

**From GlobeCampus.ca: Your questions on colleges answered –
Live chat, with James Knight, president and CEO of the Association of Canadian
Community Colleges**

November 18, 2009

Time	Questions / comments / responses
12:47	<p>Christina, Globe and Mail: GlobeCampus editor Christina Varga: Hello, the discussion will start in about 15 minutes. Thanks for waiting as we make sure all is working as it should.</p>
12:47	<p>Christina, Globe and Mail: I'd like to thank James Knight for joining us today to answer questions about the state and role of colleges today.</p>
12:55	<p>[Comment From Jim:] Looking forward to many conversations!</p>
12:56	<p>Christina, Globe and Mail: Mr. Knight, to begin, do you have any comments about the state of colleges today?</p>
12:57	<p>Jim: Colleges offer innumerable career opportunities and their graduates are highly successful at finding employment. Indeed, university graduates in increasing numbers are going to college to obtain the advanced skills that they can take to the employment market or to start their own businesses.</p>
12:58	<p>Christina, Globe and Mail: We had a question sent in advance from a reader. Here it is:</p> <p>Hi there,</p> <p>My girlfriend's mother does not approve of me only having a Technical Diploma in Mechanical Engineering from St Clair College in Windsor, ON. She thinks her daughter should be dating a man that has a degree in something. She doesn't care what it is, as long as it's a degree. I guess she sees it as more of a status symbol.</p> <p>I'm tired of trying to defend my decision not to attend university.</p> <p>I have a job that is Sales that I am very comfortable in and I see a bright future for myself, however that does nothing for my girlfriend's mother.</p> <p>Are there some facts or numbers that I can present to her that would put her at ease?</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>Shawn Hicks</p>
1:01	<p>Jim: Let me talk about a personal situation... I was a top high school grad, a top grad in my university class and got a masters degree. My brother obtained a diploma in retailing from Algonquin College. He is now responsible for about 1/3 of the shopping centres in Canada, and a fellow classmate of his is responsible for another 1/3. I could cite countless examples of college graduates who have been highly successful in business. Indeed, many well-known businessmen did not complete a university degree.</p>

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1:02	Jim: More than 90% of college grads are hired within 6 months, and we're not seeing any drop-off in the employment of college grads in this recession.
1:02	[Comment From Luke:] What would you say are the negative aspects of choosing a college program over a university degree?
1:03	Jim: The only thing I can think of is that parents who are out of touch might not be happy.
1:04	Christina, Globe and Mail: What about combining the two options?
1:05	Jim: Of course many students choose to complete a university degree then go to college to acquire an advanced skill that is marketable. About one third of college students have a university background.
1:05	Christina, Globe and Mail: What specifically do college grads bring to employers and industry in general?
1:07	Jim: They bring two things, They bring skills that are applicable to the local employment market. Colleges keep in close contact with area employers and offer programs tailored to their needs. In addition, they bring practical skills. They are educated in skills that can be deployed immediately in the place of employment.
1:07	[Comment From Simon Beck:] Jim, does it bother you when colleges such as Mount Royal have high profile campaigns to be allowed to become universities instead? does that diminish the status of colleges in general?
1:12	Jim: Good question. In fact, Mount Royal had virtually full university programs in place before it became a university. The institution has a commitment to maintain its college programs and will provide a variety of certificates and diplomas. I can't offer any personal opinion about this, but Globe Columnist Jeffrey Simpson speaking to ACCC's college presidents yesterday urged them to remain colleges.
1:12	[Comment From Luke:] Many people suggest that those unsure of what they want to do should pursue a university degree, where they can find out what interests them, and then gain the applicable skills in college? Would you agree with this? Is it possible to go into college unaware of what one's goals/job interests are and "discover" that in the college system?
1:16	Jim: There's certainly no problem with students exploring a variety of options. They could equally sample a variety of college programs and then transition to university. Colleges offer excellent career counselling. College programs are less expensive.
1:16	[Comment From Tina:] In your opinion, what type of students succeed the best at a college program?

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1:17	Jim: Colleges are strongly committed to both access and success. Students are supported their whole way through their college program. Many types of students succeed in college.
1:17	Christina, Globe and Mail: Are there things like minimum grade requirements, English/French language ability, etc.?
1:20	Jim: Of course there are entrance requirements, but owing to their commitment to access, colleges will work with students to help them achieve the competency levels required for admission. Colleges offer transition programs from high school or employment for those who don't meet the grade requirements.
1:20	[Comment From Ron:] I understand that you pay colleges teachers more money when they have university degrees. Doesn't that suggest that you value university education over college education?
1:22	Jim: Salaries are also based upon the expertise that college instructors bring from business and industry.
1:22	[Comment From Robert:] What is your view on the polytechnic model and combining existing universities and colleges?
1:25	Jim: Yes, there are many collaborative programs that embrace instruction both in colleges and in universities. These arrangements are negotiated between the partner institutions for the benefit of learners.
1:25	[Comment From Lorna Hinds:] My daughter is in a dual credit program at Sheridan College. This gives her a chance to earn 3 high school credits and one college credit each semester in grade 12. Flexible programs like this at the Colleges allow students to get a taste of what colleges offer, and help them make decisions about career goals and programs.
1:26	Jim: Glad to hear that the flexibility that colleges offer is benefitting this student
1:26	[Comment From Robert:] What can be done to improve the transferability of college credits for advanced standing in university programs?
1:27	Jim: The Government of Ontario has work to do in improving the recognition of transfer credits. Other provinces are doing a better job of this.
1:27	[Comment From Phil:] In terms of access to college, what are, if there are any, the key/main barriers for pursuing a college education?

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1:31	<p>Jim: Colleges work hard to remove barriers to post-secondary education. Their cost structure is low; they offer multiple campuses; they sometimes have storefront, inner-city facilities to encourage enrollment; financial aid offices facilitate access to grants and scholarships; and they offer transitional programs for students who lack the basic qualifications. Colleges offer an inclusive model open to everyone.</p>
1:31	<p>[Comment From Peter Halpin, AAU:] Jim, would you agree that the discussion should be less about community colleges versus universities but more about the importance of having a strong post-secondary system across Canada that encourages and enables more young Canadians to participate as well as move easily between a well-integrated system of community colleges and universities?</p>
1:33	<p>Jim: I agree that it is vital that Canada have a strong post-secondary system. But it is also important that prospective students recognize that a college education is a powerful tool for future employment.</p>
1:33	<p>[Comment From Mike:] What about access to trade employment? Do union rules, apprenticeship regulations, etc., make it difficult for college grads to find employment, even when they are well qualified and there is high demand for their skills? Can colleges do more for their students in this respect?</p>
1:35	<p>Jim: Colleges are integral in the apprenticeship system and their student are highly successful and in tremendous demand. We are not aware of any barriers of this nature.</p>
1:35	<p>[Comment From Dan:] Jim: I know that universities are facing significant budgetary deficits this year (not to mention long-term financial challenges), and many people are concerned about the effect this will have on the quality of university education. To what extent are colleges facing the same challenges and, if so, how are they responding?</p>
1:38	<p>Jim: All public sector institutions are challenged by budget limitations. Colleges are committed to excellence in education. In a tight budget environment, colleges are forced to put some students on waitlists for programs.</p>
1:38	<p>[Comment From Mike:] How can we break down some of the stereotypes that University is for "smart" students, and colleges are for students with poor academic records? Are things getting better or worse on this front?</p>
1:42	<p>Jim: Colleges are showcasing the success of their graduates. The stereotypes are already breaking down. College enrollment is skyrocketing.</p>
1:42	<p>[Comment From Phillip:] Is there any work being done to better integrate the R&D conducted by universities with the applied experience of colleges and their instructors? (e.g., to aid industry in commercialization of technology)</p>

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1:46	<p>Jim: A huge volume of industry-driven applied research is being done by college faculty and students. Many colleges have multi-million dollar portfolios of research underway, greatly benefitting local businesses. Unfortunately there is very little government support for this work. We are working with our industry partners to help governments understand better the value of applied research undertaken in colleges.</p>
1:46	<p>[Comment From Peter Halpin, AAU:] I understand your strong advocacy for community colleges as they play an important role in the PSE system. However, according to the Millennium Scholarship Foundation's The Price of Knowledge, Chapter One, over the course of a 40 year career, a bachelor's degree holder will earn a premium of more than \$745k vs. \$340k by a community college graduate. Again, both universities and colleges have important roles to play in Canada's future prosperity.</p>
1:49	<p>Jim: Canada's statistics in post-secondary outcomes are dated. There is a crisis in advanced skills currently which is driving up remuneration. In many industries, college graduates are paid at higher levels. The Canadian Federation for Independent Business tells us that in areas of skills shortages, six college grads are needed for every university grad.</p>
1:50	<p>[Comment From Jeff:] Some critics argue that college enrollment in Ontario inflates our post-secondary numbers, making it appear that we're doing a better job than we really are. Obviously, this kind of criticism implies that a college diploma isn't comparable to a university degree. What are your thoughts?</p>
1:52	<p>Jim: A college diploma is a ticket to employment. Thousands of university grads go to college for that reason.</p>
1:52	<p>[Comment From Robert:] Universities have recently complained that many of their 1st year students have not been properly prepared academically by high-schools for their instruction. Have the colleges encountered the same problems? If so what is being done to deal with this problem?</p>
1:54	<p>Jim: Colleges have encountered the same problem, particularly in mathematics and language skills. They are working with local school boards and offering remedial programs to rectify the problem.</p>
1:55	<p>Christina, Globe and Mail: Is increasing enrolment in colleges putting a strain on colleges' infrastructure?</p>
1:57	<p>Jim: Totally. The great tragedy is tens of thousands of qualified students are turned away because of lack of capacity. This is a terrible loss for the students whose careers are delayed, for the businesses who need their skills, and for the governments who realize a rate of return of 16% per year on investment in colleges.</p>

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1:58	Christina, Globe and Mail: Just one more question, as we are running out of time: are colleges actively interested in attracting foreign students, or even students out of province, or are they more locally oriented?
2:01	Jim: Colleges do attract large numbers of foreign students many of whom remain in Canada to pursue their careers. There is significant student mobility within Canada. We see this as positive.
2:01	Christina, Globe and Mail: Sorry, there is actually one more question from a reader, if you don't mind taking it.
2:01	[Comment From Robert:] I understand that in Ontario the per student funding level for colleges is significantly lower than for universities (e.g., ~60% of). What can be done to better balance this situation?
2:02	Jim: Our partner organization, Colleges Ontario is working with the Government of Ontario to achieve greater equilibrium.
2:03	Christina, Globe and Mail: I'm sorry to any readers who didn't get their questions answered - we've just run out of time. Thanks very much to Mr. Knight for joining us.
2:03	Jim: I enjoyed the questions and comments. Thanks for your participation.
	A reader added a question after our time limit, but Mr. Knight was able to answer it later: From Phil: Actually the last question raises an important counter-point - what is the mobility of college grads... i.e. we hear that university grads are competing on a national and international labour market - what about college grads?
	Jim: The principle constraint on international student mobility is the unfortunate lack of funding Canada. Most countries are realizing the value of giving students opportunities to study abroad, for example, there is a Canada/EU program. The EU wanted to triple funding and offered to put in additional money and Canada has not accepted the offer when it was put on the table. The Canadian government is not doing enough and it's an issue we're taking to them.