

**Who Goes? Who Stays? What Matters?
Accessing and Persisting in Post-Secondary
Education in Canada**

edited by Ross Finnie, Richard E. Mueller, Arthur Sweetman, and Alex Usher. Kingston: Queen's School of Policy Studies, McGill-Queen's University Press, 374 pp.

This is a brilliant collection on many levels. Every policy-maker with a portfolio that focuses on access to post-secondary education and on the persistence to move from acceptance to graduation will have to read this, and I do not need to convince them to do so. The contributors are Canada's best in the field, and no one actually working in this policy area would ignore their analysis. The Canadian Federation of Students and student unions across the country should also digest the arguments if they want to argue that lower tuition fees are the key to ensuring accessibility, given the conclusions are not supportive of their preferred policy option. But this collection also deserves to be read by a much wider audience, and I hope to convince this wider audience to actually engage with the arguments and analysis offered.

I have never encountered a better introduction to an edited volume that involves multiple authors. It brilliantly summarizes and synthesizes all the main arguments in a way which is accessible to a wide audience yet sensitive to technical and other important nuances. Every editor of a multi-authored volume could take this as a model. Indeed, one need not go beyond the introductory chapter to "get" the basic message. Yet going beyond the introduction yields incredible fruit. A faculty member or university administrator who discusses, over morning coffee, accessibility (and policies intended to make post-secondary education more accessible), problems associated with retention, or untested theories of why female participation rates are so much higher than male participation rates must read the entire collection. The contributors want policy debates to be informed by the best empirical evidence possible,

and they succeed. I even think that the collection should be read by undergraduate students in the sociology of education, econometrics, or policy evaluation courses since it is a model of policy-motivated research at its very best.

The volume begins with a review of the existing literature identifying not only previous findings but also methodological and data limitations. One of the characteristics of all but one of the 14 papers found in this collection is the use of the Statistics Canada *Youth in Transition Survey*. This rich panel data set, which is carefully described in a separate chapter, allows the researchers reporting results in subsequent chapters to identify not only the impact of financial factors such as parental income and tuition fees but also relevant non-financial factors including high school grades, standardized test scores, school characteristics, peer influences, study habits, parental expectations, and parental educational attainment. The richness of the data set allows the researchers to conclude that non-financial factors are critically important determinants of accessibility and persistence.

The remaining chapters report analysis of different aspects of the decision to pursue and complete post-secondary education. The core of the collection is divided into three main sections covering access, persistence, and financial issues. I will not try to summarize the main conclusions of each individual contribution here. However, in hopes of encouraging a wide readership for the volume, I would like to briefly identify a couple of the questions addressed and the answers provided.

Ross Finnie and Richard Mueller find that the significance of family background arises more from "culture" than "money." This conclusion is reinforced by other contributions including one by David Johnson, who concludes that no evidence can be found to link either attendance or persistence with tuition fees. The Finnie-Mueller contribution can also provide a model for researchers reporting

results of multinomial logit models to an audience unfamiliar with this statistical technique. Students and researchers interested in an effective method of reporting would benefit significantly from reading this chapter even if they have no interest in questions of accessibility and access.

The gap between male (25.7 percent) and female (38.8 percent) university attendance is a much discussed topic, and it receives significant attention here. Marc Frenette and Klarka Zeman argue that almost 77 percent of the gender gap is accounted for by higher high-school marks, higher standardized test scores in reading, better study habits, greater parental expectations, and a higher earnings premium relative to high school. But as Louis Christofides, Michael Hoy, Zhi Li, and Thanasis Stengos note in their contribution on the evolution of aspirations for university attendance, the gap between males and females appears very early on. One of their important findings is that females have higher aspirations at 15 years of age than males and that the gap increases by age 17.

Finnie and Hanqing Qui examine retention, an issue of considerable interest not only for universities but for the post-secondary education system as a whole. They find retention is not an important problem at the system level. Although five-year graduation rates are only 56.5 percent for college students and 52.1 percent for university students, retention rates rise to 82 percent and 89.8 percent respectively when program switchers, leavers who subsequently return to school, and those who remain in post-secondary education after five years are taken into account. Other papers cover equally important topics such as the impact of after-school work on performance and participation decisions, financial aid, and alternative policy options.

This is certainly not the last word on access and persistence. But it moves the debate forward by basing analysis on a better data set than previously available. This collection deserves a wide readership.

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The Politics of Public Money: Spenders, Guardians, Priority Setters and Financial Watchdogs Inside the Government of Canada

by David A. Good. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

The budget lies at the heart of government and politics. It is the principal vehicle for achieving a wide range of public policy goals—economic, social, and environmental. It provides an ideological signature of the party in power. And it speaks clearly about the competency of the government of the day. Yet understanding the technical complexity and often Byzantine nature of budgetary politics and related aspects of the management of public money is a formidable challenge for those outside (and many inside) government.

David Good provides a satisfying and illuminating (but not overly simple) guide to contemporary budgetary politics and process in the Government of Canada. He has a perspective as both an accomplished scholar of public policy (currently on the faculty at the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria) and a seasoned practitioner, having spent 30 years in Ottawa in some very senior posts in both central agencies and line departments. This is not an insider's account as such, but it does provide an insider's perspective and reflects Good's privileged access to key players. Interviews with 55 current and retired insiders form the main empirical basis for the study, along with a masterful grasp of the paper trail—budget papers, estimates, legislation, audits, other reports, and academic analysis.

Good's main theoretical goal is to update Aron Wildavsky's classic 1964 formulation of budgetary politics as a continuing struggle between Spenders (line departments with spending responsibilities) and Guardians (central agencies allocating funds and overseeing expenditure control). Two other sets of players are now as influential, if not more so, in Good's analysis: what he calls the Priority Setters, who are mainly found in the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office; and the Financial

Watchdogs, some of long establishment but who now possess greater power and credibility such as the Office of the Auditor-General, and some relative newcomers such as the Comptroller-General and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. These four sets of actors jockey for position through three key sets of decisions: determining the fiscal aggregate (how much money and whether in surplus or deficit); allocating budgets among programs and departments; and implementing programs (expenditure management). The ascendant role of the Priority Setters in particular has been evident since Paul Martin's 1995 budget. Now budgets are driven by a top-down, macro process, rather than by the bottom-up, micro process that Wildavsky described in the United States (and that for some time reflected Canadian reality as well).

The book lays out the intellectual and institutional basis for this changing environment up to and including the first two years in the Harper era. Its great strength is the author's command of and insight into the nexus of the senior public service and the ministry. His findings reinforce those of Donald Savoie and others about the continuing concentration of politics at the centre and the increasing dominance of ever-changing political considerations. Control has been long since wrestled from departmental bureaucrats. Now the independent players (and power centres in their own right), such as the Auditor-General, have major influence. Moreover, the hugely political emphasis on the "fiscal aggregate" issues, and on making room for radically shifting program priorities (cf. Martin and Harper), leaves less oxygen in the system for dealing with program performance, in particular efficiency.

While this book was published before the financial and political crisis of late 2008, one can see Good's central point in the rush to stimulate the economy and bail-out failing industrial sectors—crucial to macro success, but likely to be riddled with many micro failures. The senior bureaucrats will be left to deal with the latter largely on their own, yet the political class continues to layer on

new rules and controls in reaction to real or perceived scandals. Good dealt with some of these issues more fully in his 2003 book, *The Politics of Public Management*. How fiscal and expenditure management issues get distorted in the media and played out for partisan gain is not the focus of this new book. Readers can nonetheless pursue that part of the puzzle with much greater understanding of

how public money works from the perspective of those who are closest to it. This book will be essential reading for public servants and politicians at all levels who seek to be budget players, and for serious students of Canadian politics.

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Terminal Damage: The Politics of VLTs in Atlantic Canada

by Peter McKenna. Fernwood Publishing, 2008.

In this well-organized book, McKenna does a superb job of identifying and explaining issues of public policy surrounding the video lottery terminal (VLT) gambling business in Atlantic Canada. Drawing on numerous sources, McKenna illustrates the coincidence of interests that has led to a proliferation of the VLT industry and the human side-effects associated with it. The author states this on the back cover with such clarity and precision that my words are no substitute for his:

The truth is that financial stress, marriage break-up, physical and mental health issues, depression, alcohol dependency and suicide go hand-in-hand with pathological gambling. In spite of this obvious scourge, governments knowingly turn a blind eye toward the social fallout. What they do have an eye for is the annual revenue figures derived from gambling. VLTs, by far the most addictive of all gambling activities, are also the biggest cash cow. This book examines why public policy action has been more symbolic than substantive and how VLTs have become increasingly politicized since the early 1990s. It is a clarion call to governments to take real action.

An overview of the institutional and historical development of gambling in Canada—and VLTs in particular—is provided in the first chapter. This chapter provides not only a brief legal and legislative background on gambling in Canada, but also the gain of control over lotteries and VLTs by the provinces based on a model adopted by various US states. For each of the Atlantic provinces, McKenna systematically by chapter documents the introduction of VLTs, their effects, and the political landscape. The mechanics of the political process surrounding VLT gambling is thoroughly documented; while some readers seeking analytical or empirical evidence might occasionally get bogged down in the detailed descriptions of the lives of

addicts, McKenna succeeds in passionately putting a human face on the social problems associated with VLT gambling.

One of the pillars of VLT proliferation is that the same provincial governments that benefit financially from gaming revenues—including the important component accounted for by VLTs—are their own regulators. As McKenna puts it, “There is a manifest conflict of interest here, in the sense that governments are seeking to benefit financially from a sector of the economy in which they have regulatory authority” (p. 15). A second pillar of VLT proliferation is the crown corporation in charge of gaming. “As an organization with a staff, budget resources, and a public policy mandate, its business priorities are to ensure its survival as a bureaucratic entity, to expand its operational reach if possible, and to fortify its reason for being” (p. 17). Together with local businesses that benefit from VLT revenues, McKenna demonstrates an iron triangle of interests that has led to the expansion of VLT gambling. As long as governments are able to control or limit any political fallout, they are likely to continue to cash in on the potential for increased gaming revenues.

Our knowledge of the costs and benefits of gambling markets is incomplete. The cost side is particularly difficult to quantify since many of the costs are intangibles resulting from compulsive gambling behaviour. In this work there is no attempt to quantify the costs of gambling, nor is there any quantification of expenditures on counselling, public relations campaigns, or studies of the gambling sector. The human cost is illustrated in the tales of woe of VLT addicts. Governments have implemented so-called responsible gaming strategies to combat the social cost of the gaming industry.

In reality, though, governments are doing precious little of any real substance in confronting the growing problem of video lottery gambling: it is all about smoke and mirrors when it comes to VLTs. We are repeatedly told that they will

do everything humanly possible to deal with the VLT mess they themselves have created—short of any real, substantive action, of course. (p. 208)

Because this book does not bring systematic data collection or statistical analysis to bear on the policy issues at hand, one might be tempted to criticize it for being primarily descriptive. However, McKenna's book succeeds in clearly demonstrating

the importance of VLTs as a policy issue to a general readership. To the extent that this book does bring forth more systematic quantitative policy analyses of the VLT gambling business and its effects, McKenna's book may indeed have made a substantive contribution to Canadian policy toward VLTs.

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The Limits of Boundaries: Why City-Regions Cannot Be Self-Governing

by Andrew Sancton. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, xiv, 173 pp.

Andrew Sancton has long been concerned with urban government, and this book represents a distillation of that concern. His mastery of the subject allows him to guide us through many examples and ideas, using crisp and clear language, and a minimum of jargon. Though Professor Sancton is a political scientist (at Western Ontario), he acknowledges contributions to the topic from geographers, historians, economists, and sociologists, and he thoroughly appraises all academic arguments and theories against "real issues and problems in real cities" (p. xii).

The book is intended for a broad audience of "informed citizens," urbanists, politicians, and administrators, and is concerned to devise effective structures for the governance of city-regions. Sancton's thesis is that metropolitan areas in our modern liberal democracies "will not and cannot be self-governing" (p. 3). Their territorial boundaries change constantly and are always contested, severely limiting their capacity for effective self-government. Of course, the term self-government can be defined in different ways in relation to sovereign states, federal states, or full-functional municipal governments, and Sancton explores each of these variants. The plan of the book is not entirely satisfactory, however, in that the focus see-saws between these three levels, and the key concern of boundary delimitation is treated in a fragmentary and somewhat repetitive fashion. The bulk of the book concerns municipal forms of metropolitan government, with Toronto given pride-of-place as an extended case study of the issues.

Chapter 1 examines the ideas of certain influential urbanist writers concerning city-regions. Arguments for the city-region as a natural or at least a rational unit of self-government have been

advanced by various writers, and the works of Jane Jacobs, Alan Broadbent, Warren Magnusson, and Gerald Frug are given particular attention. Jacobs argued for city-regions primarily on economic grounds, and felt that they should be sufficiently autonomous to support their own currencies. This requirement alone makes her ideas highly unrealistic, but she has been influential nevertheless: the Greater Toronto Charter of 2001 owes much to her thinking, as does Alan Broadbent's advocacy of provincial status for Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.

Highly autonomous city-regions, such as sovereign city-states or subnational federal units, are created only in unusual circumstances, as Chapters 2 and 4 make clear. Secession from nation-states occurs infrequently, and then typically through war and on the basis of ethnic solidarity. Singapore as a city-state appears to be an exception, but its secession from Malaysia was caused primarily by ethnic tensions and rendered possible by its island location. Secession of city-regions from the constituent units of federal states is also very rare, since federal constitutions either disallow it or place great obstacles in the way of approval. Since the Second World War, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain have all allowed division, amalgamation, or secession of their federal units, but only the special cases of Brussels and Madrid can be viewed as city-regions.

In considering Canada (and with Toronto most in mind), Sancton notes three great difficulties to the realization of city-regions with the status and stature of provinces (Chap. 4). The first is what he terms "the remnant problem," though the analogy of the hole in the donut also comes to mind. A metropolis such as Toronto is the focal point for an extensive and economically dynamic region, which acts as a functional and meaningful unit. Without the central metropolis, the rest of southern and central Ontario would be but a remnant, with no focus and no meaningful cohesion. Logically, this problem could be solved by creating further city-regions (e.g.,

for London and Ottawa), but there would be great imbalance, and besides, much of northern Ontario is beyond the orbit of any large city.

A second difficulty also relates to boundaries: they become outdated. Larger and more dynamic cities typically expand their spheres of influence at the expense of smaller neighbours. Commuting patterns in particular shift through time, so that previously independent cities such as Oshawa and Kitchener become enmeshed by larger entities such as Toronto. Sancton concludes that “permanent boundaries cannot be drawn around dynamic city regions” (p. 89), but he also makes clear that the boundaries of federal units are almost inviolable: the logical inference is that city-regions are likely to exist only as municipal entities.

As a third difficulty, Sancton points out that viable city-regions need to be extensive in order to fully encompass real-world functional patterns, and to have the necessary fiscal and economic resources for a wide range of tasks. But many municipal functions are best delivered at the local level, thus suggesting the need for a two-tiered city-region, rather than a unitary one: “city-states would need local governments just as much as any other state does” (p. 90).

In his consideration of boundary problems, the author fails to mention the well-established literature on urban spheres of influence, developed primarily by economists and geographers. As early as 1934, Robert Dickinson divided the United States into “metropolitan regions” using newspaper circulation and wholesale trade data, and other pioneers (notably Smailes 1947; Green 1955; and Borchert 1972) have tackled issues of metropolitan hierarchy and the nested ordering of functional regions. It is also unfortunate that the work of Derek Senior, in his dissenting report for England’s Redcliffe-Maud Commission (1969), is not mentioned: he provided a masterful review of the conceptual and practical issues, and proposed a first tier of city-regions with a second tier of local travel-to-work districts.

Sancton’s penultimate chapter specifically addresses the issue of self-government for Toronto. He reviews four main arguments for greater autonomy, and details how the province of Ontario has tackled governance of the greater Toronto region in the last 20 years or so: formation of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) as a territorial unit for top-down regional planning in 1998, appointment of the GTA task force, formation of a new unitary City of Toronto, delineation of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) as an expanded planning region, and finally proclamation of the Growth Plan for the GGH in 2006. He notes that “in a very real way, the government of Ontario is now acting as the strategic planning authority for the territory of a city region it calls the Greater Golden Horseshoe” (p. 125). But the GGH is immense, containing nine urban nodes and half of Ontario’s population. Larry Bourne has argued strongly that it does not correspond to the usual criteria for a city-region and is too extensive for most planning purposes. Whether or not the GGH can be regarded as a city-region, Sancton sees almost no chance that it will evolve into a self-governing province, since such a province would require Ontario to be split into three parts, at least.

Sancton concludes by reiterating that, with few exceptions, politically autonomous city-regions “cannot be defined territorially” in the same way as nation-states or provinces, since their spheres of influence are many, varied, and fluid. He does not bemoan this situation, since he views subnational federal units (provinces) as approximations of city-regions, which already exist, and which provide many of their advantages.

Although one might take issue with some of Sancton’s assumptions and arguments, this is undoubtedly an important and useful book, written in an exemplary and accessible style. I highly recommend it to all concerned with the political geography of urban governance.

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