

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

A POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TWO FACTIONS' VIEWS ON
THE ABILITY OF ALBERTA'S PRIVATE POST-SECONDARY
INSTITUTIONS TO GRANT BACCALAUREATE DEGREES

By

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Abstract

In this paper, Chilton and Schnaffer's technique of political discourse analysis is used to examine discourses produced in reaction to the Albert government's 1999 decision to allow private post-secondary institutions to grant full baccalaureate degrees. This new degree-granting ability has given rise to criticism from groups including student unions, Alberta's opposition parties, and faculty unions. Groups in support include government members and employees, and staff of private institutions. The discourse has centered on two topics: quality and choice. Opponents believe the new degrees are of lower quality than public degrees and further assert that allowing private degrees will harm the quality of degrees from public institutions. Those in favour counter that the new degrees are of acceptable quality and that the competition imposed by private institutions will raise the standard of public degrees. Both factions state that choice for Alberta's students is important. Opponents contend that private degrees will reduce choice by increasing education costs, while proponents charge that private institutions offer students choices not available at public institutions. In their discourses, both factions use the four techniques of political discourse consisting of legitimization and its counterpart delegitimization, dissimulation, coercion, and resistance. More discourse from those opposed than from those in favour exists perhaps because the government can use the Private Colleges Accreditation Board and orders in council to award degree-granting powers to individual institutions, thus avoiding open debate in the legislature. Those opposed to the new degree-granting system have produced

discourse designed to sway public opinion and engage the government in direct discussion. Since the current degree-granting system is causing a variety of problems for Alberta's students, it is hoped that through discourse analysis, the two factions can gain a greater understanding of each other's positions and thus better communicate to resolve these problems.

Introduction

In January of 2001, via Order in Council 53/2001 under the supervision of Dr. Lyle Oberg, the DeVry Institute of Technology in Calgary was granted permission to offer four year baccalaureate degrees in three of its programs (“Order in Council 53/2001”). Reaction to this decision was immediate, generally negative, and extended outside of the province of Alberta.

DeVry, however, is not the first, nor is it the only, private post-secondary institution (PPSI) in Alberta to be given permission to offer full fledged baccalaureate degrees. According to an Alberta Advanced Education website, there are presently six other PPSIs that have degree granting status. Three of these were given permission to grant baccalaureate degrees *before* DeVry: first, Concordia University College in April of 1994, followed by Canadian University College in January of 1995, and King’s University College in June of 1995. Three other PPSIs were authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees shortly after DeVry, with Taylor University College and Seminary being approved in July of 2001, Nazarene College/Alliance University College in July of 2002, and St. Mary’s University College in May of 2004 (“Recommendations for Resident Alberta Institutions”).

The ability of PPSIs to grant four year baccalaureate degrees had existed for nearly seven years before Order in Council 53/2001. However, until its 2001

enactment, the reaction to this privilege being extended to PPSIs was relatively muted. It was not until DeVry was given authority to grant degrees that a nerve was hit amongst the public. Several comments will serve to illustrate the strong public reaction to Order in Council 53/2001. John Baker, president of the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary termed the order to be based upon “a thoughtless decision that should be immediately rescinded” (“DeVry Degrees Denounced”), NDP MLA Brian Mason contended the decision would “undermine our educational system” (quoted in Olsen, A1), and journalist Errin White deemed the decision to be “a dangerous step” (A9).

While some of the criticism resulting from the government’s Order in Council 53/2001 was directed specifically at DeVry, many of those reacting did not draw any distinction between DeVry and the other six PPSIs authorized in Alberta via various orders in council to grant degrees, instead criticizing the capacity of any Alberta PPSI, whether proprietary in nature or not, to give baccalaureate degrees. Therefore, this paper will examine discourses associated with the ability of *all* Alberta PPSIs to confer degrees rather than simply examining the reaction to DeVry’s degree granting ability. While the focus will be upon reactions to the situation in Alberta, reference will be made at times to British Columbia and Ontario, as these two provinces have extended degree granting status to PPSIs and reaction in these provinces has been similar to that evinced in Alberta.

I assert that there is a place for PPSIs to grant degrees in Alberta, as well as in the rest of Canada. If PPSIs are properly supervised, they should not only continue to be able to offer baccalaureate degrees as they now do, but these degrees should in future be readily accepted by all parties as being equivalent to those earned at public institutions. Before this can happen in a more successful manner than is now occurring, however, the various parties involved have to begin working together rather than maintaining their present somewhat adversarial positions. One step in accomplishing this challenging task is to better comprehend the issues associated with degree recognition. Discourse analysis can be of help in achieving this increased understanding.

Why Use Discourse Analysis

Examining written texts regarding PPSI s' degree-granting status is one means to better comprehend both the concerns and the attitudes of various factions involved in the question of allowing PPSIs to grant degrees. Discourse analysis (DA) can be a very useful way of analyzing texts. Potter and Wetherell state "there is no method to discourse analysis in the way that we traditionally think of an experimental method" (175). Instead, DA is a perspective, rather than a set of specific methods. While there are varieties of DA, one of the major trends in this field is critical discourse analysis (CDA), defined by Matheson as an approach that "seeks[s] not just to understand how language works in society but in whose interests [it works]" (12). CDA has been heavily influenced by two scholars, Foucault and Bakhtin. Foucault suggests that when analyzing

discourse, one of the primary patterns to attend to is how people gain power over each other through the use of discourse (cited in Matheson, 10). Bakhtin takes the position that discourse is never purely objective; rather “all language use is ideological” (cited by Fairclough and Wodak, 262). Those who engage in CDA often have political goals: either to advocate a particular course of action or to lobby on behalf of a specific group (Fairclough and Wodak). According to Antaki et al, there is currently “debate amongst discourse analysts whether analysts should take positions with respect to the material that they study”. These authors concede that the advisability of taking sides when doing discourse analysis is an unresolved issue even among themselves (“Discourse Analysis Means Doing Analysis”).

Bloomaert and Bulcaen state that one of the preferred topics studied by practitioners of CDA is political discourse (450). Political discourse analysis (PDA) is one of the newer forms of CDA and is an approach that I intend to use in this paper. However, precisely identifying what political discourse is presents some problems. Gee asserts that “language-in-use is everywhere and always political” (1). Wilson observes that while “defining political discourse is not a straightforward matter” (411), statements such as Gee’s lead to the “danger of significantly over-generalizing the concept of political discourse” (398). Under Gee’s definition, every act of language is political in nature; thus, all discourse analysis becomes political discourse analysis. Chilton and Schaffner provide a more useful definition of PDA than does Gee, suggesting that PDA is analysis

that concerns itself with actions involving power or resistance to power (212) and that PDA studies the strategic functions of language as they are used to establish and exercise, or to resist, power (212-13)

Chilton and Schaffner divide PDA into two main types of analysis. The first is known as “political lexicometry” and involves examining a number of texts produced by different authors or groups and contrasting the relative statistical frequencies of various terms within these texts. This strategy provides “the raw data for interpretative political analysis” (209). Although Chilton and Schaffner deem it discourse analysis, lexicometry seems to be somewhat similar to content analysis. The second type of PDA is a large diverse category that the authors label as “diverse methodological tendencies” (209). These tendencies include Marxist analyses, Foucault’s discourse formation, the critical discourse analysis techniques used by British theorists such as Orwell, Fowler, Kress, Hodge, and Fairclough, as well as European text analysis techniques used by Bloomaert and Van Dijk (210-11).

Chilton and Schaffner are more interested in the second type of PDA than they are lexicometry. PDA, as Chilton and Schaffner apply it, involves a focus upon the four strategic functions of language as they are used to establish and exercise or to resist power. These four functions are identified as (1) coercion, (2) resistance, (3) legitimization and delegitimization and (4) dissimulation. Each of these strategies will be briefly defined here. Coercion consists of a wide variety of methods used to exercise power ranging from obvious ones such as

legal statutes to more subtle means such as “making assumptions about reality that hearers are obliged to at least temporarily accept in order to process the text or talk” (12). Resistance is comprised of techniques used to fight the exercise of power. Strategies of legitimization establish the right to be obeyed while “delegitimization is its essential counterpart” (13). The authors define dissimulation as being more than simple lying. It also involves controlling information¹ (212-13).

Using Chilton and Schaffner’s definitions, it thus seems appropriate to use PDA in considering the language used to articulate the dispute over who should have the right to grant degrees, for this is certainly a power struggle. As well, all four of the functions of political language identified by Chilton and Schaffner can be observed when analyzing the discourse related to PPSIs’ degree granting status.

As discourse analysis necessitates considering the interests of those who are producing a given discourse, it seems appropriate at this point to establish my own interests in regard to the issue of PPSIs granting degrees. As a student, I have studied at a variety of public post-secondary institutions. My undergraduate education was undertaken at the University of Calgary, and as a graduate student enrolled in a program at Athabasca University, in addition to my courses here, I also took courses in the graduate faculties of the University of Calgary and the State University of California. As well, my daughter has been an

¹ In his book *Analyzing Political Discourse*, Chilton narrows these four functions to three. In doing this, he has taken the behaviours involved in dissimulation and included them in his definition of coercion.

undergraduate at two Alberta public universities and is about to graduate. Thus, both as a student and a parent of a student, I am well aware of the many benefits of a public university education. However, as an instructor who has taught at a PPSI for twenty years, I am also aware that education at private institutions can meet the needs of students for a quality education as well, sometimes in a different way than can the education offered by public institutions. In "Discourse Analysis Means Doing Analysis: A Critique of Some Analytic Shortcomings," Antaki and other noted discourse analysts caution against a tendency to under-analyze texts as a result of taking sides on an issue. As indicated in the introduction to this paper, I am in favour of PPSIs having degree-granting status under close supervision. However, in this paper my intention is not only to guard against taking an overly partisan stance but also to avoid the associated under-analysis of discourse that Antaki and his colleagues warn against.

It seems that while many of the concerns expressed by those opposed to PPSIs granting degrees contain highly valid points of criticism, some of the resistance is based either on incorrect information, on a desire to cling to familiar ways of doing things, or upon protecting vested interests. Proponents of PPSIs being able to grant degrees likewise base their advocacy on a number of both admirable and less laudable factors. A primary motive given for PPSIs being able to give degrees is that this ability provides Alberta's students with more choice. Choice includes the ability to select education which is grounded in

religious values rather than in the secular humanist values of public institutions, or to choose to study at an institution which emphasizes what Skolnik terms applied knowledge rather than the theoretical knowledge customarily emphasized at public institutions (“Some Thoughts on the Meaning and Values”). Owners or staff of for-profit institutions are in part promoting PPSIs’ degree-granting status because gaining or retaining such status is financially advantageous for proprietary schools. What of the government’s motives in allowing PPSIs to give baccalaureate degrees? Marshall attributed some of the government’s motivation as being based on providing an inexpensive and expedient way of dealing with the public’s demand for better access to post-secondary education (“Degree Recognition across Canada”).

Discourse analysis of the views expressed by the two factions concerned with PPSIs’ degree granting status will help in understanding the motives for resistance to PPSIs’ new powers as well as pinpointing what particular factors are causing this resistance. In addition, discourse analysis can help in initiating better dialogue between governments, PPSIs, and public post-secondary institutions. Skolnik contends that without improved dialogue, not “much progress can be made in dealing with the problem of degree recognition”. He adds that without effective dialogue, the imposition of a solution such as a system of national accreditation “is likely to exacerbate ... the problem... and may do more harm than good”.

The Significance of Order in Council 53/2001

Why was Order in Council 53/2001 a flashpoint for igniting controversy when the previous orders in council had not had this effect? I believe there are three reasons for the controversy which ensued after the initiation of Order in Council 53/2001. The most obvious reason, and one directly articulated at times by some opponents of this order, is that DeVry is unique amongst degree-granting PPSIs in Alberta because it is the only institution which is a proprietary for-profit entity.

A second reason that extending degree granting status to DeVry generated debate is that it is an American-based institution. While the DeVry Institute of Technology in Calgary is operated by DeVry Canada, DeVry Canada is a subsidiary of DeVry University, an American owned firm. Until a year or two ago, DeVry Canada did not even have a board of governors distinct from the U.S. parent company's board (Lund, 2006). However, several other Alberta PPSIs also have ties to American institutions.² In contrast to DeVry, though, these Alberta PPSIs are not subsidiaries of American institutions, nor do they make a point of drawing attention to their associations with American institutions. In contrast, even a cursory examination of DeVry Calgary's web site indicates that it has direct ties to DeVry University in the U.S. It is my contention that some of the reaction against the government's decision to allow PPSIs degree granting

² Taylor University is linked to the North American Baptist Seminary in South Dakota ("A History of Taylor University College and Seminary") and Canadian University College is affiliated with Union College in Nebraska ("A Brief History of Canadian University College").

status is rooted in anti-American sentiment, therefore explaining in part why it was Order in Council 53/2001 that drew forth highly negative sentiments.

Examining several comments by various individuals will help to substantiate this assertion.

Bill Bruneau of CAUT asserts that opening up degree granting to private institutions will damage Canada's economy since doing so will encourage an influx of foreign investors into the Canadian educational scene. At the present time, the term "foreign" when it applies to PPSIs nearly always equates to "American," as nearly all of the foreign-owned PPSIs which presently have the ability to grant degrees are U.S. based. "You throw open a tremendous market. I think it is fairly risky as [private investors] do not have Canadian interests at heart" (qtd in Kelly). Bruneau adds that the move will further damage Canada's economy since allowing foreign institutions to grant degrees in Canada will cause an increase in the amount of money Canadian investors put into foreign markets (cited in Kelly), but fails to explain how this increase will be caused by PPSIs being able to grant degrees. Brennen of the *Daily Mercury* described the Ontario government's decision to allow PPSIs to give degrees as heralding the arrival of "American-style, for-profit education" (A1). Further examples of this anti-American sentiment are found in the views expressed by Wojtaszek of the University of Calgary Students' Union who unequivocally claimed that the only thing private universities can offer Canadians is the chance to pay higher tuition. "Are these private universities going to be opening Harvard-quality institutions in

Canada? Not likely. Are they going to offer Harvard-level scholarships? Not likely. Is this going to improve the quality of post-secondary education in Canada? Not at all" (quoted in Zakaluzny).

Marie Bountrogianni, an Ontario MLA, views the high quality of post-secondary education in Canada as being part of the country's "branding" strategy, and thus part of its identity. "In all of the Canadian embassies across the world, one of the bragging points is that we have only public universities, by and large, in Canada. That ensures consistency and is one of the selling points of this country". She states that allowing PPSIs to grant degrees will take away this advantage, adding "it really saddens me to see the beginning of the end of this" (quoted in "Ontario Hansard, 4 Dec", 2000).

In these comments, we can see the technique of delegitimization being used. By associating PPSIs with foreign educational systems, allowing PPSIs to grant degrees is portrayed as a dangerous idea, one which makes Canada's post-secondary educational system vulnerable to pernicious outside influences from the United States. It has been asserted that "Since World War II, Canadians have ... struggled with what it is exactly that makes them Canadian... [with] Canadians now usually defin[ing] themselves by comparing their differences with the United States" ("Canadian Identity: Meaning"). If one of the main ways in which Canadians define their identity is as "not American", this charge against PPSIs is indeed a serious one.

Finally, I believe a third reason that Order in Council 53/2001 began sustained controversy is simply that, until DeVry achieved degree granting status, much of the general public were not cognizant of the ability of Alberta PPSIs to grant degrees. Prior to January 2001, the PPSIs which were allowed to grant degrees were organizations that did not make a point of calling attention to their newfound degree-granting status. DeVry, however, drew attention to this ability. Its brochures and advertisements, as well as its website, publicized the fact that DeVry's degrees were now recognized by Alberta Learning 2006-2007 ("Academic Calendar: DeVry Institute of Technology"). As well, its admissions representatives mentioned this fact in their presentations given at high schools and during meetings with individual potential students (Purvis). Thus, through exposure to these media, the public became more aware that the ability to grant degrees was no longer the sole privilege of public post-secondary institutions.

There are two factions in the dispute over allowing Alberta PPSIs to confer baccalaureate degrees. Those in favour of the action are largely government officials or employees, as well as staff and faculty of the affected PPSIs. On the opposing side are a number of different bodies, including trade unions, opposition political parties, student unions, and faculty unions. Caught in the middle are present and aspiring students and their families. These individuals are left wondering what the controversy is about and questioning the value of degrees from PPSIs. As well, those students who have graduated from PPSIs are encountering some negative reactions to their new credentials.

The controversy over whether PPSIs should be allowed to grant four year degrees is not a localized issue restricted only to the province of Alberta. It is a contentious issue in British Columbia as well, for recent debate has ensued over the decision in 2003 of the B.C. government to allow PPSIs such as Sprott Community College to grant degrees ("Sprott-Shaw is the Grandfather") ("Hansard- Thursday, Oct. 9, 2003, 24026") (Lundgren) (Petter). In Ontario, the decision of the provincial government to allow institutions such as Tyndale University and College and Tapiro College to grant degrees has stirred dissension in that province as well (Petter). Although education is the responsibility of individual provinces, what happens in these three provinces will inevitably impact the face of education throughout our country.

While some of the criticism resulting from the government's decision of January 2001 was directed specifically at DeVry, many of those reacting did not draw any substantial distinction between this institution and the other six non-proprietary PPSIs authorized in Alberta via various orders in council to grant degrees. Instead, they called for removing the ability of all Alberta PPSIs to give baccalaureate degrees. As stated earlier, this is why this paper will examine discourses associated with the ability of all Alberta PPSIs to confer degrees rather than simply examining the reaction to DeVry's degree granting ability. While the focus will be upon reactions to the situation in Alberta, reference will be made at times to British Columbia and Ontario, as these two provinces have

extended degree granting status to PPSIs and reaction in these provinces has been similar to that evinced in Alberta.

Degree Granting Privileges as Part of a Larger Trend

In discussing reactions to the Alberta government's decision to allow PPSIs to grant degrees, it is important to briefly consider the movement towards privatization in Alberta as whole, since the bid to allow some privatizing of degree-granting status is part of a general strategy on the government's part, rather than an isolated development.

Mintz contends that privatization in Canada has proceeded more slowly during the last 25 years than in other similar nations (14). Economist Bernardo Bortolotti concurs, observing that countries such as Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, and most European nations have undertaken much greater privatization than has Canada (cited in Mintz, 14). Bortolotti expresses puzzlement over the slow rate of privatization in Canada, as his studies indicate that countries such as Canada, which he characterizes as having a majoritarian system of government with relatively few parties gaining political power, introduce privatization at faster pace than do those countries with proportional political representation and higher numbers of opposition members (cited in Mintz, 14).

If Bertolotti's assertion that privatization occurs more often in places with majoritarian governments is accurate, then it is perhaps not surprising that Alberta's government is advocating privatization of a wide variety of enterprises,

for Alberta's governmental system appears to be even more majoritarian in its nature than is Canada's federal governmental system. Frank Dabbs and Gordon Laxer both warn there is a worrying tendency towards a one-party governmental system in Alberta. Dabbs contends that Alberta's present political system is not operating in a truly democratic way. He states that Alberta's opposition parties are fragmented, without the necessary financial and organizational infrastructures needed to effectively challenge Alberta's Conservative party. As well, he argues that opposition party members are generally excluded from committees. These factors have therefore produced a situation under which opposition parties in Alberta are essentially powerless. Dabbs makes the perhaps exaggerated claim that Ralph Klein "has completed the creation of the first functional post-democratic government in North America, run by the elites for the elites" (25). Political economist Laxer asserts Alberta's constituents are "no longer citizens and voters in a democratic community. They are now consumers, investors, and stakeholders, acting as individuals in the private marketplace. Everything public is discredited" (quoted in Dabbs, 29).

The Alberta government in 2005 introduced a complex public consultation process that it calls call a "Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC)". To date, the government has used the MAC only to hear opinions about the highly controversial topic of exploration of coal bed methane/natural gas resources ("Public Consultations"). However, rather than seeing the establishment of this procedure as a sign that the government is trying to be more responsive to

public opinion, Dabbs charged that the introduction of MACs is proof that there is an “absence of an effective, representative, responsible legislature” (28). He stated there would be no need for MACs if Alberta’s political system was operating the way a democratic system is designed to do.

Although the government did have a public consultation processes process in place for those who had concerns regarding post-secondary education, it did not use a MAC, although this process had been developed at the time the PSE review was held. Instead, an on-line review site that ran from June 15 to October 31 of 2005 was utilized, accompanied by discussions in various parts of the provinces led by various MLAs, followed by a minister’s forum titled Forum to Generate Bold New Directions for Higher Learning held on November 1 and 2 of 2005. At this forum, over 250 individuals were present, including representatives from PPSIs, public post-secondary institutions, business and industry; government ministers; and students. This consultation was part of the government’s strategy of public consultation, a process the government states “provides the government with an opportunity to hear what Albertans are thinking ... on important issues. Responses help form policies and legislation” (“Public Consultations”).

Guest observes that there exists a relatively long-standing tendency in Alberta for our governments to favour a social policy approach in which the private sector plays a significant role in delivering social services (cited in Church and Smith) . While it is certainly inaccurate to refer to the merchandizing of

alcohol as a social service, a short discussion of the Conservative's privatization of the Alberta Liquor Control Board (ALCB) seems germane here, if only because this privatization is frequently referred to by both those who wish to criticize and those who wish to support the government's wider tendency towards privatization. Dean Neu contends that this move "had negative consumer, social, and financial impacts for Albertans". Additionally, Neu uses the privatization of the ALCB as a method of criticizing the trend towards privatization as whole, as evidenced by the title and subtitle of his article "Klein's Free Market Utopia: How Not to Remake Government". However, the Alberta government often points to the ALCB privatization as evidence of how successful privatization can be. For example, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) states "Private liquor retailing has been remarkably well received by consumers and everyone involved in the liquor industry". The AGLC asserts that privatization has increased employment opportunities, and served consumers by providing a larger number of outlets which offer a wider selection of products ("Alberta Liquor Privatization"). These conclusions are quite different from those reached by Neu.

The government has undertaken at least partial privatization of other services such as highway maintenance and construction and registry services (Prescott) ("Alberta Hopes to Save Millions"). As well, it has considered but not as yet implemented privatization of Alberta's prisons ("Alberta Reconsiders Privatizing Jails"). Perhaps the closest service which compares to education that the government has discussed privatizing is the health care system.

Klein's long-standing battle with the federal government over Alberta's right to have control over its own health care system, including the right to introduce some privatization of services is well known. The most recent development in the proposed plans to introduce privatization into Alberta's health care system occurred in April of 2006. At that time, the conservative caucus abandoned Ralph Klein's much publicized and controversial plan to revamp Alberta's health care system, one he dubbed the "Third Way". The plan called for a European-styled blend of public and private delivery of services. Health Minister Dave Hancock attempted to defuse controversy over the abandoned Third Way scheme, stating "The whole public/private delivery question has had more heat than light. Public/private was about choice but didn't really help with sustainability" (quoted in Libin, A1). However, the minister refused to completely rule out any further discussion of privatization, stating "everything has to be analyzed on its own merits"(quoted in Libin, A1).

Libin contends that Klein's plans to privatize Alberta's healthcare system were mainly a bid for attention rather than a true goal, claiming "Mr. Klein frustrated advocates on both sides of the privatization debate, posturing as a rebel against Canada's universal health care regime but failing to follow through" (A1) . Church and Smith believe that Klein used the issue of privatization of the health care system in part as "a means of highlighting the tendency of the federal government to make unilateral decisions affecting the provinces/territories". It is therefore difficult to ascertain just how sincere Klein

was in his "Third Way" bid. Nevertheless, it appears that the relatively intense opposition to Klein's Third Way plan has sensitized the government to the need to more thoroughly consider the desires of its constituents. Minister Gary Mar stated "we would not move forward [on health care privatization] without first getting some sense that Albertans are ready to do that. They are not ready at this point" (quoted in Yourk).

Regardless of which service the Conservatives have privatized or advocate privatizing in future, the reasons given for doing so are often the same. These reasons, as will be seen, include those which have been primarily advanced for allowing PPSIS to grant degrees. Proponents of privatization, be they government spokespeople or supporters of the government's plans, usually state there are three main advantages to privatization: better access and choice for users, higher quality of goods or services, and reduced costs to taxpayers.

Critics of attempts at privatization counter with charges that quality will decrease, that ease and speed of access will be determined by one's financial means, thereby reducing choice for many people, and that costs will either increase or be transferred to those who can least afford to bear them. Bill Moore-Kilgannon asserts that the motive of the Alberta government to privatize is simple: "To shift money into the hands of the corporations" (quoted in Bunner, 10). Again, these arguments against privatization of services are ones put forth by those who are critical of the government allowing PPSIS to grant degrees.

History of Degree Recognition in Canada and the U.S.

The present debate which is occurring over degree recognition is a relatively new phenomenon in Canada. In understanding this controversy, it is helpful to have a historical perspective. Since Canada's formation, the bulk of the responsibility for education has rested with the country's individual provincial governments. The federal government is involved in education primarily through its funding efforts under programs such as the Canada Student Loans program. This relative autonomy of the provinces has one primary advantage: each province can tailor its educational system to meet the needs of its residents.³ Of course, this autonomy in provincial educational systems comes with disadvantages. One of the primary problems inherent in this system is that the differences which naturally occur under such autonomy sometimes lead to discrepancies between provinces. A good case in point is the recently abolished Grade 13 system in Ontario, with Grade 13 previously existing in only that province.⁴ In a similar fashion, this diversity permits individual provinces to unilaterally give permission for PPSIs to grant degrees, thus leading to

³ For example, Ontario, which may have a larger number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds than Alberta, has instituted a system of junior kindergarten for all four year olds while Alberta has deferred kindergarten till the age of five, as this province perceives there is little need for this particular educational program in Alberta.

⁴ Under the program, students could take their first year of university courses (termed Grade 13) at their local high school and then transfer to university in their second year. The program was eliminated largely as a cost-cutting strategy, but there had also been persistent questions raised by educational institutions in other provinces as to whether Grade 13 was truly equivalent to the freshman year of university outside of Ontario.

difficulties. As of late 2006, Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia have opted to licence PPSIs to grant degrees while the other provinces have not.

Examining how post-secondary institutions are accredited in the United States will help to shed light on why the issues surrounding degree recognition in Canada are presently fraught with problems. In the U.S., local, state, and federal governments are jointly responsible for the country's educational systems from kindergarten through to post-graduate education. In contrast to the situation in Canada, the U.S. federal government's role in education is much more prominent. The manner in which responsibilities for education are shared in the U.S. serves to facilitate the national system of accreditation for post-secondary institutions in the country. Another significant difference between the Canadian and American educational systems is that there is a long tradition in the U.S. of PPSIs, with some of the country's best known and most respected institutions such as Harvard University, Stanford University and Northwestern University being private. Canada, in contrast, has far fewer PPSIs than the U.S., and none of its PPSIs have the reputation accorded institutions such as Stanford or Harvard.

In understanding issues of accreditation, it is also helpful to know that under the American system, there are two types of post-secondary degrees: accredited degrees and non-accredited degrees. In order to offer degrees, an institution must be licensed by the state; however, such licensing does not have to be accompanied by any form of accreditation from an outside body.

Therefore, some institutions offer degrees which are licensed yet non-accredited. If an institution wishes to offer accredited degrees, some U.S. states require that all accredited degrees offered within state boundaries be accredited by a state body. Other states, however, do not require accreditation by the individual state but instead consider national accreditation to be sufficient. There are consequently four ways in which degrees may be certified⁵ with the most significant one involving having the degree licensed by the state and accredited by a national accreditation body. The national accreditation comes in the form of approval from one of six regional accreditation organizations, four of which are affiliated under CITA (Commission on International and Trans-regional Accreditation) to offer accreditation of university and college degrees ("Commission on Accreditation").⁶

While a practice with a long tradition, the U.S. system of degree certification and accreditation is not without problems. As can be seen by the above explanation of the four ways by which U.S. degrees can be certified, this degree granting system is complex. From the viewpoint of individual institutions, the requirement in some states that a degree must meet individual state accreditation requirements even if it is already nationally accredited via regional

⁵ These four methods are comprised of the following: (1) the degree may be licensed by the state but not accredited by any outside body (2) the degree may be licensed by the state and accredited by a state agency and (3) the degree may be licensed by the state and accredited by a national accreditation board and (4) the degree may be licensed by the state and accredited by both by a state agency and a national accreditation body.

⁶ To be exact, the system is not technically one of national accreditation. However, because the six regional accreditation agencies recognize each other's degree accreditation procedures and decisions, regional accreditation essentially functions as a form of national accreditation.

accreditation complicates matters, since the criteria for the two different types of accreditation differ⁷. Additionally, the complex system of accreditation poses some challenges for educational consumers⁸. However, the information needed to help students recognize the significance of state and regional accreditation of degrees is widely available, both on web sites such as the U.S. Department of Education's web site and in publications such as the numerous guides available to help students pick the colleges they wish to attend. As a result, information is easily accessible for those who seek to understand how degree accreditation operates in the U.S.

At any rate, the American system of regional accreditation appears to work reasonably well. Regionally accredited institutions are highly regarded by the public, with their courses and degrees being readily accepted for transfer by other regionally accredited institutions. Student loan funding is generally restricted to those students enrolled in regionally accredited degree programs ("Accreditation in the United States"), and usually only those students enrolled in regionally accredited degree courses have their tuition reimbursed by those employers who offer such a benefit. Such responses indicate that the concept of regional degree accreditation is fairly well comprehended and that such accreditation is viewed as a respected method of indicating degree quality.

⁷ For instance, DeVry University's degrees offered at its New Jersey campus have to meet certain standards that its degrees accredited via regional accreditation which are offered at other branches of DeVry University do not, due to specialized accreditation requirements demanded by New Jersey state (Ballheim).

⁸ Howard-Vital observes that many students, at least ones from her study who were enrolled in PPSIs in North Carolina, are confused about issues associated with accreditation.

The six American regional accreditation agencies have an established history⁹. Only after a quite rigorous examination process is an institution is granted accreditation, usually for a period of five to ten years. This process requires the institution to draw up a self-study document identifying its strengths and weaknesses, with a discussion of how it plans to address any problems. Another major part of the accreditation process involves the inspection of the institution by an accreditation panel¹⁰. It is intriguing to note that DeVry Institute of Technology in Calgary is one of the few Canadian post-secondary institutions to have been accredited by a U.S regional accreditation agency, the North Central Association. Interestingly, B.C.'s Capilano College recently has applied for accreditation through another of the U.S. regional accreditation agencies ("Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Institutions").

Present Situation of Degree Accreditation in Canada

The debate over how degrees should be recognized in Canada is a relatively new phenomenon. In every one of Canada's provinces prior to the 1990's, the only institutions allowed to grant degrees were the major public universities, most of which have been in existence since the 1960s, with some having a much earlier origin. Marshall asserts that "until recently the meaning and origin of the Canadian university degree was well understood [since]

⁹ The earliest of these accreditation agencies, Northeast Association of Schools and Colleges, dates from 1885 ("Commission on International and Trans-regional Accreditation").

¹⁰ The panel examines the given institution's curriculum, tours at its physical facilities, analyses its student services, inspects its library and other information systems, assesses the credential of its faculty, and interviews some of the institution's faculty and other staff as well as some of its students and alumni (Barmby).

degrees were offered only by universities" ("Degree Accreditation in Canada"). He adds that "the issue of degree accreditation was a non-issue in Canada ... [for] all post-secondary institutions were part of a relatively homogeneous two-sector system: a college (community) system and a university system. While there was certainly wide differentiation within [each of] these two sectors, if an institution was provided with a provincial charter ... the institution was seen to be "accredited". [Additionally], "while many existing universities had private/religious origins ... there was virtually no history of private-for-profit universities" ("Degree Accreditation in Canada").

Skolnik, unlike Marshall, is reluctant to use term "accreditation" when referring to Canadian degrees. His caution is well-founded, as there is in truth no Canadian system present for accrediting degrees. AUCC does not identify itself as being an accrediting body ("About AUCC: Membership") and the Canadian Centre for International Credentials points out that "the AUCC does not have an accreditation role" ("Fact Sheet No. 5"). Instead, AUCC describes itself as a body which provides services to its members in three main areas "public policy and advocacy, communications, research, and information sharing; and scholarships and international programs" ("About AUCC: Membership"). However, AUCC does note that in the absence of any national accreditation body, "membership in the Association coupled with the appropriate provincial legislation is generally accepted in lieu of institutional accreditation" ("AUCC Membership Criteria"). Marshall refers to AUCC as "establish[ing] the standard

of practice for degree granting in Canada” (“Degree Accreditation in Canada”). However, if one wishes to properly use the term “accredited degree” when referring to degrees from Canadian institutions, this term can only be accurately applied to those degrees which are offered in Canada but are accredited by an association outside of Canada, such as the American regional accreditation agencies discussed earlier. This situation has led to some perhaps ironic situations in which unaccredited institutions such as the University of Calgary have questioned the value of degrees from resident accredited American universities such as the University of Phoenix or Canadian institutions such as Calgary’s DeVry Institute of Technology whose degrees have been accredited by an outside agency.

Changes in the Educational Landscape

Some individuals, such as Dr. Pannu of the Alberta NDP, claim the current educational landscape in Alberta, as well as in B.C. and Ontario, under which PPSIs may now grant degrees is “unprecedented” (quoted in Koziency). Nevertheless, a situation has existed for some time which offers some parallels to the ability of PPSIs to bestow baccalaureate degrees. In order to examine the similarity of these two situations, one must first look at how the role of the college in Canada is changing. In several provinces over the last few years, colleges have been allowed to offer applied degrees.¹¹ Such degrees generally require less than the four years of study needed to earn baccalaureate degrees

¹¹ These provinces are Alberta and British Columbia.

and frequently involve a combination of formal course work and work study programs. In Alberta, these applied degrees have been offered by non-university institutions such as Mount Royal College and SAIT Polytechnic. The decision to allow colleges to offer applied degrees raised some controversy but it was short-lived. Marshall asserts that offering applied degrees did not “cause a significant challenge to the traditional degree-granting environment” (“Degree Accreditation in Canada”). According to the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers (BCCAT), the lack of strong controversy over these degrees may have been due to several factors. First, the applied degree is not designed to replace the traditional four-year baccalaureate degree but instead aims to offer those students who might otherwise take a one or two year diploma with another alternative, for the applied degree allows the student to study a subject in more depth than is possible in a diploma program. Secondly, applied degrees are offered only at colleges rather than at universities, thus helping to distinguish them from full four-year degrees. Lastly, at least until recently, it was generally recognized that an applied degree is an end in itself, since it does not provide a student with the academic foundation required for admission into graduate school (“Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Member Institutions”).

However, some of the public institutions that have received permission to offer applied degrees are now petitioning the governments in several provinces to become authorized to offer four-year baccalaureate degrees. Grant McEwen

College in Alberta has succeeded in receiving such authority. The ability of public colleges to award such degrees has also aroused controversy. For instance, the *Calgary Herald* asserts that granting degrees which are as yet “[un]proven and [un]recognized by employers and other universities ... puts students’ futures at risk” (“Degree Drive Hits a Hurdle”, A10).

Orders in Council by the Alberta Government

The system by which PPSIs are able to grant degrees in Alberta has undergone several changes since its inception in 1994. Initially, an institution was given permission, via a specific numbered order in council, to offer a particular baccalaureate degree.¹² Before an institution was permitted to grant a degree, the given degree had to be assessed by a body known as the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB). The process by which degrees were inspected was quite similar to that used by U.S. accreditation agencies (as described on page 18 of this paper). A panel of individuals, largely from public universities and colleges in Canada, made up the board of PCAB. The institution wishing to have its degree accredited would submit detailed information to PCAB about its faculty, its degree courses, and its services and physical facilities. This information was presented largely in the form of a self study document. After perusing this lengthy document, the members of the PCAB board would make one or more visits to the applying institution. If concerns were raised, the

¹² It is worth noting that it was not the institution itself which was recognized; rather, what was recognized was the particular degree(s) given by an institution. This system under which it is the degree itself which is authorized by the Alberta government rather than certifying the entire institution continues today, even under the revised techniques of supervising post-secondary institutions.

institution had to respond to these concerns and provide PCAB with plans for how these concerns would be attended to. Once permission to grant a degree had been conferred, the institution could not make any changes to the degree without documenting such changes in detail and waiting for written permission from PCAB before making the changes. Accreditation was given for a limited period of three to five years and at the end of this period, the accreditation process had to be entirely undergone again (Lund) (Barmby).

Recently, PCAB has been dissolved and the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) has replaced PCAB. The process of degree accreditation has not changed greatly, though, except for one significant change: public institutions are now affected directly by CAQC just as private ones are. CAQC approval is now required for public institutions which wish to offer new degrees, while established degree programs offered by these same public institutions do not have to be assessed by ASQC.¹³

College, University, and PPSI Cultures

Why is there resistance to the idea of allowing colleges full degree granting authority? A primary reason is that such authority will change Canada's educational culture. Whitehead observes that in Canada the culture of the college has traditionally been distinct in many ways from that of the university. Marshall draws similar distinctions ("Degree Accreditation in Canada"). In contrast, this distinction is much less prominent in the United States. In Canada,

¹³ For example, the University of Calgary has to have its new Veterinary Health Sciences degree approved by ASQC but does not need to get ASQC approval of its established degree programs such as its Bachelor of Science degree programs ("Applications Under Review").

a college has less autonomy than does a university since the province exercises much tighter control over its operations. Faculty members at a college have less decision making power and are expected to teach more hours per term than at a university. In addition, teaching is separated from research at the college, and a college's primary function is to act as a teaching rather than a research institution. Therefore, until now, the two types of institutions have differed in clear and obvious ways in the perceptions of the staff of various educational institutions and in the minds of the public. This distinction between the two institutions has traditionally led to the common perception that an education received at a university is usually more rigorous and of higher academic quality than the more practical education received at a college. However, if colleges start offering four-year baccalaureate degrees, the differences between a college and a university will begin to blur. Therein lies at least part of the source of the controversy over conferring degree granting status to colleges in Alberta, and the rest of Canada as well. This blurring of roles will likely be advantageous to the colleges as it may serve to raise their status, but it might act to reduce the present perceived superiority of the universities.

In a similar fashion, factors which have the potential to make the roles of the college versus the university less distinct have occurred in other provinces. In B.C., the province redesigned some of its colleges to become "university

colleges".¹⁴ There has been criticism of this model; consequently, the provincial government is in the process of amending it. One of the problems is that AUCC has resisted the attempts of most of B.C.'s university colleges to join AUCC ("Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Member Institutions"). Additionally, in Ontario several non-traditional institutions which are closer in their nature to colleges than to universities, such as the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, have, according to Marshall, been "accepted into the university fold" ("Degree Recognition across Canada"). Marshall's use of the term "accepted" is somewhat ambiguous. He does not mean that these institutions have been welcomed. As Marshall used the term here, "acceptance" means that the province of Ontario has given permission to these institutions to grant degrees; however, in the rest of his presentation, Marshall discussed how the pre-existing universities in Canada, particularly those in Ontario, have not fully accepted these newcomers.

How does the changing role of Canadian colleges parallel the contentious topic of allowing PPSIs degree-granting status? It is the ways in which the culture and reputation of colleges differ from that of universities that is germane in discussing PPSIs and their newfound degree-granting status, because PPSIs

¹⁴ Under this new system, the province has established five institutions as hybrid-type institutions. While they continue to offer diploma programs as colleges traditionally do, these institutions also now give students a chance to pursue all four years of their baccalaureate degrees right on campus rather than having to transfer to a larger university to finish the last few years of their baccalaureate degrees, as had previously been the case.

display many more cultural similarities to colleges than to universities.¹⁵ Perhaps part of the opposition to PPSIs being able to grant degrees is related to the blurring of the roles and reputations of colleges and universities in Canada that Marshall predicts may occur now that things have begun to change (“Degree Accreditation in Canada”). With the changes which allow PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees, the lines of demarcation between public universities, public colleges, and private colleges and universities may become increasingly less distinct, a situation which will perturb some people. For instance, Larry Booi of the Alberta Teacher’s Association contends that allowing B.Ed. degrees to be earned at colleges as well as at universities will call into question whether teaching is truly a profession (2).

In general, a number of societal pressures have accelerated the change from what Whitehead describes as a “relatively monolithic university system”. A primary factor in this change has been “the increased demand for access to university-level degrees” (“Degree Recognition across Canada”). Marshall asserts that this demand has been generated both by higher numbers of young people and by increased participation rates amongst these youths.

Unfortunately, at the same time as demand has increased, the ability of

¹⁵ First, PPSIs are even more tightly regulated by the province than are colleges. For instance, because it is a private proprietary institution, DeVry has to report more detailed information about its students' attendance records than do public colleges or universities in Alberta (Barmby). As well, faculty at PPSIs typically teach as many, if not more, hours per term as college faculty do and do not have a great deal of influence in academic policy making. Additionally, PPSIs seldom place much emphasis on research, instead stressing their role as institutions dedicated to teaching, generally to an even greater extent than do public colleges. Although PPSIs charge tuition which is equivalent to or more than the amounts charged by public institutions, they do offer education at a lower cost per student than universities do, thereby providing another similarity to colleges.

universities to meet this increased demand has diminished. A few brief statistics will serve to illustrate this trend towards reduced accessibility. A spokesperson from NAIT indicated that many programs accept only one out of every five qualified applicants for their programs (cited in Moore-Kilgannon). While the minimum average grade needed to enter arts and sciences programs at University of Calgary in 1987/88 was 60%, by 2001/02 it was raised to 70% (Moore-Kilgannon). However, this figure on required minimum grades is somewhat misleading. "The score needed to get in is actually much higher. In 2004, the average mark for first-time applicants admitted to the University of Alberta was 83.2%" (Moore-Kilgannon).

Presently, both public post-secondary institutions, such as the University of Calgary and Athabasca University, and private post-secondary institutions, such as St. Mary's University College and Concordia College, may grant four year baccalaureate degrees within the province of Alberta. However, there is much confusion and inconsistency under this current system. Although the province of Alberta recognizes degrees from PPSIs as being legitimate degrees, many public post-secondary institutions, both within Alberta and within Canada as a whole, question the validity of such degrees. Marshall describes the current situation as being characterized by "increasing consumer confusion [and] increasing student disappointment" with an overall attitude of "caveat emptor" ("Degree Recognition across Canada"). In this scepticism from established institutions, we see evidence of what Chilton and Schaffner identify as a strategic function of

political discourse: delegitimization.

In questioning the right of new non-traditional institutions to grant degrees, the established institutions are reinforcing the idea that the newcomers are not simply different from but are inferior to pre-existing universities. This scepticism can have a number of specific negative effects upon students at PPSIs. For example, those who wish to transfer to a public post-secondary institution may at times receive only partial credit or no credit at all for their coursework at a particular PPSI. As well, students wishing to be admitted into graduate programs at public post-secondary institutions may encounter resistance to having their undergraduate degrees from a PPSI recognized or may have only part of their course work acknowledged and need to take extra courses before being admitted. Marshall refers to these effects as "dead ends" ("Degree Recognition across Canada"). He further observes "Those wishing to assess the credibility of a Canadian degree would have to check first the level of provincial approval to grant degrees; then the legislation and attitude in the particular province towards degree granting; and then check for membership in the professional organization that establishes the standard of practice for degree granting in Canada (AUCC) [Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada]" ("Degree Accreditation in Canada"). Such a process is time consuming at best and may be confusing to students or parents not familiar with recent changes in post-secondary education.

BCCAT observes that “many of the new degree-granting institutions in Canada may have difficulty meeting criteria for AUCC membership because of the nature of their program base and the focus on teaching rather than research and scholarly activity” (“Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Institutions”, 12). As well, neither BCCAT nor Marshall mention another significant limitation with using AUCC membership as a way of assessing degree credibility: for-profit institutions are unable under any circumstances to be admitted to AUCC because membership in this organization is restricted solely to not-for-profit institutions (“About AUCC: Membership”). Thus, organizations such as Alberta’s DeVry Institute of Technology and B.C.’s Sprott-Shaw College would be unable ever to join AUCC and thereby gain a means of becoming accredited, even if AUCC in future were to change its mandate and begin to function as an official accrediting agency. In naming itself Association for Universities and Colleges in Canada, yet setting membership criteria so that some private universities and colleges are ineligible for membership, AUCC is again practicing delegitimization in which the “ideas of difference and boundaries” (Chilton, 46) are stressed.

Responses to PPSIs’ Changed Status

As stated earlier, the issue of permitting PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees has both supporters and opponents. Those in favour of the idea are often either government officials or administrators and staff of PPSIs. However, a few other parties not directly affected have offered support for allowing PPSIs to grant degrees. For instance, two university professors, Cooper and

Bercusson, are among the few public figures who have taken a strong position in favour of the new ability of PPSIs. It is important to realize that Cooper and Bercusson are expressing their opinions as private citizens on this issue, not speaking on behalf of their universities. These authors assert “the only way that Canada will be able to grow genuinely first-class universities is to follow the lead of Ontario and allow for the establishment of private universities” (“Only Private Universities Excel”, A8).

On the side opposed to the government’s action of allowing PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees are a number of different and influential groups. Alberta’s Liberal and New Democratic parties are both against the action, with the NDP being particularly opposed. Various faculty unions, especially the University of Calgary Faculty Union (TUCFA), have been vociferous in their opposition to the action. John Baker, TUCFA president, reacted to news that the government had given DeVry authority to grant degrees by calling the decision a “body blow” to public post-secondary institutions (qtd in “DeVry Given Degree-Granting Privileges”). Student unions in several provinces, especially the University of Alberta Student Union, have expressed disapproval as well. In addition, labour unions, such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), and professional bodies such the Alberta Teacher’s Association (ATA) have questioned the wisdom of the government’s decision to allow PPSIs to bestow degrees.

Missing Views of PPSI Students

It is noteworthy that in all of the controversy, few have thought to ask the students of PPSIs what they think about the issue of allowing such institutions to grant degrees. While the students would likely be in favour of this decision, it would be interesting to see *why* they might approve of this course of action. It has been argued that Alberta government officials do not seem to be interested in discovering the reactions of post-secondary students at either private or public post-secondary institutions to any education-related topics (Moore-Kilgannon, 32). However, amongst those opposed to the power of PPSIs' degree-granting powers, there has also been little effort to solicit opinions from PPSI students.

At any rate, there does not appear to have been any substantial research published in Canada regarding why students choose to attend PPSIs rather than public institutions.¹⁶ Not much information is available on this topic in the U.S. either. As Howard-Vital points out in her article "The Appeal of For-Profit Institutions", until her paper little research had been done on students' motives for enrolling in degree programs at for-profit PPSIs in the U.S, where a longer tradition of such institutions exists¹⁷. However, almost all of the students Howard-Vital mentions in her article are attending schools offering two year

¹⁶ Perhaps some research on this topic does exist but as Peggy Patterson of the University of Calgary's Canadian Centre for Higher Education research recently pointed out in a presentation in Calgary, there is currently a lack of coordination to ensure that research regarding post-secondary education in Canada is published and is readily available.

¹⁷ Howard-Vital's research with PPSI students in North Carolina led her to conclude that students attending PPSIs in North Carolina do so because they believe the programs at these institutions better meet their needs than public institutions due to the more specialized curricula, enhanced student services, and greater flexibility of course delivery these institutions offer their students.

associate degrees or diplomas or certificates rather than four year baccalaureate degrees, so her research on the advantages students perceive to attending for-profit PPSIs may not apply to those students attending institutions which offer full degrees. Apling has done research on the students of propriety schools as well, but his research is of little use here for the same reason; most of the students he researched attended institutions which offered only short-term training rather than baccalaureate degrees ("Proprietary Schools and Their Students").

Limitations on the Scope of The Analyses

There is a great deal more discourse from those opposed to the idea of PPSIs being able to grant baccalaureate degrees is publicly available than from those in favour. The mechanism by which the Alberta government has allowed PPSIS to give degrees has likely played a part in this imbalance in discourse. Some opponents have accused various provincial governments of subterfuge in how they have gone about extending degree granting status to PPSIs. For instance, John Baker, Faculty Association president of TUCFA, expressed similar concerns in the following manner "the government slipped this decision through Cabinet... without even a news release" (quoted in "DeVry Given Degree-granting Privileges"). CAUT expressed similar concerns over how the government implemented the decision ("DeVry Degrees Denounced").

It is worth examining the way in which the Alberta government authorizes individual PPSIs the power to grant degrees. In 1999, the Universities Act was

debated in the legislature and was passed. Under Section 64.5 of this act, the ability for private institutions to apply to the government for permission to grant degrees (either as resident or non-resident institutions) was established (Oberg). Once that legislation was enacted, any PPSI wanting to receive authority to offer a given baccalaureate degree would apply to PCAB. If a PPSI had its application approved by PCAB, this application was then examined by cabinet. Finally, if the application was approved by cabinet, an Order in Council pertaining to the particular institution and its specified degree was made (Barmby). What is significant here is that under the process of using an order in council, government regulations do not require a debate about the decision¹⁸ ("Parliamentary Terms"). Thus, the only chance that opponents of PPSIs granting degrees had for public debate occurred in 1999 *before* the Universities Act was passed.

Chilton and Schaffner contend that one of the four strategic functions of political discourse is dissimulation, and list "secrecy" as being one means by which dissimulation can be achieved (12). Whether the Alberta government is trying to be secretive about the process of giving individual PPSIs degree-granting authority is open to question. Jim Barmby, who formerly worked as a Special Assistant to the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, states that process of using orders in council is customary amongst governments because of its efficiency, since not everything can be

¹⁸ This process pertaining to orders in council is essentially the same today, except that under the Post-Secondary Learning Act of 2003, the approval body is now designated as being ASQC (Statutes 108 And 109 p. 65-69)

actively debated or the business of government would move extremely slowly. He notes that conducting business by way of order in council also does have the effect of avoiding debate. In firmly establishing whether the Alberta government is engaging in dissimulation, one needs to ascertain whether the avoidance of debate resulting from the use of orders in council is deliberately sought out or is simply a side effect of the process of using such orders to accomplish government business. While it is difficult to conclusively ascertain the government's motivation, it is clear from the above comments from spokespersons for CAUT and TUCFA that members of these organizations believe that the government was actively trying to forestall criticism of its decision to allow PPSIs to grant degrees. In like manner, several members of Alberta's NDP implied that the government was trying to stifle discussion by using orders in council to give DeVry degree-granting ability. MLA Pannu called on the government to "put on hold the thoughtless decision...until there has been a full public debate on the floor of this Assembly" ("Alberta Hansard, 12 April 2001, 56). Mrs. Tarchuk, NDP MLA for Banff-Cochrane, emphasized that Order in Council 53/2001 was made "without consulting anyone, without any public debate, without allowing the house to have the chance to debate this extremely important and significant step" ("Alberta Hansard, 11 April", 2001, 38.) Her repletion of the term "without" gives a clear indication that she perceives there was a lack of consultation with voters.

In responding to Pannu's statement contending there was a dearth of public consultation about Order in Council 53/2001, the Minister of Advanced Education, Dr. Oberg, engaged in the strategy of legitimization. He did so by informing Pannu that the decision was in essence supported by the public colleges and universities of Alberta. Oberg contended that the decision to accredit DeVry was made by PCAB and "the universities and colleges are in favour of this [PCAB] so... he should take it to the university boards, and they will come back to me, because they have no problem with them [PCAB]" ("Alberta Hansard, 12 April 2001", 56). This is a particularly interesting assertion. Not only did Oberg legitimise Order in Council 53/2001 by suggesting that it was supported by public institutions via their support for PCAB but he also eschewed government responsibility for the order, through his statement that "he [Pannu] should take it to the university boards". Oberg thus indirectly suggested that the government did not really make the decision to allow DeVry to grant degrees. Rather, PCAB decided to accredit DeVry and since PCAB has such strong support from universities, the universities are ultimately responsible for Order in Council 53/2001 themselves. Through the use of this somewhat circuitous argument, Oberg appears to be engaging in what Chilton and Schaffner term "verbal evasion and denial" (13), an approach characteristic of the strategic function of dissimulation.

In addition, Tarchuk stressed the timing of the government's decision, noting that the Order in Council was announced "just before the election was

called, a few days before that". She appears to be implying that the timing of the order was chosen as a method of distraction, indirectly suggesting the government hoped that the impending election would become the prevalent topic of discussion, rather than its potentially controversial order in council ("Alberta Hansard, 11 April, 2001", 38). Although Chilton and Schaffner do not specifically mention "distraction" as a technique, I believe distraction would likely fall under the category of dissimulation as well.

Patricia Hughes-Fuller, an academic from Athabasca University noted in an email to the author that "there is little public discourse on the 'pro' side because the government already has the authority to bestow degree granting status". When using orders in council as the mechanism for considering applications from individual PPSIs to grant degrees, any discourse from government members will remain private and thus not be available for analysis. Additionally, as Dabbs and Laxter earlier stated, such decisions are made in committee meetings from which opposition members are excluded. Thus, as Hughes-Fuller observes, statements made "to manipulate public opinion [are] the only means at their [the opposition's] disposal to influence the political agenda". This explains in part why there is more discourse from those opposed to PPSIs being able to bestow degrees than from those in favour of this ability.

John Ballheim, president of DeVry Calgary, countered claims about a lack of public consultation regarding the government's move to allow DeVry to grant degrees by pointing out that information about DeVry's application for degree-

granting status had been posted on PCAB's website for over two years prior to the institution being granted permission (cited in "Universities `Weakened' by DeVry Decision"). Ballheim's point seems to address CAUT's objection but in truth does not. There is a significant difference between consulting the public and posting an announcement regarding the status of an application. Ballheim's comment could be viewed as disingenuous; as well, when using Chilton and Schaffner's scheme for describing techniques of PDA, one can also see this statement as an example of dissimulation, more specifically, as a form of verbal evasion. While Ballheim can not be accused of direct dishonesty, he conflated the techniques of consultation and announcement. The distinction between these terms is one that a president of a post-secondary institution might reasonably be expected to be cognizant of. Randy Kilburn of Alberta Learning dismissed the criticisms of a lack of public input as well, saying that ample public consultation was part of the initial process involved in the implementation of PCAB (cited in "A Private, Public Debate"). However, Kilburn did not give any concrete illustrations of how or when such consultations were done, thus providing no substantiation for his assertion. In addition, he appeared to be evading the specific complaint being made. The controversy was not about the ability of any PPSI to give degrees; rather it was about the advisability of allowing a proprietary institution to do so. Kilburn was, to use Chilton and Schaffner's phrase, perhaps "being economical with the truth" (213).

Additionally, Chilton refers to one of the strategic functions of political discourse as “representation”, a strategy under which “political control involves the control of information” (46). Thus, by approaching the granting of permission to PPSIs one at a time via individual orders in council rather than through a discussion in the legislature during which the prospect of giving degree granting status to a number of different PPSIs was debated, the government chose an inconspicuous channel to allow PPSIs degree-granting powers. Unless one was watching carefully, it might not have been immediately apparent that a significant change had transpired in the post-secondary educational system.

I believe that one of the primary reasons for the imbalance in discourse regarding the ability of PPSIs to give degrees is that those parties who are interested in changing the traditional face of post-secondary education in Alberta want to do so in an understated way in order to minimize controversy and resistance. Hughes Fuller again observes “it is not in the government’s interest to stir up public debate on something that they have the authority to simply do”. Thus, most of the examples of discourse produced by government spokespeople regarding PPSIs’ degree-granting ability have been generated in response to opponents’ discourse and are consequently fewer in number.

As well, the approach under which public debate by the government was kept to a minimum could reasonably be interpreted as the government’s subtly suggesting it would be wise for PPSIS to be circumspect about their new status;

thus, the government may have been encouraging PPSIs to engage in self-censorship, a technique that Chilton and Schaffner refer to as another form of dissimulation (212-13). PPSIs in both B.C. and Alberta do indeed seem to be keeping a low public profile regarding their ability to grant degrees. Only when directly asked have representatives from these institutions discussed their newfound ability. For example, David Strong, president of B.C.'s University Canada West directly responded to concerns posed by a *Times-Colonist* reporter, as did Dean Dupperon of Sprott-Shaw (Rud). In similar fashion, John Ballheim, president of DeVry Calgary, spoke favourably to a reporter from the *Calgary Herald* about the school's newfound degree granting status (Olsen). However, the administrators of PPSIs do not seek out the media to argue their case or to issue press releases publicizing new Orders in Council. It appears PPSIs prefer to go quietly about their business. Drawing attention to themselves would likely simply antagonize other more established educational institutions in the province and might annoy the government as well. Thus, by encouraging PPSIs to ration information, the government is engaging in what Chilton refers to as another strategy of PDA, that of coercion. Chilton and Schaffner observe that one way coercion "can be exercised is through various kinds and degrees of censorship" ("Discourse and Politics", 212).

Another factor explaining the relative dearth of discourse in favour of PPSIs degree-granting ability is that those who make up the various PPSIs in Alberta, as well as the rest of Canada, are small groups, ones generally not part

of the recognized networks in education. As such, it is possible that they do not have as ready access to the media as do the more prominent traditional post-secondary institutions. As mentioned earlier, Chilton argues that one of the strategic functions of political discourse is coercion. Under this function, power is exercised "through access control" (45). Most of the universities in Alberta have personnel such as Roman Cooney of the University of Calgary to manage their dealings with the media. It is unlikely that the smaller PPSIs have staff of a comparable nature.

It is somewhat inaccurate to even term PPSIs a "group", since the various institutions are quite diverse. Certainly, they have not effectively acted together as a cohesive unit but rather have dealt with the various provincial governments in a relatively independent manner. This lack of unity has decreased the effectiveness of PPSIs' efforts to communicate with the media, thus further reducing the chances of PPSIs effectively presenting their views.

Topics for Discourse Analysis

Since those opposed to allowing PPSIs to grant degrees have a greater voice in the controversy, it is these groups who have set the agenda for discussion. Again, we see here one of the strategic functions of political discourse, as identified by Chilton. Setting agendas is named by Chilton as being one of the main ways in which the more powerful use the strategy of coercion to ensure their views predominate (45-46). As directly identified by those opposed to PPSIs granting degrees, the primary points surrounding this issue are

concerns about quality and about choice. Therefore, when PPSIs responded to criticisms of their right to be degree granting institutions, the agenda has already been set by the more established universities as being centred upon these attributes of quality and choice.

Quality As It Applies to PPSIs Granting Degrees

The issue most often raised when discussing the wisdom of allowing PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees is that of quality. There are two ways in which parties both in favour of and against PPSIs granting degrees have identified how quality pertains to degrees from PPSIs. The first and most obvious concern relates to the quality inherent in a degree from a PPSI. At issue is whether the degrees bestowed by PPSIs are truly equivalent in quality to degrees from public institutions. The second, more complex, concern regarding quality is how bestowing degree granting status upon PPSIs will affect the quality of degrees from *public* institutions.

Strategies for Disputing the Quality of PPSI Degrees

Let us first address the issue of the quality of a degree given by a PPSI. One of the most frequent arguments advanced against allowing PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees is that such degrees are clearly inferior to the ones awarded by public institutions. As mentioned, Chilton has identified one of the primary strategies of political discourse as involving legitimisation and delegitimization (46). Delegitimization is a strategy in which a person's or group's right to be obeyed or heeded is questioned. Indeed, in cases of extreme

delegitimization, the simple right to be heard and attended to is questioned as well. Legitimation and its counterpart of delegitimization have both been used extensively by those opposed to the right of PPSIs to grant degrees. If a PPSI can be shown to have no, or limited, legitimacy, then naturally the degrees it bestows have little or no legitimacy as well.

When interviewed by media about Phoenix University's application to offer baccalaureate degrees in business in Alberta, NAIT president Sam Shaw did not directly criticize Phoenix University. Instead, he established NAIT's legitimacy by terming NAIT's course to be "a very quality product" and dismissed concerns over Phoenix being a competitor for students with NAIT by adding "I feel very confident that students will choose quality and value over some of the alternatives" ("Questions over For-profit U.S. University Here"). Thus, Shaw reasserted NAIT's legitimacy and delegitimized private institutions' offerings as being of poor quality and little value, and he did so without ever referring to any of the private institutions directly by name.

Chris Petter and Robert Clift of the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C. view PPSIs' degrees in a similar manner. The authors did make a concession regarding PPSIs in B.C. which are allowed to grant baccalaureate degrees under the supervision of the province's Degree Quality Assessment Board. The authors stated that "if the approval process works properly and if the private institutions live up to their commitments, students at these institutions should receive perfectly serviceable degrees" ("Testing the

Water on Private Degrees”). Note that they added in two qualifications in the form of “if statements”, subtly calling into question whether the approval process is working properly and whether the PPSIs are acting ethically. Furthermore, using the term “perfectly serviceable degrees” is hardly a ringing endorsement. The authors went on to compare degrees earned at PPSIs to McDonalds’ hamburgers while likening degrees earned at public institutions to burgers “prepared by Vancouver’s Iron Chef Rob Feenie” (“Testing the Water on Private Degrees”). Clearly, they were engaging in techniques of delegitimization, stressing the differences between PPSI degrees and those from public institutions. Why are the degrees from PPSIs perceived by those opposed to allowing PPSIs to grant degrees to be considerably lower in quality than those awarded by public institutions? A number of reasons for this purported lack of quality have been given. Some of the more prevalent arguments are examined below.

One concern voiced about the quality of degrees from PPSIs is to assert such degrees will be of reduced quality since they are narrower in scope than are degrees from public institutions. A CAUT spokesperson questioned the legitimacy of private institutions, especially DeVry Institute of Technology, by complaining private institutions fail to provide a balanced education. “The great strength of the publicly financed system is that it balances applied skills with broader insights from the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. DeVry does not provide this more comprehensive experience” (“DeVry Given Degree-granting

Privileges"). Lisa McLeod, a spokesperson from the Canadian Federation of Students, expressed similar opinions, stating that private institutions could not offer the varied programming that public ones are able to (Rud). Chilton identified another technique common to delegitimization as that of drawing boundaries between oneself and one's opponents by emphasizing differences (46). This is similar to the technique identified by postmodernist theorists as marginalizing an opponent by terming him/her/it to be "the other". Whitehead observes that amongst many people involved in post-secondary education, there is what he terms to be a false dichotomy in which education is assumed to be superior to training. By relegating the education received at PPSIs to the realm of training rather than genuine education, the ability of PPSIs to offer a quality education to their students has been delegitimized. PPSIs are assumed to be training their students, rather than educating them, for two reasons: first, as discussed earlier, there is a belief that the students at PPSIs are not exposed enough to humanities and liberal arts subjects. Secondly, students at PPSIs are thought to receive courses which focus not upon theory as traditional university courses do but instead upon practical application. In this line of reasoning, since the new providers (PPSIs) are not like the established providers (public post-secondary institutions), PPSIs are inferior and the programs they offer (training rather than education) must be of poor quality as well. Gilles Paquet argues that in Canada's post-secondary educational system, theoretical knowledge is more highly valued than is applied knowledge (cited in Skolnik 13). Skolnik observes

that the majority of what he terms the “new providers” of baccalaureate degrees (colleges and PPSIs) offer education which either emphasizes applied knowledge or combines such forms of knowledge with theoretical knowledge (13). He adds that “the universities do not subscribe to the idea that different types of knowledge can be of the same status.” (13-14) Thus, we see here a situation in which those who support PPSIs are being asked to justify the quality of their degrees in terms of the given standard that theoretical knowledge is superior to applied knowledge. This is a view privileging certain types of knowledge over others, a view one that at least some PPSIs do not adhere to. This privileging seems to be an example of the form of coercion identified by Chilton and Schaffner in which “an assumption about reality is made that hearers are at least temporarily accept” in order to respond to the discourses of others (212).

Another explanation advanced for the purported lower quality of degrees from PPSIs is the different philosophy PPSIs hold towards their students as compared to how students are viewed at public institutions. Working from a more business-centred model, it is not unusual to find PPSIs at times referring to students as “customers” (Ballheim). This nomenclature, while occasionally used by those in such as Yeager of the University of Calgary who refers to students at the university as “astute customers” (quoted in Sillars) is still relatively uncommon at public institutions, at least in departments other than faculties of business. While not-for-profit PPSIs may not always use the term “customers” to describe their students, it seems to some observers that these schools are

indeed treating their students as customers. Sillars in the *Alberta Report Newsmagazine* describes a drop in tuition at Augustana University College as “a seat sale” and quotes its president as saying that the times when schools can “ignore market forces are gone”.

However, in education, being customer-centred is often seen as undesirable. Jim Turk of the Canadian Association of University Teachers decries the growing tendency of private universities to offer on-line delivery of courses simply as a convenience to students. He asserts that on-line delivery methods are more common in PPSIs than in public post-secondary institutions and states on-line delivery is being implemented without considering whether this delivery method will lower educational quality. He contends, “The implications for the quality of education are worrisome” (quoted in Clarke). Bill Bruneau, a former president of CAUT, contends that when students are treated as consumers, they develop an unhealthy amount of influence over the process of education. “Doing what the consumer wants? It’s next door to folly. Imagine a doctor trained on the basis of what she liked? Would you want to be operated on by her?” (quoted in Kelly). Bruneau’s statement is interesting for several reasons. Again, we see an emphasis on the word “training”, subtly implying that what PPSIs offer their students is not *real* education but vocational training instead. As well, his somewhat exaggerated example of a doctor who has taken only the courses she wished to take trivializes the issue of PPSIs granting degrees. Evident in these comments is the strategy of delegitimization “under which others ...have to be

presented negatively [through the use] of ideas of difference... and speech acts of blaming, accusing, and insulting" (Chilton and Schaffner, 213).

A third explanation advanced to illustrate the perceived lower quality of education at PPSIs as compared to public institutions is that that PPSIs offer a different style of teaching. Gary Salter of the University of Ottawa, explaining why his institution rejects students with degrees from schools which are not members of AUCC, states that in institutions where "teaching is not influenced by research as much as it is in universities... the program is different, fundamentally different". Salter implies that this difference in teaching methods equates to inferiority. Here we see yet another example of delegitimization in the insistence upon difference Slater makes.

A final point used to support assertions that PPSIs offer low quality education is the focus upon the private nature of education at PPSIs versus the public nature of education at public institutions. The repetition of the term "private" is frequent amongst those who speak against PPSIs' powers to bestow degrees. For instance, Wojtaszek of the University of Calgary's Student Union states that while public institutions have a broad responsibility to the public, alumni, students, and the government, "private institutions are only accountable to shareholders and their clients," ("Ontario Approves Private University"), Kim Shaw, a former employee of Sprott-Shaw College in B.C. contends "if your goal [is] to make a profit, I don't see how you can put education first" (quoted in "Hansard, Debates of the Legislative Assembly of B.C., Oct. 9, 2003"), and Lisa

McLeod of the B.C. Federation of Students charges that “allowing private businesses to grant degrees... is putting private business interests ahead of the needs of young British Columbians “ (quoted in “A Matter of Degrees”). It is worth noting that McLeod uses the word “private” twice in a single sentence. An article in TUCFA contains the claim that DeVry is able to operate its institution “without any structures save the marketplace (“DeVry Degrees Denounced”). As well, statements included in a policy statement from the Students’ Union of the University of Alberta make explicit how strong the perception of difference between public and private, specifically proprietary institutions, is. Phrases from the policy statement such as “for-profit institutions exist primarily for the betterment of their shareholders and do not hold the public interest as the foremost reason for their existence” and “for-profit institutions do not share the same goals” and “[we] oppose the inclusion of private, for-profit universities and colleges within the same governance model as public universities and colleges” emphasize the extent to which proprietary institutions are seen to diverge from public institutions, thereby being deemed inferior. Potter and Wetherell contended that categorization, while necessary to our daily functioning, can be used as a basis for marginalizing those who differ from the majority. Categorizing private institutions, both non-profit and proprietary ones, as being inherently different and thus inferior to public institutions acts to delegitimize the degrees PPSIs confer.

Strategies for Affirming the Quality of PPSI Degrees

Those in favour of PPSIs having degree granting status are well aware of concerns regarding quality. It is significant that the names of the agencies in all three provinces that regulate PPSIs' ability to grant degrees contain the word "quality". For example, when the Alberta government dissolved the first body responsible for certifying degrees from PPSIs, dubbed PCAB (the Private Colleges Accreditation Board), the new body was given a substantially different name. The new name, Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC), is quite unlike the previous name PCAB. Two of the changes were dictated by accuracy. Since the new body now looks at degrees from public institutions as well as private ones, it was necessary to remove the term "private" from the board's name. However, this term may also have been deleted because of the negative connotations that the term "private" has to many Canadians. As well, the board now examines degree proposals from universities as well as colleges, so this change necessitated the deletion of the word "colleges" from the name. Nevertheless, the term may also have been removed from the new board's name because traditionally the words "college" and "baccalaureate degree" are thought to be incompatible, as discussed earlier when examining the differences in culture between universities and colleges in Canada. The new name does contain the word "quality", perhaps in reference to oft expressed concerns about the value of PPSI degrees.

Our province is not alone in emphasizing the word "quality". When the government of Ontario set up a board designed to oversee private colleges they termed it the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board and this board was enabled under an act called "The Post-secondary Choice and Excellence Act 2000" (Hansard: Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 4 December 2000). In similar fashion, the government of British Columbia has named its assessment body the Degree Quality Assessment Board, again including the word "quality" in the board name. Thus, we see an attempt to respond to techniques of delegitimization by stressing the concepts of quality and excellence through the nomenclature used here.

In responding to criticism of PPSIs' capacity to grant baccalaureate degrees, Alberta politicians stress the concept of quality. Ralph Klein, Alberta's premier, states "It has been demonstrated in the past that quality private education can take pressures off the publicly funded degree institutions" (quoted in Olsen). Lyle Oberg, education minister for Alberta, assures critics that the accreditation process is a strict one. "What I don't want is a bunch of fly-by-night organizations offering courses and that won't happen" (quoted in Olsen). Randy Kilburn, a spokesperson for Alberta Learning, emphasizes that the board which certifies PPSIs is an independent board. As well, he adds that all PPSIs allowed to grant degrees are required to report yearly to the government and added that all degree granting PPSIs will be reevaluated in a comprehensive manner every five years (cited in Olsen). These comments demonstrate the

government's efforts to legitimise its actions in allowing PPSIs degree-granting power.

Examining CAQC's home page is also quite instructive as to how the Alberta government is reacting to techniques of delegitimization used by opponents who dispute the government's ability to recognize and regulate issues of quality in post-secondary degrees. CAQC is described as "an arms-length quality assurance agency". The statement that the board is an "arms-length" organization is an attempt to reassure those who may perceive the government to be involving itself too directly in education, a topic which they contend it is ill qualified to skilfully assess. The description of the board puts the word "quality" squarely at the heart of how CAQC is described: it is termed a "quality assurance agency".

In addition to including the word "quality" in the name of the board, the three paragraph passage on CAQC's home page uses the word "quality" three more times. As well, there is a statement that indicates Alberta is not alone in its concern for quality, as it "is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education". The effect of this repetition is to stress that quality is job one at CAQC. The frequent repetition of the term "quality" seems to be an attempt to reassure the public. However, a more thorough explanation of the measures taken to assure the quality at a given institution is initially accurately assessed and is then well monitored once degree granting status has

been obtained would be more effective in dealing with concerns regarding quality.

Effects on Quality of Public Post-secondary Degrees

The second way in which concerns over quality are squarely at the heart of the dispute over PPSIs' ability to grant degrees are contentions that this power will act to lower the quality of public institutions, thereby compromising the reputation of their degrees. Proponents of PPSIs being able to grant degrees argue in contrast that their ability to do so is no threat at all to public institutions. Rather, this ability increases competition between public and private institutes with the end product being improved quality at the public post-secondary schools.

The Negative Effects PPSI Degrees Pose

It is not always made clear by opponents exactly how it will harm the quality of public education if PPSIs are able to grant baccalaureate degrees. Barbara Samuels stated that the authorization of DeVry to offer baccalaureate degrees would harm SAIT, as she asserted the two institutions offer similar degree programs (cited in Bolan). TUCFA president John Baker, in an interview with the same reporter, stated "The move to degree programs by the private sector is yet another serious blow to Alberta's universities" (quoted in Thompson). However, a number of those opposed to PPSIs receiving degree granting power have been more specific about how this authority will lower quality at public institutions. An argument put forward in 2001 when the first

American PPSI (DeVry) was given authority to grant degrees was that under NAFTA rules PPSIs could now challenge the public funding of public educational institutions, thereby depriving the public institutions of their primary source of funds. This argument has been advanced by a number of groups, among them CAUT ("NAFTA May Force Alberta Government"), TUCFA ("DeVry Degrees Denounced"), and the Alberta NDP ("2004 Election Special Report"). This concern is a substantial one, given that main financial source for Alberta's public post-secondary institutions is public funds. However, in the six years since the first proprietary American PPSI (DeVry) was given permission to grant degrees, there has not yet been any challenge under NAFTA of the present system of using public funds to provide for the majority of public institutions' financial resources. John Ballheim of DeVry states that his institution has no intention of applying a NAFTA challenge ("NAFTA May Force Alberta Government"). Ontario MLA Tina Molinari explains that the provinces' ability to provide funding to public institutions will remain unchanged, quoting the statement made in 2000 by Canada's Minister for International Trade : "It is Canada's right [under NAFTA] to regulate and protect fundamental Canadian values within... education" (cited in "Hansard: Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 4 Dec, 2000") . Based on the aforementioned lack of challenges under NAFTA since the passing of Order in Council 53/2001, it seems that these two statements are accurate.

Furthermore, opponents claim that PPSIs will still receive government funding, albeit indirectly, in the form of the student loans that PPSI students will

receive when attending PPSIs. Although termed “loans”, many of the students receive a portion of their loans as grants. An example of this line of argument is the concern expressed by Michael Conlon of the Canadian Federation of Students that through the grant portion of the student loan programs, PPSIs will drain the total amount of money available to students who want to attend public post-secondary institutions (cited in Kelly). In a similar fashion, Tom Booth of CAUT asserts that funding students to attend PPSIs will inevitably divert money away from a public system that is already inadequately funded (cited in “DeVry Given Degree-granting Privileges”). As well, Robert Birgeneau of the University of Toronto contends that the default rate on student loans by PPSI students is higher than those attending public institutions. He adds that this not only is harmful to students at public institutions due to the reduced pot of student loan money but also that “it’s taking money out of the public purse” (quoted in Clarke). Deborah Flynn, President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association, makes similar charges (“Private Universities: Decoys Instead of Dollars”). Thus, it is asserted that even Canada’s taxpayers are being harmed by allowing PPSIs to grant degrees.

Another claim is that PPSIs have extremely deep pockets and will be able to use their riches to divert faculty away from public institutions. Viola Cassa of the University of Calgary Graduate Students Association stated that PPSIs would be able to offer faculty better salaries, thus enticing them away from public institutions to PPSIs (cited in Thompson).

A further assertion advanced by those opposed to allowing PPSIs to grant degrees is that governments are giving these powers out to compensate for inadequate funding of public institutions. Wojtaszek of the University of Calgary Students' Union warns "We fear they [the Alberta government] may be looking to the private sector to cure the under-funding of education ns the past decade" (quoted in Zakaluzny). In like manner, Bill Bruneau of CAUT also asserts that provincial governments are allowing PPSIs to grant degrees so that the government is not pressed by the public to improve the funding of public institutions (quoted in Kelly). Thus, PPSIs are presented as having a damaging influence upon public post-secondary institutions, whether such malign influence is deliberate or not. Chilton and Schaffner write of how when the strategy of delegitimization is used, others are thought of as "enemies within" or "unofficial opposition" and have to be "presented negatively" (213). The above statements warning how PPSIs will harm the quality of public education appear to be examples of such a strategy.

The Positive Effects PPSI Degrees Pose

Those who are in favour of PPSIs being able to grant degrees have countered the above arguments by claiming that rather than draining the public system, allowing greater powers to PPSIs will help to build a stronger public system. It is asserted that this increased vigour will be the result of the healthy competition stimulated by PPSI degree-granting powers. Sara McIntyre of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation states "opening up PSE [post-secondary

education] to the private sector will...force government funded schools to compete for students, to be more responsive to students and market needs". Lauren Breslin suggests that "ideally... the competition they [PPSIs] bring will guarantee that existing universities provide the courses students want". Sillars asserts that the influence of PPSIS has caused "the ivory towers [to] track their own performance and compete", applauding this trend. Christian Aagaard welcomes "the competition that private universities stir up so that institutions experiment with new programs and new ways of teaching". Cooper and Bercusson claim that public post-secondary institutions "produce a large number of reasonably well-educated graduates. But that is simply not enough". They argue that the only path to the smaller and higher quality post-secondary institutions that Canada needs "if it is to survive the educational pressures of the 21st century" is to allow for the establishment of private degree-granting universities, with its resultant effect of competition. This competition will ensure the variety needed in what they term a presently overly-homogeneous educational landscape ("Only Private Universities Excel"). All of the above arguments stress that as a result of competition from PPSIS, public institutions will have to change to keep up. In framing the discussion about quality in this manner, proponents of PPSIs giving degrees are calling into question doubts about the legitimacy of public post-secondary institutions' claims to have a high quality product.

However, some proponents of PPSI degree-granting have stressed the idea of positive competition. David Strong of University Canada West agrees with this position, claiming that his institution, because it is privately owned, is “in a unique position in the province [B.C.] to deliver post-secondary education in new and innovative ways” (quoted in MacIntyre), implying that his institution could act as a positive role model for public universities. In this comment, we see the strategy that Chilton and Schaffner term “resistance” being put forth. “Many of the discourse strategies used by the powerful...may be counter-deployed by those who regard themselves as opposing power” (212). Strong agrees with his opponents that quality is important, but turns things around by suggesting that rather than lowering the quality of public post-secondary education, allowing PPSIs to grant degrees will help to further build quality in public institutions.

In the above statements regarding how the capacity of PPSIs to grant degrees will affect Canada’s post-secondary educational system, we see two competing realities. Parties such as CAUT see the PPSIs as challenging the status quo and believe this challenge will weaken an already beleaguered system. In contrast, some of those in favour of the change involved in *allowing* PPSIs to grant degrees see the competition offered by this shift as a stimulus which will improve the quality of public post-secondary institutions.

Choice As It Applies to PPSIs Granting Degrees

It is intriguing that both sides in the debate regarding PPSIs bestowing degrees seem to concur that choice is a good thing. Although those against PPSIs giving degrees decry the commoditization of education, they have still accepted the idea central to our consumer culture that choice is inherently good. Where the divergence of opinion arises is in two aspects. First, opponents to PPSI degree-granting status are less likely to use the argument of choice than are its proponents, preferring to use other arguments to critique the idea. Secondly, when opponents do discuss how PPSIs giving degrees will impact choice in the post-secondary education system, it is to predict that this trend will decrease choices for Canada's students. In contrast, those in favour argue that this course of action will instead open a wider range of choices.

Reduced Choice Due to PPSI Degrees

Those opposed to giving PPSIs the ability to grant degrees sometimes ground their opposition in the argument that only the wealthy can pursue a degree at a PPSI. Raj Pannu of Alberta's NDP maintained that only a small group of Alberta students will benefit from the choices offered by the new PPSIs: those students who have the financial resources to pay higher fees for the smaller classes offered by PPSIs (cited in Tucker). The NDP is steadfastly opposed to allowing private PPSIs to give degrees, asserting that doing so will interfere "with keeping higher education in the public domain - accessible and accountable" ("2004 Election Special Report"). MLA Marie Bountrogianni of Ontario asserted

that merely “a couple of thousand rich students” will be able to attend the new PPSIs in Ontario which have been permitted to grant degrees (“Hansard: Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 4 Dec. 2000”). A Canadian Alliance of Student Associations spokesperson states “we are worried about a two-tiered education system that could spread across the country” (qtd in Zakaluzny). Kelly reported that “many university teachers and their students worry the move towards privatization will ... result in elitism”. The provincial Liberal education critic from Ontario does not mince words when referring to the province’s decision to extend degree-granting powers to private institutions, saying it “...is absolutely disgusting and students have a right to be angry”. Erinn George of the CFS expresses a similar opinion, saying “They [the Ontario government] underfund the public system, lowering the quality and accessibility and then miracle of miracles they come up with the solution of the private sector” (quoted in Clarke). University of Calgary Student’s Union president Toby White predicts a future in which “students who can afford the high tuition at private universities can purchase degrees while everyone else is left to the public system” (quoted in “DeVry Degrees Denounced”).

Increased Choice Due to PPSI Degrees

In contrast, proponents of PPSIs being able to bestow degrees believe the current system of public post-secondary schools is not at present sufficiently meeting the needs of all potential students in Alberta, and further state the system is unable to do so in the rest of Canada as well. Diane Cunningham, the

Minister of Training, Universities, and Colleges in Ontario, contends that PPSIs do in fact offer greater choice to students as PPSIs appeal not to the 18 to 24 year olds who are now the primary clients of public post-secondary institutions but instead to those older students who are already in the workplace. She states that these individuals often have limited access to education because of inflexibilities present in the current Ontario post-secondary system or because they live in geographic areas which are not currently served by a public post-secondary institution (cited in Kelly). Cunningham stresses that students need to have "access to high-quality education programs where and when they need them". The paper which led to the proposal to privatize education in Ontario is titled "Increasing Degree Opportunities for Ontarians", a title which clearly indicated that the government saw its proposal as one which would widen rather than narrow students' choices. Christian Aagaard also observes that not all students are young, commenting PPSIs will better meet the needs of non-traditional students such as retirees or mature students returning to school after a prolonged period in the workforce. Stephen Young of the University of Waterloo Campus PC Association applauds Ontario's decision, stating that PPSIs are "often more specialized, giving Ontario students learning opportunities that they did not previously have" (quoted in Breslin). A spokesperson from the Alberta government stresses that "providing quality post-secondary options are [sic] a high priority for the PC party", adding that private schools can aid in this process when properly supervised ("2004 Post-secondary Election Survey"). Lyle

Oberg, as minister of Advanced Education for the Alberta government, reiterates this position, stating “the Post Secondary Learning Act has opened the door to new degree-completion opportunities and greater flexibility for institutions to respond to student needs” (quoted in “Council Established to Review Degree-granting Proposals”). Cooper and Bercusson, as noted earlier, believe that PPSIs are the route to a better quality post-secondary education system. The two authors contend there is not as much choice currently present as is thought, since the various public educational institutions are relatively homogenous thus offering little genuine choice. By changing the agenda on choice from one of cost to one of greater selection, proponents of PPSIs giving degrees are using the strategy Chilton and Schaffner refer to as resistance. They are thus challenging the right of opponents of PPSI degree-granting to set an agenda which defines choice as being mainly rooted in cost.

Differing Perspectives on Choice

In summary, we see that those in favour of and those opposed to PPSIs granting degrees both view choice as essential to having a high quality educational system, yet define choice in differing ways. Those opposed to allowing PPSIs to grant degrees believe that under our present post-secondary educational system, the primary issue associated with choice is that of affordability. As tuition prices increase, choice will inevitably drop. It is asserted that PPSIs will charge higher tuition, thus either reducing choice for students or at least not improving it from the present levels. In contrast, those in favour of

PPSIs giving degrees view choice in a different manner. They feel that the current system offers too few real choices to those who seek out more flexible or unique alternatives. It is argued that allowing PPSIs to join the public providers of baccalaureate degrees will offer a wider range of alternatives to Canada's students. In this debate, we see the proponents of PPSIs challenging the prevailing definition of choice somewhat more effectively than they have challenged the status quo definition of quality. They have not, however, dealt with the very real issue of how the sometimes increased costs of PPSI tuition will impact choice for Alberta's students. Perhaps this difference in effectiveness in dealing with choice versus the issue of quality has occurred in part because choice is relatively easy to define and measure whilst, as Stephanie Oldford observed, quality of education is a challenging concept to define and precisely measure ("Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation").

Conclusion

We have seen that the Alberta Government's decision to allow PPSIs to grant baccalaureate degrees and its mechanism for doing so via orders in council has created controversy. The criticism of this decision arose mainly after Order in Council 53/2001 was passed, allowing the DeVry Institute of Technology, a proprietary institution, to grant degrees. Those who questioned this course of action consisted of various groups, including Alberta's opposition politicians, various student governmental bodies, faculty associations, journalists, unions and professional organizations, and private citizens. There is much more

discourse generated by those opposed to the idea of allowing PPSIs to grant degrees than from those in favour of this idea, since one of the main ways in which the issue could be brought forward to the public was by pressing the government to engage in public debate in the media or legislature. This public debate was necessitated due to the government use of orders in council, which are discussed privately in caucus meetings, to reach a decision as to whether a given institution will be recommended for degree granting status. In critiquing the government's decision on PPSIs' degree-granting status, those opposed primarily concentrated on issues related to how the government's actions would impact choice and accessibility to post-secondary education and upon how this action would affect the quality of baccalaureate degrees in Canada. While expressing their criticism of the government's actions, these parties made ample use of strategies identified by the political discourse analysts Chilton and Schaffner. These strategies are (1) coercion (2) resistance, opposition, and protest (3) dissimulation and (4) legitimization and delegitimization.

Those in favour of permitting PPSIs to bestow degrees consist largely of members of the Alberta Conservative party and their supporters; owners, staff and faculty of PPSIs; journalists; and other members of the public. One would assume that students at PPSIs are in support as well; however, no significant discourse from these students was available. There is much less discourse available from parties in favour of PPSIs being able to grant degrees, for several reasons. One factor is that once the Universities Act Section 64.5 was passed,

thereby allowing for the provision of degrees by PPSIS, it was then unnecessary for the government to engage in public debate. The government discussed these matters privately in caucus meetings instead. As well, PPSIs were, for various reasons, relatively circumspect about their new powers. However, when responding to criticisms of allowing PPSIS to give out baccalaureate degrees, proponents did produce discourse. As did opponents of PPSIs granting of degrees, advocates focused their discourse around questions of how this power would affect choice and degree quality. In doing so, proponents used the four PDA strategies in a somewhat different manner than did critics of PPSIS degree-granting powers.

It could be asserted that the motives of those opposed to PPSI degree-granting powers are not purely altruistic. Dr. Byrne of Grant MacEwan College observes "It could be argued that in post secondary education, quality is often established by the fraternity of academics who create the criteria for quality. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, it does raise questions around the openness to explore changes in the models. Does the current approach reflect more of a "gatekeeper" mentality than one of probing the question of how quality is measured and assured? " ("Ensuring Quality and Mobility", 3). The rest of Dr. Byrne's comments suggest that he believes such a perspective may well be in play when it comes to some public post-secondary institutions disputing the wisdom of giving PPSIs the ability to grant degrees. Similarly, as noted earlier, it has been argued that those in favour of allowing

PPSIs to grant degrees also have vested interests, whether these are commercial or other motives. MLA Pannu of the NDP termed Order in Council 53/2001 to be “shocking” adding “education is not for profit, it must never be for profit” (quoted in Koziency).

A compromise between those opposed to PPSIs granting degrees and those in support of this concept may be facilitated if greater understanding via discourse analysis is achieved. If all parties involved can be encouraged to advance, at least a little way, beyond their entrenched positions and to try to find common ground, such compromise would provide a start to alleviating the problems previously identified with degrees from PPSIs. It is hoped this paper provides at least a small step in this direction.

A conference on the issue of degree recognition was held in Winnipeg on November 10th of 2006. The conference examined the issue of recognizing degrees from both non-traditional public post-secondary institutions such as the university colleges of B.C., as well as from PPSIs. Eighty attendees were present; forty others wished to attend but no space was available for them (Barmby). These attendance figures alone indicate that PPSI degree recognition is an issue of vital importance to many.

Dr. Patterson asserts “we need to find a way to fit these new degrees and new degree providers into the framework of existing degrees and degree providers” (“Ensuring Quality and Mobility”, 12). It is time for all parties involved in Canada’s post-secondary educational system to gain an enhanced

understanding of one another's positions, thus beginning a dialogue that will initiate the changes needed to better serve Canadian students and the public at large.

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