

the major question of accessibility to post-secondary education by various socio-economic groups could have received greater attention. Of interest would have been an analysis of the proportionate representation of these various groups to their respective representation provincially and nationally. The treatment could also have been improved by comparing the findings to those of a similar previous exercise carried out in 1968-69. (See *Post-Secondary Student Population Survey 1968-69*. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1970.) Such comparisons could indicate how the characteristics of post-secondary students and the participation of different groups of the population have changed since that time. This comparison could identify trends in the participation of students from low-income groups to provide indicators of the changing importance of student loans.

The choice of opting for a quick and comprehensive highlight report was, however, deliberate. One can only hope that the Department of the Secretary of State is equally deeply committed to publishing the same high quality of work in follow-up studies designed to explore in-depth some of the fundamental issues touched upon in this highlight report on the Post-Secondary Student Survey 1974-75.

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The Post-Secondary Student Survey data is available from Mr. J. E. Wicks, Assistant Director, Education, Science and Culture Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, K1A 0T6. Copies of the research report itself are available from Mr. Bill Ahamad, Chief, Socio-economic research, Education Support Branch, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa, K1A 0G6.

Secondary/Post-Secondary Interface Study. Toronto: Ministry of Education and Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 1977. Nine volumes.

On October 10, 1975 the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities jointly invited tenders for "The Secondary/Post-Secondary Interface Study." The study was divided into three projects and the contracts for these awarded separately. Project I, "Roles and Responsibilities of the Secondary and Post-Secondary Institutions," was awarded to a private company, Canadian Facts Company Limited. Project II, "The Nature of Students", went to a group within OISE. Project III, "The Nature of the Programs," was conducted by a group from Queen's University. The contracts were awarded December 15, 1975 and were to be completed by November 18, 1976. Considering the intended scope of the study, not much time was available to the researchers. The study was completed on January 18, 1977 and consists of some 2000 pages. In addition, there are two summaries of the study, both of which have been jointly produced by the two Ministries. The first is entitled *Secondary/Post-Secondary Interface Study: Summary Report* (136 pp.) The second is called *The Secondary-Postsecondary Interface Study: Summaries of the Research Reports* (32 pp.), and is a summary of the summary.

The complete report consists of the three projects noted above plus a further project entitled "Inter-project Analysis" which combines the data in Projects II and III. It had be-

come apparent early in the study that a coordinating factor was essential if data from these two projects were to be of much value. There were Francophone aspects of this study too and some of the findings from these will be referred to. The researchers were obviously unhappy about this part of the study and they have raised a number of serious concerns about limitations to the validity of their findings. On the other hand, the study as a whole is also filled with qualifications and warnings as to the value of its findings. It is difficult to quarrel with the study, however constructively, when all possible objections can be countered by simply pointing to the difficulties encountered (and noted) by the researchers. It is a fine thing for a researcher to cover his tracks but this technique can be overworked.

Project I “reports on the attitudes of educators, the general public, and students concerning the roles and effectiveness of our educational institutions and policy alternatives.” This is an attitude survey, but the validity of the attitudes polled is questionable since the “publics” are very small. The actual number of completions were:

<i>General Public</i>	1004
<i>Students</i>	371
<i>Secondary School Teachers</i>	567
<i>University Faculty</i>	439
<i>CAAT Faculty</i>	403

The conclusions reached by the researchers are not startling. They discovered, for example, that secondary school primary goals are the “development of *first-language* skills”; the development of *problem-solving* skills”; and the “development of a *positive attitude* to learning.” They also discovered that “secondary and post-secondary educators feel that overall academic achievement of secondary school students has deteriorated, especially in basic language skills and mathematics.”

Project II “reports on the actual levels of achievement of students completing the SSGD or the SSHGD.” “The study also investigates the extent to which students’ marks at the end of first year university can be predicted on the basis of their secondary school marks and courses.” This report is concerned primarily with the elegance of the tests used and with achievement rather than with the “nature of the students.” Again, the samples used are very small. The researchers’ acknowledgement of the many limitations under which they had to work brings the validity of the data collected into question. Some of the limitations noted were: the last minute searching for sample schools to be included in the study; the number of tests that students were asked to write on one day; and the giving to students of the opportunity to opt out. This last provision upset the random selection. The conclusion is made that grade 13 marks remain the best predictor of success in university but this is a self-fulfilling prophecy since no comparable analysis on this specific issue was made of either mature or grade 12 entrants to university, although the original terms of reference specified that these groups were to be included. While efforts were made to relate achievement in mathematics and physics tests to student test results of some years ago, there is no data relating the overall grade 13 performances of these same groups of students. Possibly such data was not available, but the question appears not to have been thought of.

The researchers concluded that achievement at school was dependent upon the level of parental education and the status of the father’s job. They noted that the number of courses taken in a subject influenced the test results. They also concluded that the size, type, loca-

tion and organization of the school made no difference to test achievement. While noting the reality of “grade deflation” in some schools and the variation in marking standards (“in the sense of the likelihood of a student getting a particular mark”) between schools, the researchers claim that students “would have a better chance [to improve their marks] by studying a little harder” rather than shopping around for a softer school. Yet the researchers say that the variations are great enough to affect “whether or not a student is accepted into a post-secondary institution, if that institution admits students on a competitive basis and does not control for marking standard variation when considering candidates from a variety of schools.” It is noted that a greater variation in marking standards occurred in the Franco-phone sample, but it is concluded that this may be due to the small size of the sample.

Project III “reports on the material taught in courses on both sides of the interface and identifies gaps and duplications across the interface.” Many of the findings in this study focus on the discrepancy in some areas between what is described as a course objective and that which is actual course content. The researchers examined English, French, History, Physics and Mathematics (and their counterparts in French). They conclude that there is diversity in the system but that post-secondary institutions have been able to cope with these. It is not made clear in the report that one of the “coping” methods used by post-secondary institutions has been to proliferate first year course offerings, some of which are remedial in nature. The researchers also note that subject “co-ordination across institutions and across institutional levels at the interface is almost non-existent.” This is one of the most significant statements of the study in that the absence of subject co-ordination may prove to be the main culprit in current educational controversies.

The Inter-project Analysis, Project IV, combined the data obtained from Projects II and III. This analysis identifies gaps and duplications in the curriculum, changing trends in student population, and changing trends in program characteristics. The researchers conclude that there is no “unanimity in the field on what constitutes an adequate standard.” They also conclude “that the perceptions of various publics with an interest in education do not entirely correspond with reality,” and that our educational system is not in serious difficulty. They take the approach that our problems have arisen from “the dramatic increase in the population of our schools, colleges and universities.” Finally, they note that: “We have many students who would not in the past have been served at all by the system after their early teenage years . . .” Now, “they are served well.”

The Ministries have circulated this study to Boards of Education, post-secondary institutions, and to organizations such as the Council of Ontario Universities. They have requested responses and comments no later than March 31, 1977. Recommendations will then be drawn up based on these responses and reactions to the study. However, the Minister of Education has already taken action to institute a core curriculum in secondary schools which, it can be concluded from the report, is needed. The important questions of standards between schools and inflation of marks which vitally affect post-secondary institutions are not satisfactorily addressed in the report. It is also worth noting that the report of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario, prepared at great cost and released only in March 1973, is not referred to in the Interface Study.

The limitations of the study are recognized by the researchers themselves and the reaction of the government to this study lends credence to charges that the study is primarily a political document. It is clear from the results that there is widespread dissatisfaction with

current practices and standards on the part of the public and within all sectors of the Ontario Education system. The study does nothing to defuse the widespread concerns over mark inflation; uneven standards in the secondary schools, or the decline in basic language and mathematics skills. The difficulties that post-secondary institutions have in assessing students for admission and placement purposes remain. These difficulties are recognized but they are passed over as being comparatively unimportant by both the researchers and the Ministries in their news releases announcing the Interface Study.

The Ministries have stated that if new policies arise from the Interface Study, an announcement concerning these is to be expected by September 1977. In the interim, the Interface Study should be required reading for all students of the politics of education.

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