

SHOULD ONTARIO'S COLLEGES AWARD THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE?

Prepared for Colleges Ontario

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August 26, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The present system of academic credentials awarded by Ontario's colleges was established nearly a half century ago. It is thus appropriate to consider how well some of those credential titles fit in the global lexicon of academic credentials as it has evolved over the last half century and whether they are still appropriate today.

Presently the term for the credential that is awarded by colleges in Ontario upon completion of a program of two years' duration is diploma. In 1995, noted community college scholar John Dennison of the University of British Columbia observed that "there is not a clear appreciation of what a diploma means", and this "results in an undervaluation of the diploma from a CAAT" (Dennison, 1995, p. 13).

Changing the name of the two-year diploma that Ontario colleges award to associate degree has been suggested from time to time, including in the paper just cited that Dennison presented at a workshop sponsored by ACAATO in 1995 (Dennison, 1995). The term associate degree is more widely used in North America than diploma. The associate degree is awarded in fifty states and one province, British Columbia. Adopting this title for completion of a two-year college program in Ontario might provide broader recognition of the credential earned by graduates of these programs and thus enhance their geographic mobility. This change of title would also respond to what is believed to be the increased attractiveness among the public and prospective students, since the colleges were founded, of the word *degree* in the title of an academic credential.

In meetings and focus groups, some members of the Ontario college community have echoed Dennison's concern that the word "diploma" is not widely understood by employers. They have suggested that changing the credential title to associate degree could improve the career prospects of graduates of two-year college programs. However, there have been no empirical studies that could confirm this concern and expectation.

This paper examines the suitability of the associate degree for Ontario. While the goal of the paper is to consider the pros and cons of replacing the two-year diploma with an associate degree rather than formulating a recommendation, it does raise some questions about the appropriateness of the associate degree for Ontario. The questions pertain to the relationship between the associate degree and other credentials that are awarded by Ontario colleges, and to how adoption of the associate degree would fit with different visions of the college sector. Issues are raised also about the distinction between academic and applied associate degrees, and regarding the specific titles that would be used in conjunction with the associate degree.

A literal reading of the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act suggests that the associate degree is not one of the academic credentials that is covered by that Act, and therefore that associate degrees could be authorized by the Minister under the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act. However, this is not a legal judgment on the matter. If in fact the associate degree is covered by the PSECE Act, then each associate degree would require a Ministerial consent after a review by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. The paper suggests that this would be such an enormous and expensive undertaking that the costs might outweigh the benefits of the change in the credential title.

TWO-YEAR CREDENTIALS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

There is considerable variation among jurisdictions in the configurations of credentials awarded by colleges. Australia has one of the most differentiated sets of credentials. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) lists seven different credentials for occupationally-focused programs of two years or less duration (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011). These include four levels of certificates, a diploma, an advanced diploma, *and* an associate degree. While the advanced diploma and the associate degree are very similar, they also differ in some ways. The duration of study for the associate degree is stated as “typically two years”, and that for the advanced diploma is described as 1.5 to 2 years. Thus, in duration, the Australian advanced diploma is more like the Ontario diploma than it is like the Ontario advanced diploma.

The Australian associate degree appears to involve the attainment of more *general* knowledge than the advanced diploma. The knowledge outcome for the associate degree is described as “broad theoretical and technical knowledge with some depth in the underlying principles and concepts of one or more

disciplines” (p. 43); while the description for the advanced diploma is “*specialized* and integrated technical and theoretical knowledge with depth within one or more fields of work and learning” (p. 40). Notwithstanding these differences, under the AQF’s Pathways Policy, the floor for negotiation of transfer credit to a three-year baccalaureate degree is the same for both the advanced diploma *and* the associate degree, fifty per cent.

The principal credential awarded for completion of two-year occupationally-focused programs in Ireland is the Higher Certificate, and in New Zealand, it is the National Diploma. The National Qualifications Authority in Ireland has indicated that the American Associate Degree is comparable to the Irish Higher Certificate (National Qualifications Authority, 2012). In Ireland, the Higher Diploma is a credential that is normally awarded after completion of a one-year program by someone who holds a baccalaureate degree or an honours baccalaureate degree.

In the United Kingdom, until recently the principal credential awarded upon completion of a two-year program similar to those of Ontario colleges was the Higher National Diploma (HND). The associate degree is not awarded on the other side of the Atlantic. However, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (but not Scotland), there is now also the Foundation Degree, which was introduced in 2001. The foundation degree is a two-year credential that is at the same level in the UK Qualifications Framework as the Higher National Diploma, and is considered by some to be a UK equivalent of the American associate degree.

Judging from the frequent inquiries from prospective students that appear on the internet, there seems to be considerable confusion regarding the difference between the Foundation Degree and the Higher National Diploma. While foundation degrees are sometimes said to be the equivalent of the first two years of an honours degree, some appear to be quite vocationally oriented, a characteristic that might be more expected of a Higher National Diploma. Some say that the foundation degree is more geared toward transitioning to a baccalaureate degree than is the HND; others caution that the foundation degree is more institution-specific, while there is more national uniformity of standards, and hence potential portability, for the HND. A Report by Higher Education Strategy Associates that was done for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario states that after completion of the two-year foundation degree, a three-year baccalaureate degree can be obtained in just one year of study (Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2012). If that is true, the UK

foundation degree provides a far more effective pathway to the baccalaureate degree than the American associate degree. A major concern about occupationally-focused associate degrees in the United States is the limited amount of credit that they provide for transfer to a baccalaureate program (Townsend, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Chase, 2011).

THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

When first employed in the United States, the term associate degree was intended to connote a significant step on the way to the completion of a baccalaureate degree. The associate degree – formally known as the Associate of Arts or the Associate of Science - was first awarded by junior colleges whose mission was to provide the first two years of university-equivalent courses in arts and sciences, preparing students for subsequent transfer to a university where they could do the third and fourth years and obtain a baccalaureate degree in four years of total time studying. Dennison notes that this type of associate degree was formally part of a four-year baccalaureate program, and thus “associated [with the baccalaureate degree] in a literal sense” (Dennison, 1995, p. 4).

However, the connotation of the term associate degree changed dramatically when two-year colleges added vocationally-focused programs to their repertoire. For completion of a two-year vocationally oriented program in the United States, the credential awarded is normally an Associate of Applied Science, or Associate of Applied Arts. The applied associate degrees were not intended to prepare students for transfer to university. In fact, they were frequently described as “terminal” degrees, signaling the end of a person’s formal education. The practice of regarding these degrees as terminal endured in some places to at least as recently as 2002 (Townsend, 2002). Increasingly however, in recent years efforts have been made to create pathways to the baccalaureate degree for graduates of applied associate degrees, but these initiatives have met with only limited success. Colleges in the United States that have sought transfer arrangements with state universities for graduates of applied associate degree programs have encountered similar problems as have colleges in Ontario with Ontario universities. However, because of the greater diversity of the university sector in the United States than in Ontario, American colleges have often been able find some universities that would agree to grant reasonable amounts of credit transfer for students who complete applied associate degree programs.

In the United States, the two-year programs that consist of university-equivalent courses in the arts and sciences for which full, or nearly full, transfer credit is awarded by universities are referred to as academic associate degree programs; while the occupationally-focused programs that have as their primary aim preparing graduates for the workforce are referred to as applied associate degree programs.

The only Canadian province in which colleges award an associate degree has taken a somewhat different approach to the use of this credential than the way it is used in the United States. British Columbia has both Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, but it does not have Associate of *Applied* Arts or Associate of *Applied* Science degrees. The associate degrees are in such broad areas as Economics, Communications, Environmental Studies and Women's Studies. In areas that have a more applied focus, such as Culinary Arts, Computer Information Technology and Architectural Technology, there are diploma programs but not associate degree programs. According to Education Planner, which provides a listing of all postsecondary programs in British Columbia, across the province there are 42 Associate Degree Programs, compared to 423 Diploma Programs. Dennison notes that while British Columbia has embraced the idea of academic associate degree programs, opinion has been divided on whether it should also have applied associate degree programs (Dennison, 1995).

Replacing the two-year diploma with an associate degree would bring practices in Ontario more in line with those in the United States, and to some extent, British Columbia, but it would make college credential nomenclature in Ontario different from that of all the other provinces. This might complicate issues of inter-provincial mobility of graduates. On the other hand, if Ontario were to join British Columbia in this regard, it is possible that some other provinces might choose to follow their example.

QUESTIONS FOR ONTARIO

From this brief examination of practices in other jurisdictions, several questions can be identified regarding the adoption of the associate degree for two-year programs in Ontario colleges.

One question is whether to award the associate degree for some programs and retain the term diploma for others, as British Columbia and Australia do. A problem with this approach is that of possible differences in status between the terms associate degree and diploma. The programs for which the associate

degree is awarded might be perceived as having a higher status than those for which the diploma is awarded. Even though their opinion has not carried the day, advocates for extending the associate degree to applied programs in British Columbia have stressed this concern. This concern might carry greater weight in Ontario than in British Columbia, because applied programs have always been so central to the mandate of Ontario's colleges, and Ontario colleges have tried very hard to avoid a situation in which more academically oriented programs have a higher status than more practice-oriented programs. This is precisely what could happen if Ontario adopted the academic associate degree but not the applied associate degree, as British Columbia has done.

Also, because of decisions made when the Ontario college system was created, programs that consist of university-equivalent courses in arts and sciences were not established until recently, and are still few in number. Therefore if Ontario employed the British Columbia approach there would be relatively few associate degree programs in the colleges – perhaps too few to justify the effort involved in adopting a new credential.

If all two-year programs adopt the term associate degree, there would still remain the question of whether the titles of some programs should also contain the word applied, e.g., Associate of Applied Science, while others exclude the word applied, e.g., Associate of Science. The mixed approach may not be advisable for three reasons. First, it is likely that the vast majority of programs would be regarded as applied associate degrees, and thus the word applied would not be of the same value in differentiating among kinds of programs in Ontario as it is in some states.

Second, after the colleges have taken pains to convince the government to eliminate the requirement to use the word applied in the titles of their baccalaureate degrees, it might seem inconsistent to require that this word be in the titles of almost all their associate degrees. Third, avoiding the use of word applied would eliminate the need for sometimes hair-splitting decisions on which programs would warrant the use of the term.

However, there is one field in which it might be problematic not to use the term applied. "Applied Arts" is not only one of the core categories of college programs, the term is also in the formal name of the colleges. Thus, it might seem odd if the colleges offered an Associate of Arts degree but not an Associate of Applied Arts.

Whether or not the term applied is used, there is also a question as to whether all associate degrees should be either an Associate of (Applied) Arts or an Associate of (Applied) Science. This practice originated when associate degrees consisted entirely of university-equivalent academic courses in arts and sciences subjects. There are now many programs that are difficult to classify as either arts or science, such as programs in business or health. Perhaps Ontario should use the classification of fields that is commonly employed in the colleges, and have Associate of (Applied) Arts, Associate of (Applied) Technology, Associate of (Applied) Business, and Associate of (Applied) Health Sciences degrees. If these titles were used, then would there be a need for an Associate of Science degree at all? Would the word “applied” be redundant with Technology? Or with Business? Or with Health Sciences? On the other hand, if the point of adopting the associate degree is to bring Ontario’s credential titles in line with those of other jurisdictions, then shouldn’t Ontario employ the same terminology for the associate degree as those used in the other jurisdictions?

Another question is whether the change of title from two-year diploma to associate degree should be done on a system-wide basis, or whether each college should have the option of not adopting the associate degree. Probably it would be too confusing for students, employers and other educational institutions if some colleges adopted the new title and others did not.

Finally, a question arises as to whether the adoption of the term associate degree for a two-year program in a college presupposes that a graduate of the program would be able to obtain a four-year baccalaureate degree in two additional years of study. As noted earlier, although this was the goal when colleges in the United States began to offer two-year programs in arts and sciences, it was never adopted as a goal for two-year career programs. Moreover, often even graduates of two-year programs in arts and sciences in the United States must do more than two additional years to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Thus, the fact that Ontario does not have a completely seamless postsecondary system is definitely not a reason for not adopting the associate degree credential. Ontario may have further to go in overcoming barriers to transfer than the United States and British Columbia, but transfer is regarded as problematic in nearly every jurisdiction in which it has been adopted as a goal. If the adoption of the term associate degree in Ontario gives more urgency to the challenge of removing barriers to transfer, so much the better.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND OTHER CREDENTIALS

One of the factors that is important to consider in adopting a new credential is how the new credential would fit within the framework of other credentials being awarded. In considering the associate degree, Ontario colleges would face one issue that does not exist in colleges in the United States. This is because, unlike colleges in the United States, colleges in Ontario presently offer advanced diplomas of *three years'* duration.

A question that might arise is whether prospective students, parents, employers and the general public might be confused about the difference between the associate degree and the advanced diploma. According to the Ontario Qualifications Framework (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012), the conceptual and methodological skills required of advanced diploma graduates are more advanced than those required for two-year diploma/associate degree graduates. For example, advanced diploma graduates are expected to possess “a significant range of skills associated with fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts in relation to either varied or highly specific functions.” This requirement is more advanced than the corresponding requirement for graduates of two-year programs. Yet because the noun in one credential is the word “degree” and in the other it is the word “diploma”, might some clients of the colleges think that the associate degree is a more advanced credential than the advanced diploma?

Earlier it was noted that postsecondary institutions in Australia award both an Advanced Diploma and an Associate Degree; and institutions in the UK award both a Foundation Degree and a Higher National Diploma. However in both these cases, the degree and diploma credentials are of the same duration (approximately the same in the Australian case), and both credentials are at the same level in their respective national qualifications frameworks. Thus, in adopting an associate degree, Ontario might be inviting a problem that no other jurisdiction that awards this degree has.

The problem of confusion regarding the meaning and status of different credentials just described could likely be avoided if the advanced diploma in Ontario colleges is replaced by a three-year baccalaureate degree. In that case, it should be easy to make clear to prospective students and employers the relationship between the new associate degree and the baccalaureate degree.

However, adopting the three-year baccalaureate degree would seem to make it less urgent to be able to award an associate degree after two years. The original motive for awarding an associate degree was to mark the halfway point toward the attainment of the baccalaureate. When the first two years of study become two-thirds of the way toward a baccalaureate degree, it would seem less important to mark this point with a degree than when half the distance still remains.

THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND THE VISION OF THE COLLEGE SYSTEM

In a paper that argued why it is important for Ontario colleges to award baccalaureate degrees (Skolnik, 2012), the author described two distinct models of the role of college sectors in relation to university sectors. One model, which was labeled the European Model, is of *parallel* postsecondary sectors in which colleges offer postsecondary programs of equivalent academic rigour and stature to those of the universities, but with a more applied, workforce orientation than is typical of the university sector. In jurisdictions that have adopted this model, colleges offer baccalaureate programs, and often graduate programs as well. The best examples of this model are in Germany and the Netherlands.

The other model, which was labeled the American Model, is one in which the predominant relationship of colleges to universities is *hierarchical*. The principal focus of colleges is on offering first and second year university courses after which students transfer to a university to complete the third and fourth years and obtain a baccalaureate degree from the university.

In the real world, most jurisdictions employ a mixed model, incorporating elements of both the European Model and the American Model. However, usually one of these primary models is dominant. Thus, in most northern European countries, while there is some university transfer activity, much greater emphasis is placed on colleges offering baccalaureate and masters programs themselves. In the United States, only a small percentage of colleges award baccalaureate degrees; and for almost all colleges, the predominant way in which they contribute to baccalaureate attainment is through university transfer programs.

When Ontario colleges were founded, the intent was clearly that the colleges should constitute a parallel postsecondary sector to the universities. The founding documents described a college sector that was separate from the university sector, but a new sector that was to be an equal of the university

sector, not a hierarchically differentiated sector. However, while college sectors in Europe that were rooted in a similar vision as Ontario's were given the authority to award baccalaureate, and in some cases higher, degrees in the 1960s or 1970s, Ontario colleges were not given that authority until 2000. Thus, until 2000, one might say that Ontario colleges operated in a "truncated parallel" model in relation to the universities. Since 2000, the college sector has been allowed to become a more fulsome parallel sector, and this identity would be enhanced significantly if the colleges were allowed to offer three-year, employment-focused baccalaureate programs.

The associate degree is quintessentially an artifact and a symbol of the American Model that emphasizes the hierarchical relationship of the college sector to the university sector. Thus, perhaps the most fundamental question to address in deciding whether to adopt the associate degree is whether doing so would mean – or give the impression - that the college system has opted to move away from the parallel model to the hierarchical model.

As noted, although many jurisdictions incorporate elements of both models, one model is usually predominant. One reason for this is that it is difficult to pursue both models with equal energy, as one model involves cooperation with the universities while the other involves competition with them (Skolnik, 2011). In this connection, the British Columbia approach could be viewed as a way of reconciling these two models. In regard to programs in the arts and sciences, the relationship of the colleges to the universities is hierarchical, and thus the associate degree is appropriate in that sphere of activity. However, in regard to career programs, the orientation is more parallel, which could be a reason for not awarding associate degrees in those programs. However, this solution would not work as well in Ontario because of the relatively small amount of activity in the arts and science area.

IMPLEMENTING THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE

In order to implement the associate degree, the colleges would require an appropriate form of approval from the government. The need for approval of the credentials awarded by the colleges is stipulated in Section 12 of Regulation 34/03 under the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002 (Ontario, 2011), which states that:

The categories of diplomas, certificates or *other documents* awarded by a board of governors attesting to the attendance or

completion of a course or program of instruction are subject to approval of the Minister (*italics for emphasis*).

If the associate degree were to be considered as one of the “other documents” under Regulation 34/03, then it could be implemented just with approval of the Minister.

However, there is another Act of the Assembly which may have a bearing on this matter, the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence (PSECE) Act, 2000. This Act states that no person shall grant a degree unless authorized to do so “by an Act of the Assembly or by the Minister under this Act” (Section 2). A question thus arises as to whether the restriction on the granting of degrees in the PSECE Act overrides the authority that the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act gives the Minister to approve “other documents” that the colleges may award. To date, Ministers of Training, Colleges and Universities have followed the procedures set out in the PSECE Act for approval of four-year baccalaureate degrees awarded by the colleges, rather than approving those degrees under the “other documents” power in the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act.

However, there is reason to believe that the PSECE Act does not apply to associate degrees. For one thing, the Act has an explicit clause that empowers the Minister to grant consent to a college to award “a baccalaureate degree in an applied area of study”. The fact that there no similar power is given to the Minister to grant consents for associate degrees could mean that the Minister already has this power. Or course, this omission could also indicate that the associate degree was not contemplated when the Act was drafted. Based on that interpretation, it might be argued that by giving the Minister the power to grant consents for baccalaureate degrees, the Act implicitly gives the Minister the power to grant consents for a lesser degree. In that case, the same procedures could be employed for granting consents for associate degrees as for baccalaureate degrees.

The strongest case that the associate is not covered by the PSECE Act derives from the definition of a degree in the Act. The PSECE Act does not mention the associate degree in the section that defines a degree for the purposes of the Act.

In interpreting what a degree is, the Act states that:

For the purposes of this Act, a degree means one or both of the following:

1. A document of academic achievement granted or conferred by an educational institution that would reasonably be understood as an undergraduate or graduate degree, including but not limited to, a document including the terms bachelor, bachelor's, baccalaureate, master, master's, doctor
2. A diploma, certificate, document or other thing that includes a reference to bachelor, bachelor's, master, master's, doctor, doctoral, or doctorate (2010, c. 12, s 2(2)).

From this wording it looks like the intent of the Act was to regulate the awarding of bachelor's and graduate degrees, not a sub-baccalaureate credential. Thus, it would seem that the authority that the Minister is given by the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act to approve credentials awarded by the colleges would include the associate degree, since the associate degree is the equivalent of a two-year diploma.

If the implementation of the associate degree could be done only through the Ministerial consent process under the PSECE Act, the cost of implementation would be prohibitive. Moreover, the flexibility of the colleges to modify and add new two-year programs would be so constrained that the change of the name of the credential would not be worth doing. Data from OCAS indicate that there are 1,275 two-year diploma programs, and another 84 two-year programs that have not been flagged as diploma programs, giving a total of 1,359 programs for which associate degrees might be awarded. Based on the existing PEQAB fee structure, the application and assessment fees that would have to be paid to the PEQAB to assess this number of two-year programs would be about 19 million dollars, just to change the name of a credential. Not only would there be an enormous workload for the colleges in preparing PEQAB submissions for 1,359 programs, but the PEQAB would have to develop a whole new set of standards for a different type of program than it has ever assessed.

Two-year diploma programs in the colleges are already subject to the quality assurance processes of the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS). These programs would still have to meet all the requirements of the OCQAS if the name of the credential was changed to associate degree. It would make

absolutely no sense at all to require these programs to also undergo a full assessment by the PEQAB as a condition for changing the name of the credential.

OPTIONS REGARDING ADOPTION OF THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN ONTARIO

Five options regarding the adoption of the associate degree are depicted in Table 1. In formulating these options, a distinction is made between programs in the Arts and Sciences, such as a General Arts and Science Program, and occupationally-focused programs such as Culinary Arts, Computer Information Technology, and Architectural Technology. Because the courses in the Arts and Sciences programs are so closely aligned with corresponding first and second year courses in universities, it is often possible for a student who completes a two-year program in this area in a college to get two or nearly two years credit when transferring within the same area of study to a university. This is the practice in British Columbia, where an associate degree is frequently referred to as half of a baccalaureate degree.

The situation is quite different in most occupationally-focused programs. In that case, the courses taken in the college frequently do not align well with courses offered in the first two years at a university. Most students who seek to transfer from a two-year college career program to a university would not get two years of credit. In this regard, an exceptional situation could arise if Ontario colleges are able to convert their three-year diploma programs to three-year baccalaureate programs. In case of many of the existing three-year diploma programs, the curriculum is the same in the first two years as it is in the corresponding two-year diploma program. These are called “Flow-through” programs. If these advanced diploma programs are converted into three-year baccalaureate programs, and this curriculum characteristic is retained, then students who transfer from a two-year diploma program to the corresponding three-year baccalaureate program should get two years credit upon transferring since they would have already completed the courses required in the first two years of the baccalaureate program. One of the options in Table 1 involves awarding an associate degree for this (Flow-through) type of career program, but not for other career programs that do not earn full transfer credit.

In Table 1, the term “Arts and Sciences” is used in juxtaposition to the term “Occupationally-focused” as descriptors of the two categories of programs for which colleges in the United States award the Associate of Arts/Science and Associate of Applied Arts/Science respectively. This distinction also corresponds at least approximately to the distinction in British Columbia between programs

for which the Associate of Arts/Science is awarded and those for which a Diploma is awarded. Frequently both in practice and in policy discussions, these two categories of programs are referred to as “academic” and “applied” programs. Those terms are laden with connotations that some stakeholders find problematic or objectionable. Possible reactions to those terms and/or to the distinction which they purport to describe are noted as possible arguments against some of the options in Table 1 in the comments on those options that appear after the table.

TABLE 1
OPTIONS FOR ADOPTION OF ASSOCIATE DEGREE
IN ONTARIO COLLEGES

	Arts & Sciences Programs, including General Arts & Sciences	Occupationally-focused Programs	
		FLOW-THROUGH	OTHER PROGRAMS
I	DIP	DIP	DIP
II	AA, AS	AA, AS	AA, AS
III	AA, AS	DIP	DIP
IV	AA, AS	AAA, AAS	AAA, AAS
V	AA, AS	AAA, AAS	DIP

AA is Associate of Arts, AS is Associate of Science

AAA is Associate of Applied Arts, AAS is Associate of Applied
Science

DIP is Diploma

Option I: No associate degrees

Arguments for

- avoids adopting a credential title that is associated with the *hierarchical* model in the relationship between colleges and universities; and thus helps to maintain the emphasis on a *parallel* relationship between colleges and universities in Ontario;
- proposing to convert the two-year diploma to an associate degree at the same time as proposing to convert the three-year diploma to a baccalaureate degree may give the impression that the college sector is excessively pre-occupied with awarding degrees, and thus undermine the prospects for the three-year baccalaureate degree;

Arguments against

- ignores the situations where there is or could be an effective hierarchical relationship between two-year college programs and corresponding baccalaureate degree programs: General Arts and Sciences Programs that enable transfer to Arts and Sciences Programs in universities; and career programs where the curriculum is the same in the first two years of the baccalaureate program as in the corresponding two-year program;
- would deprive graduates of two-year college programs of a credential that could enhance credential recognition and mobility;

Option II: Award only the Associate of Arts or the Associate of Science for all two-year programs

Arguments for

- allows all graduates of two-year programs in the colleges to have the credential recognition and mobility enhancement benefits that the term associate degree may bring;
- avoids having to distinguish between “academic” and “applied” programs and all the issues connected with the formal use of that distinction;

Arguments against

- might create problems for credential recognition outside Ontario, as this option would involve using the term associate degree in a different way than it is used in any other jurisdiction;
- the adoption of the associate degree title may give the impression that full credit will be given towards a baccalaureate degree for completion of all two-year programs when that may not be the case;

Option III: The British Columbia practice: Limiting the use of the associate degree to programs in the Arts and Sciences, and continuing to award the diploma for career-focused programs

Arguments for

- enables some graduates of two-year programs in the colleges to have the credential recognition and mobility enhancement benefits that the term associate degree may bring;
- avoids the possibility of misleading students by using the associate degree title for programs for which there may not be efficient pathways to baccalaureate degree completion;

Arguments against

- would deprive the vast majority of graduates of two-year programs in Ontario colleges of a credential that could enhance credential recognition and mobility;
- reinforces the concept of a distinction between academic and applied programs which some find objectionable;
- there may be difficulty determining the programs for which the associate degree should be awarded;

Option IV: The U.S. practice: All two-year programs lead to an Associate of Arts or Science, or to an Associate of Applied Arts or Applied Science

Arguments for

- allows all graduates of two-year programs in the colleges to have the credential recognition and mobility enhancement benefits that the term associate degree may bring;
- could make the credentials awarded by Ontario colleges more understandable to employers and educational institutions in the United States
- provides additional information about the nature of the two-year program from which a student has graduated, by distinguishing between academic and applied programs;

Arguments against

- adopting the word “applied” in the associate degree may be seen as inconsistent with efforts to avoid the compulsory use of that term in the titles of four-year baccalaureate degrees;
- reinforces the concept of a distinction between academic and applied programs which some find objectionable;
- there may be difficulty determining the programs for which the word applied should be in the credential title;
- may give the impression that Ontario colleges are more like colleges in the United States than they actually are;

Option V: Awarding the associate degree for programs in the Arts and Sciences and for those career programs in which the curriculum is the same in the first two years of a baccalaureate program as it is in the corresponding two-year program; and awarding the diploma in other two-year career programs

Arguments for

- attempts to limit the use of the associate degree to those programs for which full credit is awarded for students who go on to complete a baccalaureate degree;
- recognizes the differences in curriculum structure among college career programs;

Arguments against

- shares with Options III and IV the concerns about making a formal distinction between academic and applied programs;
- makes something that should have long-term stability, a credential title, dependent upon something that could be transitory, curriculum design;
- makes credential titles dependent upon just one of the factors that influence pathways from a two-year credential to a baccalaureate degree.

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