

Task force member challenges government report

Prof rejects Grantham's findings

Dr. Steve Hunka was a member of the Grantham Task Force Report on Student Contributions to the cost of post-secondary education. After the recommendations of the Task Force were published, Hunka continued his research, establishing rationales for tuition fees and incorporating factors not considered by the Task Force. His report, Rationales for Determining Student Contributions to Costs of Post-Secondary Education, was released Friday. This is a summary of part of that report.

Dr. Hunka concludes his report by responding to the Grantham Task Force Report recommendations. This is an abbreviated version of Hunka's responses:

1. *Tuition fees and associated student costs appear to have been determined in the past without any rational approach. A minority of the Task Force members were opposed to the arbitrary nature of the tuition ratios proposed for establishment of increased fees. No substantial rationale has been provided by the majority for the raising of fees; therefore it has perpetuated the historical approach.*

2. *The Task force recognized the value of post-secondary education to both society and to individuals and contended that individual benefits accrue primarily for a lifetime, whereas society tends to benefit in perpetuity from an educated population.*

The statement is one of the most important in the entire report since it describes societal and individual benefits. It should therefore be reflected in recommendations regarding who should bear the major costs of post-secondary education. In recommending higher tuition fees, one could speculate the majority of Task Force members could not visualize that benefits in perpetuity are greater than those of a life time.

3. *The Task Force recommended that there should be a tuition fee at post-secondary institutions. It justified this recommendation on the basis that fees are only a small part of the student's contribution, and that the present level does not affect accessibility of education.*

The contribution of students toward their education is considerably higher than the often-quoted figure of one dollar by students to seven by government. The tuition fee at the university level can be as high as 20 to 25% and should not be considered a minor expense. The Task Force said the present level of fees does not limit accessibility. The evidence of many studies does not support this position.

4. *The majority of the Task Force took the position that "individuals pay for the benefits that accrue to them and share in the costs and risks" as a reason for a tuition fee.*

This negates the report's statement that society obtains benefits in perpetuity. Society collectively pays for the knowledge gained by adding to the pool of knowledge through its educational systems.

5. *The Task Force supported its position by noting that in a "free enterprise society prospective students (must) learn the value of the work ethic by paying for their tuition."*

It seems that students from poor financial backgrounds must learn the work ethic to a greater extent than those from wealthy backgrounds. In addition, the work that a student does in his educational program and the money he earns for post-secondary costs other than tuition could be considered training in the work ethic. Finally, many "free enterprise" societies do not charge tuition fees in post-secondary institutions.

6. *There are already sufficient demands on the public purse, and the general public is unwilling to support higher costs for post-secondary education.*

Of course there are sufficient demands on the public purse. The major expenditures of the Alberta government

occurred for public services. However, this is natural in a people-based economy. However, from 1976 to 1978, corporations received over one-half billion dollars in tax rebates. This is a large expense on the public purse without any assurance that the funds were spent in Alberta or even Canada.

The general public probably would be unwilling to support higher costs for post-secondary education. As a society we are spoiled. We have forgotten that many people spent years of study and research to provide us with our present quality of life.

7. *Alberta must consider its position in the North American context and could not take action to remove fees independently. Such action would have significant effect not only on Alberta institutions but on all other provinces and the United States.*

What significant effect would removal of fees have? The majority of the Task Force felt it would create increased enrollments, but this is contrary to their statement that "the present level of fees has little effect on accessibility." In addition, quotas have been used successfully for many years to control any great influx of students.

8. *Payment of fees provides a degree of autonomy to both students and to post-secondary institutions.*

The only institutions with some degree of autonomy are those with boards of governors. This excludes all provincially administered institutions. Raising fees in the latter therefore provides no increased autonomy. The best way to preserve autonomy is through legislation which clearly specifies the composition of the boards and the area of decision-making of the boards and the minister of advanced education and manpower.

9. *Accessibility to post-secondary education generally is affected more by attitudes and values than by financial factors and therefore the removal of fees would not necessarily increase accessibility.*

Research supports the position that attitudes are an important factor; whether they are more important than finances is open to question. In addition, there could be an interacting effect between finances and attitude.

10. *All programs within a given institution should have the same fee.*

Equal fees within an institution do provide some degree of social equity. However, the choice between becoming a teacher or a doctor is irrelevant if a student cannot afford either.

11. *There should be three levels of tuition fees based on the following positions: university tuition fees should be the highest, college and technical institute tuition fees should be the same, and the difference between university tuition fees and college/technical institute fees should be less than at present. Alberta Vocational Centre fees should be the lowest.*

The Task Force said fee differences have traditionally existed and that public views call for this arrangement. The Task Force has in effect asked that a student pay more for professional programs which are most beneficial to society. The rationalization for lower technical school fees is essential due to public opinion and the need for manpower training.

12. *The Task Force noted that "different fees for different levels of institutions is therefore best supported by manpower needs and the responsibility of government to express social policy."*



Dr. Steve Hunka

photo Russ Sampson

This statement recognizes that tuition fees affect accessibility, a position the majority of the Task Force does not fully accept at the beginning of its report.

13. *The Task Force report recommended that the following factors be taken into account in raising or lowering fees: manpower policy, social policy, cultural policy, total student costs, increased demands on public funds, increased costs in the base fee only, effects of costs on accessibility, trends in other provinces or countries, and historical values and attitudes.*

It further recommended that overall economy of the province, remuneration upon graduation, and cost of living increases not be factors in lowering or raising fees.

Implicit in this recommendation is the fact that fees do have an effect upon enrollment. The Task Force has also ignored one of the most important factors, the value of post-secondary education to society.

14. *The Task Force recommended the need for greater co-ordination of program development and services and control and monitoring of financing.*

The Task Force had essentially no information concerning the need for greater coordination among the institutions. No meetings were held with the officials of the various institutions to determine what co-ordination exists or where co-ordination should be increased.

15. *The Task Force recommended that a study be undertaken concerning the academic, administrative and non-academic staff members' income benefits, including the issue of tenure, sabbaticals, summer teaching and consulting.*

Properly researched reports should not be discouraged. However, the majority of the Task Force had essentially no information about such topics. It did not have any discussions with most

administrators or staff associations on this topic.

16. *The Task Force could not make any recommendation concerning fees for non-Canadian students.*

The author does feel that, with restrictions on numbers and quality, foreign students should pay the same fees as Albertans. The report of the Task Force suggests that Albertan students are subjected to a "double taxation" if they attend institutions outside Canada. It appears higher costs when required outside of Canada is a form of double taxation but higher costs in Canada enhance the learning of the work ethic.

17. *The Task Force suggested that a lack of institutional flexibility particularly at the universities prevents adjustment of internal priorities to take on new programs to benefit Albertans. The primary basis of this suggestion was the reticence of the U of Calgary to take on a new program in optometry. Universities are often wary of taking on new programs because they can have a negative impact on existing programs.*

18. *It was suggested that NAIT and SAIT be administered by a board of governors.*

Little evidence was presented to support this recommendation, although it would bring these institutions in line with others. Boards of governors do not necessarily guarantee autonomy, but the presence of a board can mean lower costs.

19. *It was suggested that the resources of ACCESS and the University of Athabasca be used more effectively.*

The suggestion may well be a good one. However there is no data to support it. Neither organization was studied by the Task Force. The public must keep in mind that there are some programs which should probably not be handled in a completely remote way. For example, the training of a medic or engineer through correspondence or self-study courses would be undesirable.