it has focused on specific issues and narrow time frames – and thus has failed to provide guidance for policy development and change beyond a rather narrow setting. Scholars need to examine the interaction of the variety of factors influencing policy change through the lenses of more general theoretical frameworks. (p. 59)

The purpose of my study is to describe how senior academic officers from Alberta's public colleges perceive their role and responsibilities in the formation and

implementation of the Campus Alberta vision, a policy direction that directly and strongly affected their own organization. The results of the study describe a policy environment that continues to be filled with tensions and contradictions that have emerged during the process of implementation of this new policy framework.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What opportunities and constraints do the senior academic officers perceive when integrating new government policy into their own college structure?
2. What are the senior academic officers' understandings of the Campus Alberta concept? What beliefs are inherent in their description?
3. How do the senior academic officers place themselves and their organizations within the Campus Alberta construct? What beliefs are inherent in their description?
4. How do the senior academic officers describe their role in the formation and implementation of Campus Alberta? What beliefs are inherent in their description?
5. What level of power to resist or effect change do the senior academic officers perceive themselves having in their relationship with the policy-makers?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Much policy research occurs after policy change has been implemented. The analysis is then 'backward looking' to identify the various causes and effects that occurred along the way. The goal for this research is to describe how college leaders, specifically senior academic officers, perceived their role in government-mandated policy formation and implementation. These individuals were asked to reflect on their role in the development of the current Campus Alberta policy framework. By interpreting those meanings and re-presenting them in some fashion, I hope to bring a new understanding to key audiences of the research. Gaskell (1988) describes the value of locating research in the context of the various actors involved:

If policy research is conceived of as addressing a democratic polity with conflicting interest groups and shifting agendas instead of addressing the benevolent administrator with a defined problem, much broader uses for research in the political process open up. Researchers can explore issues from many potentially conflicting points of view . . . It can clarify, legitimate, and expand the political agendas these groups start with instead of simply solving problems for them . . . What matters is that the research is located, contextualized, and addressed to a specific audience. (p. 413)

These reflections could help prepare current and future college leaders with some insights into the constraints and challenges of the role. It should also provide a deeper understanding of the larger sector community in which the senior academic officers work. Although the context for this research was Alberta, the findings could be relevant to academic leaders in other provincial learning systems in Canada and perhaps other countries. Educational reform is occurring in many places throughout

the Western world and although the specific changes may differ, the effect of those changes and the tensions they create amongst the stakeholders are similar everywhere.

The policy models presented in this research (Bleiklie, 2000; Pal, 1995; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) all place the actor at the centre of the policy change process. The administrators interviewed for this research are critical players in the Campus Alberta Policy Framework as it is conceptualized today. Their beliefs, as well as their vision of the policy in practice, are critical to its successful implementation. It is hoped that the reflections captured in this research will provide current and future policy makers and college administrators in Alberta with some valuable data that will form a foundation for the implementation of the Campus Alberta Policy Framework and perhaps future policy.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used throughout this study.

Advocacy coalitions

- The various sub-systems or constellations of actors within a policy community whose values and beliefs influence policy change.

Institutions

- "Systems of rules that structure the courses of actions that a set of actors may choose. In this definition we would, however, include not only formal legal rules that are sanctioned by the court system and the machinery of the state, but also social norms that actors will generally respect and whose violation will be sanctioned by loss of reputation, social disapproval, withdrawal of cooperation and rewards, or even ostracism" (Scharpf, 1997, p. 38).

Isomorphism

- “The process by which organizations come to resemble one another.” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 341). The tendency of organizations to adopt or adapt institutionalized structures as a means of gaining legitimacy.

Policy community

- A policy environment in which responsibility for decision-making is shared between government and groups and where policy outputs are reasonably stable and predictable over time (Marshall, 1995).

Policy network

- Used to describe the relationship between the actors and institutions within a policy community. Can be conceptualized as webs of interest, cooperation and conflict (Pal, 1995).

Policy regime

- Can be defined as dynamic actor networks. Policy regimes are dynamic in the sense that the actors and the relationship between them change over time (Bleiklie, 2000, p.62).

Senior academic officers

- The vice presidents academic of the public colleges and technical institutes in Alberta meet regularly as the Senior Academic Officers group. They have a rotating chair appointed annually, and regular seats for two Alberta Learning employees: the Executive Director of Institutional and Community Services, Adult Learning Division and the Director of the Public Institutions Branch. The Council of Presidents and Board Chairs also have their own regular meetings with representation from one of the Assistant Deputy Ministers, Deputy Minister or Minister.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

This document is divided into seven chapters. The first is the introduction. The next three chapters provide a theoretical orientation to this research with an overview of the relevant literature and description of the research methodology used. The fifth and sixth chapters present the data within a theoretical context. The fifth chapter provides an overview of the policy network and how the participants describe their place within it. This chapter focuses on the data that describe the policy environment and its impact on the participants. Chapter Six looks more closely at the meaning that the participants attach to the Campus Alberta policy and their role in its development and implementation. The final chapter presents a discussion of the findings related to each of the five research questions identified in chapter one. This is followed by a summary discussion that draws together the findings into emerging themes. Finally, the chapter closes with recommendations for further research and personal reflections.

CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

There are four primary areas of literature that provide context for this study. The next two chapters review this literature and its relevance to the study. Chapter Two sets the context for the formation of the Campus Alberta policy framework. Following this is a brief overview of recent literature looking at educational reform. Chapter Three looks at specific areas of policy analysis and then, focusing on the context in which the study participants operate, includes relevant literature on institutional and resource dependency theory.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Lifelong Learning

A number of factors in the world of work and education are convincing policy makers around that world that *lifelong learning* is a concept that has become critical to the health of the world economy. In the latter part of the last century, learning occurring outside of formal educational organizations was considered a luxury, a product of the leisure time we had created for ourselves through the advances in technology and efficiency. Recent critics argue, however, that in today's rapidly changing world, "lifelong learning is fast becoming not a luxury but a necessity" (Hasan, 1999, p.54).

Many governments around the world have begun to look at implementing policy that acknowledges the concept of lifelong learning. A Canadian government publication describes lifelong learning as:

A conceptual framework and organizing principle for imagining, planning and implementing reform of the existing education and training systems to enable:

- Purposeful and systematic learning opportunities for individuals throughout their lives;
- Individuals to learn wherever, whenever, and in modes appropriate to their learning styles and needs; and,
- Use of the total education and training resources (both formal and non-formal sectors) of the nation.

It is also a social goal which envisages a learning society in which the pervasive cultural value facilitates and celebrates learning in all forms¹.

(Faris, 1995)

More recently, the federal department of Human Resource Development and Employment (HRDC) has released *Canada's Innovation Strategy* (2002), which outlines new policy direction for the Liberal government regarding lifelong learning. The first part of this strategy, entitled *Knowledge Matters*, maintains that without a strong commitment to lifelong learning by business and industry as well as all citizens of Canada, our economy and our place as a desirable country to live in will be compromised. "By providing opportunities for all Canadians to learn and develop their skills and abilities, we can achieve our commitment to economic growth and prosperity and demonstrate our social values of inclusion and equality" (p.6). The

¹ **Formal and Non-formal Sectors:** in Canada the public sector, systematic providers of education and training, and related credentials (formal) private or voluntary providers of education and training
Informal Learning: learning outside of formal and non-formal settings, often self-initiated and self-directed or acquired through the mass media or natural social settings.

premise behind lifelong learning is that a productive workforce relies on the continuous learning of its workers. Whereas previously it was enough for individuals to complete their formal education before entering the labour force, continual changes in technology combined with rapid expansion of knowledge, has meant that workers feel pressured to pursue learning activities throughout their lifetime in order to maintain employment that supports their chosen standard of living. Hand-in-hand with this premise is the belief that it is the responsibility of all members of society, be they learners, workers, corporations or government, to work together to ensure that access to learning is in place, where it needs to be, when it needs to be. "To remain competitive and keep up with the accelerating pace of technological change, Canada must continuously renew and upgrade the skills of its workforce. We can no longer assume that the skills acquired in youth will carry workers through their active lives. Rather, the working life of most adults must be a period of continuous learning" (Human Resource Development Canada, 2002, p.37).

If we unbundle the *lifelong learning* concept, we begin to see how its various aspects could impact policy. First we have the idea of *lifelong* education. The traditional view of learning is that it is divided into formal and informal structures. These include preschool education, public school education (K-12), vocational or post-secondary education (college or university or technical school) community education, continuing education and professional continuing education. In addition, and recently more explicitly, we have workplace-learning or the formalized delivery of on-the-job training.

"The growing importance of adult education in this framework for lifelong learning raises many issues about the institutional relationships between the formal

education sector catering for young people and the more diffuse, heterogeneous provisions of continuing education” (Tuijnman, 1999, p.15). Non-formal adult learning has often been a route taken by those individuals in society who have been unsuccessful in education or work.

One of the cornerstones of the lifelong learning rhetoric is that “education and training are seen as a system” (Hasan, 2000, p.61). Like the federal government, the Alberta government has used the concept of lifelong learning to bring business and industry to the table as important stakeholders in post-secondary education. In 1999, the Minister of Advanced Education convened a forum of stakeholders to discuss the learning system in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2000a). At this forum he brought together educational leaders along with business and industry, community members and learners. This was a pivotal event in the learning system in Alberta, because it meant that the division between formal and informal education was blurring. It was a clear demonstration that the government felt that workplace training was as important to the economic health of the province as training delivered by traditional public sector institutions.

An important belief amongst lifelong learning proponents is that this system will work best if there is collaboration amongst the various stakeholders to build a sense of shared responsibility. “A vast and inclusive concept of lifelong learning holds certain appeal to policy makers, in part because it can serve to obscure attempts to define clearly what educational goals should be pursued and who should be responsible for which specific provisions and actions” (Tuijnman, 1999, p. 7). As we will see, this research demonstrates how far down this road the Alberta government has gone. By bringing business and industry to the table in a variety of

forums (Minister's forums combined with community roundtables, consultations for Standing policy committees and other venues), the government has clearly placed that stakeholder group at the forefront of policy decisions regarding education.

Campus Alberta

Prior to 1972, there was no coordination of post-secondary programs centralized within a single government department in Alberta. Educational organizations worked somewhat autonomously, developing programming in response to community needs. There were few formal systems in place to regulate programming, enrolment or achievement results from the post-secondary or community adult learning sectors.

In 1972, the Commission on Educational Planning released a report that set the course for post-secondary education in the province to this day. The Worth (1972) report presented a look into Alberta's future by providing a social, economic and technological forecast.

The bulk of the Worth report looked at a future direction for education in Alberta. The term *lifelong learning* was used frequently and defined as "a commitment to extend education on a continuing, though intermittent, basis throughout the lifetime of each citizen, according to individual needs and desires" (Worth, 1972, p.37). The Commission made a number of recommendations for restructuring the governance and delivery of education in the province. One recommendation was already in place with the creation of the Advanced Education Department in 1971. Under this department, the various programs of adult learning

were brought together from other government departments. These included: schools within correction facilities, all health education (nursing, nursing aides, etc), trade schools, forest technology, outdoor, and cultural education (Nussbaumer, 1976).

One other highlight of the Worth report was the recommendation that the new Department of Advanced Education should have the authority "to remove obstacles to mobility of students among post-secondary institutions" (Jones, 1997, p.76). This led to the creation of the Program Coordination Policy in 1974, a policy that still influences department decisions today. The purpose of this policy was to give the new department a role in coordinating programs throughout the system.

Over the next 20 years the Department of Advanced Education moved incrementally towards establishing mechanisms that would enhance system-wide coordination. In 1974, the Alberta Council of Admissions and Transfers was established to formalize and encourage the transfer of student credits from colleges to universities. In 1975, Advanced Education merged with Alberta Manpower, locating a human resource planning function under the department's umbrella.

During the 1980s, a number of new structures were created under the auspices of Advanced Education. These included the establishment of the community consortia (originally five, now four) throughout the province to coordinate the delivery of post-secondary programs to remote areas not served by colleges. In 1983 the Private Colleges accreditation board was established, which led to private colleges receiving authority to grant baccalaureate degrees. In 1989, the Guidelines for System Development Policy document was implemented, which updated the earlier Program Coordination policy, and initiated the discussion around colleges granting degrees.

In 1992, as the Government of Alberta began its fiscal restructuring, (cutbacks in education of 20% between 1992 and 1997) another document was released by a government-appointed task force, entitled: *For all of our futures: strategies for the future of post-secondary education in Alberta* (Advanced Education and Career Development, 1992). This task force, made up of academics, private colleges and educational planners was asked to "look at the future of the post-secondary education system in Alberta in light of both fiscal and strategic concerns" (1992, p.1). The content of this document was far-reaching. It reflected a significant shift in thinking towards a stronger entrepreneurial approach to education, while reinforcing the vision of a provincial learning system that maximized accessibility and accountability and ensured quality and responsiveness. It proposed a market-driven education system with very few government controls, where the consumer would determine product, quality and price.

In 1994, the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development in Alberta released the *New Directions*² white paper; a document intended to combine the various initiatives from the previous two decades. *New Directions* was developed through province-wide consultation and produced four broad goals for post-secondary education in Alberta: *accessibility, responsiveness, affordability and accountability*. It had a strong emphasis on creating a learning system that was focused on the learner, not the educational provider. *New Directions* contained 22 strategies for achieving the four goals. One important strategy was the introduction of funding envelopes to administer public institution funding. These were:

² The forerunner to this document was a draft document entitled Access Through Innovation released for consultation and response in the spring of 1994.

1. The *Accessibility Envelope*: to add new seats to the post-secondary system (suspended in 2002). Originally, \$47 million was allocated to create 10,000 additional spaces between 1994 and 1997. Science programs saw the largest growth in new full-time equivalent (FTE) spaces with 2350 FTEs. Other programs also grew: computing science (717 FTEs), agriculture (536 FTEs), environmental studies (608 FTEs), technologies (245 FTEs), manufacturing (248 FTEs), business (624 FTEs), management (490 FTEs) and the humanities (889 FTEs) (AECD, 1996). In January 1999, \$51 million from a new Access Fund was allocated to increase student spaces in information and communications technology (ICT) programs (Barnetson, 2000).
2. The *Infrastructure Renewal Envelope*: to fund investment in approved equipment and the upgrading and replacement of equipment and facilities.
3. The *Learning Enhancement Envelope*: to integrate technology in the learner-teaching process. The *Learning Enhancement Envelope* was intended to provide \$10 million per year from 1996/97 to 2001/02 to encourage institutions to develop alternative opportunities for adult learners through technology. It was closed in 2000 in a round of Alberta Learning funding cuts.
4. The *Research Excellence Envelope*: to support research excellence at universities only (although this is currently under review and may be expanded to include community colleges and technical institutes).
5. The *Performance Envelope*: to link funding to performance through the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (under review 2002-2003).

In addition to the introduction of envelope funding, the government introduced new accountability measures in the form of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in 1993. The department of Advanced Education and Career Development (now Alberta Learning), "linked funding of post-secondary institutions to KPI achievement,

which introduced a new sense of competition among institutions” (Kerr, 2000, p. 2). This occurred concurrently with the development of the Government Accountability Act finalized by the Alberta Treasury in 1996 (Alberta Legislature, 1996). The process of developing performance measures was done through committees, which were established by Advanced Education and Career Development during 1994. Four goals were identified to guide the development:

1. Consistency and comparability within and across sectors,
2. Comparison down to the program level because funding is awarded on that basis,
3. Publication of results as the Department wanted to be seen increasing public access to information,
4. A focus on outcome measures (Kerr, 2000).

In 1996, manuals were created to guide the process. Over the following two years, pilot data were gathered and refinements made. In May 1996 KPIs were adopted that emphasised instruction, administration, and research (Kerr, 2000). In July of 1997, the performance envelope funding was awarded based on submitted KPI data³.

During the years 1994-1998, the government of Alberta concentrated on internal restructuring. The result in May 1999 was the creation of three super ministries (Alberta Infrastructure, Alberta Learning, and Alberta Human Resources and Employment) that subsumed a number of previously autonomous departments. This restructuring created a new environment for post-secondary education in

³ The KPI benchmarks are currently under review. The goal is to build flexibility into the benchmarks to accommodate different organizational mandates.

Alberta, which demanded increased communication and collaboration between these three ministries. Alberta Learning was now responsible for program coordination and education policy; Alberta Infrastructure for all public works facilities including schools, colleges and universities; while Alberta Human Resources and Employment administered Social Services, the Student Finance Board and the Labour Market Development training programs as well as the former department of Labour (News release, May 25, 1999).

In 1998, Premier Klein spoke publicly for the first time about the vision of Campus Alberta:

Our vision is for Alberta to become like one big campus where students enrolled in one post-secondary institution can take courses from any college or university in the province, either on-site or on-line from their homes, or on the job. We want to make lifelong learning a reality in this province.

(Advanced Education and Career Development, 1998)

In the 1998-99 Annual Report from Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, there is reference to the Campus Alberta 'vision'. The report notes that planning and discussion with partners was continuing on the Campus Alberta vision with the goal of creating a seamless learning system within the province. The Campus Alberta vision is also mentioned in the 2000-2003 Alberta Learning Business Plan, again with an emphasis on flexibility, responsiveness, collaboration and partnerships (Alberta Learning, 2000b).

In the initial Campus Alberta document released for consultation by Minister Clint Dunford in 1998, four (revised⁴) goals for the Adult Learning system were identified:

- Accessibility
- Responsiveness and relevance
- Research excellence
- Affordability

Since 1998, *lifelong learning* and Campus Alberta have become prominent terms in government rhetoric (Alberta Learning, 2000a; Alberta Learning 2001a; Alberta Learning, 2002a). In 1999, after the merger of the departments of Education and Advanced Education under Alberta Learning, the new Deputy Minister Maria David-Evans, referred to Campus Alberta as an established government strategy for the post-secondary system (Svidal, 1999).

Minister Oberg convened a Minister's forum on lifelong learning in October 1999. The report released in March 2000 described the participants' vision for a 'cradle to grave' learning system in Alberta. There was strong emphasis in this document on collaboration and the creation of a "flexible-learning system that supports seamless and quality learning experiences – removing barriers and thinking creatively about how best to support the individual and their unique-learning needs" (Alberta Learning, 2000a). There is also repeated mention of efficiency and working within financial constraints. Prior learning assessment and recognition is mentioned in this report as well as the idea of portable credits. We also see reference to the

⁴ Revised from the original goals identified in the New Directions (1994) document.

need for multiple providers beyond traditional institutions and non-traditional baccalaureate and graduate degrees.

Minister Oberg convened a second symposium in October 2000. It was entitled *Campus Alberta Symposium – Results Through Collaboration*. The introduction to the Symposium report states that the Ministry would use the outcomes of the symposium to develop the overall *Campus Alberta Policy Framework* and refine the strategies and directions for the 2001-2004 Business Plan.

The afternoon of the first day of the *Campus Alberta Symposium* was devoted to the presentation of successful partnerships already in development. During the second day of the symposium, participants were asked to provide feedback on what they felt was needed to accomplish the vision of Campus Alberta. "Several participants cited the absence of infrastructure, communications vehicles and a clear consistent vision for collaboration....Several commented that the benefits of collaboration must be clear to all. . . that the benefit to the *learner*, not the system must be especially clear" (Alberta Learning, 2001a, p.9).

The language in the symposium report (Alberta Learning, 2001a) restates the goals of *accessibility, responsiveness and relevance, research excellence and affordability*. There is also an emphasis on the learner being at the centre of the vision, as well as the need for collaboration amongst all parts of the learning system. Dr. Oberg "challenged participants to work collaboratively on new ways of delivering quality learning and to realize that there is no need for Alberta's learning partners to compete with each other. There is enough competition coming from outside the province" (Alberta Learning, 2001a, p.4). This remark highlights a contradiction within the Campus Alberta concept that created some tension for the higher

education sector. On the one hand the government was encouraging collaboration through funding envelopes and key performance awards. The Access Fund, particularly in its early days, included strong encouragement for new program ideas that involved two or more colleges developing and delivering joint programs. Funding decisions for Access Funding were made on a point system, and many colleges pursued partnerships with each other in order to leverage their proposals. In the case of the Learning Enhancement Envelope (LEE), which was designed to build technology infrastructure throughout the province, partnerships were virtually mandated as part of the early proposal process. In this case, colleges were told that in order to receive approval for new projects, colleges would have to submit collaborative projects.

At the same time, the government was encouraging competition by eliminating college regionalization and opening the market to private providers from within and outside the province. In the early days of the community college movement in Alberta, regional colleges were expected to provide a breadth of training to their immediate community. In the rural areas this meant colleges provided programming in academic upgrading, university transfer as well as vocational, apprenticeship and technical training. Because these colleges were situated in rural communities throughout the province, duplication of programming naturally occurred. With the new vision of a provincially integrated system, the government was discouraging this duplication by not approving any new programming that replicated or was similar to existing programs. If duplicate program proposals came in, colleges were asked to work together. If colleges asked

for approval to develop a program that already existed in another college, they were asked to explore brokering arrangements.

The 2001-2004 Alberta Learning business plan, released in April 2001, gives strong emphasis to the concept of partnership, collaboration and system-wide planning. There is only one reference to Campus Alberta in the first goal of *High quality learning opportunities* (2001b, p.7). Under this goal a strategy for “increasing responsiveness of learning programs and learner support to targeted groups” is to: “develop strategies to implement Campus Alberta” (2001b, p.7).

In April 2002, two documents were released which affirmed the Campus Alberta policy concept. The first, *People and prosperity: accomplishments and outlooks* is an update to the 1997 document *People and Prosperity: a human resource strategy for Albertans*. The later document reports on the progress towards achievement of the six goals outlined in 1997. The third goal which is ‘promoting continuous learning’ mentions the performance envelope incentives and the Campus Alberta partnerships being developed as a “network of inter-dependent institutions that builds on best practices and individual strengths to delivery sustainable, quality lifelong learning and research” (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p.14).

The second document entitled *Campus Alberta: a policy framework* was released in April 2002. This document affirms the principles developed over the decade from 1992. It emphasizes the concept of lifelong learning and outlines four key factors driving the Campus Alberta framework:

- Transition to the knowledge economy
- Globalization
- Full use of potential and existing workforces

- Societal understanding that learning supports democracy and helps individuals achieve other objectives in their lives (Alberta Learning, 2002a, p.1).

The framework is focused on a learner-centred system that encourages collaboration and seamlessness with the goal of keeping Alberta competitive in the global marketplace. The Campus Alberta principles are identified as:

1. *Learner-centred*: activities of the learning system support learners' participation in learning and the achievement of learning outcomes,
2. *Collaborative*: Alberta learning system stakeholders work together to achieve common goals at the system-wide and local levels,
3. *Accessible*: Albertans have equitable access to quality learning opportunities,
4. *Innovative*: new practices in teaching, learning and collaboration are explored and assessed to meet learners' needs,
5. *Responsive*: the learning system anticipates and meets learners' needs for what learning opportunities are offered, how they are delivered and how learning is supported.

As mentioned earlier, the Alberta government has imposed significant funding reductions on the learning system in Alberta. Barnetson (2000), in his description of the restructured funding structures that were created as part of the performance based funding model, provides a summary of these reductions as follows:

As part of the province's deficit and debt elimination strategies, government spending on higher education funding was reduced by 21% over three years beginning in 1994 (Alberta Advanced Education and Career

Development, 1994). This reduction was consistent with a long-term trend that saw real-dollar, per-student grants decline by 45.8% between 1982 and 1997 (See Table 1).

Table 1
Real-dollar, per-student government grants, 1982 to 1997 (Barnetson, 2000 p.60)

Year	Operations Grant (\$)	Enrollment (FTE)	Grant per FTE (\$)	Grant per FTE (1997\$)
1982/83	725,081,000	78,677	9,215	14,551
1983/84	703,968,000	83,712	8,409	12,648
1984/85	717,201,000	86,519	8,290	12,110
1985/86	756,260,000	87,941	8,600	12,237
1986/87	716,231,400	90,743	7,893	10,861
1987/88	688,254,400	93,686	7,346	9,727
1988/89	716,191,700	96,208	7,444	9,603
1989/90	755,016,700	96,202	7,848	9,724
1990/91	778,011,700	97,823	7,953	9,321
1991/92	807,974,872	98,287	8,221	9,111
1992/93	833,373,052	102,592	8,123	8,879
1993/94	826,155,450	102,909	8,028	8,670
1994/95	755,505,949	103,141	7,325	7,808
1995/96	715,761,719	105,727	6,770	7,054
1996/97	834,262,000	107,842	7,736	7,890

Note. Operating grants for 1982/83 to 1988/89 have been adjusted to include Capital Renewal Grants; capital and operating grants were combined in

1990. Enrollment numbers from 1982/83 to 1988/89 have been adjusted to compensate for changing definitions of full-time equivalent students.

The table above demonstrates the reductions in funding that occurred for post-secondary education in Alberta during the 1990s. These reductions were transpiring not just in education, but across publicly funded sectors of health and social services as well as all other departments of government. The interesting element in the Campus Alberta discussion was that although it was occurring within a policy environment of fiscal restraint and financial cutback, the primary thrust of the rhetoric was not economic, but rather how the vision would benefit the learner and have a positive impact on society. This idea of using the rhetoric of individual benefits from policy change while downplaying more realistic economic arguments, will be discussed further as the findings from this study are analyzed in chapters five and six.

Although there has not been much public criticism of the Campus Alberta concept, there has been some. The Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA) newsletter had a front piece article entitled "Will the real Campus Alberta please stand up?" in which the association accused the government of having a double standard (ACIFA, 2001, p.1). The article asked why on the one hand Alberta Learning was encouraging collaboration, while on the other hand allowing some public colleges to deliver programs outside their geographic region in direct competition to the colleges already in the area (not to mention private providers). ACIFA also pointed out that the government had allowed out-of-province and out-of-country organizations to set up campuses in Alberta.

Educational Reform

An important step in contextualizing this study was to reflect on the broader environmental changes that were occurring in the 1990s. The movement of educational reform was one that happened not only in Alberta, but across Canada and in many Western nations around the world. The impetus for the reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s came from a neoliberal ideology that saw governments in the West making changes to decentralize education on the one hand, while implementing policy instruments that gave governments more control over educational outcomes. The principle puts decision-making and power in the hands of stakeholders while implementing government policies focused on efficiency and fiscal restraint (Gibbins & Youngman, 1996).

As Western countries moved towards a neoliberal ideology in governance, governments began to question the costs and outcomes of their educational systems. Emerging from the dissatisfaction of the 1980s that led to a strong shift to conservatism across the west, educational organizations were faced with increasing corporate and government intervention under the assumption that education systems could become greater drivers of the economic engine. This external intervention meant that educational organizations and their leadership had decreasing autonomy over their own operations and outcomes (Kachur & Harrison, 1999; Levin, 2001). This change resulted in control over educational delivery being dispersed to other stakeholders such as business, industry, government and the learners themselves. Business models began to seep into the practise of delivering education as government policies began to mandate accountability measures (Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). "Rather than deliver services directly, government would establish

clear expectations for service agencies and then closely and publicly monitor their operations” (Kerr, 2000, p. 9).

Although most of the literature regarding educational reforms refers to the public K-12 education system, the post-secondary system was not immune to change, and similar reform policies to those that were being implemented at the K-12 level were also being introduced to the post-secondary system across Canada. As the documents discussed earlier in this chapter attest, governments were moving towards a more market-driven environment that ostensibly placed the client or learner at the centre of policy design. However, the needs of other stakeholder clients, such as business and industry, also became central to this policy discussion. The rhetoric emphasized the role of stakeholders in decision-making as well as fiscal restraint and accountability. The corporate sector was encouraged to play a strong role in post-secondary education, particularly at the colleges and technical institutes, through board governance and advisory committees. In addition, government consulted widely with the public, business and industry and learners. All of these new structures reflected a new managerialism in education intended to ensure a productive, competitive workforce (Muller, 1990). The college sector was asked to re-organize, to “take multiple political, economic, technological and demographic aspects into account in order to provide the trained workers that industry would need to stay competitive” (p. 19).

While changes were occurring in Alberta, other provinces were experiencing their own educational reform movements (Dennison, 1995; Levin, B., 2001; Levin, J.S., 1996). In 1996, the government of British Columbia released a policy white paper entitled: *Charting a new course: a strategic plan for the future of British*

Columbia's college, institute and agency system (1996). The introductory statement is very similar to that of the *New Directions* document from Alberta. It is intended to "ensure that all British Columbians are prepared to participate in today's changing society; find productive employment in a competitive labour market; have opportunities for continuous learning; and receive value for the investment made in public post-secondary education and training" (p. 1). The four goals articulated in this policy paper are essentially the same as those from Alberta's framework: relevance and quality, access, affordability and accountability (p.14-22, part 2). In addition, the concept of funding envelopes is introduced with descriptions that emphasize partnerships and collaboration.

Between 1999 and 2002, the governments of Quebec, Alberta and New Brunswick all released papers highlighting skills and learning issues in their respective provinces (Alberta Learning, 2002c; New Brunswick Ministry of Education, 2001a; Quebec government, 1999). These papers reflect the desire of the provincial governments to link their education systems closely with productivity and exhort their citizens to understand the need for a centrally controlled learning system that will work together to achieve greater prosperity for everyone. The federal government has brought the provincial governments to the table to talk about how education and training are integral to economic health. The *Canada's Innovation Strategy* document closes with a 'call to action' that "seeks to engage provinces and territories and other partners in developing and implementing a national action plan on skills and learning for the 21st century. The objective of this dialogue is to achieve a broad consensus on overall national goals, and on the collective actions we need to take" (2002, p.55). The federal government report compares Canada's participation in post-secondary

education to other OECD countries and points out that Canada is falling behind. The report proposes a number of strategies to ensure that Canadians take on the responsibility to build and maintain a commitment to learning throughout their working lives. The strategies identified in the federal report echo that of the Campus Alberta vision: collaboration, supporting student transferability, building e-learning capacity and working closely with business and industry to fill critical skill gaps in the workforce.

The impact of the changing political climate towards education has been felt by the public college sector. "The strategies of the provincial white papers are directed at coping with decreasing public monies available for post-secondary education and at altering the colleges to provide increased workforce training and a more explicit economic role. Rather than manipulating the environment or reinterpreting external forces of change so that they are compatible with institutional goals, the white papers have reconceived the colleges" (Levin, 1996, p. 3).

SUMMARY

This study is meant to describe the current policy environment for the post-secondary learning system in Alberta. This chapter has identified how the context for the Campus Alberta vision developed from a widespread movement towards lifelong learning. This movement is occurring in many Western countries as these governments use the term 'lifelong learning' to urge their corporate sector and public to embrace the idea as one that will help spur economic growth.

In Alberta, the lifelong learning vision has been initiated over the past decade through a variety of policy instruments such as key performance indicators and

funding envelopes in the name of Campus Alberta. The government has moved to change the paradigm of higher education in the province towards a learning system that is responsive, affordable, accessible and relevant to the learner.

Alberta is not alone in confronting the issue of how a learning system operates within the context of the overall economy. Other provinces as well as the federal government are also grappling with this issue. Many of the provincial governments have developed reports and identified strategies for addressing this policy issue and are moving in similar directions. The common belief seems to be that by centralizing the delivery of education and creating efficiencies in the system, the learner and ultimately society will benefit.

This study will show how individuals working within the learning system in Alberta have been caught in this decade of change. The findings, although specific to the Alberta context, have transferability to other jurisdictions in Canada and perhaps throughout the world. As governments everywhere move people through policy change, with ever increasing demands for widespread consultation, it becomes evermore important to understand how individuals are experiencing that change and how it affects policy implementation.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

POLICY LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the policy and organizational literature that provided a theoretical underpinning to the study. Campus Alberta was a policy vision that spawned a number of policy and regulative initiatives. Therefore, the literature on policy analysis seemed relevant. This discussion begins with a description of the new public management principles that were the impetus to the changes in the Alberta learning system. The remainder of the policy literature looks at how the individual actor is critical to the success of policy change, particularly, the role of the individual in relation to their policy community and to their own organization.

The second part of the chapter describes neo-institutionalism research and how these researchers are establishing that the institutional sector within which organizations exist plays a powerful role in shaping policy change. This literature also focuses on the impact of the policy network or stakeholder community on the organization and how this interaction resists or supports change. Finally, the chapter looks at resource dependency theory for its description of resistance and negotiation within institutional fields as organizations compete for resources and make decisions regarding resource allocation internally.

New Public Management

The last two decades have seen a shift in how governments view their role (Pal, 1997). As mentioned earlier, the *New Directions* (1994) white paper, along with other similar policy papers across Canada, echoed change that was occurring

around the world. These papers reflected the new public management ideology that saw government moving its decision-making power into the hands of stakeholders, while introducing legislation to maintain fiscal control. Government services, including educational services, were severely cut back and new policy instruments introduced to create change within the policy environment. The instruments were designed to put responsibility for the outcomes of government in the hands of the providers, rather than making government responsible for these services. Key performance measures were introduced to measure these outcomes, and force change by comparing organizational outputs and creating public awareness of those organizations that did not meet new system-wide goals.

Pal (1997) outlines five key principles to new public management, and these are evidenced within the learning system in the decade leading up to Campus Alberta. The first principle is criticism of traditional bureaucracies and the belief that the public sector needs to shrink and hand over many of its responsibilities to agencies or units within the private sector. Certainly the radical restructuring and downsizing of the two education departments (Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development) into Alberta Learning as well as the formation of other related super-ministries (Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Infrastructure) are examples of this. In addition, the formation of a Standing Policy Committee on education as well as new systems for rewarding performance and funding programming means that old structures within the government are changing. The second principle is the change in thinking about whether government necessarily needs to be involved in a policy area at all. The discussions with the government managers that occurred as part of this study

certainly exemplified this way of thinking. They spoke about the constant demand from the politicians to examine the role of the bureaucrats within the Department and ask whether they belong at the policy table. This is particularly true where program approval was discussed. New ways of partnering, collaborating, and brokering are a result of this change of thinking. The third principle emphasizes the role of partners in realizing policy change and providing services. This is clearly evidenced in the expansion of private provider licensing in the province as well as the strong focus on collaboration as a central theme in Campus Alberta. Outcomes are the focus of the fourth principle. Accountability measures and quality deliverables are the new way of doing business. The government is less interested in how they achieve the outcomes, but very interested in the results. Business language is a significant piece of this new style of management, particularly in reference to the learners that are referred to as 'clients' or 'customers'. Finally, the fifth principle looks for new, flexible forms of delivery and a clearer distinction in government between the policy-making and the delivery of service. Within Alberta Learning, the Standing Policy Committee has taken much of the policy-making power away from bureaucrats who are left to implement the policy through their own departments or through arms-length service units.

The new public management calls for new "skills in building bridges and alliances, brokering interests, forging consensus, articulating shared values...[It] calls for the courage to take risks and to give up some degree of control – this is inevitable in citizen-based government, in the idea of partnership" (Armstrong & Lenihan, 1999, p. 4).

Collaboration and *partnership* are words that are being used more frequently within the public documents of Alberta's public colleges and technical institutes (Bow Valley College, 2001; Grant MacEwan College, 2000; Keyano College, 2001; Lakeland College, 2000; Lethbridge Community College, 2000). There is also a greater emphasis on partnerships within government, both in education and within other government departments. It is the new paradigm within which communities and organizations are expected to operate (Alberta Treasury, 2000; Armstrong & Lenihan, 1999).

A significant result of new public management in Alberta Learning is the increased use of consultation in policy formation (Levin, 2001). Previously, policy makers (government) and senior administration developed education policy within educational organizations or sectors. Now, there is a strong emphasis on the need to include other stakeholder groups (such as business and industry partners, parent and student associations) in the formation process in order to ensure policy change meets their needs (Marshall, 1995). Policy research, therefore, must ensure that the input of these other players is considered in the analysis of policy formation and implementation (Gaskell, 1988). This then becomes a complex, layered view of policy and the result is that individuals and groups which are part of this policy network are often caught in an environment that is filled with the tensions created by diverse players. This study, which focuses on the Senior Academic Officers within the public college system as one layer within the complex educational policy community, helps provide insight into how individual players perceive their role in the policy process, and how they react and respond to the various tensions that they

experience as a new policy change (i.e. Campus Alberta) is introduced within the Alberta Learning System.

Policy analysis

Working from a positivist paradigm, early political scientists promoted an approach to policy analysis, which assumed policy formation and implementation occurred through a rational step-by-step process driven by policy experts working to achieve a set of goals (Quinney, 1998, Scharpf, 1997). The rational model assumes that policy experts are making decisions by looking at relevant information and weighing the pros and cons before reaching a conclusion. "It presumes certain patterns of thought: it is linear, systematic, self-conscious, purposive and efficient (Pal, 1997, p. 19). Although early analysts agreed that this rational approach presented more of an ideal than a description of reality, they felt that it was something to aim for in policy development.

More recent work on policy analysis argues that although policy can be analyzed within a framework that describes steps (Levin, 2001, Pal, 1997), the role of the individual and groups, as well as the external forces which impact choice within the policy context, ensure that decision making does not, and indeed cannot, occur in a systematic, rational manner (Pal, 1997; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Stone, 1988). These and other writers challenge the assumptions of the rational model by questioning how individuals make decisions in a context that is fraught with political demands, resource constraints and complex value relationships. This body of work rejects the positivist notion that policy formation can occur in a logical sequence. Rather these writers see policy formation as taking place incrementally where each increment occurs as a result of various factors coming into play and that

these increments cannot necessarily be predicted. As a result policy formation can occur in a somewhat haphazard fashion as it lurches from one 'step' to the next.

Working from the understanding that policy is not a rational process, this study focuses on the role of the individual within the policy context. Policy analysts agree that individual actors play a critical role within the policy area. Much of current policy literature recognizes that these actors interact and behave in a manner that is often unpredictable due to the abundant and often conflicting influences that shape their thinking. As policy is formed, actors shape it in a variety of ways. They can bring political pressure to bear through resistance or lobby efforts, control resources through regulations and rewards or use normative structures to legitimate change (Oliver, 1991).

The study described here focuses on a policy framework first introduced in Alberta in the early 1990s and developing over a decade or more. The Campus Alberta policy framework continues to be refined and massaged to fit the political will of government and is at the same time influenced by those stakeholders external to government. This study attempts to describe how one group of individuals, the public college and technical institute vice presidents academic, by their position within the system, changed and were changed by the development of this policy framework. By change, the study assumes both individual behavioural and cognitive change as well as organizational change.

One researcher who has built a theoretical framework to describe the complexity of contemporary policy development is Paul Sabatier. The Advocacy Coalition Framework proposed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) claims that policy change can be traced to incremental learning that occurs within the policy

community in the years preceding policy change. Two elements influence policy change: the economic and political systems external to the policy system, and the human and non-human elements that make up the sub-systems of the policy community. Policy learning occurs through interactions within the sub-systems, and of the sub-systems with the larger system in which it is embedded (Mawhinney, 1991). This model assumes there are both stable and dynamic elements within each of these systems. Stability comes from institutionalized structures such as legal foundations and cultural values. The more dynamic elements are the economic climate or changes in government.

In the study discussed here, there are examples of policy learning throughout the past decade, both by the policy makers and the various actors within the policy regime. An example discussed earlier is the change in attitude towards collaborative program delivery. Before the introduction of incentives by government to support partnerships between colleges, minimal collaboration occurred. After a few years of collaborations initiated externally (through incentives or regulations) the attitude towards collaboration changed. However, it has not been a smooth transition. Some of the collaborations have been abandoned, whereas, in other cases strong resistance by the colleges have influenced how collaborations are defined.

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) contend that actors within the policy community form 'coalitions' that advocate for policy change to address a policy problem. Various coalitions make up the policy subsystems. The framework argues that there will be both elite coalitions and those less powerful within a policy subsystem. Over time, various coalitions, defending various beliefs and values, debate over the policy issue or problem. Policy brokers act as mediators to

negotiate conflict between opposing coalitions. These brokers initiate small changes, such as minor adjustments to institutionalized structures. As conditions are satisfied during this phase, *policy-oriented learning* occurs. This learning refers to “relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and are concerned with the attainment (or revision) of policy objectives” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 19).

According to Sabatier, policy learning within coalitions cannot operate in isolation. Along with the learning within the internal subsystem, there are external changes that can have significant impact on the advocacy coalitions, particularly if they affect the coalitions’ access to resources. These changes might include macroeconomic conditions or changes in government. For example, in this study participants were asked to describe the external agents within their environment and how they play a role in shaping policy. In addition, policy documents and policy activity initiated by government (such as regulatory incentives) were analyzed to describe the external influences that exist.

A distinctive feature of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by Sabatier is its emphasis on the role of beliefs and values in the policy process. The ACF assumes that both policy actors and policies themselves can be understood in terms of the structure of their belief systems. “This ability to map beliefs and policies on the same ‘canvas’ provides a vehicle for assessing the influence of various actors over time, particularly the role of technical information (beliefs) on policy change” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 17).

These belief systems have three key elements. The first is the *deep or normative core*, which consists of fundamental axioms about human nature, justice

and priorities among values such as security, health, and love. These ideas are very difficult to change through policy arguments, and remain consistent across policy areas. The second set of ideas is the *near core*, which comprises notions about the proper scope of government activity, distributions of power and authority, orientations on substantive policy conflicts and basic choices about policy instruments. These ideas are difficult to change, but can be altered if experience seriously differs from theory. They apply to the policy area of interest, but may not be consistent across all policy areas. The final idea set consists of instrumental decisions needed to implement the policy core such as decisions about administrative rules, budgetary allocations and statutory interpretation. These are specific to the policy area and are comparatively easy to shift or change, and constitute the bulk of technical policy argumentation (Pal, 1997).

The strengths of Sabatier's model of policy change for the purposes of this study on Campus Alberta, are that it addresses:

the importance of policy communities, the importance of aggregating stakeholders in advocacy coalitions according to policy preferences and belief systems, the importance of substantive policy information, the role of policy brokers and policy elites in policy-oriented learning and the need for study time frames of at least a decade in duration. (Bischoff, 2001)

Another theorist whose work is relevant to this study is Ivar Bleiklie (2000) who focuses on the *characteristics* of policy rather than the *activity* of the policy designers. To do this he identifies the various policy instruments used as the means to influence behaviour in such a way as to achieve the desired ends. Bleiklie (2000) lists the five categories of policy instruments described by Ingram and Schneider (1993). These are:

- *Authority tools* – statements backed by legitimate authority of government that grant permission, prohibit or require action under designated circumstances;
- *Incentive tools* – tools that rely on tangible payoffs, positive or negative to induce compliance or encourage utilization;
- *Capacity tools* – instruments that provide information, training, education and resources to enable individuals, groups, or agencies to make decisions or carry out activities;
- *Symbolic and hortatory tools* – assume that people are motivated from within and decide whether or not to take policy-related actions on the basis of their beliefs and values (important in education);
- *Learning tools* – when the basis upon which target populations might be moved to take problem-solving action is unknown or uncertain (Bleiklie, 2000).

By way of the categories identified by Bleiklie, we can identify occurrences of each of the five types of policy instruments over the last decade in Alberta. *Authority tools* included the Program Coordination Policy, *New Directions* paper, funding envelopes and key performance indicators. *Incentive tools* included key performance funding rewards as well as funding and recognition for collaborative projects. *Capacity tools* included the minister's symposiums and the ACCESS funding envelope. *Symbolic and hortatory tools* included the rhetoric on lifelong learning and Campus Alberta, and documents such as *People and Prosperity* that exhort the value education and training have to Alberta's economy. Finally, *Learning tools* such as the key performance reporting procedures and the *Program Coordination Policy*

provided structures that encouraged the post-secondary institutions to adopt new structures of accountability.

A policy regime, according to Bleiklie, is a network of actors that are driven by goal-oriented action as well as rule-oriented institutionalized behaviour and communicative action. Regimes have two dimensions that define them: that is how tightly or loosely the actors are connected to one another (cohesion) and the influence they have with each other and with external agents to the regime. Changing policy design “may be the result of efficient adaptation to changing environments, in the sense that it enhances the capacity of a policy regime to solve specific problems. However, it may also represent shifting conceptions of what are the appropriate tasks [of a given institution] and how they should be implemented.” (Bleiklie, 2000, p. 69) In the case of the current policy regime surrounding higher education in Alberta, there has been a shift in how the government and other stakeholders perceive the role of colleges and universities within the provincial system of education as well as within the economic system of the province and the country. The shift has not been the same for the different groups of stakeholders, and as a result there are tensions within the system that did not exist previously. The perception of educators as professionals who should be allowed to organize the learning system as they see fit, has shifted to view them as service providers in the system that is driven by the needs of the workforce.

For the past thirty years, Alberta has experienced policy learning that has moved us towards the Campus Alberta concept of a cohesive, transparent system. In the late sixties, Alberta had a fragmented group of learning institutions that had no central coordinating administration and no clearly articulated goals. From 1972 to

2001, a number of changes occurred which moved the system towards the concept of a province-wide-learning system, coordinated by government and involving contribution by different sectors of society.

Leslie Pal (1997) examines the current literature on the role of interests in policy making. Veering from the traditional view of the rational actor pursuing policy goals driven by personal interests, Pal purports that groups or networks can act together as a unit with shared interests. Pal describes Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition as being one type of policy community that has a shared belief system about a policy issue. This coalition can draw actors from a wide and diverse area including all levels of government, interest organizations, media and research. Pal emphasizes that Sabatier's framework asserts that policy fields are "marked by competing advocacy coalitions" (p.188).

Two other important definitions in Pal's work pertinent to this study are those of *policy community* and *policy network*. Whereas an advocacy coalition is made up of actors that share a common belief system, policy communities are all of those actors or groups active within a policy network who may or may not agree on the policy issue. Policy networks describe the pattern of multiple and complex relationships found within a policy community.

Pal points out that the introduction of these two terms is becoming much more relevant with the continued emphasis on consultation as part of the policy development process. Consultation, once confined to a small group of stakeholders often with shared interests, has grown to incorporate a wider and wider group of stakeholders who may or may not share understanding or beliefs about a policy issue. With the advent of technology and the impact of globalization, these networks

have become complex webs of far-reaching relationships and instant communication that have moved the practice of policy analysis in new directions. Governments are being forced to consult with wider and wider groups of stakeholders and as a result have become dependent on external resources to obtain necessary information to address policy issues. In other words, the domain of policy making is no longer exclusively that of government and its immediate sphere of influence. This broader description of the policy environment provides the context in which this study is grounded.

For the purposes of this study, Pal's description of the policy network literature is very appropriate. The last decade of development of the Campus Alberta framework has paralleled the Klein government's strong emphasis on consultation. Over this decade various stakeholder groups related to public post-secondary education have begun to form coalitions to promote their interests. These include private training organizations, students and parents, business and industry and local governments.

I have chosen these models of policy analysis because they reflect my own perspective on how the Campus Alberta policy framework is being managed by government and perceived by college administrators. I believe that the Campus Alberta policy framework has been in development for the past decade and we are moving towards its goals with incremental steps. These policy models, which allow for the political aspect of coalition building among stakeholder groups and recognize the powerful impact of belief systems on behaviour and relationships, describe most clearly for me a framework within which to analyze the Campus Alberta policy environment and its impact on public college leadership.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Institutional theory studies structural change within organizations by examining the institutional fields within which those organizations operate. It posits that structures become institutionalized within organizations, much as social structures become institutionalized within society. Different variants of institutional theory have drawn on three theoretical perspectives: economics, political science and social science. The sociological strand looks at how the interaction of players within an organizational field plays a role in institutional change. This body of literature provides further theoretical context for this study.

The 'old' institutionalism, based on the work of Philip Selznick during the middle of the last century (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), emphasized an organization's relationship with its environment within a political context. It focused on the non-formal relationships or coalitions that occur within an organization and undermine rationality. It argued that institutionalism "constrains an organization's rationality ... and prevents actors from recognizing or acting upon their interests" (p.12). The old institutionalism also described the organizational environment as being made up of local entities to which the organization was tied by loyalties and interests.

A new version of institutional theory began to emerge in the late 1970's that diverged from the original theories while maintaining some of their core aspects. The new group of theorists such as John Meyer, Brian Rowan, Richard Scott and later Paul Dimaggio, Lynne Zucker, Pamela Tolbert and others were grounded in the critical aspects of institutional theory, which rejected traditional rational models of organizational theory. Neo-institutionalism, while acknowledging the influence of the environment upon an organization, focused on institutional fields or sectors, rather

than local influences. These researchers believed that environments were more subtle in their influence. Rather than co-opting organizations, they penetrated the organization, creating the lenses through which actors viewed the world and their very categories of structure, action and thought (Powell and Dimaggio, 1991, p.13). Neo-institutionalists believed that institutions were formed at the field level and were therefore located inter-organizationally. The formation of shared institutions produced an interdependence that created a stability and homogeneity amongst organizations that resisted efforts of change. I believe that public community colleges can be defined as an institutional field within post-secondary education.

Old institutional theory understood institutions to be essentially made up of values, norms and attitudes. The idea was that over time, workers internalized the values of an organization as part of a socialization process. The New Institutionalists rejected this version in favour of a theory that focuses on the 'taken-for-granted' nature of organizational behaviour. They believed that institutions were in fact 'rules of behaviour' which became embedded in the organizational culture or the institutional field as 'myths' (Meyer and Rowan, 1991).

Institutional theory is useful in understanding the complex post-secondary environment in which the colleges exist in Alberta. As will be seen in the following description of Richard Scott's (1995) framework, the institutional field of public community colleges has succumbed to isomorphic forces as it nears the end of its first period of development (35-40 years approximately). In the early days, colleges were innovative and underwent regular change and growth. As the field grew, and a critical mass of organizations were included in the field, norms developed and from them 'rules' of behaviour. As the rules became structural, change and innovation

decreased, resisted by the isomorphic pressure from the larger institutional field. This study examines how new policy from government has infiltrated this institutional field and resulted in incremental change within the structures of public community colleges in Alberta.

Institutional theorists (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1991, 1995), contend that actors operating within organizations both shape and are shaped by the institutions within their environment. In turn the environment, with its variety of cultures, rules and beliefs shapes these institutions. It is a dynamic, interactive relationship, where all players both change and are changed by the context in which they are present. Meyer and Rowan (1991) summarize key ideas as follows:

The new institutionalism in organization theory and sociology comprises a rejection of rational-actor models, an interest in institutions as independent variables, a turn toward cognitive and cultural explanations and an interest in properties of supraindividuals units of analysis that cannot be reduced to aggregations or direct consequences of individuals' attributes or motives. (p.9)

Since the mid-80s, Richard Scott has been developing a theoretical framework to categorize institutions:

Institutions consist of cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour. Institutions are transported by various carriers – cultures, structures, and routines – and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdictions (Scott, 1995, p.33).

Scott (1995) emphasizes the importance of socially constructed beliefs and values in his definition of institutionalism. He expands the definition to include the influence of external stimuli:

To assume an institutional perspective is to emphasize the importance of psychological, social and political elements in the study of social phenomena generally and organizations specifically. Institutionalists call attention to the role of ideational forces – of knowledge systems, beliefs and rules in the structure and operation of organizations... environmental stimuli must be cognitively processed by actors – interpreted by individuals employing socially constructed symbol systems – before they can respond by taking action. (p. xiii)

Scott's classification of institutional theory into 'three pillars of institutions' in the following table provides a contextual framework for this study.

Table 2
Scott's classification table

	<u>Elements</u>		
Carriers	<u>Regulative</u>	<u>Normative</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>
Cultures	rules	values	categories
	laws	expectations	typifications
Structures	governance systems	regimes	structural isomorphism
	power systems	authority systems	identities
Routines	compliance	conformity	performance programs
	obedience	performance of duty	scripts

The *regulative* pillar focuses on powerful actors or coalitions of actors, who enforce rules that favour their interests, and thereby establish institutions. These coercive forces are seen as external to the organizations and emerge from a need to resolve conflict and address different interests. Rules are formed to constrain behaviour. In some cases these rules come from institutional culture, such as post-secondary education. In other cases they emerge from government structures such as Alberta Learning. And in others, they arise from routines such as credential granting practices.

In this study, the identified source of power is Alberta Learning, which legislates structures (e.g. the Key Performance Measures) to which the post-secondary administrator must adhere. The assumption is that post-secondary administrators and government bureaucrats view the Department as a regulative body, external to themselves.

The *normative* element assumes that behaviour is guided by an awareness of one's role in a social situation and a concern to behave appropriately, in accordance with others' expectations and internalized standards of conduct. It assumes a collectivist notion of human nature and perceives that external social forces influence individual behaviour. In this study, the behaviour of the senior managers, whether in college organizations or government departments, is often defined in terms of collective beliefs and expectations. The role of the vice president academic, in particular, is an institution that exists throughout the post-secondary environment. In this study, a formalized committee of vice president academics is discussed from the point of view of how the individual behaviours are shaped by the normative influences of the committee.

Finally the *cognitive* pillar views institutions as knowledge systems. “*Cognitive* systems control behaviour by controlling our conception of what the world is and what kinds of action can be taken by what types of actors. Social ... typifications help us determine what things and people are similar, and thus to be treated according to one set of rules, and what other things and people are different and are thus to be treated differently” (Scott, 1991, p.xvii-xviii). This translates into a strong pressure for organizations to become isomorphic.

The cognitive pillar described by Scott aligns well with the concept of policy learning described by Sabatier (1993). It is an incremental shift in thinking by actors towards structures within their organizations or institutional fields. The shift occurs as a result of both internal forces and external pressures for change. This policy learning often occurs as a result of policy instruments such as those described by Bleikie that serve to change first behaviour, and gradually beliefs about how structures within the field should and could operate. Organizations that tend toward isomorphism are those that seek legitimacy by adopting institutionalized structures from the external environment. Legitimacy increases the power position of an organization in its transactions with other organizations. It also builds confidence amongst employees within an organization. It is not a process driven by efficiency considerations, but a way of securing legitimacy in institutional life through the adoption of taken-for-granted social norms (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Radaelli, 1997).

Meyer and Rowan (1991) emphasize the importance of isomorphism in organizational theory:

Isomorphism with environmental institutions has some crucial consequences for organizations: (a) they incorporate elements which are legitimated externally, rather than in terms of efficiency; (b) they employ external or ceremonial assessment criteria to define the value of structural elements; and (c) dependence on externally fixed institutions reduces turbulence and maintains stability. (p.49)

Meyer and Rowan (1991) describe formal structures as being inherent in traditionally structured bureaucracies. These rationalized structures become institutionalized, as the need for coordination of 'complex relational networks' becomes imperative. These formal structures may, in fact, be quite distinct from the day-to-day activities of an organization. However, they provide the legitimacy necessary to the stability and endurance of an organization.

In the current environment of educational reform, the Alberta government has used policy instruments to move the post-secondary organizations within the province towards a more unified learning system. Institutional theory provides a framework that explains the responses of the sector to this new environment.

Policy is an instrument used by government to encourage the development of new institutions or to change old ones. When developing policy, government often uses regulations and funding or other policy instruments that serve to influence incremental change within the institutional field. These non-human tools of policy change are significant. However, another critical aspect of the policy change process is the human element, or the beliefs that relevant actors within the policy community bring (Bleiklie, 2000). This includes not only the beliefs actors have when the policy problem is first identified, but the change in those beliefs as policy learning occurs. In addition, as new actors enter the policy community over time, or new

communities of stakeholders join, new beliefs are integrated into the change process (Mawhinney, 1991).

The previous section on policy analysis established how individual belief systems work within a policy environment to effect or resist change. External factors to the policy community also have significant impact on policy actors, and can influence belief systems over time. Some of the literature on institutionalism uses these same assumptions in describing the importance of beliefs on the construction and destruction of institutions.

Many of the institutional theorists draw from organizational cultural theory as a point of reference (Brint & Karabel, 1991; DiMaggio, 1997; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 1995; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).

Edgar Schein, an important organizational culture theorist, says:

The term 'culture' should be reserved for the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are *learned* responses to a group's problems of *survival* in its external environment and its problems of *internal integration*. (1995, p. 6)

Paul DiMaggio argues that cultural theorists and social constructionists have missed an important element by not incorporating the findings of cognitive psychology research into their work. "Individuals were assumed to have acquired culture in the course of socialization and...to enact it unproblematically" (1997). DiMaggio, however, rejects the view that culture is a latent variable. Rather, he sees culture as a complex web of cognitive

structures that individuals use strategically and situationally. It is never static, but rather a dynamic, inconsistent and layered phenomenon that is influenced by people's response to others and the environment. Organizational culture is created when people merge their own 'toolkit' of experiences with others within their organizations. The inconsistencies between different toolkits are identified during this process, and discarded. The remaining 'common' understandings become part of the collective connotation.

DiMaggio (1997) stresses that the traditional view of culture as being constraining is no longer appropriate. He supports this by drawing a parallel between institutional theory and the psychological definition of automatic and deliberative cognition. Automatic schema are "routine, everyday cognition (that) rely heavily and uncritically upon culturally available schemata – knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships and entailments under conditions of incomplete information" (Internet). DiMaggio identifies the similarity with institutional theory that states that typifications influence perception, interpretation, planning and action. Institutionalized structures and behaviours are taken for granted, reproduced in everyday action and treated as legitimate. DiMaggio suggests that change within organizations can occur through deliberative cognition. This occurs when people are sufficiently motivated to override programmed modes of thought to think critically and reflexively. This occurs in three situations: when attention is drawn to a problem; when individuals are strongly motivated by dissatisfaction with the status quo or when existing schema fail to account adequately for new stimuli. Hence, individuals have the ability to strategically change organizational culture.

Traditionally, educational organizations were able to legitimate themselves to the outside world through symbolic activities. They were able to maintain bureaucratic structures because of “heavily rationalized, taken-for-granted theories about how best to organize education in modern society” (Kelly, 1998, p. 363). Technical efficiency was put aside in the interests of institutional conformity (Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Scott & Meyer (1991) and Rowan & Miskel (1999) distinguish between technical and institutional environments. Increasingly, technical environments for education are seeking outcomes of efficiency and achievement, as opposed to institutional environments (in which educational organizations have traditionally existed) that demand conformity. Previously, it was thought that pressures for conformity inhibited an organization’s ability to increase efficiency. Rowan and Miskel maintain that, in fact, it is possible for institutional conformity to protect an organization from the uncertainties of a demanding technical environment. Further, it is possible for institution building to occur to a point where a formerly entrenched institution can exist in a strong technical environment.

In tracing the development of the Campus Alberta concept, I believe the influence of both external and internal actors is evident. Internally, the post-secondary institutions are shifting from valuing autonomy to valuing collaboration. They are also shifting their beliefs about being market-driven. Colleges have moved a significant way down the road towards a more entrepreneurial approach to program planning and delivery. Administrators are using the language of business, and speaking of ‘strategic alliances’. As one President commented, “collaboration makes good business sense. Colleges are not collaborating *because* of Campus

Alberta, they are collaborating because it presents a good business case” (W. Shillington, personal communication, February, 2001).

I believe the external environment has also had substantial impact on the development of Campus Alberta. The influence of rapid economic growth in the 60s, 70s and early 80s, followed by the severe economic downturn and restructuring of the 90s, combined with the diversification of the Alberta economy and the introduction of technology, can be seen in the Campus Alberta rhetoric. There is significant emphasis on both human resource planning and cost benefit efficiencies. These concepts have challenged the institutionalized beliefs about the autonomy of the higher education system and its relationship with business and industry.

The Campus Alberta policy framework has been evolving within the Alberta post-secondary learning system over the past decade. The post-secondary learning system has incrementally moved away from the loosely connected but seemingly autonomous public and private organizations linked together by legislation and a common understanding of community college and technical institute education. In its place is a complex web of organizations being pushed to develop closer connections of interdependence with the goal of evolving into a cohesive unit labelled Campus Alberta.

Between the establishment of the first public community college in Lethbridge in 1957 until the early 1990s, the concept of the ‘community colleges’ had become institutionalized within Alberta. All levels of government, business and industry as well as the general public shared an understanding of what these organizations provided in terms of academic and vocational preparation for the workforce. The commonly accepted understanding was of a post-secondary organization that was

more than a high school but different than a university. It was expected that the community college would offer both credit and non-credit programming that responded to community needs as well as serve the function of providing a physical location for community events and functions such as theatre and sport.

The focus of this study is to describe how the government of Alberta has proceeded with incremental structural changes to introduce transformation into the post-secondary system. More importantly, the study looks at how one group of actors, namely the vice president academics, within the institutional field of public colleges and technical institutes, have changed and been changed by the structural changes occurring with the institutional field of post-secondary education. It also identifies how the policy change, by integrating a number of diverse stakeholders, has introduced new tensions to the institutional sector.

Resource Dependency Theory

The path towards a unified learning system has not been entirely smooth. Resistance and coalition building have played a significant role. In the early 1990s when fiscal restraint was at its height, the government dedicated a lot of energy to ensuring financial accountability. The backlash from the educational institutions tempered that focus to incorporate the ideas of 'sustainable funding' and 'investment' in education. The word 'accountable' has been replaced in the four goal statements originating in the *New Directions* document, with 'research excellence'.

The educational reforms that have come about as a result of the *New Directions* paper and the Campus Alberta policy framework have placed the post-secondary organizations in an environment of uncertainty and instability. As funding

mechanisms have changed, and accountability demands have become more insistent and complex, the post-secondary organizations have had to develop strategies to respond effectively while maintaining their core business of providing education.

Institutional theory describes how organizations must respond to external pressures to ensure their survival. One strand of institutional theory that looks at the relationship between the organizational environment and normative understandings of dependency relationships is resource dependency theory (Tolbert, 1985).

Christine Oliver (1991) describes the theory as “emphas[ing] that most organizations confront numerous and frequently incompatible demands from a variety of external actors” (p. 147). Whereas institutional theory emphasizes the regulatory, normative and cognitive forces that shape organizational behaviour, resource dependency theory focuses on the more uncertain technical environment and how organizations respond by developing strategies of resistance and negotiation for managing the interconnected relationships and scarce resource flow within their environment (Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987; Pfeffer, Salancik, & Leblebici, 1976; Scott, 1993; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983;).

When reflecting on the changes occurring in post-secondary education, one can view them through the lens of resource dependency theory. Governments are implementing policies to create change that will destabilize the current institutions that exist in the educational sector. This destabilization creates uncertainty in the flow of resources. In response to that uncertainty, post-secondary organizations enter into negotiation and develop strategies that will enable them to maintain control over their operations. These strategies have involved collaboration and alliances

with new stakeholders not traditionally involved in decision-making in education. These include business and industry, community organizations, politicians and learners. This is the environment in which this study was conducted.

In the current environment, public colleges have to make strategic decisions about how to operationalize their goals. Resource dependency theory has developed from the examination of how decision-makers make decisions regarding resource allocation. It is assumed that such decisions are made according to strict standards or rational criteria that exist within the organization or more generally within the institutional field. However, it happens that resource allocations occur where no such rational criteria exist. In this situation, resource allocations continue; however, the criteria are based on normative understandings that might exist within an institutional field rather than clearly defined regulations. By conforming to acceptable social standards, the organization can maintain its legitimacy within the field. "In the organizational environment there are normative understandings of appropriate and inappropriate organizational dependency patterns...Violating rules of rational and effective structure calls into question the legitimacy of these organizations and thus affects its ability to obtain resources and social support" (Tolbert, 1985, p. 2).

Resource dependency also addresses situations when there are neither rational standards for resource allocation nor social standards within the organizational field. In this environment of uncertainty, theory suggests that organizations will do more than merely respond to taken-for granted institutional (normative) forces. They may in fact actively choose to resist the forces and enter into negotiations to exert some control over the flow of resources. Early resource

dependency theory described organizational behaviour that constructed symbolic compliance structures that were purely symbolic in order to accommodate regulations and secure resources. The implicit assumption was that the costs of creating such structural elements were relatively low compared to the potential gains of increased resources from the environment (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996). This assumption presumably follows from the notion that changes in formal structures often do not alter actions.

More recent theory rejects the assumption that the adoption of new structures is not costly. Zucker and Tolbert make the key assumption that:

creating new structures takes more resources than maintaining the old...thus, structures that are altered or created must be believed to have some positive value for the organization, or decision-makers typically would not allocate resources to altering or creating new formal structures. (p.180)

Assuming that new regulatory forces demand that new structures be created, organizations will resist or negotiate those decisions before allocating scarce resources to them. The level of resistance can vary from active to more passive resistance. An example of such an occurrence would be the creation of the funding envelopes. Where colleges did not have structures conforming to the data collection demands government was making, they resisted and negotiated their way through. During this period of instability, the colleges looked to each other to establish codes of behavior that would legitimate their resistance activities.

The autonomy of post-secondary organizations was taken-for-granted in the Alberta educational environment prior to the nineties. With the advent of the reforms outlined in the first part of this chapter, that autonomy is under stress. The loose coupling that existed between government and the post-secondary sector is under

pressure to change. Government has implemented a number of coercive measures to move in the direction of a tighter coupling (Taylor, Neu & Peters, 2002). However, as this study will demonstrate, post-secondary institutions are not necessarily prepared to accept these changes without some resistance, either alone or as coalitions of actors working collaboratively. Both the government and the educational organizations are attempting to use the flow of resources to exert control over the system.

SUMMARY

To form the theoretical foundation for this study, two areas of research literature were reviewed: policy analysis and institutional theory. The first, policy analysis was chosen to provide a model of analysis for the Campus Alberta policy development. The second, the new institutional theory, provides a model for analysis of the environment in which the study participants worked.

For the purposes of this study, Sabatier's (1993), and Bleiklie's (2000) research on the role of the actor within the policy environment were useful in providing a framework for analysis. Both of these researchers write about behavioural and cognitive changes that need to occur in order for policy change to be successful. Sabatier examines the cognitive aspect of policy learning and describes it as an incremental shift in beliefs occurring over a period of many years. He categorizes beliefs into deep, near core and secondary or instrumental and provides examples of how these relate to policy development. He describes how actors within the policy community form coalitions to advocate their positions and the process of these groups working together influence how policy forms. Sabatier also

illustrates how interaction with the external environment is a key element in how individuals and groups respond to new policy and is a significant player in how policy changes emerge.

The work of Bleiklie (2000) looks at the tools that are used to influence policy change. His categories provide a framework to document the policy instruments used by Alberta Learning in the formation of the Campus Alberta policy framework. The relationship between the work of Bleiklie and Sabatier is found if we assume that in order to change beliefs and produce policy learning, there needs to be a change in behaviour. In Bleiklie's model, it is the policy instruments that change behaviour. These new behaviours, by forcing policy actors to interact differently and respond to new environments, bring about learning which in turn influences the new policy development.

Neo-institutional theory, describes how the external environment plays a critical role in bringing about change within organizations and institutional fields. Scott (1995) defines the pillars of institutions as regulative, normative and cognitive. His work complements that of Bleiklie and Sabatier because he also talks about how behaviour affects beliefs and values. He describes the impact of coercive forces on institutions and how they serve to influence change in organizational cultures and structures. Normative forces describe how actors within an institutional field view themselves and their organization in relation to others in the field. Actors within a field introduce structural change and others follow because of normative codes of conduct that have been institutionalized. Cognitive systems influence behaviour because we respond to the world we perceive. Perceptions are socially constructed

and as a result there is a strong tendency towards isomorphism as individuals and organizations adopt legitimated structures from within their institutional field.

The work of Scott and the other institutional theorists fits well with that of Sabatier and Bleiklie because it too looks at the critical role of the environment in influencing policy change, whether this change occurs within the individual actor, the organization or the policy community (i.e. institutional field). This study focuses on how a particular policy change occurred in the Alberta learning system over the last decade. It emphasizes the role of one group of actors in this policy change and examines how those actors interacted with their policy community. The interaction occurred with authority (i.e. government) as well as stakeholders (i.e. business, industry, students, community).

The final area of literature, resource dependency theory, with its emphasis on negotiation and instability, helps explain the ongoing flux that is in the system currently. New structures are still being constructed and while that is underway, the organizations within the system are redefining themselves into a new Campus Alberta.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the design and the methodology used for this research study. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggested in the introduction to their book, *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, “qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This approach to research mandates that the issue, behaviour or action in question be observed in its ‘real-life’ setting, with a minimum of influence from the activity of observation (recognizing, however, that the act of observation will, in itself, inevitably have impact).

There is a body of qualitative educational research which seeks to advance knowledge about educational practice. Michael Bassey (1999) expresses this in his remarks: “Educational research is critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action” (p. 39). This research is informed by the values and beliefs of participants and researchers and expands our understanding of the processes involved in educational practice.

This study was built using this latter approach, but differed in its intent. It was not intended to directly improve educational action, but rather to “inform understandings of phenomena pertinent to the discipline in educational settings” (Bassey, 1999, p.39). In other words, research itself may not lead to direct changes in practice, but rather may provide readers with description of an educational occurrence that may then encourage reflection on their own beliefs and understandings. In terms of educational leadership, the opportunity to hear how

others describe a specific phenomenon may open the door to a wider variety of choices in future decision-making. As Wallace (2000) suggests,

The ability to reframe experience enriches and broadens a leader's repertoire and serves as a powerful antidote to self-entrapment. Expanded choice enables managers to generate creative responses to the broad range of problems that they encounter...managers are imprisoned only to the degree that their palette of ideas is impoverished. (p.3)

Attempting to describe how others understand their world is the work of researchers working within the interpretive paradigm. Interpretists seek to inform their perception of a phenomenon by understanding the reality of its participants. They believe that ontology is constructed meaning; that it exists only in the reality of the 'I' developed through interaction with others. Each actor constructs meaning through "prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action" (Schwandt, 1998, p.222). 'Understanding' differs from 'knowing' in that understanding is an interpretation of meaning, making sense of the world in which we live. Knowing implies that there is something to know, that we can say 'this is what we know about this topic', that there is an absolute truth. Understanding is "about the meaning of speech and action, and meanings are expressed in language" (Schwandt, 1999, p.453). Language is also our means of describing being in the world around us. In order to understand others' reality, we must also seek to understand the world as they perceive it and observe how they interact with that world.

When we talk about understanding, we are really talking about interpreting what we hear others say. We hear their words, and then attach our own meanings to them as we rework the language to a point of understanding. When we re-present

our understanding of what we think is meant, we are using hermeneutics to interpret the language to achieve some level of mutual agreement about meaning. In other words, 'what I understand you to mean is...' It is the interaction that leads to understanding.

Schwandt describes interpretation as "always standing in this in-between of familiarity and strangeness" (1999, p. 458). We hear people describe their reality. We then interpret their meaning by filtering it through our own understanding of the phenomenon and its context. As we filter, a re-interpretation of our own meaning occurs as we integrate the other's meaning. We compare it against previous beliefs we might have held and look beneath the language to our history with the phenomenon and previous meanings we might have had. Through this re-view of our understanding, we hope to construct new understanding for both others and ourselves.

The interpretist view implies that there is not a single truth. There can be multiple understandings, however, no single one will be the 'truth'. Each perspective is a truth for the person who owns it. The value of the approach is that by being exposed to multiple re-presentations or multiple perspectives, we can inform our own understandings of phenomena.

I was particularly interested in the beliefs that leaders espoused regarding their own meanings, but also the assumptions they made about others' beliefs. I wanted to provide a voice to these 'lesser' elites in educational policy change and by doing so, provide a deeper understanding of the various influences that reside as part of the policy formation process.

I recognize that my own voice was part of this research. I have worked in the college sector for 17 years, the last ten at the middle and senior management level. My own experience has certainly influenced my understanding of the interview data. My challenge has been to identify how my previous experience and preconceptions have acted as filters as I listened to the participants describe their experience. Wherever possible, I have included selections from the interviews to substantiate my interpretations of the participant data. I also had a participant as well as an informed non-participant read through my summary chapter and raise questions about my analysis where they felt it was warranted.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In discussing qualitative research method, Stake suggests that the researcher identify issues in order to build a conceptual structure. He emphasizes that issues should play a dominant role because they draw attention to the social, historical and political complexities of the research problem: "Issues help us to expand upon the moment, help us see the instance in a more historical light, help us recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction" (1995, p. 17).

The issues are phrased as questions or statements, but must reflect an inherent problem. The researcher's beliefs and values will help generate the initial questions, for example in this study one of the planned research questions was, "*What level of power to resist or effect change do the senior academic officers perceive themselves having in their relationship with the policy-makers?*" As the interviews continued, other questions emerged from issues that belonged to the participants, for example, "*Do you believe that you are able to influence Alberta*

Learning policy initiatives in your role as vice president academic?" As the questions draw forth understanding, the researcher begins to restate the issues as assertions, cautiously at the beginning, then with more confidence as new observations are made and old observations confirmed.

In addition to issues, researchers require general contextual information from their participants. A list of topical questions was generated as part of the conceptual structure of the research design in advance of the study. These questions were used to begin the interviews and establish the level of knowledge that each participant held regarding current policy issues within the system and their level of comfort with their role in their own organizations. In some cases the participants were new to their role and this early discussion helped to establish the parameters of their knowledge about their role and their organization.

Data collection

The primary source of data for this research has been information obtained from interviews. "The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of informationWe interview people to find out what we cannot directly observe" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Researchers seek understanding of others' insights into an issue through interviews. In order to do so, the researcher must not only hear the information that the participant is providing, but look beneath the language to uncover the meaning and overall context of what the participant is saying (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In order to accomplish this successfully, the researcher must strive to develop an understanding of the culture of the participants, as they understand it.

Clarifying jargon, policy information and historical context are important first steps to ensuring clear understanding of what is being said.

One challenge of this research was that the participants were individuals with high status positions either within their organizations or within government. Interviewing this type of participant is referred to as *elite interviewing* (Dexter, 1970; Quinney, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and has unique benefits and challenges. The benefit of elite interviewing is that "these individuals can provide an overview of their organization and its relationship with other organizations" (Quinney, 1998, p. 65). In elite interviewing, the researcher acknowledges that the participant might in fact, teach the interviewer about the research topic.

The challenge of elite interviewing is that occasionally the interviewee may be reluctant to be as candid as the researcher might like. These individuals might regard the researcher as a journalist, and not be ready to fully disclose important information. Another problem is the lack of time available for interviews, due to the busy schedule of the participants. It is difficult for an interviewer to establish sufficient rapport and therefore, trust, without sufficient time to build the relationship (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

During the course of the study, it was helpful to use my knowledge and experience in the post-secondary sector. By identifying myself as a public college employee, I was able to establish immediately that I shared common knowledge about the learning system and how it operated. In the majority of cases, the interviewees would spend some time questioning me about my background and current employment situation. This initial conversation was useful as a means of developing rapport, demonstrating my knowledge, and allowing the interviewees to

feel comfortable with my intent. Overall, it appeared that knowing that I was closely connected to the college sector appeared to provide participants the opportunity to relax and enjoy the chance to “step back and reflect on matters with someone who is knowledgeable but who has no immediate stake” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 114).

Assuming that each person being interviewed will have a unique story to tell demands that a flexible approach be used, rather than a standardized question format. “[Unstructured interviewing] attempts to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.653).

Each of the interviews for this study consisted of a one-and-a-half-hour to two-and-a-half hour interview. These occurred between October 1st and December 15th 2001. The interviews were recorded and notes taken with the permission of the interviewee. Following each interview, the discussions were transcribed verbatim, edited only for repetitions or grammar. I then returned the transcripts to the participants with a letter asking them to review the data and respond with any corrections or additions. In every case, the transcripts were returned promptly with only a few corrections to names, references or in one case, a re-interpretation of a response. In the covering letter, I indicated that I would be available for further discussion if they felt it was necessary. At the interview, I had also sought permission to contact them throughout the data analysis period for further clarification if it was necessary.

I considered the possibility of providing the entire participant group with an initial summary of the data for their reflection, but decided against it for two reasons. First, the impact on the overall timeline for the study; and secondly, I expected that

the participants would want to make substantial changes to the data due to recent activity within the learning system. I had established that the purpose of my study was to create a snapshot of how the vice presidents were reacting to Campus Alberta at a point in time (Fall, 2001). I felt that if I gave them the opportunity to reassess their response in light of new developments, it would change the picture. In the time period between the data collection (Fall 2001) and the analysis and writing (November 2002-March 2003) significant events occurred which involved the participant group. A Campus Alberta Policy Framework document was released (2002a) along with another discussion paper, *Blueprint for Change*, 2002c). As well, in the summer of 2002, Alberta Learning initiated a discussion centred on the legislative Acts that governed universities and colleges in Alberta⁵. This activity is intended to examine the possibility of extending degree-granting status to public colleges within the province. In the spring of 2003, the first of what might be many mergers amongst the public colleges occurred when NAIT announced it was assuming the administration of Fairview College.

One critical aspect of qualitative interviewing is the researcher's role as participant. It is important to emphasize that this style of interviewing requires the researcher to be alert at all times to nuances in the conversation that may lead to new understandings. It is also critical that the researchers be sensitive to their own biases and ensure that they do not impose their own values or allow their own understanding to influence the participant. Early in the data analysis process, I conducted a peer audit that involved having two non-participants review my initial analysis and compare their reflections with my own. This process forced me back to

⁵ The new *Bill 43 Post-secondary Learning Act* was tabled in the Spring 2003 sitting of the Alberta legislature.

the data to review moments in the research where I might have imposed my own bias as a member of the policy community in which the research was conducted.

Document analysis

In order to prepare for the interviews, as well as to support the data, I reviewed policy documents related to Campus Alberta, both from Alberta Learning as well as the organizations in which the participants work. These documents were familiar to the participants and were often referred to during the interviews. This was particularly true of the *New Directions* (1994) report. Many of the vice presidents and both of the government bureaucrats mentioned this document as being a turning point in the system. Other significant documents were the *Colleges Act*, the documentation surrounding the implementation of the key performance indicators and the latest version of the Campus Alberta Policy Framework vision. I continued to review new documents until March 2003. Although the participants had not seen these latter documents at the time the interviewing was taking place, it was interesting to see how closely (or not) the participants were able to anticipate or predict the policy direction the system was taking.

Participants in study

The participants for this study were selected from two groups. The first was the senior academic officers (SAO) in the public colleges and technical institutes in Alberta. Twelve individuals were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Ten agreed and two declined. Of these ten, four had been in their positions for over five years, the remaining six less than five years. The distribution of the participants was

determined by the location and size of their organization to ensure a selection of both small and larger college as well as urban and rural. As a result, four of the vice presidents were from urban colleges and six from rural organizations. In addition three senior government officials were contacted. Two of these agreed to participate.

Data analysis

Stake (1995) indicates that two types of data analysis may be required in qualitative research: data aggregation and direct interpretation of the individual instance. Aggregate analysis requires the categorization of repeated incidences or meanings from the data; comparing new ones as they emerge and looking for correspondence with ones already identified. From the aggregate, the researcher hopes to “tease out relationships, to probe issues and to aggregate categorical data” (p. 77). The researcher anticipates that understandings will surface which might develop into assertions. This type of analysis provides structure as it repeatedly sends the researcher back to the data with different ‘filters’. Direct interpretation of the instance is unique to qualitative analyses. This is a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, as the researcher seeks a deeper meaning of a single piece of the data.

The aggregate analysis process used for this research involved a series of steps. The first step was to read through each transcript looking for themes. The pertinent segment of data was then isolated and put into a table with the theme

alongside. Themes were assigned intuitively. No limit to the number of themes or criteria for language was used.

After this process was completed, a second table was created. Those segments of data that were assigned similar themes were clustered and a broader theme assigned. This reduced the number of themes. At this point the individual transcripts remained separate.

The next step involved creating a master list of all of the themes from all of the transcripts. Thematic clusters were identified within this list and new theme names assigned to these clusters. At this point the entire set of transcript segments was combined into one master document with the new theme names assigned. The new names were checked against the original data to ensure the themes remained relevant.

A final clustering of themes was done and once again new theme names assigned. At this point there were broad categories of themes within which sub-categories were created. These were used to begin the direct interpretation of the data for organization into Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a term adopted by qualitative researchers to address the issues of validity and reliability in their research. Interpretive researchers seek to understand the subjective and multiple truths of the actors within a study. External validity is not a relevant issue for qualitative studies because researchers are not looking for a 'typical' case from which to make generalizations. This follows for

reliability as well, for the intent is not to replicate the study, but rather to assist the reader in developing deeper understandings.

For the interpretist, internal validity becomes a matter of trustworthiness, which is achieved not by the design of the study, but through the *process* involved in each step of the study, from data gathering through analysis and interpretation, to writing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a set of criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research. These criteria involve a checklist of enquiry, which the researcher answers to ensure the trustworthiness. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Guba and Lincoln (1988) defined credibility as the “degree to which the data and interpretations of the investigator are similar to the multiple realities in the minds of the informants” (p.84). The credibility for this study was established through member checking conducted with one participant, one year after the interviews were completed. The individual was asked to be alert to any researcher bias within the interpretation of the data and to assess whether it represented the reality he/she had experienced. In addition, the data were triangulated through comparison with documentation and the government interviews.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be applied to other contexts. The contextual literature reviewed in Chapter Two

provides examples of where similar policy events have occurred or are occurring in jurisdictions outside Alberta (Dennison, 1995; Levin, 2001). In Chapter Seven, the findings from this study are reviewed again in the context of similar, relevant events in other learning systems in order to demonstrate transferability of the research.

Dependability

This study involved a number of steps to ensure dependability. The data collection was organized to ensure an audit trail was available throughout the process. The data analysis process was also discussed and refined with other researchers to ensure the method was sound. Documentation used for the study was checked for authenticity, currency and reliability through library searches, discussion with government librarians and publisher information.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study were grounded in the context of the study and not influenced by my bias as a researcher and member of the policy community. Steps were taken to check for researcher bias. First, extensive notes were taken during the interview period. In these I noted points of each interview where I thought I might have introduced a bias. Second, all participants were given a complete written transcript of the interview and asked to review it. Third, two non-participants were asked to review portions of the transcripts and identify areas where they suspected researcher bias. These portions of the data were flagged and disregarded in the analysis. Fourth, a draft summary of the findings

and interpretation was shared with two informed volunteers, one of whom was a research participant. They were asked to identify any areas of suspected researcher bias. Fifth, portions of actual interview data were used to support the findings. Finally, the process of triangulation (discussed below) was included in the research design.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a method often used by qualitative researchers to check the trustworthiness of the data. Traditionally, triangulation “assumed a single fixed reality that could be known objectively through the use of multiple methods of social research” (Seale, 1999). For the interpretist researcher however, triangulation has evolved into a more constructivist approach that allows deeper understanding by providing different understandings of a single phenomenon. Rather than eliminating understandings and converging on a single truth, as the post-positivist might do, triangulation offers the interpretist “a way of explaining how accounts and actions in one setting are influenced or constrained by those in another” (p. 475). Thus triangulation “accepts a view of research as revealing multiple constructed realities” (p.475). Triangulation was created in this research study through the inclusion of multiple perspectives of the various participants. Selection of the participants ensured a broad context was created in which to develop the research questions and analysis.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research design of this study complied with the University of Alberta's guidelines for ethical research and was approved by an Ethics Committee.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study both by telephone and by letter and all participants signed and returned a copy of the consent letter.

The participants were given an opportunity to review their transcripts and again asked by letter for permission to use the data.

Security of Data

Throughout the entire 18 months of preparation, research and the writing of this document the participant information and interview data was kept secure. All interview data was stored in my home office on the hard drive of my computer. A back-up file was located on the network drive at my workplace, until the document was complete. After that it was deleted and all remaining files were burned onto a CD. All of the documents stored in this file are coded with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

SUMMARY

Chapter 4 has outlined the process used to conduct this study. The qualitative study used participant interviews and document analysis as the primary sources of data. The questions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were ensured through careful research methods. Ethical

considerations were reviewed and measures taken to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DESCRIBING THE POLICY NETWORK

The next two chapters present the research findings using data gathered from interviews with public college vice presidents academic and senior government managers. These data were interpreted using the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter Three. Combined with the interview data is the contextual data gathered from the government documents analyzed in Chapter Two.

As mentioned earlier, there were two broad areas of theoretical literature that were reviewed for this study: policy analysis and institutionalism. These areas provided a foundation for the themes that emerged from the study, which centre on the place of the individual actor within a policy community and the tensions that existed amongst the various elements of the policy environment. Chapters Five and Six outline the policy community as described in the participants' voices. Chapter Five identifies the various stakeholders within this policy community. Chapter Six describes the participants' beliefs about the policy and the community within which it is situated. From these data emerge a picture of a very complex institutional sector that has become increasingly difficult for autonomous organizations to operate within. This move away from autonomy, begun in the early nineties and continuing today in the manifestation of Campus Alberta, has been the basis for a variety of tensions, as will be confirmed by the data. These tensions, identified as themes, will be summarized in the final chapter.

The policy analysis literature described the importance of identifying the complexity of the policy community and the policy networks which exist within it (Levin, 2001; Pal, 1995; Sabatier, 1993). This is critical to understanding how a community influences policy learning and ultimately policy changes as they are

implemented and adopted. In this chapter, the data describing *policy community* have been analyzed. From the analysis emerged six policy groups that have significant impact on policy decisions for public colleges. These are business and industry, local politicians and community groups, other educational providers, students, the provincial government and other public colleges.

The policy literature also describes how policy networks develop within policy communities (Bleiklie, 2000; Pal, 1995). Relationships develop amongst the various policy coalitions and these relationships play a critical role in how policy is adopted and changes are legitimized within organizations. The following data analysis, which looks at the interactions within the policy community, demonstrates how important these networks are to policy learning and the policy change.

Institutional literature looks at organizational clusters such as the public learning system as institutional fields. The dynamic interactions which exist within the broader field and between related sectors within the field (such as amongst public colleges) are examined in this study to help us understand how institutionalized structures that have become embedded in the institutional field are being changed through regulative, normative or cognitive measures introduced through the policy network.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

As a means of introduction to the participant interviews, the vice presidents academic were asked to describe the environment in which they operated. This information, presented in a generic form, is included here. It is relevant because it places the participants within their immediate organizational structure and demonstrates the realm of influence they exert internally. In addition to this, a

description of how the vice presidents academic operate as a group within the greater provincial learning system is included to outline the formal networks that are in place and legitimated by Alberta Learning to encourage policy learning and change.

The vice presidents academic at the public colleges are in a unique position because as leaders, they have a significant amount of contact with the larger external policy community while interacting regularly and significantly with their internal organization. Within both of these communities, there are a number of institutional structures that exist. In this section, I will identify the key structures that emerged from the transcripts and how they were described, and particularly, how these structures are changing or have changed in the past decade.

Internally, colleges have had a fairly traditional, hierarchical organizational structure that has been fairly similar across the province. This includes a public board, appointed by the Minister and legislated by the Colleges Act; a President hired by the Board⁶, and vice presidents, usually two or three. One VP has the responsibility for operational administration, finance, facilities, etc. and another is responsible for the academic operation. Some colleges have a third vice president to oversee student services or advancement, while other organizations roll these mandates under the vice president academic or the vice president administration. Under the Academic VP fall the program clusters, usually headed by a Dean or someone equivalent. Two teams usually exist for planning and decision-making at the management level. One is made up of the Deans who report to the vice president academic. The other is a cross-college senior management team, which

⁶ Mandated by the Colleges Act section 28

reports to the President. The vice president in charge of administrative services will usually oversee the service area managers. Historically, students have not sat on these internal planning teams, although that is changing in some colleges.

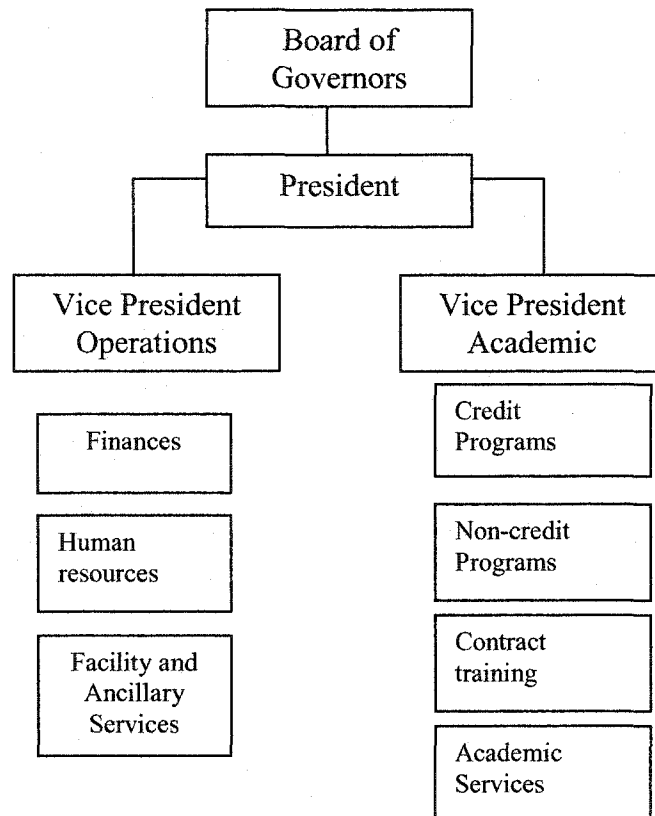


Figure 4. Organizational structure

All of the colleges have an advisory council, usually named the Academic Council, with representation from across the academic areas, including students and faculty. This team is mandated under the Colleges Act⁷. Its purpose is to vet academic issues and policy as a last consultation before reaching the Board of Governors.

⁷ Section 43 Colleges Act (currently under review as part of an initiative to bring the universities, public colleges, private universities and technical institutes under one body of legislation).

Membership in this team is outlined in the Colleges Act, and represents management, academic faculty and students.

In most post-secondary institutions, decision-making has occurred in a fairly traditional, hierarchical manner. Conventionally, information is channelled upwards along organizational lines and final decisions are made by the senior management team and formalized when necessary by the Board of Governors. In the tradition of the post-secondary organization, faculty remain cloistered within their academic disciplines, and cross-functional interaction is infrequent. This is an area that is undergoing some change throughout the system. As the focus on collaboration and relationship-building filters down to the program areas, and as the need for accountability increases, communication between faculty and administration across program areas becomes more important to achieving desired outcomes.

In March 1994, Alberta Learning released a document called *Adult learning, access through innovation: draft white paper; an agenda for change* (the final version was the *New Directions* document released in October of that year). This paper outlined a policy framework that was to change the look of education in Alberta. The focus of the document was to move the province towards a more holistic systemic approach to post-secondary education in Alberta. Rather than individual institutions working in isolation to serve the needs of their learners, the new framework outlined the goal of system coordination that was efficient while protecting the quality of education. The principle behind the strategy was to put in place systems that would encourage the 26 publicly funded post-secondary institutions in the province to collaborate to better serve the needs of the learner (Quinney, 1998). One senior manager at Alberta Learning described the changes:

So 93/94 – Access for Innovations set the blueprint – that was the framework document for - these are the things we want to do. And if you look at that document from back where it started from, it changed quite a bit. And I think that is the starting point to what led to what I think Campus Alberta is... That when we are talking about Alberta, we weren't talking about individual institutions. We were talking about the learning system working. What we knew at that point in time, with technology and that sort of thing is that for us to sort of let everything go random – without people working with each other – wasn't going to work for anybody.

With the advent in the early 1990s of the Alberta Learning drive towards a more open, whole-system approach to post-secondary education in Alberta, colleges began to re-examine their organizational structures. Structurally the colleges began to reflect the changes that were occurring elsewhere in the system. Evidence of flattened structures, changed decision-making strategies and increased consultation with periphery stakeholders began to emerge. Alberta Learning encouraged this activity by rewarding partnerships with the private sector through programs that matched donations with government funding or provided tax incentives to corporate donations to capital structures. They continue to influence the role of external stakeholders as they reopen the Colleges Act and propose changes to the makeup of the College Boards. One recommendation is to expand the number of public members on the Boards which will give the public members a clear majority over representatives from management, faculty, students and administrative staff.

The participant vice presidents academic talked about the changes they were implementing within their organizations. Three of the larger rural colleges in particular introduced significant organizational changes. Other colleges were

adopting individual strategic processes to incorporate principles of openness and empowerment.

The vice president academic at the first of these rural college remarked:

We went into a problem-solving process committed to lowering the decision making processes and moving towards what we call centres of specialization. We started with 11, got rid of the Deans and put team leaders in charge and made smaller clusters of programs.

The second VP referred to another approach:

We have no middle academic administrators. So every chairperson reports directly to the vice president academic. So it is advantageous to the program people because they have a direct pipeline to the senior academic officer. But decision-making and politics within the organization puts a lot of responsibility on the Chairs.

And a third VP refers to having a unique structure that is an attempt to rethink the traditional bureaucratic structure.

KB: *You've done quite a bit of redesigning of the organizational structure?*

VP: *We've got a unique organizational structure compared to the other colleges.*

This particular college has chosen to create functional deans that are not connected to specific educational disciplines but rather aspects of organization development. These include Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, Dean of Leadership and Dean of Student Services.

Changes such as these have moved the colleges to rethink how they conduct their activities. By redefining the organizational structure, faculty and students are encouraged to think differently about how they interact with each other and what they expect from each other. These new structures are also redefining how the public colleges interact with their community, which itself has been made more difficult because of how 'community' is now perceived.

In the early days of the community college movement, these organizations were designed to serve the population that lived within geographic proximity. This meant that colleges were mandated to provide programming that served the needs of their constituents. However, this definition of community is undergoing change, and in fact in some cases, no longer applies. The advent of online-learning, and virtual learning communities, means there may no longer be a physical community but rather a virtual community of specific learners, specific industry or specific instructional experts. It has meant that 'experts' can deliver to learners wherever they happen to be. It also means that instructors can be located far from their employing organization. In some cases, more than one provider can employ the same instructional expert. In other cases, learners can be concurrently registered in more than one post-secondary institution. It is a changing environment for education, and one that the government hopes will provide structure through the vision of Campus Alberta.

POLICY NETWORK

The literature on policy analysis refers to the complex relationships that exist for actors within any policy community. Actors represent individuals, organizations and coalitions of players who all have strongly entrenched beliefs about and agendas for any given policy issue. Policy communities can be either tightly or loosely connected. This connection can be changed by the element of influence that the actors have with each other or with stakeholders external to the institutional field (Bleiklie, 2000). The public colleges in Alberta exist within an increasingly complex policy community. Prior to the 90s, before consultation and involvement of external

stakeholders became widespread, post-secondary institutions operated more autonomously. This was particularly true of the universities, but also true of the colleges. Rural colleges worked within their regions, responding to the needs of the specific communities and working within mandates approved by the department of advanced education. The urban colleges also had defined mandates that outlined who their community of learners were expected to be.

Two changes occurred in the nineties to change the policy environment. First, the government began to emphasize the need for public consultation in policy development (Levin, 2001; Quinney, 1998; Taylor, 2002). This meant that groups such as students, industry, and business as well as community groups were invited to become involved in the colleges' activity. Structures to ensure and promote ongoing consultation were legitimated across the post-secondary system.

Secondly, the shift to a more coordinated system approach to post-secondary education in Alberta meant that colleges had to look beyond their traditional borders and consult more broadly with not only their immediate community but with other education providers within the system. Balancing the needs of this growing group of players became a very complex task for college leadership.

When asked, the study participants clearly articulated the external stakeholders that existed for their colleges. Although the specific stakeholders differed from college to college, the network of stakeholders was the same across the province, i.e. whereas specific businesses were embedded within certain geographic locations, the network of business and industry was an important stakeholder for every college. The relative influence of the different networks, i.e. business vs. government vs. learners vs. local politicians, varied somewhat from

college to college. The smaller communities tended to be more closely associated with large businesses in their region, which provided both employment for graduates and donations towards scholarships and capital infrastructure. The urban colleges were more connected to other educational providers and their learners, possibly because of the more intense competition that existed in the cities. Using the metaphor of concentric circles of influence within a policy community, these players are all seen to play a role in the planning and operation of college activity. The emphasis placed on stakeholder input depends to a large extent on their political and economic power as well as the personal value the college leadership places on the stakeholders' sphere of influence (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996).

The language used by the vice presidents academic when describing their environment often reflected the level of autonomy they perceived they had within their environment. In cases where they felt they had more control over stakeholders, they used words like 'influence' or 'control'. Those individuals or organizations who were less confident of their influence used words like 'giving input' or 'preparing responses'. It was apparent that the larger institutions, whose stakeholder groups were more extensive and more diverse, were more willing to resist control strategies from their stakeholders whereas the smaller colleges were more reluctant to put those relationships at risk.

The description the vice presidents academic used is consistent with the institutional theory that suggests that an organization cannot exist in isolation and is constantly influenced and exerts influence on its environment (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Whether that influence results in change depends on many factors, some of which the vice presidents academic mention in their comments.

The description that the vice presidents academic provide of their environment can be categorized with Scott's 'three pillars of institutions' (Scott, 1991, 1995). When the vice presidents describe the government or professional associations they are describing the environment from a *regulative* view. They perceive that these stakeholders control and establish structures through their legislative authority. When they refer to employers, advisory boards, government committees, MLAs and other individuals they are describing a *normative* view that implies that they understand their obligation to these players and understand the Colleges' role in that relationship. Finally, the participants describe their learners and community public with a *cognitive* view. In these instances their understanding is biased by their own personal beliefs about learning and the role of the colleges in that process.

When asked who their external stakeholders are, the majority of the vice presidents identified three groups as being primary to their business. They mentioned business and industry, local politicians (Town Council) and local MLAs as well as students and community. When prompted, they added their greater public community, local organizations (e.g. Rotary) and specific local industry. They also referred to their relationship with government departments, specifically Alberta Learning as well as other educational providers both public and private.

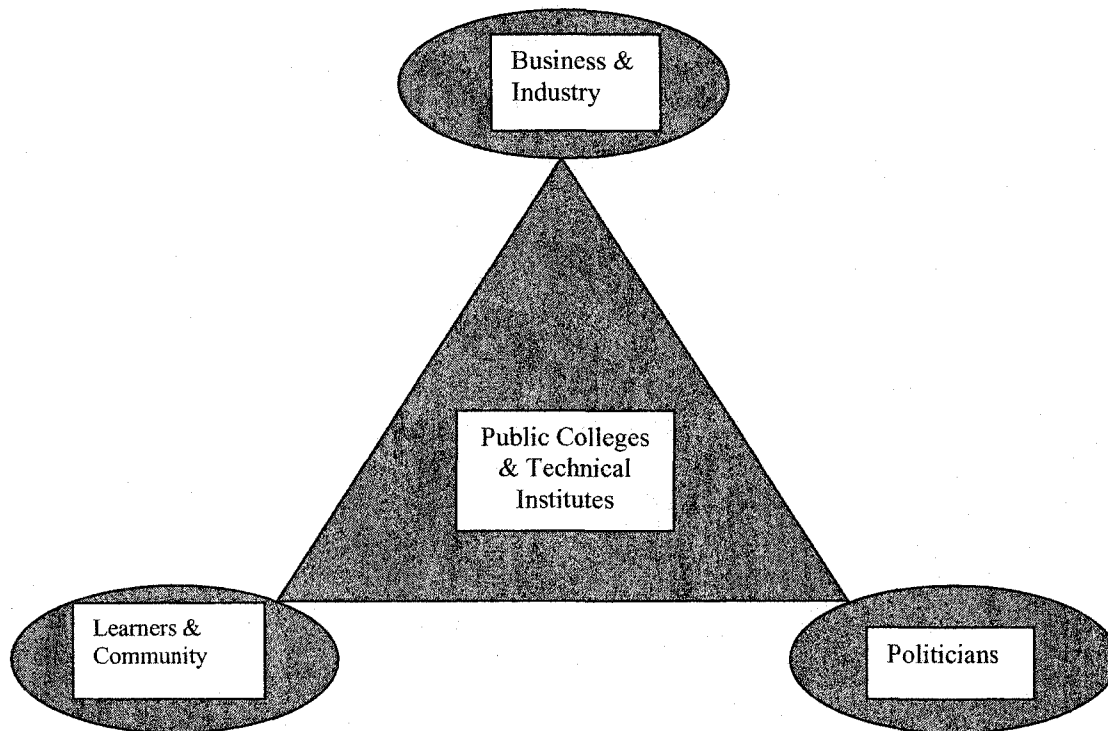


Figure 5. Policy network

Business and industry

When asked about business and industry stakeholders, the participants mentioned a number of factors including influence on programming, accreditation, funding, learner employment and practicum sites. As the participants described their relationships with these partners, they, at the same time, identified a number of tensions and challenges that have emerged from these new interactions.

The vice presidents first addressed how business and industry have an impact on programming design, content and admission requirements. This involvement occurs in a variety of ways. One way is through program advisory

groups. Representatives from employer groups sit on program advisory committees that are asked to review and in some cases approve program changes. These changes can involve curricular changes, new delivery models or new admission and graduation requirements. In some cases, industry advisory boards were seen to inhibit change because they are more interested in meeting their immediate employment needs than looking toward the future. The comment below describes a situation where an employer is more interested in the local needs than the industry as a whole. This comment was typical of VPs from the rural colleges where industry need can be quite localized.

"You used to teach them to fix the 66 Chevy...and now you don't". [say employers] And [I] explain patiently that that skill set is no longer required and we quit bothering with it.

The rural colleges also refer to the limitations of having a small group of employers to work with. They may be limited in their view of the industry they represent, as this VP suggests,

People will tell you that the knowledge of their own labour market is remarkably weak. That's been my experience over the years. So whenever you get advice from industry on something, I always try to get it from 7 or 8 different places, just to check it. They don't have that good an idea sometimes. And often times it depends who you talk to.

In others instances, industry might be pushing for their very specific equipment or process, which may be too limiting to include in a program of study because it would not give the learner the breadth of learning required to be job-ready across the labour market. One of the vice presidents from a larger college talked about the need for balance, as follows:

Yes, there's a fine line between self-interest for industry so you produce a grad who's totally focused on a region or a specific company. Or you produce a graduate who can move. And I'm really into portability.

Another aspect to business and industry impact is the role of accreditation boards, which provide a certain level of tension for those colleges that have accredited programs. These industry boards or professional associations set standards with their power to approve graduate credentials. In some cases there are both provincial and national accreditation boards, and both parties' needs must be met to ensure that learners meet the standards of the job market. One vice president academic describes the conflict that sometimes arises between the needs of these entities.

VP: *I've got an accreditation board that comes and they are very rigorous who say we must have calculus. And local industry is saying 'calculus shmalculus' who cares about that. And we're saying we can't fit it in and local industry is saying who cares we need your grads now. And the accreditation board is saying yes but the next recession in Alberta these people have to move.*

KB: *So your advisory boards are national?*

VP: *Our advisory boards are local and our accreditation boards are national. So that's where the shift is. So the national accreditation is by wide consultation with industry across the country.*

In addition to meeting the needs of employers through programming, colleges are dependent in varying degrees on business and industry for financial reasons. This manifests itself in a variety of ways. One is that business and industry provide state-of-the-art equipment that cash strapped institutions cannot afford. In another instance, business and industry might contribute financially to an endowment fund, scholarship or capital fund-raising campaign. Finally, business and industry provide work experience sites for learners, a commodity that is increasingly valuable as employers look for hands-on experience when hiring new employees. An issue that is particularly prevalent in the urban areas, and very current in the health sector is the competition for work experience sites. This occurs for both public providers and private training organizations.

There does not seem to be a significant difference in the relationship with industry across the province. Most colleges had made solid connections with their local industry and businesses and were also well connected to the professional boards. The following comment was typical of the responses:

VP: *Well this college has been in this particular specialty with its industry connections. We very much view ourselves as a partner with the industrial base we serve...So we're very, very tightly connected with those groups. Both as employers and as an industry period. We have a very close relationship with most banks. Through their lending operations which are quite big. Equipment dealers – very closely connected.*

In rural communities particularly, fund-raising efforts are closely tied to the relationship with business and industry. As a significant employer, the rural colleges are important to the regions in which they reside. Small business relies on them and their employees for business, as well as to provide workers.

VP: *Probably our biggest stakeholder is really two groups – business and industry which is oil and gas...We just went through a \$7M fundraising campaign and certainly they were big donors.*

Because colleges are seen to be feeding the Alberta labour force, they are expected to keep learners current with industry standards. Sometimes it can be a challenge to align program-planning efforts with those of industry. The drive to continually refresh curriculum and keep training labs and materials up to date can be draining. This VP comments:

The current environmental factors are the very strong local economy, and the tremendous work force needs of our local industries. So, it's aligning our program offerings to match their educational needs, and that can be quite a challenge because often they don't articulate their educational needs in the way that you and I would be able to do it. Also, their planning processes are not as sophisticated, as rigorous as we would assume from major corporate players.

The Alberta government recognizes the role of the post-secondary institutions in feeding the labour force and keeping Alberta's economic engine strong (Alberta

Learning, 2002b). The measurement of graduate employment used by Alberta Learning as a key performance indicator means that colleges and institutes have become reliant on business and industry to help them accomplish their performance targets.

Resource dependency theory addresses the issue of how organizations must negotiate their relationships with their stakeholders in order to establish their resource flow (Oliver, 1991). The colleges' dependency on corporate funding has resulted in an association that is sometimes troubling to the vice presidents academic. The insistence by Alberta Learning to establish those relationships and negotiate a partnership they can live with has been one of the significant challenges of the 1990s.

Local politicians and community groups

A second group of stakeholders mentioned by the college vice presidents is local politicians and community groups. Local politicians have the same needs as business and industry to a large extent, because they are concerned with the economic health of their constituency. Town and city councils are united in their desire to keep a post-secondary institution in their region because colleges attract people to a community and provide a significant number of jobs. The shrinking population in the rural regions of Alberta makes this a particularly key strategy for rural town councils. One rural vice president explains,

So we [the college] are the major employer. So there's a lot of concern about [what] we might do that might influence the economy.... So community as the town, chamber of commerce here, economic development board, all have a stake in what we do. And they all have their ear to the ground as far as we're concerned.

The rural colleges in particular mentioned the role of the local politicians in their community. They recognize the importance of keeping them onside with college activity.

I think MLAs have a lot of clout and that's why we like to meet with them throughout the year and keep them informed of what's happening here.

There is recognition that MLAs are also involved in an informal way as members of the community, local businessmen, parents etc.:

Certainly the political structure is involved. We have two MLA's, and they're involved officially and unofficially in various ways: board selection, and that kind of thing.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the rural colleges play an important role.

In some towns, they house the only full-scale theatre and fitness centre. Their buildings provide facilities for community activities. They also become a meeting place for academics and community members. As one vice president remarks:

[The community is] involved as consumers of educational programs, the whole arts and entertainment areas because the regional colleges are very much arts and cultural centres, and entertainment centres.

An example of the dynamic college/community relationship is demonstrated by the colleges' response to their community, particularly in the rural areas of Alberta. As described by institutional theory, the normative forces of the community play a role in shaping the programs and activities that the colleges provide. They do this because there is an established sense of obligation on the part of the colleges to provide these services (Scott, 1995). One rural vice president described how the theatre was an essential part of the community. Another rural vice president from another area of the province described how the community fought hard to maintain the theatre and arts programming, when there was discussion of it being cut back.

The behavior on the part of the college demonstrates the powerful normative forces that exist within this institutional field.

Students

One other stakeholder group that impacts colleges in a significant way is the students. This group includes current students, but also future students as well as alumni.

Both current and potential students are the future of the colleges. Colleges, by the very nature of their programming, have a very diverse student population. The university transfer programs attract younger students who have recently finished high school and have chosen to begin their post-secondary career at a college. In the rural communities, these students may be from the geographic region and wanting to remain at home. In the urban centres, these learners are perhaps choosing the smaller classes and lower tuition of the colleges over the universities. In both rural and urban settings, parents continue to play a significant role in program choice and location. As a result, these parents become an 'extended' stakeholder group in the policy network.

In 1999-2000 youth aged 18-24 comprised about 65% of total enrolment in universities and colleges in Alberta. People aged 25-29 around 14% and those over 30 years about 21% (Alberta Learning, 2002c).

Career and apprenticeship programs tend to attract older learners. These students are individuals who are often returning to education after being in the workforce. In many cases they have a clear idea of where they are going and what

their needs are as learners. These students may be less influenced by parents, but are taxpayers and members of the community in their own right, and therefore have a sense of ownership over the institution that may not be as prevalent among the younger learners.

Interestingly, many of the rural colleges draw students from neighbouring provinces, states and across Canada. This is particularly true for the agricultural colleges that draw students to their specialized programs in agriculture and animal husbandry. As one vice president from a rural college described:

We have about 15% of enrollments from Saskatchewan. Another 10% from B.C. Another 5% from other provinces.

Those colleges situated close to Alberta borders tend to draw from nearby provinces as well as Alberta.

Primarily the breakdown is approximately 60-70% Albertans, 30% from Saskatchewan and then 10% from BC and Manitoba. No international or American students. The odd one from Ontario in applied degrees.

In shopping for programs, potential learners influence both the delivery models that are developed and to some extent the choice of programming that is delivered. Many of the colleges have begun to implement flexible programming models that include evening and weekend courses, online-learning as well as community-based and distance print delivery. In so doing, they are trying to attract the growing population of part-time learners who want to continue their formal education but may not be able to do so full-time because of the need or desire to continue working or family obligations. The choice of programming is also determined by the learner. A recent example is the rapid growth of the university transfer programs at colleges in Alberta. In some colleges, these programs have grown so large that they have forced other career programming to be cancelled (e.g.

an agricultural diploma), in order to make space for the larger enrolments of university transfer students. In other cases, career program enrolments have fallen off despite high graduate employment rates, and the result has been cancellation or suspension of these programs.

Past students, or alumni are also vital to the college's well being. These individuals become the marketers and long-term supporters of the college as employers, politicians, community members and donors. For the colleges, it becomes imperative that they direct resources to maintain excellent relationships with this group. This involves developing sophisticated network groups, maintaining a formal fund-raising alumni office, producing alumni newsletters and hosting alumni events. For the rural colleges and large urban colleges this is an activity that is well established and serves them well for the most part. Graduates of career programs will go directly to employment and remain attached as alumni to their college. Problems occur however, for the new public colleges, such as the former Alberta Vocational Colleges and the university-transfer schools. The former vocational colleges face the challenge of not being considered true post-secondary institutions by many in the general public. University transfer organizations face the dilemma of watching their graduates go on to the universities where they become attached to a much larger and possibly more sophisticated alumni network.

And it's different in rural than urban. The U of A raises \$140 million in their alumni campaign. That's twice our annual budget. Remember that those alumni may have spent two years here – but send their donation to the U of A! So our advancement office fights to get \$200,000 a year!

The participant interviews did not reveal outstanding tensions that were emerging from their relationships with their student stakeholders. The challenge existed in balancing the needs of the learners with the demands of other stakeholder

groups within the policy network. The tension then becomes one where educators feel that their traditional and professional obligation to their learners is being compromised in the interests of satisfying others' more insistent demands.

Other educational providers

Other educational providers are also key stakeholders for colleges particularly in the large urban centres. Three of the larger urban centres have other public post-secondary providers operating in their geographic areas, often drawing from the same pool of learners⁸. These centres also have private education providers who operate in direct competition with the public colleges and institutes. Providers from other jurisdictions within the province and from outside Alberta and Canada are pulling the market in many directions.

The issue of the provincial institutions working outside their traditional geographic area is of concern to a number of the urban institutions. It was mentioned by all of those vice presidents academic that participated in the study, and also referred to by a number of the rural college vice presidents academic in their discussions around provincial rationalization. In the past couple of years, two rural colleges have moved programs into Edmonton and the technical institutes are offering programs in each other's regions. In addition, the four universities are offering online opportunities not only throughout the province, but around the world (e.g. Athabasca University's MBA program which enrolls students from Asia and Europe). The University of Lethbridge has opened off-site campuses in Edmonton

⁸ These include universities, technical institutes and private university colleges funded with public dollars.

and Calgary. One urban college vice president academic identifies this trend as the most significant challenge facing this college today.

I think a primary one right now is competition. From other institutions public and private. [For the] public one there's this new, what I refer to as open skies in post-secondary education...I mean, with all these things you wonder if the system is rational at all.

The smaller colleges in the province may not face the same competition as the large urban colleges, but some of them do compete for students. This is more prevalent in the south-central region and northwest where colleges are located in close proximity to one another. When asked about this competition, these colleges saw the challenge, but were already beginning to address it by being proactive in their program planning, as suggested by this VP:

So there was duplication – but there was duplication of effort because that region needed it. And of course with that goes ownership for what was produced and curriculum and then we did form partnerships. The Agricultural colleges formed partnerships.

Another rural college VP identifies how they have worked hard not to duplicate efforts in close geographic regions.

So what we're trying to do is offer some horticulture and agricultural courses in [our town] and we'll offer some theatre and university transfer course in [their town]. We'd like to try to offer joint calendars. We're really not competitive other than perhaps office administration and some of those more general courses.

The more remote colleges in the province are probably alone in not facing direct competition from other public post-secondary providers. Increasingly, however, other public and private providers are pulling the market away from these rural institutes through e-learning capabilities. The vice presidents academic from the more remote colleges were not asked about, and did not identify, any specific responses to these challenges.

Important policy issues emerge from this competitive environment. It reflects a more market-driven approach to education, which prior to the 1990s was quite foreign to the Alberta system. It raises the question of to what extent government will become involved in this marketplace to either establish regulative controls over the competition or reconcile this market model with the collaboration emphasized in the Campus Alberta vision. A recent discussion document (Alberta Learning, 2003a) on proposed changes to the Performance Funding envelope identifies the issues of competition versus collaboration as a key concern of public college leadership.

Other public colleges

Brokered programs from other colleges, and degree completion programs are becoming more common as a response to learner demand and need. A brokered program is one where college X enters a contract with another institution (Y) to offer Y's credential at college X. The students receive the credential from the institution that owns the credential (Y). The advantage for college X is that they do not have to incur the upfront costs of developing a new program. However the vice presidents agreed that Alberta Learning has not developed an adequate system for recognizing brokered programs. For example, although college X offers the program, it is not able to count the students registered in that program. Another example is that the government will not increase the base grant funding to an institution for programs that are brokered from elsewhere. This means that the infrastructure costs must be absorbed within existing resources. A senior manager at Alberta Learning acknowledges this concern:

VP: *But fundamentally, what we reward financially is still built on the competitive model. It's hard for us to reward you for collaboration because it's hard for us to quantify collaboration.*

KB: *Like brokering, FLEs and that sort of thing?*

VP: *Sure. That's our challenge.*

Despite recognizing the problem however, Alberta Learning is still encouraging brokering as a first step in program planning. A vice president academic describes this with some frustration when describing new programming areas that are in high demand:

The whole move to brokering... Alberta Learning has essentially taken the position that if you are moving into a new program area where there is strength already in the province, don't ask to do that program yourself.

Another type of brokering is degree completion. Many of the rural colleges are using this program design to keep learners in their communities to complete their post-secondary education. This model occurs where the entire four-year baccalaureate degree from a university is offered on-site at a rural college. The credential remains with the university. It is essentially a 2+2 agreement where the learner is first enrolled in a two-year university transfer program with a college credential and then remains at the college to complete the university degree. In some cases the university sends their own faculty to teach at the college. In others, college faculty are hired by the universities or through an arrangement with the college to teach in these programs. One rural VP states:

We soar ahead on collaborations – we're working on a BFA [Bachelor of Fine Arts] with U of C [University of Calgary], a Bachelor of Business Administration. A Bachelor of Early Childhood with U of A [University of Alberta] and Athabasca University. So there is certainly a lot of interest in students having a seamless transfer and moving on. And giving them opportunities, career opportunities and what not.

There are also status issues related to being a graduate of a university versus a community college, and this can become an area of tension for the vice presidents. This status difference concerns the granting of degrees and the ability to do research and have access to public research grants. As one vice president academic mentions when discussing the difference between university degrees and applied degrees:

I think it's because it's that very conservative view (and maybe it's because it is a conservative government, I don't know) that only universities can grant 'real' degrees.

A senior government manager acknowledges this issue in discussing the desire of some college and technical institutes to receive money for research activity.

Even the research – now colleges do research – it's seen as a sexy part of the business. They have doctoral students like you who want to do research – particularly when they get their doctorate – they for sure want to do it. Part of being an expert is keeping current and I want to be able to do research. Can we afford having everybody doing everything?

These questions regarding who delivers credentials and who will conduct government-funded research are fundamental to the Campus Alberta discussion. The Campus Alberta vision is moving the learning system away from local responsiveness by community colleges towards centres of excellence located throughout the system. In the most recent government documents released after the interviews took place, Alberta Learning asked whether research should be an exclusive mandate of the universities (Alberta Learning, 2002c). These questions challenge fundamental beliefs that society has about post-secondary institutions. As credentials move across the line that separates the colleges from the universities,

so too will faculty. As colleges begin to request public grant money for research, what criteria will deny or allow that?

As reflected in chapter two, DiMaggio (1997) built further on Scott's (1991) description of the cognitive pillar of institutionalism theory by asserting that change within organizations occurs through deliberate cognition. This occurs when individuals are motivated to change their thinking to absorb new typifications for the structures that frame their lives. By changing their definitions for the institutional structures, they effect change within those institutional fields. The perception of the role of the colleges versus the role of the universities within the learning system is one that differs amongst the many stakeholders within this policy community. As specific new perceptions are normalized and legitimated amongst certain coalitions within the stakeholder group, and those perceptions influence change, structural transformation within the institutional sector should occur.

Provincial government

Another group that exists externally to the colleges, but has tremendous influence over them, is of course, the provincial government. As described earlier, there are three government ministries that are directly involved in the operation of the colleges: Alberta Learning, Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Human Resources and Employment. One of the most significant changes that occurred in the 1998 reorganization was the amalgamation of the K-12 system with post-secondary. For the colleges this meant they were competing with two huge users of government resources: the universities on the one side and K-12 education on the other. Both the

rural and urban colleges leaders mentioned this perception as being one that concerned them. One rural college vice president academic summed it up well:

I think the colleges and technical institutes more than the universities, are having difficulty feeling they have the same kind of level of recognition in the joint portfolio at Alberta Learning. We are caught in the middle. We are the meat in the sandwich – actually I wish we were the meat – but when you look at those two big gobblers of resources – the K-12 and the universities...

For the vice presidents academic, academic programming and program funding is a key element of their work, and therefore they interact regularly with Alberta Learning. There are a number of systems that regulate program approvals and funding as discussed in Chapter Two. The importance of the government as external stakeholders to the colleges is the role the individuals within government (bureaucrats) and the politicians involved in post-secondary education play. These will be discussed in the following section on relationships.

NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS

The networks described above involve a complex web of relationships. These relationships are influenced by the changing dynamics within our society as well as within the provincial learning system itself. The study participants referred to relationships, and their importance and impact, during their interviews. These allusions were interesting in that it was one area where the vice presidents academic didn't always agree in their perceptions. There were three primary relationships that were mentioned by most of the participants. The first was the relationship with the immediate community, including business and industry. The

second was the relationship with the other colleges, and the third was the relationship with the Alberta Government.

One of the prevalent themes in this study was the issue of perceived autonomy. As many of the vice presidents academic mentioned in their conversations, the predominant belief about post-secondary education is that the organizations within the field are autonomous from government and operate independently. The colleges, institutes and universities have a history of managing their own operations without much interference. *New Directions* (1994) opened the discussion of creating a whole-system approach to post-secondary education in Alberta. The latest discussion paper released in spring 2002 continues that debate⁹. What is the role of government and what is the role of the post-secondary institutions? The dilemma for government appears to be how to balance that important concept of academic freedom and research innovation, with fiscal efficiency, while maintaining a relationship of open communication and trust with college leadership. The dilemma for college leadership is how to ensure the viability of their organization while maintaining relationships with various stakeholders, serving the learner, and preserving their integrity as experts in education.

Relationship with community

When discussing the relationship with their communities, the vice presidents academic tended to speak from the College's perspective rather than reflecting on their own personal relationships. This is not unexpected as elite interviewees generally reflect views in their capacity as spokespersons for their organization

⁹ Blueprint for Change (2002c)

(Berry, 2001). This reluctance to provide a personal view was less evident when the vice presidents academic were discussing their relationships with other colleges.

For some, the affiliation with the community was very interactive, with a history of very hands-on involvement. The rural colleges had more to say in this regard than the urban institutions. The relative size of the organizations within the communities, the history of being a 'community' college, and the visibility of a college within a small community, all play a factor in building these relationships. One vice president from a remote college felt that the community involvement was most important in the rural colleges.

This interaction with the external community, although existing in all of the colleges, seems more prevalent in the rural colleges. In some communities, the colleges are big employers, if not the biggest employer in the region. As a result, any changes in their programming which will impact the residents or local businesses is noticed and commented upon.

In some instances, the relationship with the community was somewhat capricious, as the College tried to assert its role as expert. Another vice president from a remote college referred to a needs assessment the college completed with the community that reflected the difference in worldview.

The overwhelming response was that the college was perceived as aloof, distant, standoffish, separate, insulated, isolated... And I think there's evidence for that. This is not an academic community. This is an agricultural, gas, oil, energy, forestry community and we're a small academic bastion within that. The community itself I'd describe as proudly independent. We don't need government intervention. If we do, help us don't stand in our way. So I think there is a history in the area of a pride in people's independence and ability to do for oneself. I think in the College there is a substantially different worldview and that is cooperation and sharing. And illumination and sharing not just hard work. So there is a clashing of worldviews between the largely educated college community and not so educated city community. There are points where they interface quite closely and points where they have quite different views.

Another vice president academic, also from a rural college, noted they had consulted the business and industry community regarding the organizational structure of the college in an attempt to strengthen that relationship and demonstrate a willingness to respond to their labour market needs more quickly. The suggestion was to flatten the management structure to encourage increased responsiveness to stakeholder needs.

Resource dependency theory describes the need of organizations to stabilize the flow of resources. If there are elements in the environment that are threatening to destabilize that flow or interfere with it, resistance and coalition building can result. This seems to be appropriate description of what is occurring in the rural communities. As the colleges experience the diminishing flow of resources, they begin to negotiate new alliances with business and industry and ensure that those relationships move to become institutionalized.

With business and industry, one of the relationship issues is the control of curriculum. In some post-secondary communities where specific industries such as Agri-Business or Information Technology have a strong link to the institutions, and hire a significant number of graduates, as well as make large financial contributions, the desire on the part of industry to control the curriculum content is often quite prevalent. The colleges face the dilemma of keeping these partners happy, while maintaining the integrity of the program and serving the long-term needs of the learner. This is another example of the contradiction between the rhetoric of Campus Alberta, which espouses a vision that has the learners' needs at its core, and the reality of the economic drivers that influence educational programming.

One remote college leader expresses his view that business has a position of power in this relationship.

And what business wants is a better-educated workforce that they don't pay for. So they want the outputs of our education which are our graduates to be able to move into business – invest a little money into research and development – and move in to be overworked and underpaid right off the bat. And the food chain – if you want to look at it – is who pulls the strings – but to me industry and business are the ones who pull the strings.

This tension raises the issue of whether the institutions should be providing specific technical skills for the workplace, or providing learners with more generic, transferable skills that allow them to move into a variety of work settings and make informed choices about their future. One vice president academic from a large urban institution commented extensively on this pressure.

KB: *Do you see industry feeling that they should have a role in programming?*

VP: *Yes, there's a fine line between self-interest for industry ... On the one hand I like to see kids getting good training on first-rate equipment. On the other hand I ask myself 'what are they NOT doing?' What might be more beneficial to be doing in the long run? So if someone is coming to me and is not able to write a report, but is a whiz on routers. ... So I rely on them having a good background in literature and the ability to write, some science, an appreciation of how the world works. So should they be doing hours of a company-focused curriculum?*

Relationship with other colleges and institutes

The second area of relationship building that the vice presidents mentioned, is their relationship with other colleges. Sometimes a formal relationship is established as colleges move to create collaborative partnerships with each other through brokering programs or co-developing new programs. Those colleges who do broker programs see the benefit in a number of ways. A primary benefit is of course the financial savings in not having to develop programs and the savings in

response time that allows. However, as one rural college vice president academic describes, not all brokering arrangements are ideal and the relationships can become strained:

We had great confidence in the curriculum and thought we could do this. Well it was just a nightmare. College X took our curriculum up there and immediately started trying to change it. They wanted to swap this course for that course..... College X thought we were extremely rigid and narrow.

As mentioned also, there are systemic issues related to Alberta Learning policy on counting learners in brokered programs. These situations are another example of contradiction within Campus Alberta policy framework. Reflecting the views of many of the participants, a vice president academic from a large urban institution identified how, without financial compensation, there is very little incentive to pursue partnerships like brokering.

KB: *Do you see that [collaboration] as a mandate from government?*

VP: *No, not at all. It's my perception that the Ministry of Learning has the rhetoric of Campus Alberta but they don't fund that way. When you put collaborative projects together it's not given enough marks to make it – not high enough marks on the grading scale to force collaboration.*

KB: *So the rhetoric is collaboration – but they're not actually encouraging it in any kind of way financially?.*

VP: *Yep in my opinion.*

One senior government manager talks about the challenge of quantifying partnership agreements in order to reward them financially. This individual felt the program approval division was developing appropriate systems, but the financial side was still lacking policy direction:

We've been trying through a variety of processes to come up with a way of doing that. I think we've come up with it at the program level. Because if you come in with a proposal that has four institutions in it – we'll look at that just on the basis that it has 4 institutions. That will have a higher standing than if it was just you. So in some aspects we do reward it. It's hard to recognize that. But it does have a higher level of currency with us. But we don't have a way of quantifying how much collaboration is going on.

Many of the brokered programs come from the larger institutions that have had the resources and student demand over the years to grow new programs. Their sense of ownership can be problematic as smaller institutions ask to enter brokering arrangements. Sometimes this can be quite fractious as originating institutions try to protect the integrity of their programs. This is where issues of power can enter into the institutional field. The larger more powerful institutions want to maintain control, while the smaller organizations while not wanting to be controlled, do want to adopt the programming of the larger, more established organizations within the field. The negotiation can result in the failure of a partnership agreement. As mentioned in the literature review, institutional and resource dependency theories identify situations where the more powerful actor becomes the model for the less powerful actors who move towards isomorphism in their attempt to maintain legitimacy within the field. One urban vice president describes a brokering negotiation. The larger, urban institution resisted the efforts of Alberta Learning to encourage negotiation.

VP: *We want the exclusive rights. We want to be the only show. We have the only approved program in Alberta and we're not brokering it to you or anywhere else. That would be the best example.*

KB: *And does Alberta Learning get involved?*

VP: *Sometimes – because they have the authority to approve new programs. And they may very well say sorry you want program X, then you import it from an existing institution and we'll hold out and say, well, you don't really have the horsepower to deliver this [our credential] so we're not lending our name and our program for you to mess up. You know, stuff like that. So all of that goes on.*

Other times brokering works quite well and both originating institution and brokering institution benefit from the arrangement. Many of the rural colleges broker quite a number of programs from the urban colleges for reasons of efficiency and flexibility. One vice president academic explains:

In Health we saw a need for Personal Support Aide and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). So with the LPN we started a program and we just broker from College X. Pay a brokerage fee. Helps them keep the curriculum current and pay the overhead and we get a high quality, current program. And that works. And tomorrow if the need goes away, we shut it down.

Relationships with other vice presidents

The Senior Academic Officers (SAO) committee meets four to five times per year. It is made up of the vice presidents academic from the public colleges as well as two representatives from Alberta Learning: the Executive Director of Institutional and Community Services, Adult Learning Division and the Director of the Public Institutions Branch, Adult Learning Division. The chairperson is chosen from amongst the members, and is rotated annually. Many of the participants commented quite positively about this committee. When asked to comment on the dynamics of the group, many participants mentioned the excellent rapport that existed amongst the members and the sense of shared responsibility that is prevalent. A few of the vice presidents commented on the atmosphere of egalitarianism that existed at the committee table. These comments came from large and small institutions, urban and rural. There didn't seem to be a specific clustering that reflected this positive perspective.

Although generally the vice presidents academic felt there was a good atmosphere at the SAO table, and overall a good sense of fair play, some of the smaller regional colleges felt they did not have an equal voice at the table. This was manifested in a variety of ways. One remote northern college referred to a hierarchy of institutions within the province:

We have institutions that are big and powerful, and know it – even within the regional institutions there's a hierarchy.

Another vice president from a larger rural Alberta college recognized the balance of power within the system:

I think the bigger colleges are always bigger players. I think Alberta Learning doesn't like to alienate for instance a NAIT or a SAIT cause they're big. Or a GMC or a MRC. I think that they have more clout. But I don't know if that's terribly obvious. I think there is an attempt made to involve everyone. But certainly the bigger you are the more weight you carry.

One other aspect of the discussion that will be elaborated further in this document, is the sense of competitiveness that never goes away. The colleges felt themselves caught between a rock and a hard place when it came to working with the other colleges. There is intense pressure coming from Alberta Learning to increase college enrolments. There is also pressure from business and industry declaring a need for increasingly skilled workers, as well as from the echo boom that has created a bulge in the 18-24 aged youth population. In the quest for growth, there are a limited number of options to explore. One is to expand enrolment, which is rewarded through performance envelope funding¹⁰. As one vice president academic points out, expanding enrolment means moving into other geographic regions and possibly competing directly with other institutions.

Where are we going to find the money? We find money through students. And those students by their very nature are going to come from a bigger and bigger catchment area and as it get bigger it is going to overlap on someone else's. Or I'm going to run programs that were previously off limits to me.

¹⁰ Performance envelope funding is awarded to post-secondary institutions each year based on a set of criteria that they are measure against, e.g. enrolment growth, graduate employment rate, learner satisfaction, etc. Until now, all colleges were measured against the same criteria. The Department is exploring changes that will match the criteria more closely to the approved mandate of the institution.

Other participants were quite candid about the paradox of the climate the SAO committee works within. They knew that despite all efforts to remain as neutral as possible, or as egalitarian as possible, the reality is that the colleges exist within a very competitive marketplace.

In the last years of the 1990s, the Department was strongly pushing for collaboration and rewarding it through various funding envelopes such as the Access Fund, LEE funding or the Knowledge Fund.¹¹ This resulted in institutions scrambling for dollars. One vice president academic described it as being somewhat chaotic, and not necessarily resulting in better programming.

When they first brought out the Access Fund if you didn't have multiple collaborations in your submissions you didn't get considered. Well it was awful. Every VP in this province would receive stacks of new programs [proposals] that they wanted you to sign on as their collaborator. They just wanted your name.

However, as many of the vice presidents academic acknowledged, collaboration is driven primarily for business reasons. If two institutions see a benefit to themselves and their learners by establishing a partnership, they will explore collaboration regardless of whether there is an immediate financial advantage. In many cases, the alliance is created to expand enrolments or replace enrolments that have fallen off as learners were lured to other providers.

When it comes to acquiring resources, we're basically competitors. I think there has been some [collaboration], and our college has been pretty successful at it, and that is collaborating, mostly with senior institutions.

¹¹ The Access Fund envelope was awarded each year to support the development and initial delivery of new programs. The Department identifies criteria that the proposals will be measured against, and outline key occupational areas in which they are going to support program expansion. It was not awarded in the spring of 2002 as part of the current round of cuts.

The Learning Enhancement Envelope (LEE) was established to encourage and support the use of technology, both by the institutions and the learners. This fund was discontinued in 2000.

The Knowledge Fund was established to promote collaboration and create efficiencies amongst libraries. A number of collaborative initiatives were created with this funding in the 90s that linked libraries across the province using innovative technology and partnership agreements.

The vice presidents talked about the informal relationships that are developed through their shared interest in the learning system. They talked about the camaraderie that existed amongst the members of the SAO group. A number mention how they used this network to communicate with each other. For the rural colleges, it was a way of keeping in touch with other players in the system.

And it's really important when you're sitting in the middle of 'prairieville' – to have your nose to the ground.

For the urban colleges, it was a way of keeping tabs on the competition and finding shared solutions to problems facing the colleges as a whole. All of the participants saw the benefit in having regular and ongoing contact in a formal setting with the bureaucrats at Alberta Learning. They felt that presence was critical to maintaining an open channel of communication with the government and an opportunity to bring their own issues forward to the Department's attention. This recognition of the power of the informal relationships came very strongly from those vice presidents academic that had been in the system for a considerable period of time and were comfortable in their role and place at the SAO table. Both of the following comments were made by senior members of the SAO committee.

We [SAO] do have a very informal network. We do exchange a lot of emails on various things. We confer. We don't try to reinvent the wheel. And to get a sense of the climate in post-secondary.

Well I maintain various networks where I can influence through the team of SAO.

One final aspect of this committee is the relationship it has with the Council of Presidents. This group is made up of the Presidents of the colleges and technical institutes in Alberta. The Assistant Deputy Minister sits on this committee representing the interests of the Minister. Many of the items that come to the SAO

table are issues that the Council of Presidents has sent down for review, investigation or comment. The vice presidents then are expected to gather input from their college communities and provide feedback. There have been occasions where this feedback has been listened to and acted upon. In other instances, as one former chair of the committee describes, it is disregarded.

And they report to us. Sometimes we actually sit on that. Last year there was one on distributed learning, which devolved down to us from the Council of Presidents. All the people on it were SAOs. We arranged the consultations and experts. And then reported back to Council of Presidents. They promptly ignored us. Which was disappointing.

Many of the participants commented that they felt the Council of Presidents was not as cohesive a group as the SAOs because they were in a position of lobbying the Assistant Deputy Minister and Minister directly for their own interests more than looking after the system. One got the sense that the vice presidents academic were a more likely group to look at system issues pragmatically and less politically than the Council of Presidents. In 2001 the Council of Presidents decided to establish its own lobby group¹². This example of coalition building amongst the members of the institutional field may become more prevalent as the need to exert influence increases.

Relationship with Alberta government

One aspect of this research concerned the change in the relationship with Alberta Learning that has occurred over the past decade, and particularly since the concept of Campus Alberta was introduced. The relationship with the Department

¹²Association of Alberta College and Technical Institutes

came up throughout the conversations with the vice presidents and a variety of opinions were expressed.

When asked directly, all participants said that the relationship had changed. A couple of respondents felt the relationship was the same, but that the environment had changed. Here they were referring to a number of transformations. First, the amalgamation of Alberta Education with Advanced Education and the separation of the Career Development division. With that change came a reorganization within the Department of Learning which saw new players in Executive Director positions and a new Deputy Minister and Minister. There was also a new Director of the Public Institutions Branch that oversees Program Approval and the Access Fund. In addition, responsibility for facilities and the Infrastructure Renewal Fund that had previously been within the jurisdiction of Alberta Learning were now under the Ministry of Infrastructure. One last change was the move of the Student Finance Board under Alberta Human Resources and Employment, along with Social Services and Career Development. What this upheaval meant for the vice presidents academic was that their network within the Department had changed and they needed to forge new relationships and build new networks. The “accumulated knowledge built up over the years was therefore lost” (Marshall, 1995). One of the more senior vice presidents academic talked about the need to spend time with the new players in order to build those relationships. This VP’s comment is a reflection of how the changes in organizational structure of government have forced change at the college level.

So we spend more time educating new players at Alberta Learning than we have ever done before. Now there’s autonomy that we have as an institution, but when it

comes to them approving the mandate statement the questioning of us doing this or us doing that – we've been doing it for 35 years. Because they're uninformed. Not because they're critical – they're uninformed. You get caught unawares at times. Then you've got to bite your lip and remember that the more you can help educate the better they will understand your needs in the future. But that was a given before. We never had to explain that to people. I mean you used to call people at Alberta Learning and they'd say "well I was here when that program was first approved and I think if you just did this." Sometimes they came up with the solutions for us. They had been there from the beginning. Now there is none of that history and it makes a difference.

Sabatier (1993) refers to such changes in his discussion of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. He mentions that aside from policy learning which reflects cognitive changes in beliefs there are other elements within a policy community that can change over time. These changes can have significant impact on the rate of policy change, or the direction that change takes. He refers to these changes as 'real world' changes and gives examples such as system-wide governing coalitions (i.e. newly elected governments) or turnover in personnel which can "substantially alter the political resources of various advocacy coalitions and thus the policy decisions at the collective choice and operational levels" (p.19).

Others of the more senior vice presidents (those who had been in the system for a considerable length of time in senior positions) felt they could draw on their personal relationship with the bureaucrats. Although they did not have a long relationship with the bureaucrats in some cases because of the government reorganization, they did feel their seniority in the system allowed them special privileges. They would not hesitate to phone a government manager if they had a matter of concern.

When asked to reflect beyond the structural changes, the participants all expressed the view that the attitude at Alberta Learning was quite different after the

amalgamation. They described the change as a positive move towards more consultation and less micro managing from the Department. Their description fits well with the new public management model. "A more collaborative outlook requires a major shift in the traditional culture of the public sector, from its role as unquestioned monopoly to a more open team of diverse players, from a provider-focus to a client-focus, from a closed system with clear boundaries to a borderless network" (Armstrong & Lenihan, 1999, p.24). A few of the participants attributed this reduction in management activity to the fact that, due to the considerable downsizing, the Department no longer had the personnel to get involved in the detail as they once did. One VP comments:

Pragmatically, the department has shrunk to the point where they don't have the workforce to be activist anymore. And they'll admit it.

One senior bureaucrat talked about the establishment of the Standing Policy Committee (SPC) as being a key factor affecting the Department's process of developing policy and reflective of a new public management approach, which took decision-making out of the hands of the bureaucrats and into the hands of elected politicians who represented their communities

Government created those [SPC] committees when Klein got elected I guess. The politicians felt that bureaucrats were making public policy, not politicians. And they didn't think that was right. So what they said was 'we make policy, you implement it'. So they created Standing Policy Committee. Their job is to create policy.

Protocol within the learning system is structured so that the College Boards and Presidents communicate with the politicians while the vice presidents academic tend to communicate with the Department officials. One participant made a point of differentiating between working with the politicians and working with the government bureaucrats.

- VP:** *The college has a relationship with Alberta Learning through its bureaucrats.*
- KB:** *Through Alberta Learning's bureaucrats?*
- VP:** *Yeah. So we try to at best here to keep those relationships good so if we want to get a point of view across or request something or do something we'll get a hearing. And it's hard to maintain that relationship if you are always going to the politicians. The bureaucrats and the politicians – it's not that they don't get along – but they view the world very differently.*

Levin mentions this diversity in his discussion of policy adoption.

Politicians and administrators (bureaucrats) live in quite different worlds. Politicians...tend to be sensitive to the symbolic impact of the pronouncements and with the extent to which proposals are consistent with government programs and political realities...Civil servants, on the other hand...are concerned to make the system work as smoothly as possible. They may have no personal commitment at all to a government's purposes, but they do have to think about the procedures in detail – what could go wrong, who will administer or manage the policy, how exceptions will be handled, what timelines are possible – all the things that form no part of an attractive political vision. (2001, p.118)

The participants felt that there was a sense of trust between the vice presidents academic and the bureaucrats they interacted with most closely. Part of this trust was the understanding that the vice presidents had around the difficulties the Department faced in trying to meet the various needs of the system within the budget allotted them from Treasury.

I think things have improved quite a bit. I think it is better than it was [relationship with government] . I think they're better. I think it's more inclusive than perhaps in the past. More of a – maybe this is just hopeful on my part – I think it is more inclusive – more team oriented. I think government departments have all been restructured along those lines.

Critical issues involved in the relationship with the Department bureaucrats pertained to the differences in the mandate and needs of the various colleges and the apparent contradiction in messages of competition and collaboration that were prevalent in the Campus Alberta rhetoric. They felt that there was a gap between what was being asked of the colleges and what was being supported financially.

For example, the rural colleges felt that they were being asked to support a comprehensive menu of programs without sufficient base support. They believed that politically, the government had to support their regional colleges within their communities, but that they were not investing adequately in initiating appropriate innovation such as brokering or e-learning.

Another area of concern was what one vice president academic referred to as the 'open-skies' approach to post-secondary delivery in the province. On the one hand the government approved college mandates and asked colleges to adhere to them, while at the same time allowing colleges to offer programming in direct competition with each other. The move of the Fairview College business programs into the St. Albert area was mentioned frequently as an example of this. The participants felt that the move brought yet another provider into an already competitive urban market.

You know Fairview College moving into St. Albert was a huge issue for the Edmonton colleges. Ministry of Learning was there at the opening ceremonies condoning the opening.

In discussing these issues, some of the vice presidents described the system as in a state of transition. They saw that the government had been cut back and therefore could not 'meddle' in the colleges' business as much as they once had. Some expressed a desire for the Department to become more involved and dictate jurisdiction and mandate more strongly. Interestingly these comments came from both large urban institutions as well as smaller rural colleges. The common element amongst the participants who desired more government involvement was that these vice presidents academic were either new to the system (from outside the province) or new to their positions.

Other participants appreciated the change, and felt that it was the Department itself that wished it had more clout, but that the colleges were better off without the interference of government. These participants felt that government was waiting for the colleges to rationalize the system themselves and would not step in at all. These comments came from more senior participants who had been in the Alberta system for a long time and were comfortable with having more of a free rein in decisions that affected their colleges.

What these participants were describing is again symptomatic of the new approach to governance being promoted with new public management models. It is possible that these participants are describing a trend that centralizes control by putting the emphasis on outcomes and rewards for achieving regulated outcomes.

Most entrepreneurial governments promote competition between service providers. They empower citizens by pushing control out of the bureaucracy, into the community. They measure the performance of their agencies, focusing not on inputs but on outcomes. They are driven by their goals – their missions – not by their rules and regulations. They redefine their clients as their customers and offer them choices – between schools, between training programs, between housing options. (Osborne & Gaebler, cited in Pal, 1997 p. 56-57)

When asked how they felt the amalgamation of the two departments had affected their relationships with Alberta Learning, the vice presidents expressed some concern. As mentioned earlier, they saw the Department's attention pulled away from their needs as it dealt with the huge K-12 system and the universities. For the most part, the participants recognized the issues facing the Department and understood the pressures they were under from their own Minister and the government in general. The senior government managers also saw this new tension from within Alberta Learning.

And we get a lot of comments even from our K-12 colleagues, that we should be much more prescriptive. Because that's really what they are. It's their system and they manage the system. They pull most of the strings.

Another senior government manager commented on the effect the amalgamation had on the concept of Campus Alberta and the whole-system approach to policy design.

KB: Does it weaken the impact of Campus Alberta by including K-12?

MGR: Yes. Too broad and it's not owned by the post-secondary system like it was before. Like the presidents and down through the organizations was very much owned by the post-secondary system. It wasn't the department's vision – it was theirs. And when it was expanded to capture the entire system – they started saying – gee maybe I didn't understand what Campus Alberta was. It's not ours anymore – it's now owned by the superintendents. I think it did erode the sense of ownership. Made it is more confusing and less clarity on what the government expects in this policy

Two participants mentioned the concern that because few bureaucrats or politicians had actually benefited from the college experience first-hand, they had no understanding of the important role the public colleges played in the Alberta learning system. The introduction of the Standing Policy Committee meant that politicians were more involved in system-wide decision-making. For many this indicated a need to create advocacy coalitions to lobby the Standing Policy Committees and local politicians. Organized groups such as faculty associations, Council of Presidents and SAO groups began to see the benefit of forming more organized coalitions to defend or argue their positions and assert themselves as professional experts in the field.

This expansion of the policy arena to include a greater number of interest groups was a direct result of the government's emphasis on increased consultation with a more diverse group of stakeholders. Marshall (1995) defines three categories of interest groups: the sectoral associations (e.g. colleges themselves, student

unions), specialist higher education interests (such as the Council of Presidents or Senior Academic Officers) and transectoral groups (such as Health sector groups becoming involved in health education during the health workforce restructuring of the mid 1990s).

When the government funding cuts of the 90s hit, the rural colleges in particular had to be creative and strategic in their response. They had a number of alternatives they could pursue. First was to cut programs. Only a couple of the participants mentioned this as something they were looking at specifically. One small rural college was in the process of developing criteria they could use to make decisions about program reduction. One larger institution mentioned the frustration of being mandated to continue delivering apprenticeship programs where the costs far exceeded the tuition revenue.

A second option for colleges was to attract other funding. This option is most plausible for the larger institutions that were able to draw from a larger industry and business base and are quite successful in corporate fund-raising. The colleges located in the smaller cities were also quite successful at this because they had good community support from business and industry and local government.

A third option for colleges is to broker programs. This seemed to be an alternative that all of the colleges were looking at for expansion, regardless of size or location. In the majority of cases, the smaller rural colleges look to the larger urban colleges or universities to broker programs or introduce degree completions on-site.

And finally, a fourth option is to maintain the status quo. This meant delivering the same number of programs with fewer resources. In the initial round of

cuts in 1992-94, this is the approach many of the colleges took. They pared down services to students, increased ancillary fees and reduced staff.

As the colleges moved in these directions, their interaction with Alberta Learning became more specific and their mandates became a primary topic of discussion. The frustration of working in a 'generic' provincial system was quite prevalent in this section of the discussions as indicated by this vice president:

I don't feel that Alberta Learning feels that it has any teeth. And I think that's it. ...And in general. I mean if we look across our system we can probably see the instances. I think these colleges should be amalgamated. They would never take a leadership role in that – never. They would let us fight it out until it happened. But they would never, ever be the ones to lead that. And it's not putting them down. It's just a fact... They don't have any teeth. The only thing that talks is money. So they say 'if you don't do this you won't get money', everyone will do it.

SUMMARY

This chapter has focused on the various stakeholders within the policy community, and the network of relationships that have emerged in recent years for the vice presidents academic in the public colleges in Alberta. As discussed in these interviews, these relationships are significantly different than previous ones the college leaders had with their community. More and more, these relationships are defined by the flow of resources or new regulations imposed through legislation. New relationships with other educational providers have been established where they did not exist before. Whereas previously post-secondary institutions were able to conduct their activities with little interference or attention paid to what other colleges were doing, they now have to be involved in complex partnerships and collaborations. Once these relationships were identified in the data, analysis uncovered evidence of tensions and contradictions within those relationships.

The tensions emerged around issues of power. In some instances this was a struggle between Alberta Learning and a college, where the college resisted government attempts to regulate changes. In other instances, it was a coalition of leaders working together to advocate for themselves. In others it was the tension between rural and urban colleges, where rural colleges needed programs at the urban colleges and the urban colleges used this dependency to exert influence on the system.

Contradictions in policy were frequent as the relationships were analyzed. In particular was the contradiction between the pressure to grow and the reduction of resources. The department implemented performance funding that rewarded enrollment growth while at the same time cutting back on base funding grants. It also did not create structures to financially reward growth created through contractual alliances with business and industry or brokering from other educational providers, yet rewarded these partnerships through other symbolic means such as public attention or program approval mechanisms. The opening of the education market to private providers also reflected a contradiction in the vision. A free market environment would allow colleges to thrive or fail as the market dictated. However, the Department, through its regulation of program approval and private licensing, was allowing only a limited market environment to carry on.

The effect of these contradictions on the policy network was significant and served to shape how the institutional field was defined. In order to access the envelope funding more readily, colleges began to formalize partnership structures such as brokering and degree completion arrangements that a decade earlier were rarely evident in the province. A single college rarely initiated new programming.

Rather, colleges and technical institutes, private providers or even universities began to seek out opportunities that would allow partnerships to be established. The price of this collaboration was loss of regional responsiveness and community attachment. Whereas previously colleges responded first to the needs of their geographic community, the funding reality drove them to meet the more generic needs of the provincial learning system.

One final contradiction, which will emerge again in the next chapter, is that of the rhetoric of the learner-focused policy agenda and the reality of the business and industry influence on programming and funding. The Campus Alberta vision states that the needs of the learner are paramount and the policy change is driven with those needs in mind. However, the reality described by the participants in the study reflects a different influence on the policy. The VPs mentioned throughout their interviews the strong impact of the business sector on education policy-makers and the bureaucrats in Alberta Learning. Evidence of this was in the consultation with these stakeholders and their appointment to the college boards.

In the next chapter, I look at how the vice presidents believe they impact policy in Alberta. This analysis will lead to a description of how the vice presidents view the Campus Alberta framework and how they see it playing out both in their community and in the system in general.

CHAPTER SIX: UNDERSTANDING CAMPUS ALBERTA

The previous chapter examined the policy community and complex relationships that exist within the institutional field of post secondary education and specifically the public college sector in Alberta. The environment that the vice presidents described during the study interviews is one of change, tension, and contradiction. It demands new skills of leadership and the abandonment or adaptation of traditional institutional structures. The words of the participants align well with the literature on resource dependency theory and new institutional theories, which describe how the various actors within a policy network create a dynamic relationship that has significant impact on policy change.

This chapter will express how the vice presidents academic described Campus Alberta and its influence on policy, their roles and their colleges. This discussion will first define the Campus Alberta policy framework in the words of the participants, and then focus on how their personal beliefs influenced their response to the policy change. Then the discussion will move to the viewpoint of the bureaucrats at Alberta Learning who are responsible for implementing policy. Finally, the last part of the chapter will look at policy formation in a more general sense and then specifically at the vision of Campus Alberta.

WHAT IS CAMPUS ALBERTA?

Early in each interview, the participants were asked to describe what they saw as 'Campus Alberta'. For the most part, they shared an understanding of the concept as a provincial learning system that is seamless and transparent to the learner and the public; where learners can move freely between institutions, taking

their credits with them, and receive advanced standing for those credits. One vice president academic described it as follows:

Basically that we're looking at Alberta being a campus. A broad post-secondary campus where students can seamlessly transfer from our college to LCC or U of A or whatever without loss of, or having to repeat things.

Another participant talked about the driver behind Campus Alberta being the focus on the learner:

I think the drive behind Campus Alberta, and I don't dispute it for a minute, is the public demand to make the education system responsive to the needs of learners as opposed to 'this is what we do and you play by our rules'. We should change who the driver is in the system. We respond to this all the time.

As mentioned earlier, this idea of the learner being the driver was a strong theme used in the introduction of the Campus Alberta vision. The rhetoric emphasized the needs of the learner as being paramount in education. It was a good example of the use of symbols and shared values to create a context for a policy change (Ingram & Schneider, 1993). Public colleges could not very well argue against the needs of the learner and were therefore coerced into adopting the vision of Campus Alberta before knowing how it would impact their organizations and understanding that the underlying agenda might be more fiscally driven and focused on labour market needs rather than learner needs.

There were a couple of interesting aspects to the Campus Alberta phenomenon when it was first presented. First, as one senior Department manager pointed out, it was a very top-down process, unlike many other consultations that had happened within the Department. In the case of Campus Alberta:

It actually started more with Board Chairs. It was actually a Minister's initiative. It was Minister Dunford at the time. It was his idea. What he did was he brought together a group. And this was not the normal process but this is how this one developed. He brought together a group of about ten board chairs of the public post-secondary

system. He sat down and said, "I'm going to talk about something I'm going to call Campus Alberta." He said, "What is this?" And that is where the whole thing started. So it was a discussion among them. They went away and came up with some stuff sent back through the Ministry, which we created a document.

As this government official points out, it was unusual for the Minister to start this type of policy discussion with the Board Chairs, who are community members appointed by the Minister, not employees of the college. As was described in the previous chapter, policy changes are often initiated at the Council of Presidents or Senior Academic Officers committee. Bureaucrats introduce policy issues at those tables and elicit responses from college leaders before developing new policy. This discussion was an example of how the Campus Alberta vision was different. It was in fact a discussion on a new vision for the Alberta learning system that would change the way educational organizations would conduct their operations. The government focused on a policy problem to introduce the discussion for change. The Minister chose the Board Chairs as a means of focusing the attention more deliberately on the perceived problem of learner need.

Levin (2001) points out that policy issues emerge constantly in the political arena. These issues can come from many sources, both political and institutional. However, the only issues that are acted upon are seen as important by the politicians. By pulling together the Board Chairs and drawing attention to the Campus Alberta vision, the Minister was telling his bureaucrats and his college leadership that this was going to be at the top of his agenda. He used the policy problem of college course transferability, and used it to create a politically driven discussion around the post-secondary learning system. In this case, the Minister used a perceived policy problem to open the door to policy change. However, as this

study describes, the policy agenda was much broader.¹³ The Minister, moving forward with policy changes initiated in the 1994 *New Directions* white paper, intended to move the learning system to become much more responsive to the skill needs of the labour market as well as less reliant on public funding for its operation at the post-secondary level.

Another interesting aspect was that the policy problem that was identified by the Minister was in fact, not a very significant issue. Dunford created an issue around the lack of transferability between institutions, when in fact there was already a well-established transfer system in place through Alberta Council of Admissions and Transfers. Colleges and universities were working together and had ironed out articulation agreements throughout the system. So as one vice president described:

I think it came from the perception in the public, or in some quarters of the public (which is wrong by the way) that there isn't a great deal of transferability between and among the education systems. If you accept that true, then a framework like Campus Alberta becomes popular as a cure. The interesting issue is – did you ever have the disease in the first place? ... Most institutions do a whole lot and always have, to make sure students can transfer in and out with more or less credit intact if at all possible.

Another vice president defined it as something that was already in place as a matter of good practice:

So I've always looked at Campus Alberta as something well meaning educators would want to do anyway. If you're at all interested in the future of your students you'd want to do it. There was a big Minister's forum last year that was the only one I've ever attended. And I thought 'we're all doing this already'. So the whole notion of Campus Alberta seems to be a little grandiose. 'I'll move in and take credit for something that's already happening'.

Just as the vice presidents academic had a shared understanding of what the concept meant and where it came from, they also shared a scepticism about what

¹³ As evidenced by the People and Prosperity documents 1997 and 2002.

the underlying agenda for the concept was and how it was being manifested. From the discussion with the participants, it was apparent that they did not attach significant meaning to the Campus Alberta vision in its early conception.

I think it all depends on how it is interpreted. Kind of what I see is a notion. I think it has some laudable objectives. I guess another part that I'm a little suspicious of.

For some, the term 'Campus Alberta' was nothing more than a slogan that government was using to push collaboration and partnerships.

It's my perception that the Ministry of Learning has the rhetoric of Campus Alberta but they don't fund that way.

For others it was a tool that government was going to use to continue their drive for financial efficiencies that had begun with the *New Directions* (1994) document and its policy instruments such as Key Performance indicators and envelope funding.

Oh I think there is no doubt it [Campus Alberta] is a question of efficiency. Financial. If you are going to have people who are not trained or can't use what they had before – that's lack of efficiency.

The above quotations demonstrate how policy identification cannot be "easily disentangled from the other issues of the policy process" (Pal, 1997, p.82). The vice presidents were placing the Campus Alberta discussion in the context they were most familiar with. For them, Alberta Learning was using symbolic forces to make policy change. These were occurring within rhetoric of a provincial learning system, but the details of that vision were still unclear.

The suspicion that the agenda for Campus Alberta was one of efficiency led the participants to speculate on the ramifications of a system-wide approach to policy planning by the Department. Examples they identified included the move to a

rationalization of the system to collapse into specialized centres and a centralized application process; standardizing curriculum; closure of rural programs; and the growth of E-learning. The bureaucrats at Alberta Learning also saw opportunities that Campus Alberta had created. They saw it as consistent with the vision from the *New Directions* (1994) paper that emphasized a whole-system approach and a strong focus on the learner at the centre. The sections that follow address participants' views of the possible implications of Campus Alberta.

System Rationalization

The concern that the Department was moving towards rationalization of the public college system was discussed in most of the interviews. Generally, the vice presidents academic felt that political forces would prevail, and the colleges would remain intact, with the possible exception of a couple of the more remote colleges whose enrolment numbers were dropping. The consensus seemed to be that maintaining a college presence in the rural communities was a political necessity for the government and the local economies and that despite the attraction of centralizing programming, it was not something that would occur in the near future.

As one participant said:

It's unimaginable that the government in Alberta would let a college go down. The politics, the price to be paid in the region would be too high, for the minimal amount we cost - in the grand scheme we cost nothing. You know it just doesn't compute - it wouldn't happen.

But another talked about the possibility of some colleges being collapsed together. This participant felt that the government was hinting at this possibility in

their latest round of discussion documents, *Developing the Blueprint for Change* (2002c).

So you have GPRC and Fairview down or flat. Keyano up slightly because of the oil patch. Northern Lakes and Portage flat. There is subtle reference to that in those documents you mentioned [Developing the Blueprint for Change documents]. You know how these boys operate. They are getting it into the discourse by putting it into those documents. And I don't know where it's going to go. And it's pretty scary and it's pretty tough.

Standardizing curriculum and centres of specialization

A few of the participants remembered when the concept of Campus Alberta and the earlier document, *New Directions* was introduced, that there had been some discussion with the Council of Presidents about creating centres of specialization. From the government this meant that certain colleges and institutes would develop expertise and programming in specific areas related to their mandate. Other colleges wishing to offer this programming would be required to work with the college that 'owned' the curriculum. It was the more senior participants from the Senior Academic Officers group that remembered these previous negotiations. They were able to reflect on those earlier discussions from the point of view of hindsight.

For example, the first implication of Campus Alberta orientation was the suggestion that we have Centres of Excellence and those would be the prime deliverers of certain specialized content. Nobody had really directed in the past, or perhaps tried subtly in the past, the colleges, or technical institutes, which are a little different, because there are only two and they are regional anyway. I mean they were all placed in certain regions so that you could address the needs of – in fact the word community was in the name and implied that you could provide everything that community needed and you could address those needs. To go from that concept to the fact – so there was duplication – but there was duplication of effort because that region needed it. And of course with that goes ownership for what was produced and curriculum.

One senior government manager talked about the reaction to the concept of centralization. He recognized there was a strong fear of centralization from the colleges. However, he felt that it was important to push the leaders to think beyond their borders and look for opportunities to strengthen their programs.

We were trying to build on the strength of each institution. Because centralizing it means, do we need a Fairview? Do we need a Medicine Hat? Do we need Keyano? Well there are other intrinsic benefits besides education that those institutions provide in those communities. And the more you centralize, the less benefits those communities with those institutions would get. We know that. But I make my decision from Edmonton... Because none of us can do things in isolation anymore. We have to work with and through others. And so the evolution is occurring anyway. This [Campus Alberta vision] might have highlighted it more, and started to focus on things that work really well. So if we can get best practices out of this, and show others that this can work here and work here.

The discussion of centralized programs led to the discussion of standardized curriculum. Those Vice presidents who had worked outside the province, were familiar with this trend in other places. One VP mentioned that in Ontario, there had been a system-wide initiative to standardize first-year curriculum. Another VP mentioned the same initiative and mentioned that it had been very contentious. There had been resistance from colleges who felt that it would erode niche markets and lower enrolment demand. Other colleges resisted arguing that it would inhibit innovation. Interestingly, both the VPs who spoke about the Ontario experience, felt that some standardization of junior level courses would be a positive move. These two individuals thought it had some merit for entry-level courses and could create some administrative and cost efficiency. They also saw it benefiting the learner where it meant that admission requirements into 3rd year or professional programs at the universities would be more standardized across the system.

These issues – if you look at in engineering. Our students do our first year. If they do this set of courses they have to go to U of C. If they do this set they have to go to U of A. That's stupid. That's absolutely ridiculous.

The issue of standardizing curriculum raised the issue of autonomy and ownership. For the college leaders, centralizing curriculum development or having government mandate centres of specialization had the potential to give the Department more control than the colleges were prepared to give up. They also felt that expertise in design and development sat with the colleges and institutes, not with Alberta Learning or the politicians. However, as one participant mentioned, there could be public demand for it, again because of the efficiency aspect. The colleges are dependent on government funding for development, and if the public demand responsiveness and efficiency, then standardization might be mandated.

KB: *So a standardized curriculum?*

VP: *Not necessarily. Not necessarily – I think there'd be a lot of resistance to that in the post-secondary system. Because the pride of that is still in the post-secondary – the reverse of the K-12 system. Where you have a standardized curriculum approach. There'd be a lot of resistance from the colleges I think. But at the end of the day – notwithstanding cost recovery and everything else, a significant part of the money for curriculum comes from the taxpayers of Alberta. If not the taxpayers, the industry of Alberta... In basic terms – one way or another – it's either taxpayers or industry that pay for the development of these materials. So if people in Cold Lake need program X...we ought to be able to have access to that curriculum.*

One VP felt strongly that in fact centralizing curriculum development through the department would in fact slow down response time and create more unnecessary bureaucracy.

I can sure see that. But I'm sure glad that these people who don't know what we do – are not micro managing curriculum. Because if they were the whole system would be bogged down forever.

This discussion on standardization and centralization of curriculum emerged without specific questions being asked regarding curriculum. Again, in the vice presidents' minds, it was an example of government interference they would resist

unless mandated to do otherwise. However, in reflecting on the data in the previous chapter, it was apparent that the colleges were moving towards standardizing curriculum more deliberately than they thought through the various brokering agreements they were engaged in. This brokering activity was a good example of normative behaviours whereby the various players in the institutional field provide common solutions to a perceived problem (Taylor, Neu & Peters, 2002). Colleges throughout Alberta were entering brokering arrangements because it was being seen as the best political response to the instability of the current environment. This represents another example of tensions within the learning system. On the one hand the colleges were doing their best to be responsive to their local communities while having to achieve partnership and growth targets set by the department that forced them to adopt more generic curriculum models.

A centralized application process

Another implication of Campus Alberta that the participants identified was the possibility of a single entry application to the post-secondary system¹⁴. This involved technology that would allow students to access an application form online for all of the colleges, institutes and universities in the provincial system. It is a process that exists in other provinces, for example British Columbia, where all post-secondary applications are done through a central website and fanned out from there¹⁵ From the Department of Learning's perspective it would be an excellent example of

¹⁴ Since the data were gathered, the system-wide application is much closer to reality.

¹⁵ This is done through a common database called PASBC.

Campus Alberta because it serves the learner very well. It would also create efficiencies for the system, allowing them to track enrolment data more easily.

When the idea of a centralized application form was initially brought forward to the Council of Presidents, they resisted the idea. The presidents felt that the Colleges owned the process of admission, and it was imperative that the individual colleges and universities be allowed to establish their own criteria for admission. They saw it as a critical aspect of quality control. The presidents also wanted to control their own recruitment, recognizing that they were in competition with one another.

One Alberta Learning manager who was interviewed agreed that there were issues to iron out in this situation. However, he felt strongly that it was still an important step and seemed to indicate that it would eventually go forward.

The application – we shouldn't have duplicate applications out there – but institutions should also be managing their own admission processes. I mean that's the idea behind it, we're trying to streamline it from the student's perspective. Why do they need to apply to ten institutions? Now, the downside of this document when it first came out was the perception of what were we trying to do. There was just one application process and we were trying to control it as government.

The discussion of the standardized curriculum and the centralized application process indicates problems in what Levin (2001) describes as the process of policy adoption. He says that policy is often put forward from the political realm on a very general level, with the details not thought through.

It is often difficult to anticipate the impacts of multiple policies on each other. Changes in separate areas such as financing, curriculum and governance will all affect each other as implementation proceeds, making the policy design task extraordinarily difficult. In many cases compromises have to be made during the political process to secure approval. (p. 115)

In the case of the current policy environment, the Campus Alberta policy framework is still in the adoption stage. During the five years since the vision was unveiled in 1998, the government has had to make some compromises on a few of the initiatives stemming from the Campus Alberta vision. This has usually occurred where the government encountered a lot of resistance from the colleges. An example is the key performance indicators. In response to a significant amount of negotiation and resistant behavior on the part of the colleges, the first iteration of the indicators has been revised and is currently under review once again. Another example is that of the degree granting status of colleges. When first requested, the department adamantly rejected the idea. The government was under pressure from the universities to resist that accommodation. The compromise at that time was to instigate the applied degree model at the public colleges and technical institutes. However, with continued pressure from the colleges, the Minister has agreed to open the Acts governing post-secondary education in Alberta and re-examine this issue. In this way, Alberta is following other provinces. British Columbia has already established university colleges. In Alberta we have a number of private colleges that have degree granting status. Some of these, such as Concordia University College or King's College, also receive public funding. In the USA there are four-year colleges that are degree granting at the undergraduate level.

Growth of E-learning

The discussion about an open, seamless system raises the issue of how technology will play a role. There was some suspicion that the department is using

the notion of technology to enhance connectivity and learner accessibility as a smokescreen. Some of the participants felt that there was a sense that e-learning was going to create a new source of revenue for the system that would further alleviate the responsibility for funding from the government.

Although all of the colleges involved in the study are developing programs online and using technology to reach learners off-site; the vice presidents academic that were interviewed had some concerns about embracing e-learning wholeheartedly. First, they felt that it was not something that was going to save the system a significant amount of money, because of the costs involved in creating and maintaining the infrastructure required. Second, they felt that government could use it to collapse programs to one or two delivering institutions. Third, the vice presidents saw the potential for intense competition coming from outside the province through e-learning. They anticipated that this programming was going to create huge systemic issues around quality and credential recognition and ultimately cost the institutions money. As one vice president from a larger college pointed out, it was fast becoming an issue within the system.

Now somebody has to recognize what it is they learn. That will be the big issue in the long run. I suppose if you get a degree from Harvard; it might be recognizable. But if you get some kind of a degree from Phoenix University, well what does that mean? And are students going to be bringing those kinds of learning experiences to the college or to the university and want recognition for them? The system may get too open in that regard. So I think that's creating a dilemma for the system right now.

The vision of Campus Alberta embraces the use of technology to enhance accessibility and affordability for the learner. It also follows the notion that the system is seen as a whole. It is this notion of accessibility that creates tension within the Campus Alberta discussion. While Alberta Learning is promoting collaboration

and shared responsibility within our system, the e-learning discussion is encouraging providers to pursue e-learning to increase their learner pool. By doing so, the providers likely draw students from other providers within the province. Those larger institutions, which have the infrastructure to support a rapid investment in technology, have been able to enter that market much more quickly than smaller, rural colleges.

Two issues are identified in the Alberta Learning *Developing the Blueprint for Change* (2002c) document involving technology and e-learning. The first is the problem of quality control:

Advancements in information and communications technology have led to innovative delivery methods that have made post-secondary programs more accessible than ever before. The development of online-learning allows Albertans to access learning opportunities with few barriers to time and location, through Alberta-based institutions as well as providers based in other provinces and countries.

While the range of learning opportunities for Alberta has expanded, the province's post-secondary institutions increasingly are exposed to competition from a broad range of out-of-province and international learning providers....Online-learning has increased accessibility and expanded the range of learning opportunities available to Albertans. It has also increased the potential for exposure to poor quality programming. Concerns have been raised regarding the balance between the government's responsibility for ensuring that Albertans have access to high quality programs and the learner's responsibility for making informed choices. (p.18-19)

The second issue involved the financial resources required to maintain the infrastructure and whose responsibility it was to resource this.

Provincial operating grants are provided to support post-secondary infrastructure within the province. It has been observed that post-secondary institutions are increasingly involved in providing learning opportunities outside the province. The development of online-learning has made the definition of out-of-province activity problematic. Many have pointed out that public resources need to be appropriately invested. (*Blueprint for Change*, 2002c, p.19)

A more recent draft policy document released by Alberta Learning (2003b) acknowledges again “Alberta learning providers will obtain access to worldwide markets for their programs and services. Alberta will be recognized as an international leader in online-learning” (p.5). This seems to put a new spin on the issue, by appealing to the desire of Albertans to be recognized as leaders in education. Whereas two years earlier the government had expressed concern that public dollars were being used to educate learners outside the province, now they are promoting that as positive progress.

The issue of financial support and the allure of e-learning as a source of revenue was mentioned by a couple of the participants. They did not feel that there was potential for increasing revenue through the use of online-learning.

VP: Obviously e-learning and technology is part of our Campus Alberta environment. I think the Council of Presidents had an idea as business leaders – that ‘let’s get into online-learning and leverage the Alberta advantage and make money. Expand our footprint. Get into global – all that - business case. To augment our cost recovery. And we’ll do that as a system. So [the Department] comes back and says ‘what is your take on this as an SAO?’ Our kind of advice is – ‘no question we can expand access – if we want to do it as a system – great. To expand our footprint – yes. But if we think we’re going to make a lot of money at it – we don’t think we’re going to make a lot of money.

The issue of e-learning is one that emerged later in the development of the Campus Alberta framework. The use of technology in education is a multi-faceted topic that has entered the discussion much more aggressively in the past two years. It seems to be an example of policy borrowing (Levin, 2001), which occurs when policy from other jurisdictions or scenarios is integrated into the developing policy as a means of legitimating the policy change. "Another caveat is that the global economic forces that are driving our perceptions of policy problems are also at the root of new, more intense demands for local and community actions" (Pal, 1997, p.97). Certainly the e-learning debate has heated up over the past two years. It was no surprise to any of the participants in the study that it should have entered the Campus Alberta policy discussion. It reflected the government's attention to national and international trends and could be massaged to fit the expanded Campus Alberta vision of learning anytime, anywhere.

The Council of Presidents asked the Senior Academic Officers group to consider the potential of e-learning. One rural vice president expresses the view that it would probably expand access to learners but would not, in the end, save the system any money.

The reality of that whole business in my mind is there is kind of a system-wide thinking operating on this, which is rare for Alberta. There's no business case for it. By any stretch of the imagination, it is a more expensive way of doing things. The advantage is that you can probably increase access for those who can afford it. But the bang for your buck from there is probably pretty weak. If you spent the same money doing something else you'd probably get more out of it.

BELIEFS

Successful policy development and implementation is closely linked with beliefs. Without a cognitive shift, policy learning cannot occur. The participants in this study were being asked by the department to make a cognitive shift in their beliefs about the learning system. For some of the participants this shift occurred more quickly and easily than others. All of the participants, however, felt some tension around their own personal beliefs about learning and education and how they perceived the current and future impact of the new Campus Alberta policy framework.

The above sections describe perceived outcomes of the Campus Alberta initiative. These themes emerged from the discussions with the vice presidents as their examples of how they anticipated the Campus Alberta policy framework being implemented. In addition to these concrete examples, the conversations with the participants also touched on more personal beliefs related to the learning system and Campus Alberta. These beliefs are described here under broad themes: beliefs about community colleges, beliefs about learners and later in the chapter, beliefs about policy and the policy process.

Beliefs about community colleges

During the discussions with the participants, personal beliefs regarding the learning system and the colleges' role emerged. The issue of the community college model was brought forward by a few of the participants as being a key element of the Campus Alberta discussion. They referred to the role of the community college in

serving the region they were located in, and that this was as important as serving the entire system. For the participants, the community was defined both geographically and by mandate. For example, there are four defined agricultural colleges in Alberta and these colleges serve a specific population of learners as well as their geographic region. For the urban community colleges in Edmonton and Calgary, their original mandate was to serve the community through both non-credit and credit certificate and diploma programs exclusive of technical and apprenticeship training which were the domain of the technical institutes. The rural community colleges on the other hand did have the mandate to provide apprenticeship and technical training as well as community education. One participant felt that it was possible to retain the model of the community college while working collaboratively within the system as follows:

So if you translate that to the future – you have one technical institute – that does the whole thing... College X could run all the college stuff using technology. And that would leave no role for the smaller, rural community colleges. I think you could advance a really neat economic argument that would be defensible politically, economically all that. But I think another way to retain the model of the community college is on the model where we were grounded in the first place. As a community college that is truly a community college that should provide access to learning. And we should be able to work together to figure out how to do that.

Beliefs about learners

Another aspect of the interviews that strongly reflected beliefs was when the conversation touched on learners. Without exception, the participants supported the government rhetoric of putting the learner at the centre of policy design. However, there was some disagreement about what was best for the learner. As well, some scepticism about whether the learner focus was in fact driving the change, or whether it was being used as a smokescreen.

We're trying to download the cost of education onto the user. We have this user pay mentality in Alberta. And who's the beneficiary of education? It is assumed it is the student. It is society that benefits from this. But elected officials wouldn't concede this.

This participant was the only one who articulated this idea of the beneficiaries of education as being more than the learner. Although many of the participants agreed that the colleges provide more than education to the communities they served in the way of providing jobs and bringing consumers into the community, this vice president spoke quite forcefully about how learners were being used as human capital for the labour force. He felt this was particularly true in those colleges where industry players such as oil and gas, agri-business or forestry were significant. These sentiments reflect the literature on the vocationalization of colleges and the push from the business sector to skew educational programming to serve the immediate interests of the labour market (Taylor, 1998).

However, not all the vice presidents saw financial efficiency as negative, if it served the student at the same time.

And also to serve students. I mean that is probably as compelling a reason as anything else and if you can turn that into a financial situation that serves both institutions that's great.

One of the vice presidents academic, from a large institution cautions that moving towards collapsing programs for the sake of transferability and fast-tracking may not be in the best interest of the learners.

If things are missed in the process of advanced standing, then kids are getting cheated in my mind. The most snobbish thought is if I can teach this in high school then what am I doing in a post-secondary setting. Because I'm here to teach people who have completed high school so my courses should be more advanced. So I'm not sure who gets what out of this.

Another vice president questions whether Campus Alberta is applied in a rational way. This participant refers to the issue of advanced standing in the

interests of an open system, and points out a contradiction in terms of which credentials are recognized. He questions whether the explosion of offerings available online has meant there is less accountability for the educational integrity of courses for which advanced standing is requested. He also argues that not providing constraints to the number of programs in certain occupations is not efficient or productive:

And then Campus Alberta, presumes that maybe the system is somewhat rational. But on the other hand, quite often, I think that right now One that comes to mind is an Office Admin program – the old secretarial programs – if I drew a circle around downtown Edmonton, we could probably come up with 12. In the public and private. And you say to yourself – now does that make sense? And they're all competing basically for the same student.

This participant went on to discuss the issues surrounding prior learning assessment. There is a lot of pressure for colleges to recognize the learning acquired on the job or through life experience. The issue for this vice president was that prior learning assessment is a cost to the colleges because of lost tuition revenue and the human resources required to do a proper assessment. In addition, Alberta Learning has not developed a system to account for the credits that are awarded the learner in these situations:

Instead we have to give this student prior learning assessment or advanced standing and the government won't recognize that so that's where there's a contradiction.

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICY

The previous chapter examined the relationships the vice presidents manage in their role as college leaders. This next section describes first how they use those relationships to manage the development and implementation of policy within their organizations. Then follows a description of how they perceive their role in policy

management external to their organization, and how stakeholder relationships play a role. From the discussion with the vice presidents academic, it appears that these individuals see their role as leaders differently in relation to their own organization versus their relationship to the system. This varies somewhat depending on whether the vice president is from a smaller regional college or a large urban college (including the smaller cities in the north-south corridor). It also hinges on whether the vice presidents have been leaders within the system for a longer period of time and have established their credibility amongst the SAO group and with the bureaucrats in government. It is interesting to note how differently the vice presidents describe their sense of control in both these spheres. Within their own organizations, where their level of control is much greater, their subordinates consider them the formal authority and legitimate source of power (Morgan, 1998). This legitimate authority allows the vice presidents control over decision-making processes as well as control over knowledge and information within the organization. As a result, they "carry an aura of authority and power that can add considerable weight to a decision that rests in the balance, or that needs further support or justification" (p.167).

The participants describe the policy relationship with external stakeholders differently. In this case the power relationship is less stable, and the stakeholder network more complex. Frooman (1999) uses resource dependency theory to examine relationships amongst stakeholders. He explains his approach as "providing a useful account of stakeholder power, although not in the form of a stakeholder attribute but, rather, as a structural component" (p. 193). He posits that stakeholders' interests and a firm's interests can be divergent, and that the

management of this potential conflict is critical. One influence strategy that Frooman identifies is 'usage strategy', which he defines as that where "the stakeholder continues to supply a resource, but with strings attached" (p.197). This describes the relationship that colleges have with Alberta Learning. It is a situation where the college as a stakeholder is reliant on the resources from government. However, the government is also reliant on the colleges to provide education to supply the labour market.

Perceptions of vice president academic role within organization

Those leaders with more longevity within the system responded in a similar way when asked to describe their role in policy development within the college. These leaders had established internal organizational systems within their colleges to identify policy, create new policy and review existing policy. These structures seemed well established and involved considerable consultation with their subordinates. In most cases, however, these vice presidents confirmed that they were in control of the process on the academic side, and very involved in all other policy as well. One vice president talked about their role within the institution:

Obviously I use my learners, my faculty, my administration to double check the standards that I think should be in policy and are legit. It's really been important over the last while that I had some kind of a vision of where I was going with this... that it could be legitimized and not just me off having a vision under whatever influence. Part of that had to do with the fact that I had done the job and was credible in my practise of the job. But I directly influence the policy because many of the policies come through a gap that I identify or a piece of the framework that I am trying to visualize... So my role is a pretty strong influence. What I dictate of this process of getting through these standards becomes the institutional policy.

Another vice president from a large urban college describes how they see their role as leaders in policy development:

Well one thing the Academic Vice President is, at least in this institution, is responsible for playing a major leadership role in the development of academic policy. They kind of oversee it at an executive level the academic council, which is a representative body that discusses and debates policy and recommends such to the Board. The academic vice president is also part of the academic policy committee so that's a primary part of that role.

Another of the presidents from a larger college talks about the importance of consultation in the formation of policy. This college has a fairly elaborate system of committees that process policy to ensure a wide consultation occurs before policy is approved and implemented:

I have a lot of influence on the policy...So our student policies are all developed within my portfolio and the Dean of Student Services essentially leads that group right now. And they all have to go through academic council, not for approval, but for input. Academic council doesn't approve stuff, it just gives recommendations. But it would be stupid not to listen to what they say. So the policy is made up by a committee, which is made up of faculty, and student services staff. So that means they'll go out and get the input. So they'll visit departments and such and put the policy together.

Those vice presidents academic that have not been in the system as long, or are new to their leadership responsibilities, describe their policy practise as more informal, intuitive and less rigorous. This may be because it is something they have not become involved with yet, or that they are from colleges without a formalized structure of policy review. One rural vice president talks about how policy identification and formations tends to be an intuitive process that has not been formalized as follows:

My stance on it so far is that those things tend to percolate – especially those that need review. And our Registrar is really good at keeping her nose to the ground on that. She has regular meetings with the Chairs. It is not a formal thing. They talk about operational academic issues. And one of the things they'll uncover is that this policy sucks or needs review because it is outdated. Like any other college we're there with our nose to the ground, ear to the ground for best academic practice.

Another rural vice president describes the importance of the vice president's role in policy identification; saying: *Typically... in the academic area, most of that*

[policy] is initiated by the vice president academic. In this organization, there was no formal policy development structure, but rather a committee approach in response to specific policy issues identified by the vice president.

Perception of role within system

When asked to talk about their role in system-wide policy, the vice-presidents academic spoke from two perspectives. Either they saw themselves as having an important role with some influence, or having very little role or voice. Those who felt they had some influence on system-wide policy (the minority) described it as having the opportunity to provide input, rather than being influential:

VP: *I think we have an active role in terms of the consultation process.*

KB: *Would you say influential role?*

VP: *Uh. . . Well it all depends. I think sometimes you influence more or less and sometimes you don't.*

The participants felt they were consulted both by the Council of Presidents, and by Alberta Learning managers. This input was generally elicited through the Senior Academic Officers (SAO) group as a whole, rather than from individual vice presidents academic. They felt that they were consulted on the more contentious issues, but that there were many issues in which the SAO group was not consulted.

They're [the Department] fairly good at surfacing issues with the SAOs and running things through with us as a group as they develop stuff. I know I have a sense that they wouldn't land something on us without first coming to us.

Another vice president felt that the SAO group had the opportunity for input, but were not involved in the initial or final stages of policy formation:

Because they can carry that back and say to the Minister anonymously that the colleges don't think that will work very well. So in terms of formulating policy as an SAO group – we don't do a lot of that.

However, at least one of these vice presidents academic remarked that if they had a need to give feedback, they had no hesitation in taking that forward to the

Department:

So I use that forum with my partners in this business to register any issues with the partners in Alberta Learning that we may see with the direction to our institutions.

The perception of agency for these vice presidents academic came from their sense that they had some influence once government policy was brought into their institution. In their role they were able to interpret policy for their subordinates and manoeuvre the policy through their internal channels toward implementation. They could manipulate the policy to fit the needs of their college:

And I don't think there is a formal process. [For bringing public policy into the college.] But there are the parameters and processes that I set up for any individual area.

The other group of vice presidents academic (a majority) had less confidence in their ability to influence policy at the system-wide level. This group tended to see consultation with the SAO committee more as a formality. Although they agreed they had the opportunity to provide input, they did not feel they had a role in the formation of policy. They felt that was very much a political process that came from politicians and bureaucrats and if the post-secondary system was involved it was at the Council of President and Board Chair level. For example, one vice president comments:

I see us being very much reactive to it. I don't see us being an initiator of public policy, I really don't. And maybe I'm not aware of that, or I haven't thought about if I've made a difference in that way. What we usually get is a paper from Alberta Learning and we respond to it and they come around. So that's not to say we don't give input to it, we certainly do, but we're more reactors to it, not initiators of it. I mean from a proactive point of view there's probably some things if we bring to people's attention frequently enough someone will say we need to look at that. That happens. I don't feel like it's a strength. That we can make much of a difference.

This same vice president felt that policy was very much driven by the political will, informed by communities through their MLA.

The vice presidents academic did mention that there were other means by which they brought issues of concern forward to the Department. These were through responses to white papers, through their annual reports and business plans. The senior managers at Alberta Learning, who strongly supported the formal document process that the Business Planning mandate had introduced to the system, confirmed this. One manager described the process that was used to analyze the business plan to extract key issues facing the system:

When they put together a business plan, everyone identifies what their key challenges are. Their environmental scan. So in order of priority, we just base it numerically on how often it is mentioned. Facility upgrading, faculty attraction and retention. There it is. So right away we start seeing top three issues here. All this has to do with infrastructure and staffing. Then we get into salaries, well that's another piece of it; capital funding. So if you look at all of this you see the challenges. And if you go to the other side which is their opportunities – partnerships, program reviews strengthened, collaboration.

Another government manager described how the Department used the business plans as a catalyst for discussion with the colleges to initiate an environmental scan and determine policy problems:

KB: *How do you involve the colleges in policy formation?*

VP: *Well the Developing the Blueprint for Change [document] is a classic example. We do the environmental scan through their business plan process. That's their first input into us. Then we go to every college and go through it with them...basically we sit down and walk through the business plan with them.*

BELIEFS ABOUT POLICY PROCESS

Scott (1991) and DiMaggio (1997) refer to the cognitive process that individuals bring to their role within organizations. People construct their beliefs about institutions based on how they view their world and the various structures within it. The vice presidents academic interviewed for this study all had moments when they shared their personal beliefs about their institutional sector and the role public colleges and technical institutes played in the Alberta learning system. It became apparent that they shared many beliefs perhaps because of the interaction of the vice presidents academic at the SAO table. This interaction provides the context in which institutional constructs develop (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Many of the participants mentioned the positive rapport that existed amongst the members of this committee and how they used the committee relationships to share ideas and concerns and explore best practices.

Despite the positive relationship described in the data among the vice presidents as a group, there were hints of an underlying tension within the relationship of the Department to the vice presidents. Two themes emerged from the data. Both of these themes describe belief systems, or cognitive constructs that the vice presidents held regarding their role and their organizations' role within the learning system. The tension existed because of changes that were affecting these beliefs. The first theme is that of autonomy and how the Campus Alberta policy change have impacted the traditional autonomy of post-secondary providers. The second theme is that of accountability and how the new regulatory changes have impacted the operational structure of the public colleges in Alberta.

Autonomy

The scrutiny and reorganization of the management of public education is not a new phenomenon, but most reforms until now have typically involved shifting responsibilities horizontally across government offices or vertically between layers of administration. The more thoroughgoing reformulation of relations between the centre and the periphery currently underway has focused and individualized management responsibility in new and different ways. (Power, Halpin & Whitty, 1997, p. 343)

The *New Directions* (1994) white paper, the *Campus Alberta Vision* (2002a), the *People and Prosperity 2000* (2002b) report and the new *Developing the Blueprint for Change* (2002c) discussion document, all emphasize the importance of a coordinated learning system. This is a move away from the tradition of the autonomous post-secondary organization and reflects the new public management milieu. As one Alberta Learning senior manager described the impetus for the Campus Alberta vision:

Institutions were becoming city-states and deciding who could come and who could leave. What credentials would be required and what they would recognize. What high school marks. So the idea was we have to get together and act as a system. Not as city states all the way around. I think that's where the issue came from.

There was a belief from government that it needed to intervene and create systems that would push the colleges towards more collaboration in the interests of serving the learners better.

The outcome of Campus Alberta vision is a system of inter-dependent institutions collaborating to deliver quality lifelong learning. (Campus Alberta briefing notes October 8, 1998)

This belief was not shared by the participants in the study. The vice presidents believed that the post-secondary systems had a tradition of operating within an atmosphere of autonomy that was a legacy from the universities. The vice presidents strongly supported this concept, and felt that it had a long history in the province, and was one of the strengths of the system. One vice president described it as being a fine balance that was kept in check by the politics of board governance:

We have a very strong culture in higher education of autonomy for institutions. It flows out of the universities and we in the colleges have benefited. That culture has been transferred to us in the colleges where that doesn't happen in other provinces and the States. In other places the systems are more discrete. So government [in Alberta] knows that they can't muck around with universities with any great success. It can't happen because of the autonomy of the faculties. They've got powerful boards of governors who won't tolerate it. And because boards are political appointments – and you get boards who are closely aligned with government but who are loyal to their institutions. They say 'you are meddling too much – stop doing it'. And it doesn't get out into public debate but I'm sure it goes on behind closed doors. The other reason the government isn't interventionist is that our values on institutional autonomy works in Alberta. It works because it allows institutions to evolve in ways that are in tune with their mandate.

Another rural vice president, however, felt that there was a significant difference in how the colleges and universities were treated by the Department:

There is cooperation between the colleges and university systems but not a lot. We tend to look at them and think they control the situation and no one controls them. That's the perception we have. Alberta Learning keeps pretty close tabs on the colleges and gives the universities free rein.

This question of agency is a theme that emerged consistently throughout the discussions. The sense from the vice presidents was that they were frustrated by the mixed message they felt was coming from Alberta Learning. On the one hand, they were hearing that the new way of doing business was outcomes based and that the government would outline the outcomes and the colleges would be allowed to

decide how they would achieve those outcomes. On the other hand, all new financial and physical resources were being allocated with complex conditions that constrained the type of choices that could be made. So in fact, autonomy was superficial at best. At the same time, some of the larger colleges were being allowed to move outside their mandates and regions to deliver programs that directly competed with other colleges in the system. The senior managers from the Department also recognized this paradox:

Mgr: *You don't want to hold up the guys who are way ahead of the game. But we want to assure those who aren't in the game, like College X, that they can be an active part. They may choose not to be, but we have to create the environment that allows them to participate.*

KB: *So it is a limited market?*

Mgr: *Well it's limited and a question of what our role is. How active we need to be in terms of managing it. It's a balance. And every time I talk to someone I ask 'what's the right balance here?' And it changes. It changes based on the issue and the time of day.*

Another Alberta Learning manager talked about the temptation to protect the smaller colleges while allowing the larger institutions a free rein to explore new models.

But that's very risky if we don't take that system perspective. Because we have gotten caught that way before. And if you try to solve a problem for a sector, as opposed to a system – well sometimes you can get away with that. It's very rare nowadays that an issue is college specific or technical institute specific. Very rare.

What was interesting was that this frustration on the part of the colleges came through the interviews in a very mixed way. It was almost as if the vice presidents sensed that their hands were tied, but didn't want to admit it. They would refer to the contradictions in the policy and then in the next minute talk about how the system was working well because the Department was less involved. A few of the participants expressed the view that they wished the government would be more

involved in decision-making and clearer about how outcomes were to be achieved.

One of the urban vice presidents expressed the view that:

There needs to be a clear statement from the government if they are going to allow that then they need to say it's a free market. The strong survive. Survival of the fittest. Make it clear. I think that would be detrimental to the system by allowing that. I think we need to respect our own geographical areas. There are much bigger opportunities abroad and in other parts of Canada that we need to be working on collaboratively.

Another of the vice presidents who had been in the system for a long time and embraced the concept of autonomy reflected on a vision of how the system should be working:

And let me design this system that builds in the kind of accountability that the private sector and the politicians value and within that accountability framework, we will value the institutional autonomy and the institutions will evolve and change in different ways because that is what's appropriate.

The differences in opinion around the issue of autonomy did not cluster in any specific way amongst the vice presidents that were interviewed. If there was any similarities it was amongst the larger, urban colleges and institutes who had been able to direct their organizations through the 1990s successfully and were experiencing tremendous growth.

The tension described here in regards to the perception of lost autonomy, reflects again the environment of new public management with education reform which pervades learning systems around the world (Levin, 2000; Power, Halpin & Whitty, 1997). In the quest for increased efficiency the government has moved to centralize coordination of the system. "The assumption [is] that commercial organizations are the most naturally occurring form of coordination, compared with which public sector organizations are deviant...for public sector organizations to become more efficient they need to become more businesslike" (Power et al, p. 344).

A current example of this desire for autonomy is the lobby for degree-granting status by public colleges. In Alberta in 2002, the two large urban colleges pushed the Department to allow them to grant baccalaureate degrees. These two colleges had reduced their community based programming in the interests of developing their undergraduate programs. This was done despite the strong emphasis on vocational and technical education during the eighties and nineties. These organizations felt a much greater degree of autonomy as a result of their success than did the smaller, rural colleges who were facing enrolment reductions and program suspension. The smaller colleges saw the larger colleges benefiting from the urban drift of students from rural areas while the rural colleges suffered. They argued that Alberta Learning should not allow the larger colleges to co-opt the provincial agenda and should mandate a more equitable resource allocation that would encourage learners to remain in the rural colleges.

Accountability

Hand in hand with the issue of autonomy goes the idea of accountability. This is one of the four pillars of the *New Directions* (1994) document and continues to be a major cornerstone of any Alberta Learning policy discussion during the past decade. The senior Alberta Learning managers enthusiastically embrace the concept and believe that it has been responsible for changing the system. They believe that by making the colleges and institutes responsible for achieving defined measures of accountability, they do not need to interfere in how the colleges reach them. One example is the recent allocation of dollars for faculty retention and attraction. One senior government manager describes the process:

When the money was given we thought we were going to get some money. We met with the Senior Business Officers and we said, we're successful getting some money based on this assessment of the problem. Here's the issue. So we laid that out for them. We told them that the range of issues was so different across the system. Like Fairview and Keyano's issues are so different from Grande Prairie's. We can't prescribe so you will spend the money for relocation, or whatever. We said, we got the money based on this problem. You be prepared to demonstrate to us how you spent the money and resolved the problem. If you can't do that, don't ever come back and say there's a problem.

When asked to discuss how they felt about this new approach to allocation of resources the vice presidents responded by saying that they agreed the new approach had changed the way they behaved. They appreciated the decreased intervention in program approval, but resented the necessity to create elaborate systems of reporting that were now required. They also felt that in some cases, the new system forced them in directions that were not always sensitive to their regional needs. They would prefer to have more autonomy within the new guidelines.

I support Campus Alberta wholeheartedly. But you can't have us as autonomous stand-alone institutions and then after the fact try to force-feed us into some of these other structures.

One participant who had been in the system for a long time, described the new system as being very effective as a method of changing behaviour:

It's real genius and really simple. You set up funding mechanism that rewards the behaviours you want. So there are behavioural rewards for increasing enrolment. There are behavioural rewards for controlling administrative costs. You squeeze the funding. Even today the funding is still squeezed. You squeeze the funding on one hand and provide rewards on the other – and the system will move in the direction you want.

The issues of autonomy and accountability appear to be quite separate. This may be because the issues of autonomy described by the participants relate to academic issues such as program approval and learner choice while the issues of accountability are related to technical efficiency measures surrounding financial

concerns. However, what this study demonstrates is that autonomy and accountability are in fact interdependent and that there exists significant tension between these two. It seems that the vice presidents remained ambivalent about these issues. On the one hand they are entrenched in the tradition of their institutional field that had a foundation of autonomy and academic freedom. On the other hand, they were being forced to negotiate some of these principles because of their dependency on the Department for resources and the unstable environment in the system as different colleges developed different strategies of response.

Governments do have massive power to coerce, but on the whole there is reason to be an optimist on these points. The trends seem to be pushing towards a wider, not narrower, distribution of political influence, even if such influence remains highly unequal. (Levin, 2001, p. 193)

SUMMARY

This chapter looked at the participants in the study and described how they saw themselves in the context of the Campus Alberta policy framework. From the interviews emerged a sense of uncertainty about the new post-secondary environment. The vice presidents were experiencing anxiety in their relationship with the Department and with their counterparts in other colleges. They were uncertain of the Department's expectations of them or where the Department was heading. The participants were being asked to examine their beliefs about post-secondary education and the community college mandate. They were also trying to redefine their role and determine how they could assert their own needs in the emerging centrally-focused provincial system.

The themes of uncertainty and instability are relevant to the literature of policy change. If one accepts that public policy change is not a rational, predictable process then research relating to it will reflect that volatility. As the government introduces various regulations pertaining to the Campus Alberta policy framework further uncertainty will occur during the implementation phase as the various stakeholders establish their new positions in the system. "The more a policy is designed to appeal to a variety of interests – which is frequently the case – the less clarity there may be about its purpose in a given setting" (Levin, 2001, p. 144).

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter will provide a synthesis of the research study findings. This will be done first, by using the research questions identified in Chapter One, and second, by outlining themes that emerged from the data. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research and practice as well as some reflections on more recent events.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of the Campus Alberta policy framework over the last decade. The context for the study was the public colleges in Alberta. The participants were the vice presidents academic of 10 of the public colleges and technical institutes. Three bodies of literature provided the theoretical foundation for the study. The first was the documentation that provided the factual information to support the study. This came primarily from government publications such as white papers, policy drafts, media releases and business plans. Interview data from conversations with two government senior bureaucrats were also included. In addition, the business plans from the colleges were gathered and examined to validate the system-wide aspects of the findings.

The second area of literature was that in the area of policy analysis. The work of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), Pal (1995), and Bleiklie (2000) provided the broad foundation in this area and guided my interpretation of the findings. Their focus on the role of the individual in policy formation and how policy networks interact within policy communities informed my understanding of the complex nature of this policy change. The model of Levin (2001) provided an understanding of the

widespread nature of educational reform in the world today and how the Campus Alberta initiative was reflected in similar changes occurring elsewhere.

Institutional theory was the second theoretical literature used to guide the data analysis. Scott's (1995) work on the three pillars of institutional change provided a framework in which to discuss the findings, while DiMaggio's (1997) work focused on the cognitive aspects of institutional change and the interaction of players within an institutional sector. Both were key in describing the policy learning and structural changes that have occurred in the Alberta system over the last decade.

Although the study was initially intended to focus on individuals within the Campus Alberta policy development, the data provided more than that. What emerged was a picture of not only how the individual vice president academics were responding to the changes within the learning system, but also how the system as a whole was responding. For this reason, the research questions were merely a starting point. It was the analysis of the findings, combined with the documentation and other research literature that provided a broader picture of the impact of the Campus Alberta vision on the provincial learning system.

Environment of post-secondary education in globalization

As outlined in Chapter Two, there is a widespread reform occurring in the education systems of many Western nations (Levin, 2001). In Canada, the reforms began in the late 1980s with a move to create structures within government departments that put control of day-to-day operations in the hands of the local education organizations, while tightening controls over financing and system-wide program coordination at the government level. In the K-12 system in Alberta this

was manifested through the introduction of school-based management, which gave school boards and school principals control over their budgets. School districts were collapsed and funding was removed from the local municipalities and centralized in the provincial Department. At the post-secondary level, the introduction of the *New Directions* white paper in 1994 was the beginning of a series of reforms that introduced new accountability measures in funding and program approval.

An initiative of the Klein government that coincided with the *New Directions* (1994) white paper was the establishment of Standing Policy Committees on education and post-secondary education. The change meant that policy decisions that had previously been the primary responsibility of the bureaucrats in government were now much more in the political arena. The committees focused politicians' attention on matters that might not have caught their attention before. The intent was to move control away from the bureaucrats and into the hands of the elected officials. The widespread use of consultation structures, Minister's forums and community consultations was another new way of doing business. Bureaucrats were expected to demonstrate broad consultation with all stakeholders as part of the policy development process.

The intent of all of these changes was to move the post-secondary organizations away from their traditional model of autonomous governance and towards a 'whole-system' approach. In 1998 the Minister of the day captured this concept with the 'Campus Alberta' moniker, which continues to be used to describe the provincial system as a virtual, seamless campus. Within this system however, the government introduced an environment of competition by establishing performance benchmarks that were public and by which post-secondary

organizations were awarded funding. At the same time, a contradictory expectation was formed as educational organizations were encouraged to look beyond their own regions to establish partnerships and collaborative programming. In addition, ideas of standardizing curriculum, opening the market to private providers and implementing e-learning were introduced as potential instruments intended to move organizations towards thinking in terms of a system rather than as individual organizations.

The public college vice presidents academic's response to this era of reform was mixed. There was consensus that the government was interested in promoting the Alberta learning system nationally and internationally, and therefore wanted to ensure they had some control over system outputs. The participants also agreed that the government had become less interventionist in their day-to-day interaction with the colleges. However, there was disagreement over whether this was a positive change or not. The smaller colleges in the more remote areas were concerned that the government was not being interventionist enough in protecting the regional mandates of their colleges. The larger rural colleges were anticipating the potential rationalization of programming that would mandate specific programming at certain colleges. The large urban colleges and institutes who had been successful at delivering cost neutral programming outside of their base operating grants, felt that the intervention was limiting their potential for growth. The urban colleges also felt that the universities had too much say in how the system was governed, despite the fact that these colleges were experiencing increasing student pressure for university transfer programs, while university enrolment at the first and second year was remaining stable.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section provides a brief summary of how the interview data informs my original research questions. Following will be a more in-depth examination of the themes that emerged from the data.

Research question #1:

What opportunities and constraints do the senior academic officers perceive when integrating new government policy into their own college structure?

The findings confirmed that the development of this policy and its implementation was not a rational process. The literature reviewed for the study provided a description of how a policy community is filled with multiple stakeholders, holding diverse beliefs and promoting a variety of agendas driven by self-interest (Pal, 1995). Policy change is a result of the interaction of these elements over time. Policy learning occurs incrementally as coalitions form to influence policy and policy networks join together to support or resist change (Pal, 1995; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993).

Recent institutional theory supports the concept of a volatile policy environment. Institutionalists argue that organizations that are within institutional fields behave like open systems and are strongly influenced by the wider social and cultural context in which they exist (Scott, 1995). Players within these organizations are motivated to change through regulative, normative and cognitive forces that impact an institutional field. These forces come from a variety of sources, both internal to the organizations and externally through various stakeholders that impact their operation (Levin, 2001; Scott, 1995; Taylor, Neu and Peters, 2002).

As vice presidents academic, the study participants were responsible for implementing academic policy changes being introduced by Alberta Learning throughout the development of the Campus Alberta vision. In the 1990s the changes were introduced through regulations requiring financial accountability. This served to move colleges in the direction of sharing information and becoming more transparent to their stakeholders. At the same time, the government pushed colleges to collaborate and work together by creating incentives through the funding envelopes and publicly applauding partnerships. Normative behaviours emerged as colleges began to work together to achieve outcomes defined by the key performance indicators initiated by Alberta Learning.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that there is great pressure for organizations to look and act alike. The vice presidents academic succumbed to this pressure during the development of the Campus Alberta policy framework as did most other players within the Alberta post-secondary learning system. Examples can be found in the move to collaborative program delivery that reflected partnerships initiated by vice presidents academic throughout the province. Another example is the behaviour of the Council of Presidents that pulled together to lobby for applied degrees, and later for full degree granting status. The findings of this study demonstrate that although the participants may not agree with the changes, and often resisted them in the early stages, isomorphic forces pushed them to adapt their organizational structure to accommodate them.

Overall, the vice presidents academic felt confident in their policy role within their organizations. These individuals understood the complexity of policy change and the need to introduce it incrementally and allow time for policy learning to occur.

They intuitively understood that cognitive conceptions of institutions needed to be altered in order for any change to be implemented successfully and be legitimated internally with their organizations. They also recognized the need of their faculty and staff to negotiate change in order to protect their own interests.

The vice presidents academic used their positions to establish or maintain internal structures to identify policy issues and to develop practices to implement new policy. The similarities across the colleges were in how they used their organizational structures to assign appropriate personnel the task of developing new policies to bring forward to the management teams of the organization. In every interview, the vice presidents described a process where individuals were given the responsibility of preparing policy drafts within their own departments. In most cases, the vice presidents spoke of relying on their Deans or Managers to consult widely with stakeholders in the process. Drafts of the policy were then finalized with the academic management team and then sent for approval to the Board where appropriate. An environment of consultation was reasonably well established in all of the colleges in the study.

Differences between the colleges lay in how established the committees were that developed policy. In the larger colleges that had vice presidents who had been in their positions for a considerable time, there were standing committees that were responsible for academic policy. These committees reviewed existing policy on a regular basis and were also responsible for developing new policy. These vice presidents were much more adamant about their leadership role in policy formation. They referred to themselves as the authority and leader in academic policy, and

spoke about how they controlled the process on the academic side of the operation. These vice presidents viewed their role in policy as proactive.

In the smaller colleges, the process was more ad hoc and policy committees were struck as the need arose. The newer vice presidents referred to themselves as more of a participant in a process. These individuals referred to other managers who brought the policy forward to the vice president's office, as they deemed appropriate. In these colleges, the role of the vice president was more reactive, responding to policy problems brought forward by other individuals in the organization.

A few of the vice presidents spoke in some detail about the constraints and opportunities they perceived when integrating government policy into their organizations. The more senior vice presidents understood that they had to frame any new policy within a context that would be amenable to their staff. One vice president talked about avoiding any discussion of fiscal restraint and always emphasizing the benefit to the learner. Another vice president talked about working with individuals to overcome resistance. Another mentioned the importance of allowing staff sufficient time to vent before mandating any policy change. All the vice presidents saw the implementation of government policy as an imperative that was often a challenge and required both planning and leadership. Participants most keenly felt the pressure during those times they were mandated to promote and implement policy where they were not entirely comfortable with its intent or proposed outcomes.

Research question #2:

What are the senior academic officers' understandings of the Campus Alberta concept? What beliefs are inherent in their description?

The Alberta government introduced the campus Alberta vision by capitalizing on a central and fundamental belief that existed within the learning system. This was that learners were at the centre of the learning system and all decisions needed to benefit their learning. By focusing on the learner, Alberta Learning was able to emphasize the normative aspects of the institutional sector and “give priority to moral beliefs and internalized obligations as the basis for social meaning and social order” (Scott, 1995, p. xv).

When asked what the Campus Alberta policy framework meant to them, the vice presidents were unanimous in their description of the concept as a move towards a fully articulated post-secondary system where learners could transfer easily between colleges and universities to meet their own learning needs. They were all familiar with the concept and the vision that Alberta Learning had put forward. Those vice presidents who had worked in the Alberta environment for a while referred to the earlier *New Directions* (1994) white paper and described Campus Alberta as being the result of that framework. The general consensus was that Campus Alberta was a slogan or concept more than a policy framework. The vice presidents saw it as an instrument the government used to push a system approach and move away from independent post-secondary organizations. Many of the vice presidents expressed support for the concept because they saw it as a move that enhanced services for learners and created some efficiency within the system. They all agreed that the primary focus of the concept was increased collaboration and could all name examples of collaborations their organizations had

pursued in the spirit of Campus Alberta. They also saw the integration of the K-12 system as occurring after the fact, but the merger fit with the Department's emphasis on lifelong learning.

Two beliefs came through clearly in this part of the discussions. Despite the increasing pressure from government to include business and industry in post-secondary planning, there was a strong commitment to the learner and the community in which the college was situated. This was particularly emphasized by the vice presidents at the rural colleges who were committed to serving the needs of their community and to providing opportunities that would keep the learners in their home communities. This commitment also extended to the other stakeholders within the community. The rural vice presidents valued the role their organizations played within the community both as employers and as learning organizations that met the needs of the local workforce. There was a strong belief that the integrity and uniqueness of each rural community college should be protected in any move towards standardization at the system level.

The second belief that was reflected was a strong belief regarding collaboration. All of the colleges valued collaboration where it enhanced programming and improved service. At the same time, they did not value collaboration for collaboration's sake, or where its only purpose was to enhance a proposal for funding. All of the participants saw a contradiction in the Campus Alberta policy where the rhetoric was focused on collaboration yet no systemic structures were in place to support it financially.

Research question #3:

How do the senior academic officers place themselves and their organizations within the Campus Alberta construct? What beliefs are inherent in their description?

The vice president academics at the public colleges and technical institutes used their relationships with their communities, their subordinates, their learners, their colleagues, the Department and their politicians to position themselves and their organizations within the Campus Alberta construct. As mentioned above, the rural vice presidents all expressed strong values around ensuring their community's needs were met. They felt strongly about the importance of how their community stakeholders were involved in the operations of their organizations. They also recognized the political necessity of those relationships as well as the relationships with the Department bureaucrats and their political leaders. A key relationship that emerged from the study was the one that existed amongst the vice presidents themselves.

The literature emphasized how the policy community is made up of a diverse set of players, many of whom form into coalitions to promote their interests: "An advocacy coalition consists of actors from a variety of public and private institutions at all levels of government who share a set of basic beliefs...and who seek to manipulate the rules, budgets, and personnel of governmental institutions in order to achieve these goals over time" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 5). The findings of this study indicated that the vice presidents academic saw the need to work together in order to position themselves in the new Campus Alberta vision. They recognized that they had similar issues and concerns and that sharing these would strengthen their voice with Alberta Learning. The Senior Academic Officers committee served as a form of advocacy coalition.

The choice of academic programming was another area where the participants felt they could position themselves in the learning system. They recognized the college sector's role in preparing Albertans for the workplace, and as a result saw programming as the most significant aspect of their responsibility. The relationship with the Department officials was key, because program approvals were done at the system level. The changes that the Department had undergone over the last decade played a role in these relationships. For the longer-term vice presidents, key people were no longer available as advocates. As a result, these vice presidents felt that they no longer had an edge in having their needs met at the Department level. For all of the vice presidents, the shrinking department meant that the bureaucrats had become more concerned with outcomes than with the operations of programming. Although the vice presidents welcomed this, it meant that they could no longer rely on their reputation and relationships to have a place of power within the system. They were now required to implement and closely monitor their outputs to meet the system requirements and establish their status.

Relationships were a key element of how the vice presidents managed their operations. The vice presidents reflected on their relationship with their learners and learners throughout the system and on how public colleges met their needs. They were concerned about how the learners were being impacted by tuition fee increases and curriculum changes driven by business and industry. A final relationship that was mentioned as being very significant was that between the community colleges and their business and industry employers. The vice presidents recognized that government viewed the colleges as offering a critical facet of workforce development. The rural colleges acknowledged how key this was to their success. As a result they

devoted a large part of their planning to promoting and supporting their relationship with business and industry partners, with a recognition that they needed to set boundaries to ensure they protected the integrity of their programming.

There was frequent mention of the tension the rural colleges felt in their place in the system, being small players in comparison to K-12 or universities. Some of the vice presidents expressed the belief that they were considered insignificant in comparison to these other players, and were concerned that with the amalgamation of the two educational departments under one ministry, the colleges would not receive the attention they required.

Research question #4:

How do the senior academic officers describe their role in the formation and implementation of Campus Alberta? What beliefs are inherent in their description?

The vice presidents in the study did not perceive themselves as having a significant role in the formation of the Campus Alberta policy framework. They referred to the misconception that led to the formation of the concept: the perception by politicians that there was no articulation and little collaboration within the post-secondary system. The vice presidents pointed out that this was in fact not true and that a significant amount of transferability had already been established even before the *New Directions* document was released. They mentioned that if they had been consulted, the misconception could have been clarified. They described it as a situation where communication between politicians and the post-secondary system was not very clear. However, as the vice presidents and the government officials recognized, there was an underlying policy agenda that was primarily economic and political. This agenda was driving the system to be more responsive to the labour

market and to become more cost efficient. This study identifies that the department used the transfer issue as a central policy problem that would appeal to public sentiment and allow government to introduce the Campus Alberta vision and provide them with the impetus for system-wide change which was in fact not intended to focus on transferability at all, but rather centralize coordination of the post-secondary system more obviously within the department.

What resulted from the introduction of the Campus Alberta vision was a number of contradictions as the department used the rhetoric of 'seamless transfer' and a coordinated learning system to obscure new regulations that were in fact fiscally driven. These new measures included envelope funding, key performance accountability indicators as well as new systems for program approval, which promoted collaboration and an entrepreneurial approach to program delivery. Later in this chapter, the tensions that result from the various contradictions in the Campus Alberta policy framework will be highlighted and discussed.

Levin (2001) defines four elements of the educational reform process as origins, adoption, implementation and outcomes. From the discussions with the study participants and examination of relevant documentation, it was evident that the Campus Alberta policy framework was an educational reform that could be described using this model and placing the vice presidents academic within its context. As demonstrated above, the origin of the policy concept was rooted in a political misconception used to harness public sentiment. The policy problem of transferability proved to be very useful as a means to focus the public's attention and begin the process of reform.

The second step of the process is adoption, which “is the process of moving from an initial policy proposal to its final form in an approved piece of legislation, regulation or other vehicle” (Levin, 2001, p.115). In reality, Campus Alberta itself has yet to become an official policy, regulation or piece of legislation, although many of its elements have been adopted by the system. Alberta Learning released a description of the vision in its most recent form in the spring of 2002.

Campus Alberta is emerging as a key framework under which Albertans will be able to pursue and achieve their lifelong learning goals. Campus Alberta is not a program, nor is it an institution. Rather it is a concept, a set of principles and a way in which the learning system works together to deliver seamless learning opportunities for Albertans. (2002a, p.1)

Despite the assertion that Campus Alberta is not a program but a concept, it has spawned a number of changes within the learning system that have served to move the field towards a realization of the vision. Examples include the Access Fund, Key Performance Indicators and the Learning Enhancement Envelope. The process of adoption, which saw the colleges grapple with these regulations, was not necessarily smooth. It was a situation where a ‘slogan’ had to be turned into policy that could be implemented. It created debate and resistance that were and continue to be political in nature. In their interviews the participants reflected on the politics of the change and the impact it would have on their organizations within their political communities and within the field of post-secondary colleges. It was apparent that the participants had felt the impact of the changes within the learning system and acknowledged that they had adopted elements of the new vision into their organizational structures. They did not yet, however, have a strong sense of

ownership over the new regulations and shared an awareness of 'being regulated' rather than being able to impose control over the implementation.

Two interesting differences between the vice presidents and the bureaucrats were highlighted in this part of the discussion. All participants were asked how the Campus Alberta model compared to other models in other provinces or countries, and how they saw its impact on a national and international level. Whereas the bureaucrats stressed the importance of positioning Alberta within the global economy and saw the Campus Alberta framework as a part of that strategy, only one vice president mentioned this. That individual saw the Campus Alberta framework as being a political strategy that allowed the government to sell the province internationally.

The second difference was that the vice presidents saw what was happening in Alberta as a being an imitation or adoption of models that exist elsewhere. In contrast, the bureaucrats felt that Campus Alberta was unique and a first amongst the provinces and that Alberta was a leader in this type of reform. The possible reason for these differences could be that many of the colleges were already operating quite successfully on the international stage in collaboration with other colleges across the country. Most of this activity was occurring through the Canadian International Development Agency and coordinated through the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. This activity was occurring without any Alberta Learning involvement so it was possible that the bureaucrats were not fully aware of the breadth of the activity or the national scope it had. This may also account for the knowledge that the college vice presidents had of other models of

reform in Canada. This was information that was shared amongst college leaders in different provinces.

Levin's third stage is implementation or the move from policy to practice. This stage is intended to bring into focus the various pieces of the policy and move them to practice. This process often highlights the complex nature of the policy problem and the multiple and widespread impacts it will have. The Campus Alberta policy framework is still in its implementation stage, although many of its pieces or regulations are in operation. At the time of the interviews, the participants described the system as being enmeshed in the stage of implementation, still embroiled in the messy phase of sorting out the politics and addressing the ambiguities and contradictions within the various new policy proposals. As the data findings in the previous two chapters indicated, the responses to this research question identified some of the contentious issues that had arisen as a result of the policy implementation. The vice presidents were able to articulate the vast number of players that were a part of the policy community and how the networks that existed amongst those players were playing a role in the implementation process. They were also able to identify the many policy instruments that were being used to move the policy change forward. In particular they focused on the New Directions white paper as well as the introduction of envelope funding (i.e. Access, Performance, Learning Enhancement). Levin (2001) describes activities such as the introduction of policy documentation as *opinion mobilization* or an "effort by governments to change the way actors see the system" (p. 153). He describes additional funding mechanisms such as the funding envelopes as a form of *inducement* that "promotes attention to policy goals" (p. 152). The study participants, however, recognized that

they had not completed the policy change and understood that there was still more to come.

Levin's (2001) final stage is outcomes. Levin's research on educational reform in different jurisdictions concludes that outcomes fall into three levels. "One set of outcomes is concerned with what happens to students. A second focuses on policy impacts on the education system itself. The third looks at the broad social outcomes of education policy" (2001, p. 165). In the case of the Alberta policy framework, it is difficult to speak about outcomes per se as the policy was still in development at the time the research was conducted. However, the process of development did provide some interim outcomes, such as new regulations and systemic restructuring that can be discussed using Levin's model. Other than the introduction of the key performance indicators the department has not initiated a formal evaluation process to assess the success of the Campus Alberta policy framework. They are however conducting ongoing assessment of various policy instruments and using that information to define further policy development (Alberta Learning, 2003c).

In the case of the Campus Alberta policy, the first level of outcomes concerned the need to redress a perceived barrier that existed for learners. This was that there existed few opportunities within Alberta for post-secondary students to transfer between colleges or from colleges to universities. This outcome has been met to a large extent as the system is now using an electronic course and program articulation process through the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer.

In the case of student outcomes, it was clear that the vice presidents felt they played a significant role. They were responsible for the aspects of their operation that

impacted student satisfaction, articulation and graduation rate. They were also closely involved in establishing the data gathering instruments at their organizations that provided data to Alberta Learning.

Levin (2001) describes the second level outcomes as being related to the school itself; focused on aspects such as work of instructors or administrators and programs. For the purposes of this study, the second level outcomes for Campus Alberta were interpreted as being focused on the whole post-secondary system and the rationalization of various elements such as urban needs vs. rural needs and community college versus university college mandates. The policy instruments used to achieve these outcomes are still in development, although incremental steps have been taken to achieve them. Changes to the program approval process have introduced an electronic registry system that is province wide. Criteria for approval have an increased emphasis on collaboration and program brokering.

The vice presidents were slightly less confident about how they fit into the policy development process designed to achieve these second level outcomes. This was particularly true in the program development area. Although the participants had always played a key role in program development and approval through the Department, they had recently faced new barriers in achieving these outcomes. Examples were given of programs that were not approved and where brokering relationships with other colleges were virtually mandated.

Third level outcomes are focused on the broad social outcomes of education that include economic, equity and social cohesion (Levin, 2001). Many of the vice presidents were quite up-front in their assertion that the Campus Alberta vision was primarily focused on economic outcomes being promoted by the business and

industry sectors in the province. These included a focus on certain types of programs to address skill shortages in the labour force. The Access Envelope was the most significant example of a policy instrument that was used to direct colleges to develop programs in very specific occupational clusters such as Information Technology or Nursing, regardless of other regional needs that might exist. In the case of the third level outcomes, the vice presidents indicated that they had a lesser role than their presidents. They did mention that the Senior Academic Officer group was consulted on these system-wide initiatives, but that sometimes the information they provided was ignored. At the same time, the general belief was that the colleges were more in tune with the programming needs than the Department. Even the government bureaucrats articulated this belief. Despite this, the Department continued to implement policy that dictated centralized programming priorities for the Access Fund and insisted on program approval structures centralized within the Department.

The vice presidents valued their role within their organizations and believed they had significant power in decision-making and organizational planning. However, they did not believe that their role was significant to the system-wide planning process. The vice presidents saw their autonomy and that of the college system as having been eroded. This impacted their belief in their own power within the system.

Research question #5:

What level of power to resist or effect change do the senior academic officers perceive themselves having in their relationship with the policy-makers?

“Historical studies illustrate how conceptions of what is important, true or worthwhile shift over time” (Levin, 2001, p. 77). Issues of power and change were implicit throughout the discussions with the vice presidents and bureaucrats. As the response to Question #4 indicated, the vice presidents saw themselves in positions of power in some aspects of their relationship and in others as more powerless. The same paradox emerged from the senior bureaucrats within the Department. Morgan (1998) describes various sources of power that exist within organizations and how individuals use power to exert influence. Some of these apply well to the situation that the study participants found themselves in within their own organizations and beyond that to their place within the provincial learning system.

Formal authority is a “form of legitimized power that is respected and acknowledged by those with whom one interacts” (Morgan, 1998, p. 163). The source of power is the organizational structure itself and the authority vested in various senior positions. The vice presidents all expressed a high comfort level with their level of authority within their own organizations. They knew they had the power to exert influence over key academic decisions and expected to be able to use that power whenever they felt it was necessary to make change. The same was true of the senior government managers. Their sphere of power was well articulated in the department structure and within the learning system itself. These managers also understood that a greater authority rested in the elected officials who made up the Standing Policy Committee. The lack of power to resist or influence change was also

felt by the bureaucrats when it came to the Minister's jurisdiction. The bureaucrats described the environment as being somewhat whimsical. It was important to think strategically to keep policy items on the Minister's agenda. Levin (2001) describes the tension that exists between the civil servant and the politician as being one of response. He describes the political world as being "extremely intense and fast-paced. There are huge number of pressures and very little time, ...senior politicians and staff have to deal with an enormous range of policy issues, so they can never be very knowledgeable about most of what is on their agenda" (p.24). The civil servants on the other hand are more interested in the long-term implications of policy change. The bureaucracy does exert influence, therefore, by "modifying the ideas of politicians or in terms of bringing forward requirements for new legislation or political action that grow out of the routines of government" (p. 70).

Another source of power that could be ascribed to the study participants was the control of decision-making systems. Morgan (1998) divides decision making into three aspects: premises, processes and issues and objectives. These three categories work well for this study and help explain both the sense of power and powerlessness that the participants might feel. The first area of decision-making premises refers to the ability to control the decision-making agenda. The vice presidents referred to this when they described their ability to decide which policies are developed within their organization. They felt they had power over those decisions. However, when they referred to externally-driven decisions such as those coming from the Department or the Council of Presidents, they felt much less control. The same was true of the government senior managers. They understood implicitly

that the politicians were in fact in charge of the decision-making agenda and had the ability to bring policy items forward or not.

Decision-making processes describe the 'how' and 'who' of decision-making and the study participants described numerous instances where they had this power. The vice presidents spoke about how they had established policy committees, either standing or ad hoc. They also talked about how they had established structures for policy discussion, some more formalized than others. The bureaucrats talked about how they had implemented processes such as business-planning and key performance indicator reporting procedures that allowed them to control the policy agenda to a certain extent. In these instances the participants felt a sense of power in their role. There was mention that occasionally this agenda was co-opted by the politicians. An example was the original introduction of Campus Alberta, when the Minister introduced a policy problem that had not previously been in the public arena.

Finally, the control of issues and objectives occurs when an individual has power over the reporting material or by "highlighting the importance of particular constraints" (Morgan, 1998, p.166). This is one area where the interviews revealed a sense of powerlessness. The vice presidents expressed the view that in many cases decisions were made based on political whim or climate and were not always well informed. An example was in the choice of priorities for the Access Fund Envelopes where the Department was highlighting particular occupations without consulting with the colleges themselves.

Another source of power stems from control over scarce resources. Resource dependency theory purports that most organizations "confront numerous and frequently incompatible demands from a variety of external actors" (Oliver, 1991,

p.148). It is the primary task of the organization to manage and control the flow of resources through negotiation with various stakeholders. As the findings of this study indicate, the level of power to resist or effect change varies depending on the relationship with the stakeholder, the level of resources that are in question and the role the organization plays within the institutional field.

One area that the vice presidents felt that their power had shifted incrementally, was in their relationship with their community stakeholders. In most cases they felt that they were in control with their stakeholders, particularly business and industry. However, as the colleges begin to rely increasingly on revenue raised outside their base operating grants, they felt that they had to give their business partners more say in their day-to-day operations.

The aspects of the relationship where the college leaders felt they had some power to resist or effect change came from those vice presidents that had been in the system for a long time and relied on their seniority or experience to give them power when negotiating with the Department. These individuals, regardless of the size of college they came from, used their personal relationships within the Department strategically. In the case of the larger colleges and technical institutes, they also used their size (budget as well as learner numbers) when necessary to put pressure on policy makers. The larger colleges also used their relationships with the universities to their advantage. The two urban colleges were perceived as using that relationship more because of their large university transfer programs. All of the vice presidents referred to the SAO committee when discussing their influence. They felt that the committee had the potential as a group to bring issues forward or to argue against policy that was being brought forward by Alberta Learning. They also saw

the committee as a channel upwards to the Council of Presidents and through it to the Deputy Minister and Minister.

A strong value around fiscal stability emerged from the discussions. With the decade of funding constraints and more in 2001-2002, the vice presidents identified a desire for more stabilized funding. They described the uncertainty that came with envelope funding as well as the extra resources required for reporting and monitoring the benchmarks. They also mentioned the process for Access Funding as being somewhat uncertain, for example the funding for 2002-2003 was cut even though colleges might have anticipated it in their planning.

THEMES OF TENSION

As evident throughout this document, the study participants experienced some areas of tension regarding the development and implementation of the Campus Alberta policy framework. A number of these have been mentioned in the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings as they related to the research questions. In the next section, the prevalent tensions will be identified and discussed in relation to the findings overall.

Tension of rhetoric vs. reality

From the beginning, the Alberta government used the name 'Campus Alberta' to describe a vision for the provincial learning system. In the early days of its usage, (Advanced Education and Career Development, 1998) the term was not used to describe specific policy initiatives but rather to serve as an overarching goal that the system was expected to strive for. As such it was an example of a symbolic policy

instrument used to communicate a policy agenda (Bleiklie, 2000). The rhetoric associated with that early time focused almost exclusively on two aspects that were intended to reflect the values of the government. The first was the benefit to the learner in having a seamless system that was transparent. The second aspect was the focus on partnership and collaboration that reflected a theme prevalent in other public sector documents at the time. This sort of rhetoric continues to the present in schemes such as the P3 (private, public partnership) initiatives promoted for education this past year.

Any mention of the Campus Alberta term by the post-secondary providers was usually evident in rhetoric contained in documents prepared for government such as college business plans (Bow Valley College, 2001) or Access proposals (Alberta Vocational College Edmonton, 1999). The use of the term by politicians and bureaucrats was used, as one senior government manager termed it, as 'a robust slogan' to push forward fundamental systemic changes such as performance funding and the present examination of the governance legislation.

The reality of Campus Alberta was a restructuring of the system to become strongly outcomes based, focused on fiscal targets set by Alberta Learning. The results were decreased base grants from government, increased tuition revenues and partnerships with the corporate sector that had a possible negative influence on curriculum. In addition, the restructuring implemented regulations encouraging broader consultation with stakeholders. The following themes of tension will elaborate further on the reality for the learner and the public colleges.

Tension between participants

Another tension that emerged during the interviews was verified during the analysis when it became evident that interviewees had contradicted their own responses. The most common contradiction was when the vice presidents described the role of Alberta Learning in monitoring the system. On the one hand the vice presidents were generally happy to have less intervention in their day-to-day operations. At the same time, many of the participants expressed a desire for the Department to intervene when colleges worked outside their mandate, or to make consistent decisions regarding rationalization of programs. A few of the vice presidents described the department as a living paradox where there were bureaucrats who would have loved to intervene more in the system's operation. This desire was leftover from practice that had existed in previous decades. The new political mandate, however, was to let the colleges decide operational details while the government monitored resources and controlled outcome measures. As a result the bureaucrats themselves were feeling ambivalent about their role. This came through in the interviews with the bureaucrats who acknowledged they saw areas where intervention might be in order but were reluctant to step outside the limits of the new public management model (NPM) that encouraged transference of operational control to the colleges. The tension the participants were feeling, therefore, could be explained by the simultaneous tendency toward devolution and centralization of control by government.

Tension between stakeholders

Another area where tension existed in the system was between the various stakeholders that had influence on the public colleges. This included external stakeholders, internal stakeholders and the system itself. The complex stakeholder environment that was the new reality for post-secondary organizations required a new type of leadership. It meant that where formerly colleges had been the experts and virtually controlled the academic content and structure of programming, the new model of consultation and fund-raising meant that stakeholder partners, particularly business and industry, were demanding more of a say in what the college was doing. This was creating a dilemma of professionalization for the post-secondary organizations. They wished to maintain their professional integrity and control over academic decisions but saw the necessity of establishing new types of relationships that facilitated the input of their stakeholders.

Post-secondary organizations are unique in that they hire professional experts to deliver products to outside consumers. This is manifested in faculty being focused on their own professional areas as opposed to the interests of the whole organization. Sometimes the loyalty to the disciplines impacts negatively on the whole college. For the vice presidents, the tension arose when they tried to implement new structures that were seen to interfere with faculty's work or questioned the integrity of professional practice. The example in health care is one that has recently impacted the colleges. As the province restructured the health workforce, they put pressure on the colleges to train more para-professionals. This created some resistance from the professional nursing faculty that were training

professional registered nurses, and did not want to be seen to be undermining the nursing profession.

Tension of competition vs. collaboration

A significant tension that became apparent was that between an open market model and a collaborative model. Both the vice presidents and the bureaucrats acknowledged that there was contradiction in the system. The funding mechanism such as key performance indicators were not structured to recognize or reward collaboration, so that organizations that chose to enter into brokering arrangements or partnerships to co-deliver programs were sometimes doing so at a financial disadvantage. In addition, the expansion of private providers in the system and the lifting of restrictions on regional jurisdiction meant that rural colleges were facing competition from other providers outside their area, while the urban colleges were delivering programs in each others' region.

An aspect of this tension was the pressure for standardization. The emphasis on program brokering meant that the colleges created fewer new programs. The result of this was that programs across the province became more standardized as program credentials from one college were delivered by other organizations through the system. This was positive in terms of saving the cost of curriculum development and design. However, the downside was that a college's ability to design and deliver new programs in response to new market or labour market needs was diminished, and the uniqueness of individual organizations was eroded.

When asked about this contradiction, the bureaucrats acknowledged that it was a problem. In fact the *Developing the Blueprint for Change (2002c)* document specifically identifies this as a key challenge. However, the bureaucrats were also supportive of an environment that encouraged some competition because they felt it would improve quality. They believed that if they established clear outcome goals, the colleges would choose to collaborate where it was in the best interest of their organizations and their learners.

Tension of learner focus vs economic focus

It was clear to the participants of the study that the government was intent on a fiscal restructuring of the learning system when they introduced the Campus Alberta vision in 1998. This was no doubt due to the fact that a significant amount of cost-cutting had already occurred in the years immediately prior to the Campus Alberta announcement and that many of these vice presidents had been in the system during that time. That experience also helped explain the scepticism that surrounded the discussions with the vice presidents about their understanding of the vision itself. Many of the participants described the benefit to learners as a laudable goal, but argued that the transfer issue had already been addressed. Many of the participants were able to articulate this contradiction that had emerged in the Campus Alberta vision. They identified that on the one hand the government was promoting increased transferability between providers to allow maximum flexibility to the learner. On the other hand the government had introduced a restructured financial support system into education that had resulted in increased tuition cost to the learner and reduced availability of unique programming in the regional colleges.

The other related paradox that existed concerned the rhetoric that focused on learners being a primary driver in the system. What the participants were observing was in fact something quite different. They were observing a Standing Policy Committee that was influenced strongly by lobby groups in business and industry. In addition, they were experiencing their organizations being pushed to establish much closer ties with business and industry through partnerships, donations and advisory groups. As a result the focus again seemed to be on elements in the system that did not directly impact the learner in a positive way, or did not put their needs at the centre of the policy agenda.

Tension of standardization vs local response

The issue of standardization was one that emerged as the participants discussed the role of the government in mandating program approval. Initial overtures by the Department in the late 1990s to begin discussion about program standards were not greeted favourably by the colleges. This early response was in reaction to mention of centres of excellence at specific colleges to provide curriculum to the entire system. Many of the interviewees felt that the influence of the K-12 system might have a negative impact on program approval with the introduction of province-wide curriculum standards. There were a few participants, however, that saw some advantage in a system-wide discussion of program standardization particularly as part of entry-level programs that were common across the province. Many of the participants were already participating in a form of program standardization through their use of brokered and collaborative programs where the same curriculum was delivered at a number of institutions.

The tension occurred when the colleges sought approval for programs they felt were in direct response to the local needs of their community, and the Department responded by encouraging the use of curriculum and credentials from other regions in the province. The Department saw this as preventing duplication in the system. The participants felt this was eroding their ability to be responsive to their own community needs. In addition, the participants felt that the push to use more global curriculum meant that they had less opportunity and could devote fewer resources to developing innovative programs to move the system into the future.

Tension of market vs regulated environment

Throughout the discussions with the participants and also evident in the documentation produced by the Department over the past decade, was a sense of tension between the desire of government, business and industry to see a more market-driven model in education and the desire of the educational sector to maintain autonomy over their operations and profession.

An aspect of the interviews with each of the participants focused on how their organizational structure had changed over the past few years. One noticeable aspect was how some colleges were reorganizing to reflect similar structural changes in the corporate sector. For example some colleges had eliminated the more hierarchical structure of deans and chairs with the intent of creating more cross-functional dialogue. There was an emphasis on team-building as well as a strong focus on efficiency and productivity. There seemed to be an inherent belief that using a stronger business model would increase the ability of the organization to respond to increased competition in the educational system.

The increasingly competitive environment was primarily due to the increased number of private providers in the system as well as the increased access by learners to programs from other provinces and states. This had introduced a new element to the educational setting in Alberta and it was creating some tension for the vice presidents academic. This tension stemmed from the need to work within a highly regulated program approval process that dictated a college's mandate while still be responsive in a timely manner that allowed a provider to remain competitive. This situation was creating a significant amount of tension for the participants in the study. In particular, they were frustrated by the apparent lack of recognition of the problem by the Department. At the point of the interviews, the Department was still trying to encourage competition by not restricting private providers, while tying the hands of the public colleges through regulations and approval requirements.

Tension of academic autonomy vs centralized control

The final area of tension that emerged from the analysis of the interview data was the impression by the participants that they had lost some control over their own operations and in particular over the academic integrity of their programs. As the government continued in its goal of centralizing the systems of education in the province, and providing a virtual 'Campus Alberta' to learners, the individuals colleges and institutes were experiencing an erosion of their ability to control their own destiny. This was not true for all of the college vice presidents that participated in the study. The larger urban organizations seemed to be flourishing in the open market system and had been able to capitalize on the ability to offer programs in new geographic regions through e-learning and to attract new learners through part-time, flexible delivery. These vice presidents expressed the desire for even less

government intervention in their financial support. They felt that the less they were dependent on government support for programming, the less they would have to answer to government regulations. The rural colleges, on the other hand, were looking for more government intervention and resources to protect them from the free market environment. They felt that the government needed to take stronger measures to protect the public post-secondary system from the free market.

In both cases of the urban and rural colleges, however, there was a strong sense of protectionism around academic integrity. A few of the participants mentioned this in the context of the tradition of academic autonomy that had developed out of the university paradigm. The vice presidents felt that the government should have little or no role in deciding program content and delivery or academic policy; that this was clearly within the jurisdiction of the professional educational sector in the province. They were concerned that the changes they were experiencing as a result of the Campus Alberta initiative might result in the government becoming more and more involved in the academic operation which was the particular responsibility of the vice presidents academic.

In addition to the sense that government was interfering in academic decision-making, the increasing role of external stakeholders was also of concern to the study participants. As evidenced in the data, there were a number of external players who were closely involved in program development and curriculum planning at the colleges and institutes. Sometimes these stakeholders held diverse views that increased the challenge surrounding the academic vice president's role. This invasion of external players who felt they had the power to influence academic decisions proved to be an additional source of tension for the participants.

RECENT EVENTS

In response to the last decade of change, the Department in 2002 released a new discussion paper which provides a profile of the current system while outlining future challenges that have emerged and need to be addressed (Alberta Learning, 2002c). The goal of the document (as described by the bureaucrats that were interviewed for the study) is to establish clearer role definitions for the government and for the post-secondary organizations in Alberta.

The document identifies the key challenges for the future of the learning system in Alberta:

1. Defining the Ministry's role in terms of articulation, transferability and portability of credentials,
2. Determining the appropriate balance of regulatory control and board-governed autonomy,
3. Improving incentives for establishing collaborative programming to decrease program duplication across the system,
4. Re-aligning the geographic distribution of post-secondary capacity to align with the shift of population to urban areas,
5. Clarifying the role of private providers and ensuring it supports the vision for the post-secondary system,
6. Promoting integration of education and post-secondary education systems to improve high school graduation rate,
7. Keeping the system accessible and affordable through financial assistance programs,
8. Establishing coordinated system effort to respond to globalization and technology. (*Developing the Blueprint for Change*, Alberta Learning, 2002c)

These points reflect much of the discussion that occurred during the interviews for this study. They continue to be challenges for the system as it attempts to realize the vision that is Campus Alberta.

Since completing my interviews in the fall of 2001, I have watched the Alberta learning system continue to move deliberately in the direction outlined in the Campus Alberta vision document. The most predominant way in which the government is using the Campus Alberta concept is in its communication instruments. The term 'Campus Alberta' can be found in many documents, including policy documents, media communication releases and political speeches. The Minister and policy makers use it as a way of justifying any new changes in the system. One example is the new policy framework draft document on technology (2003) recently released for discussion. Within the document there is reference to Campus Alberta and a system-wide coordination of technology whether it be in curriculum or infrastructure.

Another example is from a news release provided by the department when making public the decision to hand over the Alberta College facility to Grant MacEwan College and NAIT.

'This is a positive move for students', said Dr. Lyle Oberg. 'Grant MacEwan and NAIT are respected and established institutions. In keeping with the Campus Alberta concept, their collaboration will make the most of the Alberta College facility and its programs. Students will have access to a broader range of options and Alberta's post-secondary system overall will be strengthened'. (Alberta Learning, 2002d)

As mentioned earlier in this document, there was a strong lobby during 2002 by the urban colleges to change the legislation to allow colleges to grant degrees. There are indications in the early part of 2003 that the Minister is not going to allow

this to happen. The policy change that will prevent this will occur through the amalgamation of the Colleges Act with the Universities Act, and other legislation related to post-secondary education in Alberta. *Bill 43: The Post-Secondary Learning Act* was tabled in the spring sitting of the Alberta legislature.

One of the highlights of the draft document outlining the new Post-secondary Learning Act (2003) is the introduction of a new body referred to as the Campus Alberta Accreditation and Coordination Council. The section of the new act will “allow the Minister of Learning to put in place a structure and process to support the orderly development and evolution of the Alberta adult learning system, with a particular focus on degree completion and expansion in the province” (p.5).

This new document indicates that the government is now going to begin ‘coordinating’ the universities in a manner similar to how it has approached the coordination of the public college system. It is going to become involved in operational matters of budget, board responsibility, program approval and community consultation. I anticipate that in the next year we will hear further reference to Campus Alberta in discussions of university funding, enrolments, degree delivery and community stakeholders.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Six years were devoted to the completion of my Ed.D. degree. It has been a period in my life where I have sought and achieved significant career advancement while pursuing my academic studies. Both my career changes and my immersion in this research study have meant that I have seen the change within the learning system from many angles. I have heard about it from the participants as they

manoeuvred their organizations through it. I have lived it while working at two public colleges and have employed my administrative skills to respond to it and help my subordinates integrate it into their daily work. And I have internalized it intellectually and emotionally as a professional educator who has worked in the learning system in Alberta for my entire professional career.

Personally, I have experienced a shift in how I approach planning within my own organization. Whereas in the past, budget planning was the last step in new program development, it is now often the first. This is because Alberta Learning will not provide additional base funding for new programming unless it is approved through the Access Fund envelope. In addition, new programs are always assessed first on whether they will fit into available Access funding which is a system-driven criterion as opposed to being regional. Cost cutting has resulted in fewer dollars for researching new program ideas and therefore brokering is always a first step. I look much more readily to models that might exist in other organizations to offset development costs.

Another area where I have seen myself change is in my commitment to consultation. Whereas before I was more selective in choosing who I would consult with in terms of change, I am now more conscious of the political value in appearing to be consulting widely. As a result, I now devote more of my own time as well as my budget resources to ensuring broad consultation is done before implementing any significant structural changes.

The literature on policy and institutionalism has helped me to understand that the messy policy environment we have lived through in the past decade was integral to the process. The frustration and anger that was felt by those trying to respond to

the change was a critical aspect of that process. Frustration and anger are most often expressed in resistance, which creates short-term conflict as solutions are explored from both sides. This process of problem solving hopefully results in improved results for all involved. More frustration and anger is yet to come, and it is critical that it is articulated clearly. Hopefully, this research has demonstrated that we academic leaders who are involved in the system need to be vigilant about our role in policy change. We need to speak up when we see the need and support the change when we believe it will benefit the learner. We also need to be alert to the hidden policy agendas and ensure that we inform the individuals within our organizations about what we see as the reasons behind the policy changes.

What I have learned from this study is that policy change is incremental and its outcomes cannot be assumed from the outset. Institutional forces will attempt to maintain a status quo through resistance, or promote structures that will be adopted by the strongest forces within the policy community. As a manager, the institutional literature will support my understanding of how organizational structures are institutionalized through regulative, normative and cognitive forces. I will be aware of how these forces impact my subordinates as well as my superiors and peers, and this will help me as I manage my own departments and negotiate resource allocation alongside my colleagues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are many aspects of the Campus Alberta vision that warrant further research.

1. Of particular interest is the current discussion regarding the granting of degrees by public two-year colleges. It is a continuation of the debate which centres on

how best to serve the learner, how to rationalize the system most efficiently and how to achieve the best social outcomes possible. It is also a debate that must include the universities, both private and public, and look beyond the borders of Alberta.

2. The political use of the learning system by the Alberta government to position itself nationally and internationally is an area of research that is emerging. The effect of globalization on political activity continues to grow and inevitably will impact how the government views its learning system.
3. Finally, the changing role of academic leadership is one that has attracted some attention, but requires more, particularly at the college versus the university level. There has been a strong move to a more corporate model of leadership as opposed to one of professional educational administration. Research to determine the impact of this change and whether it will last is needed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

1. A significant finding of this study was the description of the policy community of post-secondary education in the Alberta learning system and how various networks form in response to policy mandates from government. The identification of this complex and dynamic network provides useful context for college leaders within the system as they continue to plan their responses to further policy agendas from Alberta Learning.
2. The process of change as described in the institutional literature also has important implications for future practice. First, external forces from within the system influence organizational structure within the public colleges. Therefore, it

will be important for college leaders to acknowledge these forces as they plan change within their organizations. Second, Scott's three pillars will provide a useful framework to structure and plan change, both within individual organizations as well as within the institutional sector itself.

3. The potential role of leaders in the policy community should be recognized. Although leaders often feel powerless, their actions arguably have implications for policy. Therefore finding common ground with other leaders, developing and presenting a vision that reflects integral beliefs about education, and pointing to contradictions in the policy that need to be addressed by the policy community is important.

CONCLUSION

In the process of conducting the interviews, it was apparent that there were big-picture concerns facing the education system that had impact on the daily lives of the college vice presidents. Although the Campus Alberta policy framework remains more of a vision than a concrete strategy, there was a broad shared understanding amongst the study participants of its far-reaching impact on the provincial education system. This study has touched on a few of those concerns and how they have impacted the participants.

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