

Procedural Diversity in Ontario's Non-Degree Sector

A Study Describing Educational Processes in a Private Career College and a College of Applied Arts and Technology

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Richard Edward Davey

Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

Ontario's competitive postsecondary non-degree sector provides the context for this study of for-profit colleges' (FPCs') contribution to procedural diversity. As well as a description of Ontario's private career college sector, the thesis includes a comprehensive review of the literature about FPCs focusing on their functions, governance and administrative practices and linking these attributes of control to procedural diversity. Given the differences in control (public vs. for-profit-ness), it follows that educational processes will be different in for-profit colleges.

A best practices model of educational processes based on three research-grounded models provides the conceptual framework to investigate this hypothesis. The Educational Processes Model presents 13 neutral best practices statements categorized under the general categories of curriculum, instruction, out-of-class environment and assessment and continuous improvement. Specific research questions derive from the model, as does the methodology to analyze the data. Two best practices institutions in the sector—a private, for-profit college and a publicly funded community college— provide the sites for this comparative case study.

Educational processes, as implemented in similar programs at each site, are described and analyzed, focusing on the similarities and the differences within the similarities. The study finds that the student experience is different in a for-profit college and that cross-site themes consistent with the literature about differences in control (public versus for-profit-ness) explain how and why the student experience is different. These themes include differences in faculty and administrative roles and responsibilities, resourcing, the accountability framework and responsiveness.

The study concludes that educational processes in FPCs do represent real choice for postsecondary learners and are implemented to increase postsecondary participation and student satisfaction. However, FPCs tend to have standardized processes that must fit in a policy framework to achieve their designed benefits. The study also tests the Educational Processes Model, concluding that it may have general applicability to improve educational practices in postsecondary institutions.