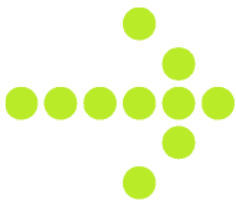




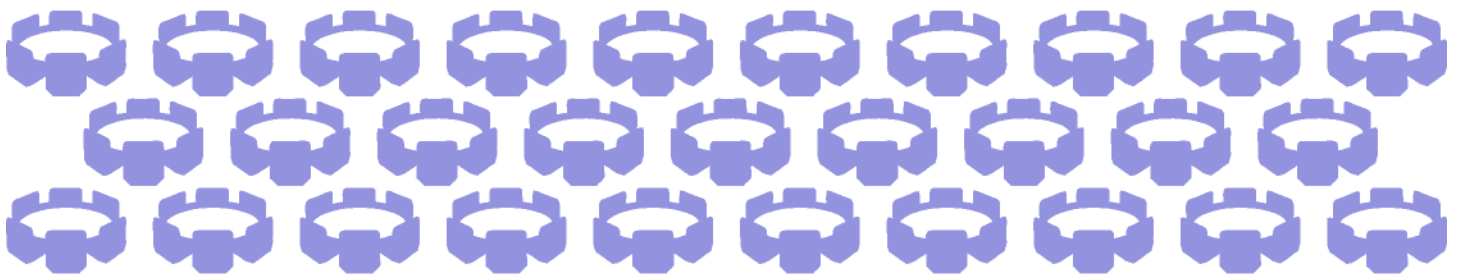
Public Policy Forum
Forum des politiques publiques



**ISSUE STATEMENT #1:
SMART RECRUITMENT**

**Recruiting Community College and Institute
Graduates into the Public Service**

Nancy Averill
June 2005



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- Anna Toneguzzo and Terry Anne Boyles from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges
- The members of the Advisory Committee

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Issue Statement #1: SMART RECRUITMENT

Recruiting Community College Graduates to the Public Service

Introduction

In partnership with the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) and with financial support from the department of Human Resource and Skills Development Canada and the Public Service Human Resource Management Agency of Canada, the Public Policy Forum recently undertook an on-line survey of community college students in Canada.

The main purpose of the survey was to assess college and institute students' interest and motivation in working for the federal public service. The survey also provides insights on college and institute students' perspectives on future career choices and preferences, the skills they gained at college and preferred job search strategies.

To help inform career counseling, recruitment campaigns and human resource policies around the workplace of the future, the Public Policy Forum is analyzing the results of this survey and releasing a number of issue statements on survey findings.

This first issue statement presents survey findings supporting the recruitment of community college and institute graduates into the public service of Canada and an enhancement of the role of community colleges/institutes in promoting lifelong learning among public servants.

The Context: A Changing Public Sector

Federal public sector managers are currently facing a number of human resource management challenges.

The baby boom generation—made up of those born between 1946 and 1964—created the federal public service workplace as we know it today with the traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday, hierarchical management systems, and standards around productivity and timeliness of service delivery.

However, these baby boomers are retiring. Projections are that over 40 percent of federal public servants will be eligible to retire with unreduced pensions by the year 2012.¹ And

¹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat data: Public Service Eligibility for Retirement with an Unreduced Pension 2002-03 to 2012-13.

when these baby boomers retire, a particular skill set and work culture will be retiring with them.

At the same time, under modernization initiatives and rapidly evolving lines of business such as Government On-Line and Service Canada, demand is being created for a more technically literate and flexible public service—one available to serve Canadians on-site and in real time 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

To complicate matters, in categories most likely to experience profound change in working environment and skill requirements, the percentage of potential retirees is much higher—within the broad technical and operational support services categories, such as information, program and administrative services, 68 percent of public servants are projected to retire by 2012.

Over the past decade, deficit-fighting budgets and various forms of restructuring and reengineering the business of government have made recruitment and human resource planning a low priority. One senior public official described the lack of a human resource strategy as “a case-by-case term employment to indeterminate employment system with almost no big picture plan.” So, in addition to modernizing human resource management, the public service now faces the challenge of making up for lost time in forecasting future needs and developing recruitment strategies to meet them.

How will the federal government meet the challenge of a rapidly changing workforce in rapidly changing technological times? One of the solutions the Public Policy Forum is proposing is more active recruitment of community college/institute graduates and a wider role for community colleges/institutes in ongoing training of federal public servants. Here’s why.

Smart Recruitment: New Federal Public Service Recruitment Policies Required

A modern, technically adept, citizen-centred public service demands a new generation of technically literate public servants possessing hands-on practical training. The good news is that the federal public service is already partway there.

Community College/Institute Graduates Representation in the Public Service

There are approximately 736,000 students enrolled at 145 community colleges and institutes across Canada. Every province and territory in Canada has access to these community colleges and institutes, which focus on practical training in a wide variety of programs and partner with local employers to develop programs.

According to the *2002 Public Service Wide Employee Survey*, 29 percent of federal public servants listed a diploma or certificate from a community college, CEGEP, institute of technology, nursing school or a trades certificate or diploma as the highest level of education completed. A much larger percentage of public sector employees probably have this college/institute type training. For example, those who list a university education as their highest level of education may also be graduates of college/institutes. Numerous other employees who list high school as their highest level of education may have taken courses at colleges/institutes but have not graduated.

Community College/Institute Graduates Representation in Specific Occupational Categories

College/institute graduates work in most occupational categories in the federal public service, but their largest concentrations are in the technical and operational support categories such as science and engineering support. They represent 47 percent of this group. They also represent 39 percent of the clerical and regulatory group, 41 percent of employees in computer services, 30 percent of those in administrative services, and 23 percent of those in program management. They are also found in occupation groups specific to federal public sector business such as ships officers and ship repair (60 percent and 73 percent), technical inspection (58 percent) and correctional services (33 percent). The operational nature of all the above occupations means that community college/institute graduates are most likely concentrated in the regions, where most public services are delivered and where the greatest need for new skill sets will be felt.

Community College/Institute Roles in Ongoing Training

Colleges/institutes are also playing an increasingly significant role in the upgrading and retraining of federal public sector employees by providing contract training services.

Colleges/institutes located in all regions of the country have delivered upgrading and training for Canada Post, Canada Revenue Agency, the Department of National Defence, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These services include needs assessments and evaluation, the development of employee training plans, consulting services, training facilities and diverse training programs and courses ranging from computer software and

Web page design to team building, project management, performance evaluation, conflict resolution and human resources management.

The advantage of using the college/institute system is that colleges have experience in collaborating for the delivery of standardized programs across the country. For example, standardized training was offered to postal workers at different locations in Canada. The colleges involved provided instructor training and orientation prior to the delivery of the training to ensure standardization.

Beginning to Fill in the Research Gaps

The community college/institute sector is, clearly, already a presence in public service education and training. In an on-line, technology-driven environment, community colleges/institutes will also be an increasingly important source of employees for the public sector in replacing current technical and operational cohorts and in meeting the demands of new public sector management initiatives.

To date, though, most research on government recruitment has focused on university graduates.² There is a gap in the documented analysis of recruitment issues in the college/institute sector. That's where this PPF survey comes in.

The Survey

Through the ACCC, the Public Policy Forum invited Canadian colleges and institutes to participate in this survey of their students. Institutions were targeted in geographic areas where there is a significant federal government presence. In total, 22 colleges and institutes across Canada agreed to participate in the survey. Of those 22, five³ were unable to participate due to technical or timing difficulties. (Please see Appendix A for a list of the 17 participating colleges and institutes.)

The survey was designed with the support of an advisory committee of college and institute representatives as well as representatives from select federal government departments (listed in Appendix B) and was pretested with two marketing classes at Algonquin College in Ottawa.

Each participating college and institute was provided with the bilingual e-mail text and link to the bilingual survey to distribute to all of their students via their intranet system, e-

² See, for example, the Public Policy Forum publication *Facing the Challenge: Recruiting the Next Generation of University Graduates to the Public Service* (1998), and *Recruiting the Next Generation of Scientists to the Public Service* (2004).

³ Northern College, Vancouver Community College, Grant MacEwan College, Lethbridge Community College, and Collège Édouard Montpetit

bulletin boards and student e-mail system. In this invitation to participate, students were offered a chance to win one of twenty \$100 cash prizes for completing the survey. From March 4 to April 13, 2005, over 6,000 students completed the survey.⁴ All students who voluntarily completed the entry form were included in the draw and winners were randomly chosen on April 14, 2005.

The survey asked students:

- about their career plans
- for a self-assessment of the skills they acquired or improved upon through their community college or institute education
- for their views on the job market and careers in various sectors (public, private, not-for-profit)
- about their previous work experience.

More specifically, the survey included questions on respondents' interest in a career in the public sector, what they thought of the federal government as an employer and as a workplace, and where they thought their chances for employment were highest. The survey also asked students to assess the extent to which their community college education had improved essential workplace skills such as their ability to communicate effectively, analyze and problem solve in real-life situations, and apply technical skills in their area of study.

Of the respondents, 63.2 percent were female and 36.8 percent were male. In all, 93.2 percent of surveys were completed in English and 6.8 percent in French.

⁴ The 17 participating Canadian community colleges and institutes represent a student population of 84,625 out of the approximately 736,000 students enrolled in 145 community colleges and institutes across Canada.

Findings and Recommendations for Smart Recruitment

An analysis of the survey responses on the subjects of career-related plans and self-assessment of skills leads us to conclude that community college and institute graduates are an important human resource pool which the federal government should include in its post-secondary recruitment campaigns.

The federal government should expand its post-secondary and student co-op recruitment programs to include colleges and institutes, and should include these institutions in its promotion of lifelong learning for employees. Human resource managers and senior federal government officials, many of whom were educated strictly at universities, should become more familiar with community college and institutes.

Here are our recommendations in detail.

Recommendation #1

That the federal government expand its post-secondary recruitment programs to include graduates of community colleges and institutes

Currently, the following federal government post-secondary recruitment programs are limited to graduates of universities:

- Management Trainee Program
- Accelerated Economist Training Program
- Financial Officer/Internal Auditor Recruitment and Development Program
- Aboriginal Masters Program
- Foreign Service Officer positions with Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada

There are no comparable programs specifically targeting graduates of community college and institute programs, although many public service skills shortages will be in areas where a technical education rather than an academic degree would be most suitable.

When asked what sector they would prefer to work in, 61 percent of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to work in the public sector over other sectors such as the private or not-for-profit sectors, while almost 65 percent indicated that they would seek careers in the public sector as part of their post-graduation job search.

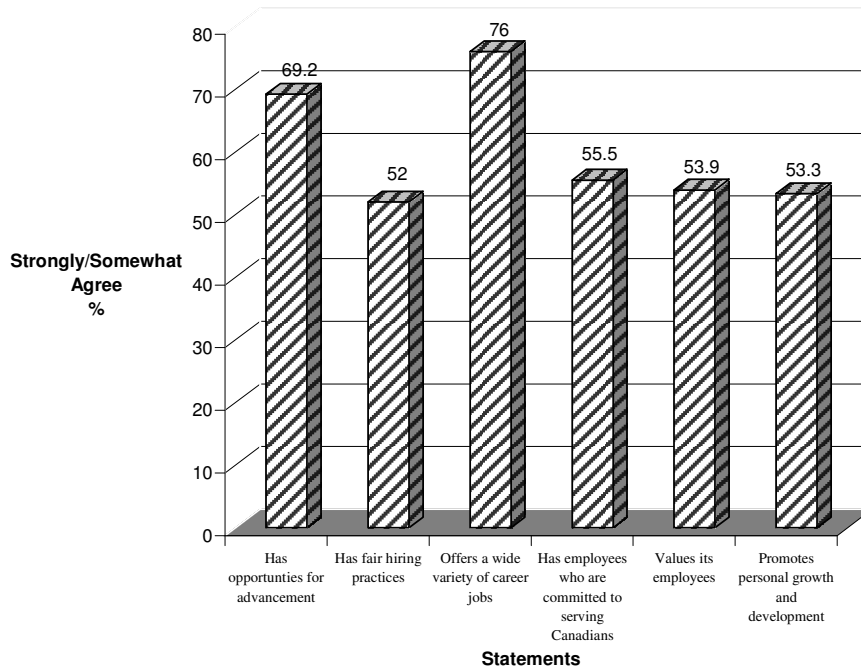
Community college and institute students have a positive attitude toward public service and the federal public service as a workplace and as an employer. Almost 83 percent indicated that it is important in their career choice to have work that contributes to the betterment of society. Of respondents who indicated a preference for work in the public

service, 85 percent also indicated that they want work that contributes to the betterment of society.

As an employer, the federal public service was seen as valuing its employees and promoting personal growth by over half of those surveyed. The public service is also seen as offering a variety of career choices (76 percent), fair hiring practices (52 percent) and opportunities for advancement (69 percent) (See Table 1).

Table 1

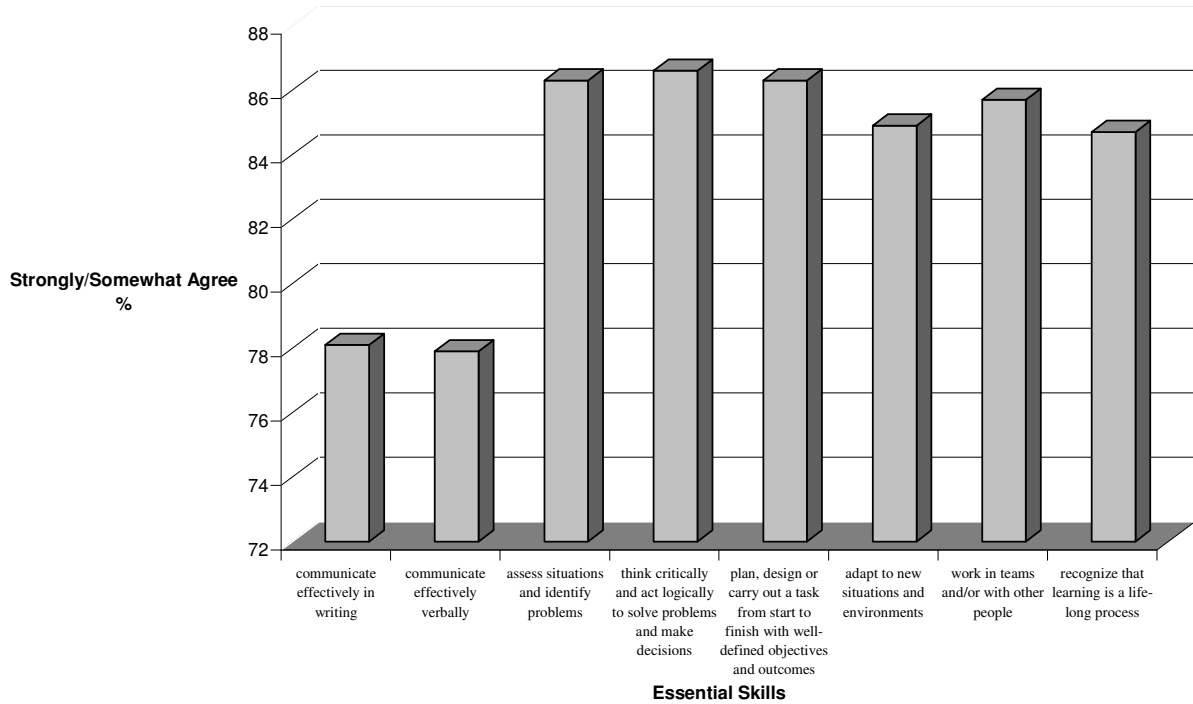
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements when you think of the federal public service (Government of Canada)?



Community college and institute education provides essential skills for the modern public sector workplace. When asked to assess their college or institute education, 78 percent indicated that their ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing had improved. Over 86 percent indicated that their ability to identify problems, think critically to solve them and to plan design and execute tasks had improved. Over 85 percent indicated that their college or institute education had improved their ability to adapt to new situations and environments and to work in teams. Most significantly, almost 85 percent indicated that their college or institute education had improved their ability to recognize that learning is a lifelong process (See Table 2).

Table 2

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My college or institute education has improved my ability to..."



Recommendation #2

That the federal government expand student co-op recruitment programs to include community college and institute students

As a means of promoting the public service to community college students and to experience first-hand the skills that a community college education provides, the federal public service should expand its co-op student recruitment and placement programs to include community college students.

Almost 75 percent of respondents indicated that a co-op placement/internship/field placement/practicum or job shadowing experience had better equipped them to find employment in the labour market. The federal government currently has a bridging policy whereby students hired for co-op jobs can ‘bridge’ into permanent employment in the federal government, but most federal co-op placements are at the university level. Expanding co-op programs to community college and institute students would allow the federal employer to experience first-hand the skills and training of community college and institute students.

Recommendation #3***That the federal government as an employer lead by example in promoting lifelong learning***

Federal public service human resource managers say they often receive several thousand responses to single job postings. Initial screening of applications to get them down to a reasonable number for review has often involved considering only those with the highest level of education regardless of the skills needed for the job being staffed. This screening of applicants by education levels biases the recruitment process against community college and institute graduates. Human resource managers rationalize recruiting from applicants with the highest level of education because advancement through the organization will eventually require one or more university degrees. As a result, new hires can be overqualified or have skill sets not well matched with the jobs they are supposed to do.

In recent years, the federal government has promoted the notion of lifelong learning as a means of boosting innovation and economic growth⁵. As an employer, the federal government should lead by example in promoting lifelong learning among its employees. This would involve first recruiting for the skills of the job being staffed and then encouraging employees to continue their education and skills development to qualify for advancement.

The community college and institute sector and the university sector are working toward greater integration of their programs. Community colleges and institutes are found in most communities in Canada and access is an important opportunity for individuals to build on their education and training regardless of their location of work. The public service could work in partnership with these organizations to tailor programs to specialized human resource needs.

Recommendation #4***That human resource managers and senior officials in the federal public service visit community college and institute campuses across the country***

This is the best way for to experience first-hand the innovative programs and state-of-the-art education provided there.

⁵ See *National Summit on Innovation and Learning Summary Report, 2003* - One of the National Summit themes was, Strengthening Our Learning Culture: Support Life-Long Learning (p.17); also, in his speech, the Prime Minister set out a 5-point action plan on innovation and related government initiatives that included: "To make Canada a learning society, where learning and upgrading become continuous." (p.8).

The students themselves were best in describing their community college/institute education:

- “Made me feel comfortable going into the field I am entering”
- “Gives exposure to the realities of Human Services”
- “Helped develop a well-rounded set of skills necessary in my field of study”
- “Gives examples of the work environment”
- “Provides quality and flexible practice facilities”
- “Opened my eyes to a whole new side of business”

Conclusions

In a workplace characterized by changing personnel and rapidly evolving technology delivering round-the-clock service, modernizing public sector management can only be achieved with a skilled and committed public sector workforce.

To ensure that it has the right people with the right skill set to serve Canadians in the future, the federal public service must recruit from the broadest possible pool of qualified candidates and encourage skills upgrading as a means of employee promotion.

Future federal government post-secondary recruitment strategies should include community college and institute graduates, who possess the essential skills needed in a modern workplace and want to work in the public sector.

Appendix A

Survey of College and Institute Students: Skills and Career Goals Advisory Committee Members

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New Westminster, British Columbia

Appendix B

Survey of College and Institute Students: Skills and Career Goals

Participating Colleges and Institutes

Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology - Ottawa, Ontario

Cégep St-Jean-sur-Richelieu - St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec

College of the North Atlantic - Stephenville, Newfoundland

Durham College - Oshawa, Ontario

Heritage College - Gatineau, Québec

Holland College - Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning - Toronto, Ontario

Justice Institute of British Columbia - New Westminster, British Columbia

La Cité Collégiale - Ottawa, Ontario

Mohawk College - Hamilton, Ontario

New Brunswick Community College and Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick - St. John, New Brunswick

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology - Edmonton, Alberta

Nova Scotia Community College - Pictou, Kingstec and Annapolis Valley Campuses, Nova Scotia

Red Deer College - Red Deer, Alberta

Red River College - Winnipeg, Manitoba

St. Lawrence College - Brockville, Cornwall and Kingston, Ontario

Southern Alberta Institute of Technology - Calgary, Alberta