What’s in a Name?
A Historical Analysis of Seneca College’s Journey
Towards Increased Institutional Differentiation
within the Ontario Postsecondary System
2001–2012

by
Cynthia D. Hazell

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
OISE/University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Pursuant to Ontario's Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence (PECE) Act, 2000 and the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, the then Progressive Conservative provincial government announced in August, 2002, that the “doors were open” for colleges to submit proposals for formal differentiated status. In November, 2002, in response to this invitation, Seneca College proposed a business case and strategy for formal differentiated status. Seneca’s resultant, approved “Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement” committed the college to a differentiation vision which included an expanded academic mandate, pathways and partnerships with other institutions, increased applied research and an “on again, off again” pursuit of polytechnic status.

Using a historical case analysis, Seneca's intent and rationale in pursuing this vision during the study period are examined in the context of Ontario’s broader postsecondary system design.
Based on documentary analysis and interviews with key internal and external informants, the study finds that Seneca's overarching goal was to increase access, choice and degree-completion options for Ontario's postsecondary students, and that the college made considerable ongoing contributions to the province in each of these differentiation areas. Seneca's success in affecting broader system design change, up to an including the creation of a new institutional category of institutions, was seen to be limited by underlying competitive dynamics among and between both colleges and universities, ambiguities and breakdowns in trust regarding Seneca's institutional aspirations, turnover of key champions both within government and in the institutions, and a perceived influence over government by Ontario's university presidents.

Seneca (along with some other institutions) was seeking a recognizable branding for its expanded academic mandate and differentiated status that would distinguish it from the other Ontario colleges and from the universities. A perceived hierarchy of institutions both within and across the two sectors, and the resultant competitive dynamics therein, likely constrained these efforts. Any future postsecondary reforms that are perceived to alter the strength and clarity of Ontario's binary system (and the convergence of institutions within each sector) would require bold government vision and political support in order to succeed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this research has been a long journey. What began as a personal and professional goal, truly became a “labour of love”. Having spoken professionally about the importance of lifelong learning for many years, I have developed a renewed appreciation and respect for all adult learners.

It would have been impossible to stay motivated and committed throughout the process without the support and encouragement of so many people. First, I want to thank my supervisory committee -- Professor Michael Skolnik, Dr. Katharine Janzen and my supervisor, Dr. Glen Jones -- for saying “yes” so many years ago, and for their ongoing encouragement and feedback each step of the way. Most significantly, I’m quite sure I would not have made it to the finish line without Glen’s incredible advice and support; he kept me grounded throughout the journey despite various personal and professional circumstances that interrupted my academic focus. Glen’s approach epitomized the principles of adult learning, offering encouragement and guidance when I needed it most, but allowing me to chart my own path (and learn from my mistakes) along the way. I would also like to thank my oral examination committee, in particular Dr. Greg Moran and Dr. Leesa Wheelahan, for their contributions in enabling such an intimidating process to morph into a truly engaging and enjoyable discussion!

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This research enquiry provides a historical analysis of Seneca College’s journey towards increased institutional differentiation between 2001 and 2012, subsequent to the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence (PECE) Act, 2000 and the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, and more specifically, following a formal invitation issued by the then Progressive Conservative government to Ontario colleges to propose a differentiated strategy in response to the new legislation.

The research includes an examination of how the political environment, institutional values and culture, and changes in senior leadership, all combined to shape Seneca College’s positioning towards increased institutional differentiation during the study period. Using documentary analysis and interviews with key informants, the thesis attempts to develop a deeper understanding of Seneca’s goals and rationale in pursuing greater differentiation, and related strategic decisions and priorities established therein. The influence of Seneca’s institutional positioning on the policy discourse in Ontario at the time, and the simultaneous, evolving relationships among and between Ontario’s colleges, and between the colleges and universities, are also considered. Finally, the ongoing impact of Seneca’s efforts towards increased institutional differentiation on Ontario’s broader postsecondary system design will be considered.

Drawing on the distinction provided by Birnbaum (1983), this examination is about external (sector) diversity rather than internal diversity, exploring one institution’s journey towards greater differentiation in the context of a broader system diversity discussion. The focus is on postsecondary system design in Ontario, and specifically, the relationship between government policy and direction, Seneca’s differentiation goals and
strategy, and the efforts by Seneca and other institutions to influence system design change. My interest is in Seneca’s efforts towards increased system diversity, rather than a discussion of increasing diversity within Seneca as an institution. I believe this enquiry offers an important, unique and timely contribution to our understanding of Ontario’s evolving postsecondary landscape.

This chapter outlines the background and context surrounding Seneca’s pursuit of increased differentiation during the study period, along with a brief overview of Ontario’s binary postsecondary system design, the origins of the Ontario colleges, transfer and mobility issues between the two sectors, and Seneca’s evolving institutional mandate in this context. The last half of the chapter introduces the research enquiry, including a discussion of its purpose, its persistent importance in the Ontario postsecondary landscape and my personal interest in exploring this area, a brief introduction to the theoretical framework which informed the thesis, and the research questions, scope and limitations therein.

1.1 Background

When Seneca College’s fourth president, Dr. Rick Miner, joined the college in August 2001, he initiated a college-wide consultation intended to confirm the college’s strengths and opportunities, shape new directions, and develop a strong, shared vision for the institution going forward. As a result, in May, 2002, he released “Future Seneca: Leading the Way Again” which declared Seneca’s intent to become “the first of a new type of post-secondary institution”, a new institutional form that crosses the college-university divide and “has the potential to revolutionize Canada’s understanding of how post-secondary education and skill acquisition could operate in this country” (Miner, 2002, pp. 2-5).
Seneca’s institutional aspirations as declared in Dr. Miner’s vision coincided with two important pieces of Ontario legislation that provide a critical backdrop to this discussion: The Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 (permitting private universities in Ontario and degree-granting authority for colleges based on approved ministerial ‘consent’) and The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002 (increasing institutional autonomy and enabling differentiation in the sector). According to Ramdas (2017), these legislative changes marked the beginning of the most dynamic period of change for the Ontario colleges since their formation in 1965 (p. ii).

In August, 2002, the presidents and chairs of Ontario’s Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology received a formal communication from then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Diane Cunningham, providing a “framework and process for colleges that are interested in seeking approval for a greater degree of differentiation” and inviting colleges that wished to differentiate to submit a Business Case (email correspondence from The Honourable Dianne Cunningham to Board Chairs and Presidents, August 19, 2002). In response, on November 7th, 2002, the chair of Seneca’s Board of Governors submitted “New Seneca: A Business Case for Differentiated Status” to the Minister for consideration (email correspondence from R. Atherton to The Honourable Dianne Cunningham, November 7th, 2002). In April, 2003, Minister Cunningham wrote to President Miner: “I am pleased to inform you that the Seneca College business case to differentiate by expanding the choice of education credentials including applied degrees, expanding partnerships with degree-granting institutions, and creating centres of excellence, has been approved” (email correspondence from The Honourable Dianne Cunningham to R. Miner, April 8, 2003).

Thus began Seneca’s differentiation “journey”. Its institutional goals and intent were
explicit and clear in many aspects, perhaps less so in others. The purpose of this research is to examine Seneca’s differentiation journey further, including its goals and intent, in the context of Ontario’s broader system design discussion.

1.2 Ontario’s Binary System Design

When the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (the “CAATs”) were created in 1967 by the then Progressive Conservative government, they were intended as a postsecondary alternative for students who were not destined to attend university, with the philosophical underpinning that there were two separate and distinct kinds of postsecondary student: those capable intellectually of succeeding at university (and who could afford to do so), and those who were not (Decock, 2006, p. 27). As a result, Decock notes, the Ontario postsecondary system was both conceptualized and designed intentionally as a binary system (p. 24). From a system diversity point of view, students had limited choices within that binary system, dictated by their academic abilities (in theory at least) and/or social-economic status and, until 2002, by geographical access, since formal geographic catchment areas were assigned to each college prior to that time.

Over 50 years later, some argue that system diversity in Ontario has expanded, both across and within the two sectors, even though the fundamental binary system remains. According to a report published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), “... history, geography, regional development, innovation and response to student demand and the labour market have created an organic diversity in the Ontario university system and a good base to build on for further differentiation” (Weingarten and Deller, 2010, p. 9). HEQCO makes a similar case in regard to the Ontario CAATs, in a subsequent paper called “The Diversity of Ontario’s Colleges: A Data Set to Inform the
Differentiation Discussion” (Hicks, Weingarten, Jonker & Liu, 2013). “Regional programmatic diversity is a distinguishing factor among Ontario colleges” (p. 3), with each institution responding to the unique characteristics and needs of its local labour market, "true to the tradition of community focus in the college movement” (p. 5). Despite this “organic diversity” within each sector, however, the lingering impact of Ontario’s historical binary system is strong: “For Ontario, the distinction between colleges and universities is the single stable, long-standing, legislatively enshrined and culturally anchored element of postsecondary differentiation” (Hicks et al., p. 23).

1.3 Transfer and Mobility

Although the possibility of transfer between the two sectors was debated by then Minister of Education Bill Davis and his advisors when the CAATs were created, a formal transfer mandate was not part of their final vision (Ontario Department of Education, 1967, pp. 12-13). Citing Skolnik (1995), Charles (2011) notes that the Ontario universities at the time were influential in shaping the ultimate binary system design, arguing against the need for a formalized transfer mechanism (Charles, 2011, p. 30). To reinforce the fact that transfer was not intended to be part of the new institutions’ mandate, practitioners and scholars often point to the fact that Ontario’s Colleges do not offer university-level transfer courses as a major component of their programming, as is the case for transfer institutions in most other jurisdictions, in order to deliver on their transfer mandate. More than fifty years later, however, notwithstanding the absence of a formal transfer mandate for the colleges, Ontario’s postsecondary students increasingly “vote with their feet”, with greater numbers of students moving, in both directions, between the college and university sectors (Colleges Ontario, 2009, p. ii). Indeed, Pitman (1993), used this same expression in
describing the movement he was observing, even then, between the two sectors, noting that students appeared to be pursuing the best of both worlds in spite of the binary structure (in Decock, 2006, p. 33). The ongoing movement of students back and forth between college and university, both before and after graduating from their first postsecondary programs, clearly suggests that there is no longer a distinct or “typical” college or university student (if there ever was). A glance at the enrolment trends and credential mix at the colleges over the past twenty-five years supports this conclusion: a doubling of enrolments in graduate certificates specifically designed for degree graduates; the creation of general education/liberal arts diploma programs to assist students wishing to prepare for university transfer; a number of “articulated” college-to-university degree completion programs and/or programs delivered collaboratively; and over 10,000 college students enrolled in baccalaureate degrees by 2015, with a first intake of only 92 students in 2002 (http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/Research/quickstats/Pages/qs_2_2.aspx). What is less evident is whether the students who transfer and/or continue their studies across the two sectors do so by choice, or by some (perceived or real) necessity in the context of their educational goals. In seeking to understand Seneca’s journey towards increased institutional differentiation more fully, the college’s evolving role in student mobility and credit transfer is an important factor worth examining.

1.4 Seneca’s Evolving Mandate

According to Decock (2006), the increasing movement of Ontario’s postsecondary students between college and university is not necessarily about students electing to take advantage of the very different forms of education offered in the two sectors. By examining Seneca’s persistent transfer patterns over a decade, Decock argues that Seneca students
have come to see the college as a useful vehicle to assist them in realizing their goal to attend university. According to Decock, “(f)or them, the College is a transfer institution” (p. 270).

Decock’s research found that, beginning in the early 1990s and through until 2004, increasing numbers of students moved on to university after studying at Seneca, in some cases after successfully graduating with a Seneca diploma or certificate, and in others, leaving their Seneca program prematurely. Over this same period, potential applicants increasingly sought out information regarding degree completion opportunities “after Seneca”, based on available partnerships and pathways. As a result, in my former role as the college’s senior vice-president, I observed some interesting philosophical debates among faculty, staff and board members regarding the institution’s changing role and mandate, and specifically its ongoing commitment as an “access” institution, an alternative to university, consistent with the vision intended for the Ontario colleges at their inception.

According to Background Data Questionnaires administered to all incoming Seneca students over the period 1992 – 2004, the percentage of students aspiring to enter university after graduation almost doubled (from 22.3% to 41.0%) during that time, and in 2003 and 2004, this number exceeded the percentage who planned to enter a fulltime job after graduation (42.3% to 39.7% and 41.0% to 40.3% respectively) (Decock, 2006, p.120). As Decock notes, this was a watershed moment for Seneca in attempting to understand its changing applicant pool. On the basis of this trend, the college’s primary mandate of providing career education began to be openly challenged, since increasing numbers of students appeared to be enrolling with the intention of subsequently attending a university. What was unclear, however, was whether the driver behind this phenomenon
was a desire to attend university, or a desire to obtain a baccalaureate degree – or both.

Anecdotally, some Seneca stakeholders found this to be an exciting revelation. Others found it a compromising contradiction to the historic, primarily vocational, career-oriented focus of the Ontario CAAT’s as envisioned in the Basic Documents. Some expressed concern that this trend presented a looming threat to the Ontario colleges’ institutional and sector independence (i.e., from the university sector), a slippery slope that could inevitably lead to a redefined mandate for the Ontario CAAT system, similar to that of American Junior Colleges - destined to play a feeder role to Ontario’s universities as dictated and prescribed by the universities alone.

Further complicating these opposing tensions, Seneca was one of five Ontario colleges formally approved for “differentiated status” in 2003 in response to the Minister’s invitation for proposals, and the first of the Ontario colleges to offer a baccalaureate degree, admitting its initial cohort of degree students in Fall, 2004 to the Bachelor of Applied Business (Financial Services Management) program. In Fall, 2018, Seneca had approximately 2300 students enrolled in 17 stand-alone baccalaureate degree programs (Seneca College Institutional Research Office, Fall, 2018). For some, both internal and external to Seneca, this expansion in the college’s academic mandate represented a natural institutional evolution, a long overdue acknowledgment of the quality of Seneca’s programming and its emerging reputation as being more “university-like” than “CAAT-like” in some ways. For others, however, the introduction of degrees at Seneca introduced a new threat (or at the very least, a lack of clarity) to institutional direction and identity. By offering both stand-alone degrees and pathways from Seneca diplomas into university degrees, some speculated that the college had become somewhat ‘schizophrenic’ in its
identity. This raised the question: were Seneca's strategic goals related to increased degree-granting authority compatible with its commitment to increase access opportunities to postsecondary education and, increasingly, transfer pathways to university? Internal and external policy actors pondered whether leadership in both of these areas was advantageous, confusing to students and parents, or even possible. Seneca’s goals and strategy related to increased differentiation were tied closely to this discussion.

1.5 Purpose of the Research

Using a historical case analysis, this thesis attempts to develop a deeper understanding of Seneca’s differentiation goals and rationale between 2001 and 2012, and the related strategy and institutional priorities established therein. The enquiry is conducted in the context of Ontario’s broader postsecondary system design, with a specific interest in determining whether the college’s differentiation efforts during the study period had any ongoing impact on the province’s evolving system design. Policy discourse around system design in Ontario has been stimulated for several decades by recurring pressures for reforms intended to increase student access, choice and mobility, credit transfer strategies and/or baccalaureate capacity. (In 1996, for example, the provincial government funded the College-University Consortium Council [CUCC] to conduct research on credit transfer, and “facilitate, promote and coordinate more movement between the two post-secondary sectors” [Decock, 2006, p.35]). According to Decock, "...rising credentialism, reduced funding, increased competition from out of province institutions, and government pressure for efficiency and co-operation have forced participants from both sectors to re-think the structure of post-secondary education in Ontario" (p. 26). Given more recent,
ongoing fiscal pressures, global competition, and persistent student expectations for change, policy actors continue to consider the challenges, opportunities and risks associated with various design options.

1.6 Why is it important to understand this phenomenon?

In his 2005 report on postsecondary education “Ontario: A Leader in Learning”, The Honourable Bob Rae reaffirmed the concept of increased participation rates in postsecondary education as a provincial policy goal that was paramount to the long-term social health and economic welfare of the province (Rae, 2005, p.11). In this context, he identified a number of underserved populations in Ontario in terms of access to postsecondary education (aboriginals, at-risk youth, students whose parents have no prior postsecondary experience [“first generation”], mature/adult students), calling for outreach strategies targeted to these groups in order to improve provincial participation rates. Given the Ontario colleges’ historical access mandate, it was not surprising that the colleges would expect to play a significant role in operationalizing such a strategy. Over time, and flowing from the McGuinty government’s Reaching Higher Plan (Ontario Budget, 2005), the focus on increased access, participation rates, retention and success became increasingly mainstream in the college sector, and indeed, performance indicators for each became embedded in the earliest versions of multi-year accountability agreements (MYAA’s) and reporting templates (MYAA Report Back’s) that were required as part of the multi-year funding framework for all Ontario colleges. (Examples can be found on the Seneca College website at http://www.senecacollege.ca/about/reports/past-reports.html)

In 2007/08, the access and participation discourse expanded to include a discussion about system capacity. The Ministry released several new enrolment projections for
Ontario, especially for GTA and primarily for baccalaureate level programming, which forecast shortages of between 60,000 and 120,000 postsecondary spaces by 2021, depending on assumptions regarding immigration patterns and overall participation rates (Seneca College corporate files, 2007; Clark et al., 2009; HEQCO, 2009). This contextual pressure is discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

Reflecting back to Rae’s (2005) review, Rae’s recommendations related to system design focused mostly on institutional collaboration and structured pathways as the critical design change most needed. In a section entitled “Differentiation and Collaboration,” the Report recommended improving system effectiveness by enabling “distinct missions” among individual institutions and “…expanding the number of specialized joint or transfer college-university programs and allowing selected colleges to deliver the first two years of some university programs, like junior colleges do in other jurisdictions” (p. 42). Rae noted that colleges in Ontario could adopt a similar transfer mandate as exists in the United States and Western Canada, but was unclear as to whether this kind of transfer role could co-exist alongside the historical, more terminal career-oriented programming that had become the mainstream focus of the Ontario college system. Rae further suggested that aggressive government interventions would be needed in order to effect real system change in this regard, including financial incentives and disincentives. In his final report, he concludes: “if institutions cannot make progress under an umbrella of incentives, government should be prepared to mandate greater cooperation in the best interests of Ontario students” [emphasis added], (2005, p. 42).

The McGuinty government’s subsequent 2005 “Reaching Higher” budget included an action plan for colleges, universities and training providers, supported by a $6.2 billion
cumulative investment by 2009-10. The government’s news releases surrounding the 
budget billed this injection of funds as “an historic, multi-year investment in postsecondary 
education—the largest in 40 years”, representing a 39 per cent increase compared to the 
2004-05 funding base (Office of the Premier, 2005). Ironically, despite this significant boost 
in operating funds following Rae’s Review and the release and implementation of the 
Liberal’s subsequent “Reaching Higher II” and “Building Ontario Up” plans (Ontario Budget, 
2009, 2015), we were still debating the same potential solutions to the same access, 
capacity and student mobility challenges more than decade later. The lack of progress, 
despite the significant increase in multi-year funding during the period of this study, 
suggests that the persistent barriers to system transformation in Ontario may not be 
simply financial; based on the literature, one might speculate that they are more systemic 
and/or political. Indeed, when Rae’s discussion paper and then final report was released, 
there were some practitioners who anticipated that his recommendations regarding 
system design and transfer were likely to be more controversial than those in the report 
regarding funding and tuition. This research enquiry seeks to understand Ontario’s 
resistance to system design change more deeply, by examining Seneca’s efforts towards 
system reform and the surrounding policy discourse during the study period.

1.7 Renewed Urgency

In November, 2013, the then Liberal government announced “Ontario’s 
Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education”, the first ever such formal 
policy for the province (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2013). In a 
supporting backgrounder, the then Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities 
noted:
The government has opted for differentiation as a primary policy driver for the system. The government’s policy of differentiation sets the foundation for broader postsecondary system transformation by publicly articulating government expectations and aligning the mandates of Ontario’s colleges and universities with government priorities. Our overarching goals for a differentiated system are to build on and help focus the well-established strengths of institutions, enable them to operate together as complementary parts of a whole, and give students affordable access to the full continuum of vocational and academic educational opportunities that are required to prosper in our contemporary world. (p. 6)

In May, 2015, MTCU released a call for proposals to expand access to postsecondary education in Ontario (“building capacity”), which stated in part:

Demographic projections and analysis of enrolment trends over time show that fulltime, undergraduate, degree-level enrolment demand could increase by 56,000 to 90,000 by 2035...In some areas of the province, especially in GTA communities such as York, Peel and Halton, enrolment demand is expected to grow sooner and quickly. (MTCU, 2015)

With the Ontario colleges still relatively small players in the delivery of baccalaureate programs in Ontario, these more recent projections point to the need for new substantive sources of degree level ‘supply' in GTA. This has reignited the system design discourse among some policy actors in the province.

Building on Clark, Moran, Skolnik and Trick (2009), the potential solutions could include a wide range of options such as creating a new university (or universities), a new category of degree-granting institution such as polytechnics, substantive changes in degree-granting mandate of some colleges, and/or other major system design changes (p.183). Given the continuing interest in improving access to (and success in) postsecondary education for underserved populations in Ontario; the ongoing, projected capacity challenge in the GTA especially as this relates to baccalaureate spaces; the previous Liberal government’s clear and persistent interest in improving transfer and mobility conditions for Ontario’s postsecondary students; and that same government’s
eventual release in 2013 of a formal differentiation framework and policy, it seemed that the political environment could be finally gearing up for transformative system design change in Ontario. This is supported by Fallis, (2013), who noted that it was an “opportune time to rethink higher education” in Ontario, adding that “the government has indicated an interest in considering system design alternatives” (p. 4).

In early Spring, 2018, presumably in response to renewed pressures by some Ontario college presidents (including Seneca’s President Agnew), the then Liberal government announced the appointment of an independent review on the question of polytechnic designations in Ontario (Ontario, 2018), signaling perhaps that it was open to considering options for “broader postsecondary system transformation” as referenced in its 2013 differentiation policy. Later that Spring, however, Ontario experienced a change in government as a result of the provincial election. The new Conservative government’s initial, declared interest in finding productivity, efficiencies and innovation in the public sector suggested that the momentum in favour of postsecondary system reform might be sustained. According to college sector practitioners, however, Premier Ford's government has since made it clear that it has no interest in polytechnic designations -- and consistent with those perceptions, the independent polytechnic review has been terminated. Capital funding support for several college-university partnerships has also been cancelled (Stone, 2018).

And so, Ontario’s system design policy discourse is “on hold” once again. If history is any indicator, however, it will resurface as a result of institutional, environmental and/or government pressures in the foreseeable future. As one of five colleges that was formally approved for differentiation in 2003, the first Ontario college to offer a stand-alone
baccalaureate degree in 2000, and one of only “three clear leaders in the four-year (college) degree movement” (Hicks et al., 2013, p. 16), Seneca is well-positioned to be in the forefront of any future system redesign discussions, should these resurface, up to and including further differentiation and/or institutional reclassification based on expanded academic mandate. By developing a deeper understanding of the differentiation journey that Seneca undertook during the study period, and the political dynamics surrounding these efforts within the broader postsecondary sector, this enquiry will hopefully contribute to the literature on differentiation and system design in Ontario, while also informing ongoing institutional and provincial deliberations regarding strategic mandates, system design and transformation—in ways that will ultimately serve the needs of Ontario’s future postsecondary students.

1.8 Research Questions

This thesis focuses on two overarching research questions:

*What was Seneca’s intent and rationale in pursuing institutional differentiation during the period 2001–2012? [And]*

*How did the college’s institutional positioning during this period contribute to Ontario’s evolving system design?*

To assist in exploring this enquiry, the following secondary (supporting) research questions are examined:

1. How did Seneca College evolve during the period from 2001 to 2012 as a result of its differentiation goals? How was the college’s institutional positioning during this period different from other Ontario postsecondary institutions?
2. What was Seneca hoping to achieve?

3. How was Seneca's journey towards increased institutional differentiation impacted by the college's historical roots and institutional identity?

4. What impact did Seneca's role in the delivery of college baccalaureate degrees have on the college's institutional positioning related to differentiation? How was Seneca's degree-granting strategy perceived by various policy actors?

5. How did Seneca's involvement in credit transfer and university collaboration impact its institutional positioning related to differentiation? How compatible was Seneca's credit transfer/pathways agenda with the college's institutional differentiation goals?

6. What impact did the external political environment (e.g., changes in government, explicit and perceived responses of stakeholders and policy actors, relationships with external partners and colleagues, and the actions of other Ontario institutions) have on the decisions Seneca made in its institutional journey towards increased differentiation?

7. How did the change in presidential leadership at Seneca between 2001 and 2012 impact Seneca's institutional journey during the study period?

8. How significant was the ongoing question of what “kind” of institution Seneca was aspiring to become (e.g. ITAL, polytechnic, university)? Was there clarity and support among policy actors (internal and external) in this regard?

9. How successful was Seneca in achieving its differentiation goals? What
conditions/factors might have changed the outcome?

10. What impact, if any, did Seneca have on the differentiation and system design discourse in Ontario?

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Using the literature on higher education diversity and differentiation as a backdrop, this research enquiry is informed by the distinction between the concepts of “diversity” (a snapshot of the variety of entities that exist in a system at a point in time) and “differentiation” (the process by which new entities emerge, in whole or in part, within a system) as described by van Vught (2007). In addition, this expanded definition of diversity in higher education offered by Trow (in Codling and Meek, 2006), is particularly relevant in the context of Ontario’s current binary system design:

...the existence of distinct forms of post-secondary education, of institutions and groups of institutions within a state or nation that have different and distinctive missions, educate and train for different lives and careers, have different styles of instruction, are organized and funded and operate under different laws and relationships to government. (p. 5)

My analysis of Seneca’s differentiation journey is guided most specifically by those aspects of the differentiation literature relating to the processes and conditions that typically lead to institutional convergence and isomorphism, unless there is government intervention to the contrary, as described Codling and Meek (2006), Huisman (1995), Rhoades (1990) and van Vught (2007). I describe these theoretical perspectives more fully in Chapter Two.

1.10 Conceptual Lens

This examination of Seneca differentiation journey was guided by a worldview that uses a social constructivist lens, with research questions that were open-ended, broad and
general so that participants could construct their own meaning of the situation based on
evidence and observation (Creswell, 2009). Consistent with a social constructivist
paradigm, the research enquiry is inductive and “qualitatively driven” using a sequential
mixed methods approach (as described by Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Information revealed
during the early stages of data collection informed subsequent interviews and document
reviews, in order to assist in developing a deeper understanding of the research
phenomenon. A detailed discussion of the research methodology is provided in Chapter
Three.

Given both the persistence of the ongoing discourse on differentiation in Ontario’s
postsecondary system, and various, related developments in Ontario during the study
period leading up to the government’s 2013 Differentiation Policy Framework, the social
constructivist lens (and related, inductive approach) was most helpful in terms of
understanding Seneca’s intentions, goals and outcomes during the study period.

1.11 Personal Interest and Rationale

In presenting this research, it is critical that I disclose my former role as a direct
participant and policy actor in the case being examined. This brings with it both the
benefits and potential challenges of providing an “insider perspective” (including questions
of objectivity and access to confidential and/or proprietary information). Having served as
Seneca’s Vice President Academic (VPA) and then Senior Vice-President\(^1\) for the duration of
the study period, it is critical to acknowledge my own role in, and recall of, various events

\(^1\) In 2009, my official title changed to Senior Vice-President. I also served as the Ontario Colleges’ provincial
VPA representative on the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) from 2001 until 2011.
\(^2\) The author of this thesis served as a member of HEQCO’s Expert Panel appointed in 2012 to review the first
round of SMA’s.
\(^3\) In 2008, Algoma University was established as a teaching oriented university with a particular focus on the
needs of northern Ontario, including a specific mission to cultivate cross-cultural learning between aboriginal
(subject to memory loss), in leading certain academic directions and programming decisions, and in supporting new academic policies and plans relevant to the differentiation journey. In this regard, I have attempted to be conscious and forthright in acknowledging that the observations and findings revealed throughout the study are perceived through my own personal social constructivist lens, possibly reflecting perspectives, built-in biases and interests developed as a practitioner during the study period. “Triangulation” of data (see Yin, 2009) using multiple sources was a critical element of the research design, therefore, in order to offset any conscious or unconscious bias stemming from my personal involvement in the case. This aspect of my research design was addressed further as required through the research protocol and ethics review process, and is discussed more fully in Chapter Three under “Ethical Considerations”.

As a policy actor who was actively engaged in related discussions and decisions, both locally and provincially during the study period, my interest in this research is both personal and professional (although no longer “vested” because of my retirement from Seneca). I have a keen interest in examining whether Seneca’s actions during the study period were effective in helping to move the system transformation agenda forward, and in understanding what conditions might have created a different outcome for the college and the province.

1.12 Scope and Limitations

The time period covered in this study aligns with my appointment as Seneca’s Acting Vice-President Academic (VPA) in Summer, 2001, until my retirement from the college as VPA and Senior Vice-President in Spring, 2012. In addition, by beginning this analysis in 2001, Seneca’s actions and strategies related to differentiation coincide with the
two aforementioned pieces of important Ontario legislation that are critical to this discussion: The Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 and The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002.

The research period also spans the terms (in the second case, partial term) of two different presidencies at Seneca, coinciding, at the front end, with the arrival of President Rick Miner, new to the Ontario postsecondary scene but with a traditional, academic background from within the New Brunswick university system (i.e. serving as Vice-President Academic at the University of N.B. before coming to Seneca). In 2009, Dr. Miner retired and President David Agnew assumed the presidency, bringing a very different background and experience to the role, including significant government and public sector experience but no prior background in postsecondary education.

The impact of the differences in backgrounds and explicit goals of the two presidents during this period is considered as part of the analysis of Seneca’s institutional differentiation strategy, and the direction and decisions made along the way (see Chapter Six). It is important to be aware, in exploring the impact of these two institutional leaders, that various interview participants (practitioners and policy actors) bring their own previously developed, personal biases regarding the two presidents to the interviews. Again, through detailed questioning, constant comparisons and social constructions that are evidence-based (e.g., supported by document analysis where possible), this enquiry attempts to mitigate this challenge.

Due to the inherent limitations of time and attention, this research does not consider a number of other important, persistent aspects of the Ontario postsecondary landscape that are frequently in the spotlight in parallel to system design and
differentiation discourse. These include funding challenges, quality assurance, and increasing concern over a perceived, ongoing “skills gap” in Ontario (see Miner, “People Without Jobs; Jobs Without People”, 2010) -- except where these issues intersect with this specific differentiation discussion. In addition, this examination does not offer an analysis of related decisions made by other differentiated/differentiating colleges in Ontario, except where reference to these arises for comparison and contrast purposes, relative to Seneca’s differentiation strategy and direction.

This case analysis provides only limited, preliminary insights into the internal impact of Seneca’s differentiation efforts on the college’s students, faculty, external partners, curriculum, governance and overall culture (see Hofland, 2011 for an example of a detailed analysis of internal changes as a result of institutional differentiation at Great Basin College, Nevada) and the reactions and perceptions of Ontario’s universities to the colleges’ increasing degree-granting authority (Skolnik, 2011, identifies this as an important gap in the literature that would deepen our understanding of college-university relationships in Ontario) (p. 353).

The findings of this research are not generalizable beyond the specific Seneca case, yet the lessons learned may be informative. My hope is that, in developing a deeper understanding of the differentiation goals and efforts undertaken by one, major comprehensive college in Ontario during the study period, I will be able to make some useful and timely contribution to the ongoing system design dialogue and future opportunities for system transformation. Additional opportunities for further, related research are suggested in Chapter Eight.
1.13 Organization of the Thesis

In the next chapter, an overview of previous scholarly works that are most relevant to this thesis is presented, in order to provide a theoretical framework within which to consider Seneca’s efforts towards increased differentiation in the context of Ontario’s postsecondary system design. Chapter Three provides a summary of the methodology used for the enquiry, including research design, data sources, limitations and ethical considerations. In Chapters Four and Five, the findings related to Seneca’s differentiation goals and rationale, and the college’s perceived success in achieving those goals during the study period, are presented. Chapter Six provides a specific, chronological discussion of findings related to Ontario’s polytechnic discourse during the study period. Finally, in Chapters Seven and Eight, the evidence is examined and analyzed in the context of Ontario’s postsecondary system design, persistent pressures for change, and a changing political landscape. Potential policy implications for Ontario and additional opportunities for further, related research are also suggested in Chapter Eight.
CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the thesis by reviewing previous scholarly works in the literature on postsecondary system diversity and differentiation. The discussion is divided into two components. Part A offers an overview of the conceptual ideas in the literature that are most useful in providing a theoretical background for my enquiry. Part B examines the ongoing policy discourse surrounding Ontario’s system design, and the ways in which these conceptual ideas have emerged in the context of increasing pressures for change in this province.

A. Theoretical Framework: Diversity and Differentiation

This research enquiry was guided by the literature on postsecondary system diversity and differentiation, and specifically those aspects related to the processes of differentiation, institutional convergence and isomorphism as described by Birnbaum (1993), Codling and Meek (2006), Morphew (2009) and van Vught (2007). The application of this theoretical framework in the context of a binary system design was particularly useful in examining Seneca’s differentiation journey during the study period.

2.1 Elusive Definitions and Terminology

According to Birnbaum (1983), it is difficult to identify a commonly understood and accepted definition of diversity in higher education. In addition, the uses of the terms “differentiation” and “diversity” in the literature (and in practice) can be confusing. Some practitioners and scholars use the terms interchangeably; in other cases, these terms are presented in contexts that are quite distinct. Further complicating matters, I am aware as a former practitioner that the more common usage of the term “diversity” in practice (in the Ontario college sector, at least) is in reference to discussions of student and employee
demographics and policies designed to ensure non-traditional populations are supported. Finally, in the more recent Ontario discourse around differentiation, there are mixed usages of these terms. For example, five Ontario CAATs received official “differentiated status” from government in the early 2000s, yet in the persistent debate about whether Ontario’s higher education system should seek to become more differentiated and what that might look like, there has arguably been a tendency to focus the discussion (whether deliberate or not) on the need for greater diversity within the university sector.

For purposes of this thesis, a useful definition of diversity in higher education is offered by Trow (1995) and cited in Codling and Meek (2006):

...the existence of distinct forms of post-secondary education, of institutions and groups of institutions within a state or nation that have different and distinctive missions, educate and train for different lives and careers, have different styles of instruction, are organized and funded and operate under different laws and relationships to government. (p. 5)

Interestingly, Trow’s definition provides a broader lens for considering institutional differences than some institutional categorization systems tend to reflect. As Skolnik (2011) notes, there is a tendency in higher education to focus solely on programmatic diversity, and in particular, types of credentials offered, when distinguishing between institutions. This is a very limited view of diversity that can constrain the processes and outcomes of system differentiation.

Van Vught (2007) provides a useful distinction between the concepts of diversity and differentiation in higher education, drawing on Birnbaum (1983) and building on Huisman’s (1995) discussion of external diversity. According to van Vught, the term “diversity” describes a static situation, a snapshot at a specific point in time, of the variety of entities that exist within a system; “differentiation” is a dynamic process in which new
entities (in whole or in part) emerge within a system (2007, p. 2). His analysis focuses on
differentiation and diversity within higher education systems, rather than within higher
education institutions, which is consistent with my interest in this discussion of Seneca in
the larger context of the Ontario system (p. 2).

Building on Stadtman (1980), Birnbaum (1983) offers a useful, further distinction
between internal and external diversity, suggesting that variations within a single
institution constitute “internal” diversity, and differences between institutions constitute
“external” or “institutional diversity”. Birnbaum argues, for example, that many higher
education institutions in the U.S. have become increasingly more internally diverse as they
increase in size and complexity, diversify their programming (and therefore become less
specialized), and respond to the educational needs of non-traditional student populations
(p. 38). In response to concerns that external diversity in the U.S. in the 1970s was
decreasing, Stadtman (1980) argued that such anxieties were unfounded and premature,
suggesting that less external diversity between institutions is often offset by important
increases in comprehensiveness within institutions, (i.e., greater internal diversity) (in
Birnbaum, 1983, p. 62). Although it is interesting to note that this same trend may describe
Ontario over the past twenty years, my research focus is more specifically on the ways in
which Seneca became different than other higher education institutions in Ontario (and/or
more similar to some) during the period of this study (“external diversity”), and on ‘how’
and ‘why’ this occurred (the “differentiation process”). This is not to say that there wasn’t
internal diversity and differentiation occurring within Seneca during this same period, but
such a discussion goes beyond the scope of this case study except where it may be relevant
to a discussion of the external differentiation journey (e.g., related, internal tensions).
2.2 Benefits of Diversity

Birnbaum (1983) prefaces his discussion on diversity in higher education by stating that diversity is “assumed to be good”, describing institutional diversity as “one of the major ideological pillars of American higher education” alongside quality and accessibility (p. ix). Birnbaum cites the Carnegie Commission (1973a), Carnegie Foundation (1975), and others in suggesting that one of the main reasons for the “high performance of the American higher education system” is its institutional diversity (p. xi). In these discussions, Birnbaum notes that a diverse higher education system enables individual institutions to “specialize” across a number of dimensions. According to the report of the Carnegie Commission (1973b):

(T)he search for excellence can be aided by specialization which allows not only a concentration of attention and effort, but also a higher status for some endeavours than they would have if they were subordinated to others in the same institution. (In Birnbaum, 1983, p. 72)

Birnbaum offers a useful overview of the major arguments in favour of external diversity. With references to Stadtman (1980), Birnbaum notes that diversity enables a higher education system to be both stable and responsive at the same time, allowing the system collectively to meet varied student needs, and respond to varied student profiles and academic backgrounds, learning styles and capacities (1983, p. 61). He argues that there are institutional, societal and systemic grounds to support diversity in higher education, including claims of increased institutional effectiveness, increased access to social mobility for a broader segment of society, greater innovation and reform through increased competition and resource dependency, and greater responsiveness to changing environmental realities, including social, economic and political pressures. Further, according to Birnbaum (1983), the United States is able to offer its higher education
students second “and even third chances” because diversity among institutions has been coupled with system integration that facilitates credit transfer and mobility:

There is no false start in higher education, no student errors in college or program choice, nor poorly motivated or poorly qualified students, nor underachieving of students with low confidence who can’t have their errors in judgment rectified at some point by advancing to another program or institution. (p. 12)

The argument that diversity is an important strategy for meeting the varied educational needs of students, resulting in increased access, transferability and social mobility benefits, offers an important contextual backdrop for this case study. Birnbaum suggests an additional, particularly relevant benefit of system diversity in the context of Ontario’s current binary system design. Citing Clark (1976, 1981) and Trow (1979), Birnbaum observes that institutional diversity enables the successful co-existence of mass and elite education – and therefore, offers a means of responding simultaneously to the philosophical pillars of both quality and access (1983, p.33). Clark (1976) further suggests that “mass systems must be more differentiated than elite ones” (in Birnbaum, 1983, p.33), noting that this is requisite if the institutions offering mass education are to remain responsive to local labour markets, varied student profiles, diverse learning styles and educational goals, and other social, political and environmental factors. Birnbaum (1983) argues that institutional diversity within and between institutions offering mass and elite education (paralleling Ontario’s college and university sectors, perhaps) is important for reducing tensions between these two philosophical foundations, and indeed, creates an important interdependence (a “dynamic interaction”) between those institutions and across the system:

Without the tensions between institutional types (and in varying degrees within institutions) that arise from these two different approaches to higher education, it is doubtful whether the higher educational needs of a pluralistic industrialized society
could be successfully met. A system of elite higher education without the balancing force of mass higher education would not be politically or socially viable; a system of mass higher education without the academic models and values of elite institutions would be unsound educationally and politically. Each subsystem depends upon the existence of the other; each subsystem in turn, is based upon the existence of institutional diversity. (p. 17)

On an emotional level, those who work closely with the Ontario college sector might object to a broad-brush extension of Birnbaum’s arguments, suggesting that the Ontario CAAT system would be “unsound” educationally in the absence of university values and influence - but perhaps this emotional reaction epitomizes the crux of the systemic tensions that exist in a binary system. According to Trow (1979), the “survival of elite higher education depends absolutely upon the existence of a comprehensive system of non-elite institutions” (cited in Birnbaum, 1983, p. 285). One might speculate that this could be an underlying factor, at least in part, in the apparent resistance by some universities to the momentum enjoyed by some Ontario colleges in the early 2000s as the colleges entered into the world of baccalaureate degrees and research grants. This dynamic interaction and potential systemic tension within and between the two sectors of a binary system, offers an important backdrop for this research enquiry.

Clark et al. (2009) suggest that the “dominant story” in Ontario’s higher education landscape over the past 50 years has been the transition from an elite system to a mass system, and then from a mass system to a system that attempts to offer universal access (greater than 50% participation by adults aged 24 -34) (p. 23). This is significant in the context of Trow’s (1983) observations that almost every challenge in higher education systems (and in society more broadly), from financial issues to governance, curriculum and faculty recruitment), can be better understood if these are examined in the context of “growth” and “expansion” as postsecondary systems transition from one phase (e.g. mass
Ontario’s movement towards a “near universal” higher education system over the past 50 years and the potential challenges therein, provides an important contextual landscape for this study.

Despite Birnbaum’s (1983) clear conviction that diversity in higher education is beneficial, he notes that it has costs as well as benefits. He stresses that diversity is only one value that higher education policy makers should be aware of, when considering resource allocation and strategic alternatives. He speaks of the tension between discussions of system diversity and discussions of educational quality, noting that these are often assumed to be inversely-related. Birnbaum also acknowledges the high fiscal cost of a diverse system, resulting from the built-in “slack” that necessarily exists to ensure institutions can remain responsive and adapt to niche opportunities.

Skolnik (1986) observes that Birnbaum’s (1983) work emphasizes the many commonly accepted benefits of diversity, with only limited discussion of potential negative aspects. According to Skolnik (1986), one important, possible drawback is the inequality of experiences that individual students may have depending on which institution they have the opportunity to attend in a diverse system (p. 21). Skolnik notes that highly diverse systems present potential institutional inequalities and possible, consequent inequalities in quality and service levels offered to students (p. 21). In such a system, Skolnik argues, it can be difficult to identify any common characteristics of a postsecondary education. In addition, Skolnik suggests that too much specialization, particularly around subcultures, can lead to fewer and narrower exposures to differences among students and faculty (p. 21). He reflects on the tradeoffs of increased institutional specialization and the efficiencies and innovation that often follow, when measured against the potential, reduced
interaction between different programs, credentials and activities (such as research and teaching).

2.3 Measuring Diversity

If one accepts the generally accepted notion that diversity in higher education is beneficial, then it is important to be able to understand whether a given postsecondary system is, indeed, diverse - or diverse enough to yield some of the intended benefits. It is also valuable to be able to determine if changes are occurring in the degree of diversity that exists in that system. Birnbaum (1983), Huisman (1995) and others offer ways of measuring diversity, through the selection of variables that describe institutions relative to one another. Birnbaum (1983) expresses dissatisfaction with the typologies typically used to categorize higher education institutions, suggesting that these either present too few categories, or the available categories are too broad, with too much emphasis on the similarities between institutions rather than differences. He proposes an alternative, seven-category typology for purposes of quantifying external diversity, ranging from systemic and structural diversity (based on historical and legal foundations) to programmatic, procedural, reputational, cultural and constitutential diversity (i.e. relating to differences in populations served).

In his study, Birnbaum (1983) compares the types of higher education institutions and their distribution in eight selected States in 1960, to those that existed in the same jurisdictions in 1980. To measure the change in system diversity, he uses a multi-dimensional “diversity index” (according to six programmatic and structural variables, each with varying values, used to define institutional type), in order to create a quantitative indicator to assist in measuring and describing the changes over time, differences between
states, and differences between institutions. According to Birnbaum,

> Comparisons show not only how the population of institutions differed during the two periods, but also the extent to which such differences reflected the development of new institutions, the demise or merging of old ones, and the transformation of those that existed over the entire twenty-year period. (p. xii)

Birnbaum (1983) concludes that, although there was significant change within and among the institutions and their broader higher education systems in each state, and despite enormous growth in enrolment, number of institutions and overall investment in postsecondary education, there was no increase in overall system diversity between 1960 and 1980. In fact, Birnbaum notes with “concern but not alarm” that, although American higher education was still extremely diverse, there was an overall, slow decline in diversity during the study period, reflected in almost all individual sample states as well as collectively. “It appears that the higher education system has used the vast increase in resources primarily to replicate existing forms (such as the community college) rather than to create new ones” (p.144). Birnbaum’s study was extended to the period 1972 -2002 by Morphew (2006), who found zero (or negative) growth in overall diversity, despite many important changes in the nature and activities, structures and programs of the institutions and systems during that period (cited in van Vught, 2007, p. 13).

In his examination of differentiation processes in varying environmental circumstances, Birnbaum (1983) draws on the theory of “natural selection” normally used to describe the evolution of biological species in ecology in order to explain changes in organized populations. Birnbaum also provides a useful definition of evolution for purposes of this thesis, as the “filling of niches within an ecosystem” (p. 27). His summary of changes in diversity across jurisdictions examines the evolutionary effects of the environment on institutional form. He argues that higher education systems are made up of
evolving parts (the individual institutions) whose “component parts” (variables or characteristics of those institutions) change as a result of natural selection (p. x). In presenting his results, Birnbaum provides a critical analysis of the natural selection method and its suitability in explaining the consequent survival and demise of higher education institutions, as compared to the “resource dependency method” used by prior researchers (which focuses on individual institutions and the ways they adjust and/or change by making tactical and strategic choices in response to the environment). Birnbaum concludes that the resource dependency model may be most useful for examining changes in individual institutions over short periods of time, whereas the natural selection model is more valuable for studying changes in populations of institutions over longer periods.

According to Birnbaum (1983), the natural selection model offers important insights regarding the impact of the environment on institutional survival (and demise), and policies that would likely increase diversity in higher education. Birnbaum maintains that the responsiveness and stability of a higher education system are strengthened when the emergence of new institutions, structures and programs is not only permitted but encouraged (p. 151). Using this theoretical model, the introduction of degrees at some Ontario CAATs in the early 2000s could be seen to reflect a natural institutional “evolution”, triggered by a system design that was lacking in external diversity (leaving a gap or “niche” that needed to be addressed) - at a time when environmental forces were demanding choice and mobility. This line of enquiry is examined further in Chapters Four and Five.

2.4 The Process of Differentiation - and “Dedifferentiation”

In describing the five phases of higher education development which have
characterized the post-war years across jurisdictions, Codling and Meek (2006) note that there was one constant underpinning in policy development that characterized many systems, despite the dramatic changes that were occurring: the “publicly stated desire by governments to promote diversity and differentiation among their higher education institutions” (p. 3). They also observe, interestingly, that governments have used diversity as a fundamental policy driver in different jurisdictions to defend both binary and unitary system design. Further, and perhaps most significant to the Ontario context, Codling and Meek discuss the steady trend in most systems towards increased institutional conformity (decreased diversity) despite repeated government reaffirmations of the desirability of diversity. Their paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the conditions and factors that affect diversity in higher education and the seemingly inevitable trend toward institutional “convergence”. In looking at the literature on differentiation and diversity, the alternative terms of “dedifferentiation”, “institutional homogenization”, “convergence” and “isomorphism” are used (almost interchangeably) to examine this trend.

Codling and Meek's (2006) twelve propositions on diversity and five key factors which influence institutional diversity in various environmental conditions, offer an interesting theoretical backdrop for considering the Ontario context between 2001 and 2012, including Seneca’s journey towards increased differentiation. Based on an exploration of the higher education systems of Australia and New Zealand, Codling and Meek’s model explores the variables, parameters and key factors that influence institutional convergence, concluding that, in the majority of environmental conditions and circumstances, system design tendencies will favour convergence rather than diversity unless there is specific, directed government policy and intervention to the contrary.
[emphasis added], up to and including funding intervention. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of several other scholars, and seems particularly pertinent to my discussion of Ontario’s system design context, and emerging opportunities both within and across institutional types.

Using a conceptual framework based on “open systems” theory, van Vught (2007) offers a comprehensive examination of the contextual conditions and circumstances that are likely to hold an institution in place, and those that typically will allow it to evolve or differentiate itself. He argues that it is possible to better understand the “social phenomenon” of differentiation and diversity by examining the behaviours and perspectives of the various actors in a higher education system, including the institutions themselves and government (p.2). In what he terms the “reputation race”, van Vught notes that typical higher education ranking systems tend to favour traditional academic values and performance measures (such as academic research), and therefore, in the race to be ranked higher, institutions will mimic behaviours of those at the higher echelons of the ranking - thus increasing homogeneity of the system, and decreasing diversity. According to van Vught, “The dynamics of higher education are first and foremost a result of the competition for reputation” (p. 17). Van Vught notes further that this race for reputation is expensive, for institutions and for society, since the institutions are in constant need of more resources in order to successfully compete, calling this “the rising cost of excellence” (p. 18).

In his review of previous works on differentiation and diversity, Huisman (1995) identifies a number of studies that focused on the different roles and functions fulfilled by different types of institutions in a higher education system, and the driving forces behind
changes in these. Rhoades’ (1990) examination of the higher education systems of Sweden, France, England and the United States between 1960 and 1980 (in Huisman, 1995), includes an analysis of the roles and actions of different actors in the differentiation process. Rhoades concluded that the environmental conditions in all four countries (high student enrolments followed by slower economic growth and reduced government funding, and the introduction of new institutions and institutional types) should have led to increased institutional competition and a consequent increase in differentiation - but the differentiation process was inhibited by human factors. “And only through considering people’s beliefs and actions can we explain the tendency toward dedifferentiation in higher education. Human agents determine both pace and path of differentiation” (as cited in Huisman, 1995, p. 29). Rhoades’ (1990) findings include a number of observations regarding the political interests and influence of various stakeholders on differentiation processes, including the important role that academic professionals play in this regard. “I found repeated instances of the profession's stiff resistance to a variety of reforms that could have effected dedifferentiation” (in Huisman, p. 31). Referring to Rhoades’ (1990) study, Huisman concludes: “The academic profession defends with success its own norms and values and achieves dedifferentiation. The input of laity (and the state) is sometimes necessary to stress other interests in the system and to increase differentiation” (1995, p. 31).

In a discussion connecting the processes of differentiation to the processes of change, Clark (1983) describes the impact of academic power on the political dynamics that typically surround change in higher education settings (in Huisman, 1995). According to Clark, when differentiation occurs in higher education, “...interest is basically divided
between those already vested and those seeking to become vested; the outcomes of the struggle are determined by relative power; and power is rooted in respective legitimacies” (in Huisman, p. 33).

2.5 Ensuring Diversity in Higher Education Systems

Birnbaum’s (1983) study focused on measuring changes in external diversity in the U.S. over time; he did not examine the cause(s) of such changes (or lack of), nor the processes leading to these. One question that emerges from his study, for example, is whether (and how) central state/government direction and levers impacted diversity in a particular jurisdiction. In summarizing his findings, Birnbaum offers a number of recommendations to assist in ensuring that higher education systems maintain a requisite level of diversity. As Huisman (1995) notes, however, his hypotheses in this regard have never been tested.

According to Birnbaum (1983), when a state wants to maintain or increase diversity, it should relax centralized planning and controls, and introduce policies instead to stimulate and reward innovation. Birnbaum maintains that centralized state planning stifles the experimentation and innovation that otherwise would naturally occur, as institutions strive to ‘fit’ new niches; as a result, over-zealous state controls can lead to homogenization of norms, values and structures (p. 172). “Because of these limitations, to a great extent the concept of planned diversity is a contradiction in terms” (p. 173). He argues that controlled planning can limit the alternatives that are considered, leading to fewer rather than more variations, and often only those that resemble existing structures and programs rather than innovative ones. Huisman (1995) notes, however, that there are counter-examples in other jurisdictions where centralization of government planning and
intervention results in \textit{increased} system diversity (emphasis added), such as in California, where a diversified public sector is maintained through legislation. Huisman's observations are more consistent with those of Codling and Meek (2006), who concluded, when looking at national higher education systems like those in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, that “…convergent tendencies predominate amongst higher education institutions because policy and regulation are not strong enough to sustain differences between institutions” (p. 9). Codling and Meek further note that “…one of the most powerful forms of policy intervention that a government can use to maintain differences between institutions is that of higher education funding policy” (p. 12). This dialogue around whether government intervention, and the nature and extent of that intervention (including state planning, policy, legislation and funding levers), will stimulate or stifle diversity in a higher education system, is relevant to my examination of system design in Ontario.

\textbf{2.6 Other Jurisdictions and the Role of Government}

As a contextual backdrop for his examination of differentiation and diversity in the Netherlands, Huisman (1995) provides an overview of efforts used by policy makers in a cross-section of other jurisdictions to increase diversity, in order to highlight different approaches. Huisman’s snapshot looks at the higher education systems of the United States, Australia, Finland, Austria and the Netherlands at the time, and focuses specifically on systemic and programmatic diversity as defined by Birnbaum (1983). Huisman (1995) notes that these two classifications partially overlap when the type of institution dictates the type and/or level of programming the respective institutions are permitted to offer (such as in Ontario’s binary system); it is therefore not always possible to limit discussion
to just one of these two aspects.

Noting in his dissertation that the United States is often considered the prototype of a diversified higher education system, Huisman (1995, p. 2) contrasts the wide range of institutional types that exists across the U.S. to the approach in Australia, where diversity is structured as a unified system. Huisman notes that Australian policy makers assume that state interference is required in order to ensure diversity is increased and higher education objectives are met, by determining and creating the necessary conditions (p. 2). In the United States, however, it is generally assumed that “diversity can only be realized in a system where market forces prevail rather than governmental regulations” (p. 3). In Finland, diversity was one objective of a larger set of restructuring proposals that the Ministry of Education introduced in 1992, including the creation of a new, non-university sector and an invitation for educational reform through experimentation and innovation. In the United Kingdom, university status was granted to all existing polytechnics after a successful polytechnic “experiment” that lasted over 25 years. Although Huisman’s overview is now dated, it offers a useful snapshot of the range of approaches to increasing diversity in higher education that has been attempted over time by various governments.

In his examination of diversity in the Netherlands specifically, Huisman provides a chronological overview of the Dutch government’s ongoing efforts to promote programmatic differentiation over a forty-five year period from 1949 to 1993. These covered a range of policies, regulations and strategies including limits on government interference in program decisions; requests for alternative programs and more freedom of choice for students; elimination of the binary system of university and non-university sectors, replaced by a four-category system; and proposals to increase differentiation in
study duration. Most significantly, Huisman notes that very few proposals by the Dutch government or its advisory boards during that period resulted in any form of differentiation, except for the “partly successful” proposal to introduce a three year baccalaureate. “The policy documents make it clear that government wants to convince the institutions of the importance of differentiation, but government has not taken explicit steps to achieve the stated objectives” (p. 154). Huisman further notes that the nature of the instruments used by the Dutch government over that forty-five year period changed over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, government tried to effect change using legislation, which was translated into specific objectives for differentiation through associated regulations, but most often the interpretation of those regulations was left to academia (p. 158). In the 1970s, the government tended to use the instrument of information more frequently than legislation, with various policy papers released to test the feasibility of plans with the institutions and other stakeholders. By the 1980s, the government not only released policy papers; but used these to stimulate a written dialogue between the Ministry and individual institutions to develop and implement the ideas in those papers. Most often, however, government was non-prescriptive (“vague”, Huisman suggests) in its recommendations regarding ‘how’ its objectives might be achieved, and left this to the varied interpretations of the institutions (p. 158). Specifically, Huisman notes that many of the government’s policies, regulations and informational documents failed to include specific guidelines or instruments designed to achieve the intended objectives, nor any rewards for implementing these (or penalties for not complying). Based on this review, Huisman concludes that government policies should include stimuli (such as targeted resource allocation and/or status-granting) in order to motivate higher education actors
(such as individual institutions) to comply with government objectives (p.161).

2.7 Academic Drift and Mission Creep

Skolnik (2011) speaks of the frequent charges of “academic drift” and “mission creep” which tend to accompany attempts by community colleges to move into baccalaureate degree jurisdiction, often with pejorative connotations (p.367). Building on Fisher and Rubenson (1998) and Russell (2010), Skolnik suggests that these terms are typically used to describe situations where an institution takes on additional function(s) that reach beyond its original mission, and in so doing, potentially compromise the institution’s ability to pay the same attention to other components of that mission. More recently, the concept of “vocational drift” has been added to these discussions, used to describe the tendency among some universities to push the traditional academic boundaries and become more “polytechnic-like”, by offering applied programs and applied research initiatives in partnership with business (Doern, 2008, p. 5).

To a limited extent, Skolnik (2011) attempts to counter the negative sentiments surrounding accusations of mission creep by pointing to some important advances in higher education that have resulted from changes in institutional mission, such as increased access to non-traditional student populations and accelerated research development. Most noteworthy, however, he reminds us that the use of these terms as a reaction to community college attempts to offer baccalaureate degrees implies that institutions can be adequately defined by the credentials they offer. As noted earlier, Skolnik maintains that by focusing solely on credentials offered, we oversimplify the means by which institutions in higher education should be differentiated from one another. In the Ontario context, the role of the Ontario CAATs (both degree granting and non-degree
colleges) in responding to non-traditional student populations, and in delivering applied education, is a case in point.

Thelen (2003) maintains that by layering new types of institutions on top of old ones, the old institutions can continue to survive (in Trick, 2005). Thelen further suggests that, within an existing institutional arrangement, it is possible for a new “coalition” to arise that establishes a new institutional arrangement without replacing the old one. Thelen’s concept of “institutional layering” (the partial renegotiation of some elements of a given set of institutions while leaving others in place) provides an interesting, potential backdrop for considerations of mission creep in the Ontario context. Although this theoretical framework is used in Trick’s (2005) research to describe changes in universities (such as research policy and funding), it seems quite applicable to an examination of differentiation among the Ontario colleges during the period of my research, and the resultant dynamics in Ontario’s broader postsecondary landscape. The very creation of the Ontario college system as an “alternative” to university for those who were not seen to be academically qualified for university, may have resulted in a binary system design that was inevitably destined to become ‘blurred at the seams’.

2.8 The College Baccalaureate Degree

In a book edited by Floyd, Skolnik and Walker (2005), the increasing opportunities for postsecondary students in North America to access baccalaureate degrees through community college are examined, including the practical issues and policy implications of this development. This includes perspectives of practitioners and scholars at the forefront of the trend, both within Canada and in the United States. Floyd et al. describe this trend as a significant development in postsecondary education, but also as a “hot and controversial
topic” among institutional leadership, students, politicians, and business leaders, raising important questions about access, costs, curriculum and core institutional purpose (p. 2). The editors note that community college mandates are traditionally characterized by a commitment to affordability, open-access admissions, geographic accessibility and programming with duration of less than four years. With references to the literature including prior works by Floyd and Walker (2003) and Skolnik (2001), they highlight the conclusions of some that degree-granting is a natural evolution of a college’s commitment to access (i.e. an “expansion” of mission) while others see it as a threat to core community college values (a significant “change” in mission).

Floyd et al. (2005) explain that their purpose in editing this book was to document, describe and attempt to understand the community college baccalaureate trend; to stimulate public dialogue and encourage further research; and to help create informed understanding of diverse views. In so doing, they hoped to contribute to the development of important policy in this area. To assist in achieving their goals, they focused on manuscripts from contributing practitioners and scholars, using stories of college degree programs and practices to help describe the history, rationale, institutional initiatives and trends in both U.S. and Canada (including the creation of the Community College Baccalaureate Association, CCBA), and the resultant issues and themes for policy and further research.

Floyd et al. (2005) acknowledged that the facts presented in their book would become dated almost immediately after publication, but they offer an important snapshot in history given the changing landscape and rate of change relevant to this topic. Throughout the book, several of the contributors note that the movement of the Ontario
colleges into baccalaureate programming is especially important to watch, since the history of the Ontario colleges is very different from that of community colleges in other provinces and in the United States.

In a foreword by then president and CEO of the League for Innovation in Community Colleges, Mark David Milliron suggests that the book provides a balanced examination of both the positive outcomes and the challenges of this trend (in Floyd et al., 2005, p. ix). Milliron emphasizes that the introduction of pathways to baccalaureates, and decisions to offer new stand-alone college baccalaureates, should both be driven by students’ educational needs rather than by executive or faculty ego (p. x). He urges colleges to ensure core institutional values are not compromised, and to remain respectful of the distinct roles that different institutions play in higher education. He also speaks to the range and extent of internal cultural issues that must be acknowledged and addressed when a college begins to offer degrees. Milliron’s messages resonate with me as a former practitioner that lived through this transition at Seneca during the study period, and provide an important backdrop to this examination of Seneca’s differentiation goals and experience.

The ideas presented by several of the contributors to Floyd et al.’s. (2005) book are discussed in the following three sections of this literature review, organized based on themes and emerging issues rather than chronologically by chapter.

2.9 Institutional Identity and Culture

In an examination of the impact of community college degrees on the future of higher education, Townsend (2005) suggests that those who support this new trend see it as consistent with the traditional college mission, as an access strategy that responds to the needs of underserved student populations as well as employers in the local community (p.
This is accomplished by reaching students that otherwise wouldn’t be able to access degree level education due to academic, social, circumstantial and/or confidence barriers (“democratizing higher education”) (p. 181). According to proponents, therefore, the introduction of college degrees is quite consistent with the “core values of easy access, learner-centredness, affordability, and convenience” (p. 182). Townsend also offers an overview of the concerns of those who oppose the college degree trend, including perceptions that the new degrees are often underfunded, that internal funding may be diverted away from diploma programming, questions about degree quality, and the likelihood of mission creep and other institutional changes.

Ward (2001) states that the introduction of baccalaureates in community colleges is a high-risk strategy which creates a serious threat to institutional identity and a shift in emphasis that is “profound and strike[s] at the very heart of their institutional purpose and culture” (cited in Floyd et al., 2005, p. 159). Based on an examination of British polytechnics and colleges that were granted university status in the late 1980s and 1990s, Ward suggests that a change in institutional name and status is not necessarily a positive one, and that such a significant change in institutional identity can be “risky, perhaps even fatal, to institutions that stray beyond their well-defined parameters” (p.159). Ward identifies several areas of concern, including funding, faculty expectations, competition with more established universities for resources, and institutional identity.

Vigil Laden’s (2005) field-based overview of the applied baccalaureates in Ontario is based on interviews with administrators and faculty at three Ontario CAATs, looking at the impact and issues resulting from these new offerings at their institutions. In her data analysis, she categorizes the themes that emerged into five groups, including impact on
institutional culture and identity. She describes the opinions of supporters who see the introduction of degrees as simply a natural expansion of the colleges’ commitment to access and responsiveness to the needs of the current economy (p. 172). Alternatively, she points to Ward (2001) and others who suggest that these new credentials have caused a paradigm shift in the traditional mission of the community college, or mission creep, as discussed earlier. This notion is further developed by Townsend (2005) in her analysis of opinions ‘for and against’ college baccalaureates. According to Laden (2005), the introduction of a number of innovative, entrepreneurial and collaborative transfer and degree-granting strategies by the Ontario colleges in recent years (driven by labour market needs) has increasingly blurred the lines of the colleges’ original mandate. Still, she notes, “(t)he greatest blurring of that line thus far has resulted from the introduction of applied baccalaureate degrees” (p.155).

In a discussion of community colleges and mission creep, Ward (2001) argues that: “Moving away from their primary mission of providing entry-level opportunities for students who otherwise could not gain access to higher education can only serve to dilute and to confuse this mission and possibly place the entire enterprise in jeopardy” (cited in Floyd et al, 2005, p. 14). At the same time, Ward concludes that the ‘true calling’ of community colleges is to educate and train the “broad spectrum of students who pass through their doors...taking those who enroll, preparing them well, and sending them out to be successful in their workplace and in their continued studies” (p. 173).

In an examination of the community college baccalaureate in Canada and its development in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, Skolnik (2005c) identifies three key, emerging issues including the effect of these new credentials on the colleges’ future roles
Skolnik further examines “how the community college baccalaureate affects the way the community college sees itself and the way it is seen by others” (p. 5). In a later work, Skolnik (2009) notes that most colleges that are granted authority to offer degrees not only declare an ongoing commitment to their traditional access mandate, but in fact, this is often a formalized condition attached to their degree-granting authority. Still, Skolnik observes, “as a community college moves more into baccalaureate programming, it may adopt the values of the university” (p. 368). This is consistent with Codling and Meek’s (2006) and van Vught’s (2007) conclusions regarding isomorphism and the “reputation race”, where institutions tend to emulate those they perceive to be of higher ranking or status.

Townsend (2005) points to a new category of institutions created in the United States by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education in 2000, in response to the growing number of U.S. community colleges that started offering bachelor’s degrees between 1970 and 2000. This new category, called “baccalaureate/associate’s colleges” continues to be primarily diploma (associate-degree) and certificate-granting institutions, but at least 10% of their conferrals are at the bachelor’s level (p. 179). Regardless of whether this was intended to be an ‘expansion’ in mission or simply an institutional repositioning, it seems apparent that the Carnegie Commission felt that these institutions had sufficiently differentiated themselves from other community colleges such that a new category was warranted.

According to Townsend (2005), opponents see the new degree credential as threatening a college’s ability to fulfill its fundamental access commitment, negatively impacting the institution’s commitment to transfer education, and potentially, leading the
college to change entirely into a four year institution. Townsend argues, however, that the introduction of the community college baccalaureate (CCB) in Ontario has created a clear and positive reality for Ontario college students – increased access and choice in degree level education, either through the new community college programs, through greater collaboration with other institutions, and/or through increased diploma transfer programs in the 4-yr institutions (p. 187). What is less clear, she emphasizes, is the impact the new degrees will have on the future of the community college as a distinct institutional type. Considering the trends we have already seen in other jurisdictions (including British Columbia and Alberta), and notwithstanding the system design differences in the American higher education system, her reflections about potential institutional ‘morphing’ are particularly relevant: “Only time will tell if the CCB (in Ontario) is the catalyst for transforming the majority of community colleges into baccalaureate/associate’s colleges, which might eventually become baccalaureate colleges-general, in which over half of the degrees conferred are baccalaureates” (p. 188).

2.10 Institutional Transformation

A number of scholars and practitioners have written about the detailed academic, structural and internal changes that colleges have undergone as a result of the introduction of baccalaureate degrees to their credential mix. Furlong (2005) offers a practical, institutional perspective of the detailed processes involved in seeking approval, curriculum development and implementation of college baccalaureate degrees, by examining the experience at St. Petersburg College (SPC), the first community college in Florida to offer these new credentials. Similarly, Remington and Remington (2005) and McKee (2005) document the introduction and implementation of the first baccalaureate degrees at Great
Basin College in Nevada in 1999 and Westark College in Arkansas in 2002, respectively. In the Arkansas case, Westark College also experienced a change in governance and institutional status four years after its first degree was introduced (becoming the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith), but this, according to McKee (2005) was more of a ‘by-product’ of introducing degree programs rather than a deliberate strategic goal (p. 129). According to Floyd et al. (2005), however, most two-year institutions in the United States that had introduced baccalaureate degrees had gone on to become four-year institutions by the time their book was published (p. 184).

Furlong (2005) traces the transformation of St. Petersburg College (SPC) from a junior college to a four-year degree-granting institution in response to changes in state legislation in 2001. According to Furlong, this conversion was part of a multi-pronged solution intended to increase access to baccalaureate education for local students and in response to perceived gaps in workforce development. By legislative authority, SPC was approved and funded to create a University Partnership Centre on six campuses, and to develop and offer its own discrete degrees in niche areas (p. 105). Furlong outlines the approach and strategies employed by the college to ensure it stayed true to its traditional community college mission while adding the new specialized baccalaureate programs. “The college takes the position that, because it is a community college serving its community, its adding programs to address a community need – such as baccalaureate access – is an enhancement of its mission and in no way a move away from that mission” (p. 108). As a result, Furlong stresses that St. Petersburg was able to maintain its commitment to open access, transfer and articulation, remedial education and a focus on teaching as its top priority (p. 107). Furlong further notes the importance of the institution’s “One College"
strategy, designed to avoid fragmentation between the baccalaureate and non-baccalaureate components of the college, and ensured that programs and services added as part of the institutional conversion were available to support students in all types of credentials, from remedial to baccalaureate programs. (The “One College” model could also be an interesting option to consider in the context of concerns identified in Laden’s (2005) interviews with Ontario Colleges regarding the creation of a “two-tiered” faculty.) Furlong’s (2005) overview also identifies key policy issues and research opportunities that emerged as a result of SPC’s transformation to a four-year institution. The importance of staying true to traditional college values is underscored, as is the importance of offering a range of baccalaureate delivery options.

Baker (2011) traces the evolution of Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, from its founding roots as a Methodist-inspired private institution in 1910, through several significant institutional changes and eventually to its transformation into a fully recognized, publicly-funded university in September, 2009. In speaking to this last transformation, Baker stresses that, although the institution went through several phases of development including significant changes in mandate, governance, scale of operation, student clientele and public perception, there was also a “continuity in underlying purpose” and values that was alive and well throughout (p. ix). During this period, he notes, Mount Royal remained true to its cultural traditions and academic values including an insistence on a core curriculum in the liberal arts; an ongoing commitment to meet students’ needs, especially those not met sufficiently by other institutions; a commitment to quality in teaching and learning; and a community focus (p. ix). As the president of Mount Royal at the time, Baker experienced first hand this tension between embracing a new and
expanded identity, while remaining true to fundamental and shared institutional values.

Baker observes that the participants in Mount Royal’s story did not “make the college as they pleased, for it developed in symbiotic relationship with the community...and in ongoing interaction with government ministers, ministry officials, and other post-secondary institutions at home and abroad” (p. ix). Further, according to Baker, his historical overview of Mount Royal’s transformation has significance beyond a case study of institutional transformation - it puts an important spotlight on the development of provincial higher education policy and the changing character of higher education in Alberta and in Canada at the time (p. x). Although much of Baker’s discussion focuses on internal life at Mount Royal, he places this in a broader context, including the Alberta government’s evolving policy on higher education and Mount Royal’s own struggle for “differentiation”, first within the Alberta college system and then, as a new university.

Baker’s examination of Mount Royal’s differentiation journey, placed in the context of a broader, provincial system design, is consistent with the focus of this thesis, although his detailed presentation of Mount Royal’s internal transformation goes beyond the scope of my enquiry.

In November, 2007, a new classification scheme for postsecondary institutions in Alberta was announced, and later embedded in an amendment to that province’s Post-Secondary Learning Act, 2008, which included the creation of two new institutional categories: Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions (CARI), representing the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca; and Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institutions (BASI), to include Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College. This latter group was authorized to offer four-year baccalaureate
degrees as well as certificates, diplomas and applied (three year) degrees, but research was limited to applied research and scholarly activity. The colleges in Ontario that had received differentiated status watched the Alberta landscape with great interest, noting that a more diverse postsecondary system in Alberta including new institutional categories, was consistent with the direction that Ontario appeared to be heading in allowing some colleges to differentiate themselves from the others. According to Baker, however, the new Alberta categorization within which Mount Royal found itself fell short of that institution’s aspirations, by forcing the institution to “fit” in a newly defined college category (emphasis added):

(T)he obvious purpose of this distinction was to keep Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan in the college category even as they offered four-year degree programs. They would be undergraduate universities but without the name university ...universities with a college atmosphere. (p. 261)

Regardless of the college vs. university categorization, it is interesting that the description Baker provides of Mount Royal’s institutional aspirations during this period so closely matches the description of “a new type of institution” proposed for Ontario by several scholars and policy advisors in recent years (See Clark et al., 2009; Jones and Skolnik, 2009; Clark, Trick and Van Loon, 2011). This discourse is examined further in Part B of this Chapter.

Kevin Ramdas (2017) examines institutional change in the Ontario CAAT system resulting from the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 and Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002. More specifically, through case studies of three Ontario Colleges (including Seneca), he studies the extent of institutional change in each institution from 2002 -2012 (essentially the same time period as this thesis), including changes in structure, processes, governance and institutional actors. Grounded in
organizational theory, Ramdas’s research provides important contextual and comparative data relevant to this study. Building on the study of organizations proposed by Selznick (1957), Ramdas found that all three colleges made significant decisions as a result of the two pieces of legislation that are “slowly changing the personalities of the institutions” (p. 23). He notes that the extent of these changes varied among the colleges, however, such that “processes of differentiation are happening” within the Ontario CAAT system (p.23).

2.11 Differentiated College Status in Ontario

Skolnik (2005c) offers some important contextual background surrounding the introduction of baccalaureate degrees and formal differentiation in the Ontario Colleges, quoting then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Dianne Cunningham, in April, 2000: “We have been exploring all possible options to increase choices for getting a degree, including some groundbreaking new approaches” (p.156). In February 2003, the government announced that four Ontario Colleges were being approved for greater diversification of program offerings (“differentiated status”), three of which would be known as Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITALs), with up to 15% of programming permitted at the degree level (i.e. Humber, Sheridan and Conestoga); Georgian was approved alternatively as an “Institute of University Partnerships and Advanced Studies”) (p. 159). Skolnik notes that Seneca was approved for differentiated status almost immediately thereafter, but did not request nor receive the ITAL nomenclature. By November, 2003, there were eleven Ontario colleges, including those with formal differentiated status, offering a total of twenty-two baccalaureate degrees according to the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU, 2003).

Based on interviews conducted with faculty and administrators in three Ontario
colleges, Laden (2005) offers some important insights into the dynamics that may have been present in the colleges in this changing context. Laden notes that the issue of institutional identity only came up in her interviews when the coincidental name change of a handful of colleges to Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITALs) was introduced. The most common understanding of this, according to her interviewees, was that the ITALs were “the new polytechnics”, with some further suggestion that these were “the next generation of CAATs” (p. 172). This is examined in more detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis.

Among the areas identified for further research by Floyd, Skolnik and Walker, (2005) are several with contextual relevance to my examination of Seneca’s differentiation journey and diversity in Ontario, including the impact of offering college baccalaureate degrees on institutional culture, transfer rates, transfer enrolments of four-year institutions (e.g. universities in Ontario), and institutional positioning of the universities. Most noteworthy, the editors also discuss the higher education ‘disruption’ that the new college degrees create in terms of our historical assumptions about institutional roles and traditional definitions of a baccalaureate degree. In the U.S., for example, several four-year institutions have now developed “upside-down degrees”, independent of any partnership with the community colleges, challenging the assumption that the major field should build on a solid base of general education in the first two years (p.187). Seneca’s development of the Interdisciplinary Degree in 2011 (an “upside-down” degree) is consistent with this alternative view, and coincidental with this trend in some four-year institutions. This outcome, and other system or institutional changes arising from college baccalaureates, are beyond the scope of my enquiry and were therefore not specifically explored during the
B. System Design Discourse in Ontario

The study period for this thesis (2001-2012) overlaps, especially in its later years, with increasing pressures for system design change in Ontario as a result of several environmental conditions - including sustainability challenges, growth in demand for undergraduate degrees, expansion of the research university model, changing immigration and participation patterns, global competition, and labour market pressures for advanced technological skills (See Clark et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2011; Skolnik, 2012; Weingarten et al., 2010; and others). In response, a number of scholars, policy advisors and practitioners have offered system reform recommendations that build on the theoretical concepts of differentiation and diversity presented above. This section provides an overview of the ongoing policy discourse in Ontario, including the proposed solutions that have emerged in this context.

2.12 Calls for Change

In Clark, Moran, Skolnik and Trick (2009), greater differentiation is described as “crucial” to an enhanced post-secondary education system in Ontario (p.181). According to Skolnik, (2005b): "Attention to system design is an important part of policy-making for higher education" (cited in Clark et al., 2009, p.145). Clark et al. (2009) further argue that one of the ‘core responsibilities’ of those who oversee a higher education system is the ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of a given system design and the implementation of modifications as required. “...(S)ystem design is integrally linked with system governance” (p. 145). Clark et al. further suggest that this kind of system monitoring and design change was explicitly anticipated by William Davis, then Minister of Education, when he
introduced legislation in 1965 establishing the Ontario colleges. (p. 201). This notwithstanding, the authors note that no significant system design changes have been made in Ontario since that time. Indeed, Ontario has not had a clearly articulated provincial vision or strategy for postsecondary education over that period (p. 201). According to Clark et al., this situation is exacerbated by Canada’s federation of provinces, each with independent responsibility for post-secondary education. Jones (2009) notes that the provinces in Canada have “strongly resisted direct federal government interference in educational policy issues at any level from kindergarten to graduate education” (p. 372). As a result, there is no national agency or Ministry with responsibility for overseeing postsecondary system education in Canada, and no national goals, strategy or policy framework guiding higher education. Clark et al. (2009) note, however, that a number of observers and stakeholders have called for a national strategy for Canada over the past decade, citing as examples the Canadian Council on Learning in 2007 and Ontario’s former premier, Bill Davis, in 2008 (p.145). In contrast to other jurisdictions, they observe, there is also no national accreditation mechanism in Canada, although a voluntary degree qualifications framework was introduced by the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) in 2007, and supported by all provinces and territories at the time (p.146). Clark et al. emphasize that this lack of a national context only underscores the urgent need in Ontario for clear, definitive and deliberate provincial government leadership in postsecondary education. “The absence of planned and complementary diversity among the province’s post-secondary institutions limits the system’s effectiveness in both education and research” (p. 189).
2.13 Ontario University Sector

According to Clark et al. (2009), “...a striking feature of the Ontario university system in comparison with other public systems of comparable size has been the lack of mandated institutional differentiation by mission, function, areas of study, educational philosophy, or approach to program delivery” (p. 150). To demonstrate, they note that almost all of Ontario’s current universities offer a full range of undergraduate and graduate programs, and all are committed to both teaching and research. Although there are acknowledged differences in various university cultures, character and traditions in Ontario, Clark et al. observe that university systems in many other jurisdictions also display “differences in mission and role that are the result of deliberate public policy decisions” (p. 150). The authors argue that a few, newer universities in Ontario have specialized mandates, but these too are seemingly destined to expand their respective mandates in an attempt to be the same as their more established peers. This is consistent with van Vught’s (2007) analysis of the inevitable postsecondary “reputation race”, Codling and Meek’s (2006) conclusions regarding institutional convergence (p. 150), and Pizarro Milian et al’s. (2016) observations regarding isomorphism.

In a broader discussion of Ontario’s postsecondary system design, Clark et al. (2009) also offer commentary on the financial sustainability of the status quo. The authors note that Ontario uses the “highest cost institutional model” (p.171) for educating its baccalaureate students (i.e. delivered primarily by universities that offer degree programs at all levels and also engage in substantial research activity) and that this approach is no longer sustainable and warrants “significant modification” (p. 203). Clark et al. (2011) expand on this, adding that “...there are enormous opportunities to improve the cost-
effectiveness of the Ontario higher education system through institutional differentiation, through greater use of teaching-oriented faculty within existing universities, and through the creation of teaching-oriented institutions” (p. 20). Clark et al. (2009) further suggest that more institutional differentiation in Ontario could also provide opportunities to improve quality of undergraduate education (by matching individual learner needs with institutional characteristics) and to increase accessibility for groups that have been historically underrepresented in universities (p. 173).

2.14 Access, Equality and the Policy Context

In his doctoral thesis, Trick (2005) notes there was very little change in government policy towards Ontario universities in the late 1980s and 1990s despite an environment “filled with pressure for change”– economic, political and fiscal (p. 18). “With occasional exceptions, governments respected the autonomy of each university to manage its internal affairs and the prerogative of each university to set its own mission in a competitive environment” (p. 17). According to Trick, two overarching government commitments from the post-war era dominated the relationships between universities and government in Ontario during the period between 1985 and 2002: that all qualified students should have access to university, and that there should be equality among universities. Despite the fact that there were significant economic, social and environmental variations during that period, Trick observes that these two government commitments created a dominant paradigm that was “embedded in institutions established in the 1950s and 1960s, placing boundaries on the range of available policy options and protecting universities from externally-imposed restructuring during a period of fiscal restraint” (2005, p. 2).

Trick’s (2005) conclusions about a dominant “access” and “equality” paradigm in
Ontario are relevant to this enquiry and the ongoing system diversity discourse in Ontario. As noted by Trick (and subsequently reinforced in Piché, [2013]), these two overarching values have stood the test of time in the university sector despite changing circumstances and environmental conditions. The “access” commitment has evolved over the years, however, and perhaps flip-flopped at times, in terms of whether that commitment was intended to be about “access to postsecondary education” or more narrowly, “access to university”. Trick (2005) traces the origins of the government’s access commitment as declared first by then Premier Frost in the Legislative Assembly in 1958 (p.80). Trick notes that, with the creation of the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in 1965, then Minister of University Affairs Bill Davis provided a broader iteration of the access commitment, (foreshadowing the critical role the CAATs would soon play), by explicitly acknowledging the need to commit to “some form of postsecondary education” for all qualified students. In a summary of government policy as interpreted by the Bovey Commission (1984), however, the government’s commitment seemingly reverted back to the narrower, ‘university-access’ interpretation:

Basic government policy, established two decades ago, has been to ensure that no student who has the requisite capacity will be deprived of the opportunity to find a place in some program of study in some university in Ontario...but not necessarily in the program or university of first choice. (cited in Trick, p. 81)

Fast-forwarding to the 2005 Liberal government’s Reaching Higher Plan (Ontario Budget, 2005), the explicit postsecondary goal was to increase postsecondary participation rates, reinforced in part through the “Ontario Tuition Grant” initiative which applied to both university and college students. More broadly, the government repeatedly declared its commitment to ensure “access to postsecondary education for all qualified Ontario students”, and to increase participation/attainment rates overall, with renewed
commitment to a broad range of postsecondary education and training opportunities from apprenticeship and trades to baccalaureate and graduate study. This explicit commitment to a more-broadly defined access and postsecondary participation was sustained throughout the study period and beyond – withstanding (so far) even the 2018 change in provincial government.

In his thesis, Trick (2005) offers some predictions for the future of Ontario’s postsecondary landscape. “The resilience of the dominant paradigm suggests the future possibility of gains in access for disadvantaged students, renewed financial accessibility programs, and integrating quality into the paradigm” (p.6). The second commitment, however, “equality for all universities”, has been exposed over time as a questionable, inefficient and expensive (if not unsustainable) system design goal, as articulated in much of the recent system design literature (Jones & Skolnik, 2009; Clark et al, 2009; Clark et al, 2011). The system design discourse among some advisors and policy actors in Ontario, and some of the related, more recent scholarly literature, suggests that some Ontario colleges, and/or some new type of postsecondary institution in Ontario, could be well positioned to respond to these expanded notions of access in a more sustainable way.

Trick’s (2005) study period (1985 -2002) ends just as the study period for this research enquiry begins. Some of the same arguments that Trick offers in his thesis regarding university and government relations during those earlier years (and the impact of a dominant paradigm in “putting boundaries around” the possible policy options that otherwise might have been considered), are worth examining for their applicability to relationships among and between Ontario Colleges, universities and the government during the study period for this thesis (2001 – 2012). In fact, Trick explicitly acknowledges
this as a potential research area of “substantial interest” for future consideration (2005, p. 30). Trick’s suggestion that a dominant “access and equality” paradigm during his study served to “protect universities from externally imposed restructuring...” (p. 2), is worth keeping in mind as we examine the reactions of various policy actors in Ontario to the Colleges’ expanded legislative authority and differentiation efforts subsequent to the enabling legislation. The founding premise of Ontario’s colleges, as noted earlier, was that they should operate as a postsecondary alternative in a binary system for those who were not suited to university (Ontario Department of Education, 1967, p. 11). Is it possible that this or other dominant paradigms surrounding the role of the CAATs were so embedded in various policy actors’ assumptions, including the institutions themselves, both colleges and universities as well government, that these created (conscious or subconscious) boundaries around possible policy and legislative options that might otherwise have made sense? Government policy around college-university transfer during much of the study period comes to mind, as do policies around institutional differentiation, PEQAB approvals, ministerial consents for College degrees, and policies concerning access to graduate studies for College degree graduates. Perhaps the dominant paradigm concerning the Ontario CAATs and their foundational mandate to serve students who would not be “served well nor fare well in a university” (Basic Documents, 1967, p. 11) fed assumptions and perceptions about the quality of College programs (including the new degrees), and/or the abilities of College students to handle university curriculum if and when they transfer, or to handle graduate level study after they complete a college degree - despite the various quality assurance policies and checks and balances that were put in place. These specific questions are beyond the immediate scope of this enquiry, but potentially relevant in terms
of the philosophical and political dynamics that may have been in play during Seneca’s differentiation journey during the study period.

2.15 Access in a Binary System Design

According to Clark et al (2009), “the pressure to expand accessibility to baccalaureate programs has continued unabated” in Ontario since the mid 1960s (p. 1). Several scholars and policy advisors have identified improved collaboration and transferability between Ontario’s two postsecondary sectors as an important access strategy for the province in this context (See Clark et al., 2009; Decock, 2006; Hicks et al., 2013; Jones and Skolnik, 2009; Rae, 2005 and others). In his commentary on the shifting categories of higher education and further education in Canada and in England, Jones (2009) notes that increased articulation and collaboration between sectors in a binary system can increase access to higher levels of post-secondary education. Jones emphasizes however, that in some Canadian provinces such as Ontario, there have been persistent systemic issues that prevent students from optimizing their mobility between sectors (p. 380). In the absence of a centralized national agency to oversee such issues in Canada, Jones observes that individual provinces, and indeed, individual institutions and well-meaning individuals, have attempted to develop a range of strategies to facilitate student movement across institutions and sectors. Citing Marshall (2008), Jones notes:

The recent history of system-level structural change in several Canadian provinces has involved at least a blurring of the boundaries between sectors, and in some cases, a complete redrawing of the borders, with considerable experimentation in the development of new institutional categories and credentials.... (p. 381)

Jones’ description of the structural changes that have occurred in other Canadian provinces provides an interesting context for examining the ongoing pressures for postsecondary transformation in Ontario during the study period and beyond. According to
Clark et al (2009), the consequence of “designing a post-secondary system that consists of two independent and unconnected silos” in Ontario is that the pathways to higher learning have been limited (p. 173). Clark et al conclude that “(t)he design modifications seeming to hold particular promise are those that would achieve greater institutional differentiation” (p. 174).

2.16 Resistance to Change

In his doctoral thesis, Piché (2013) observes that Ontario’s fiscal climate of restraint has intensified the push for system design changes in higher education through increased institutional differentiation (p.1). Piché’s research applied Birnbaum’s (1983) diversity matrix methodology to evaluate changes in diversity of Ontario universities during the period from 1994 to 2010. Piché’s results indicate a decrease in both systemic diversity (differences in the type and/or size of institution) and climate diversity (differences in campus environment and culture) among the universities, despite the high resource flow by government over that period (p.181). His analysis also identifies the factors that promoted or hindered the process of differentiation during the study period, and offers a projection of university diversity in the year 2018 based on a review of strategic mandate agreements and specific institutional plans. Piché research empirically confirms the general belief that diversity is decreasing in Ontario’s university sector. Based on policy analysis and other qualitative research methods, he also suggests the sector-wide government policies and conditions that would most likely promote systemic and climate diversity in Ontario’s university sector going forward.

Piché (2013) concludes that the significant funding made available to the universities during the period of his study actually contributed to institutional convergence
(emphasis added), by enabling universities to access additional graduate operating and capital funding allocations. “In essence, this meant that universities that were previously primarily undergraduate institutions were able to morph themselves such that they became more similar to the comprehensive and medical/doctoral institutions” (p. 183). Piché notes that these findings are consistent with Codling and Meek’s (2006) conclusions that a higher education system will inevitably evolve towards increased institutional convergence, unless there is formal policy intervention to promote diversity (p. 183).

Piché (2013) used a mixed research methodology for his thesis, including a qualitative phase to assist in interpreting and corroborating the quantitative results. Interviews were conducted with Ontario university presidents to gain a greater understanding of the key factors or barriers behind Ontario’s apparent resistance to structural changes in its higher education system. Participants were also asked to comment on various solutions that were emerging in the literature and more broadly, in the policy discourse at the time, and to suggest provincial and federal government levers that could be effective in increasing university diversity. Piché concludes that the concepts of diversity and differentiation are not well understood in Ontario’s university sector, represent different things to different people, and are interpreted according to inconsistent criteria and values (p. 164). These ambiguities notwithstanding, he notes that participants generally agreed that differentiation is a “cherished” but feared value, constrained by another underlying Canadian value: the need to have policies that treat all universities consistently and fairly (p. 165).

Piché’s (2013) thesis includes a number of supporting quotations from his interviewees, many of which offer interesting, potentially relevant context for my
examination of Seneca’s pursuit of increased differentiation and the surrounding political dynamics: “Everything in this sector seems to be sacrificed on the altar of consistency” (for example) and “(T)he pressure for none to stand out above the others is enormous. We always avoid issues that would allow a particular institution or group of institutions to emerge into a dominant position...” (p. 165). Interview participants also expressed concern, according to Piché, that efforts to differentiate institutions in the prevailing fiscal climate would likely mean redistribution of already limited funds, which in turn would create inequities (p. 166). These comments from Ontario university presidents offer some interesting potential insights for my enquiry, as I explore the reaction of other Ontario institutions to Seneca’s pursuit of increased differentiation. Piché concludes that: “Ontario’s reticence in making design changes in its higher education system may stem from the desire to have policies that treat everyone equitably” (p. 176). This aspect of his conclusions supports Trick’s (2005) observations regarding a dominant “equity among universities” paradigm during the period of his historical study of the sector. Piché goes on to suggest that, in order to increase system quality and accessibility in a cost effective way, the province needs a clear, well-defined diversity policy that will alter the current “egalitarian funding model” by providing differentiated funding that supports specific diversity objectives (p. 186).

In noting the limitations of his study, Piché cautions that his thesis looks only at diversity in the university sector, and the results cannot be extrapolated to include the colleges. He also notes that his results cannot be generalized to represent the views and opinions of all university presidents in Ontario (p. 188). He suggests that future research could consider applying the same methodology to include all of Ontario’s colleges and
universities in order to quantify diversity in the higher education system as a whole.

### 2.17 Ontario Government Interest

In July, 2010, then Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Deborah Newman, invited the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to provide advice on “…whether a more strongly differentiated set of universities would help improve the overall performance and sustainability of the system, and help Ontario compete internationally…[and]…how to operationalize a differentiation policy, should government be interested in pursuing this as a strategic objective” (in Weingarten and Deller, 2010, p. 6). Whether intended or not, the request was for HEQCO to focus its attention on the university sector; consideration of diversity in the college sector (or across the two sectors) and the role this broader analysis might play in improving system performance, sustainability and competitiveness, was neither explicit nor implied. As a result, a Working Group convened by HEQCO to help frame and inform the analysis was composed primarily of university presidents, plus MTCU’s then Chief of Staff and the Deputy herself. Still, Colleges Ontario President Linda Franklin was also included, either for political reasons or in recognition of the importance of having the college perspective as part of the dialogue. To support the latter conclusion, HEQCO solicited comments from some stakeholders during the review which included both college and university presidents beyond the Working Group, as well as students, staff and faculty groups (Weingarten and Deller, 2010, p. 6).

In the Final Report published by HEQCO, the authors conclude that a more differentiated postsecondary sector would offer “considerable advantages to both students and the public” (2010, p. 6). The Report provides an overview of these advantages
including increased variety and clarity of choice for students; a more cohesive, coordinated and cost effective system that builds on institutional strengths and expertise; enhanced system quality as a result; increased recognition of the value of teaching and learning; increased access for a wider range of student profiles and needs; and improved student mobility and credit transfer opportunities. Interestingly, the authors also conclude that “(g)reater differentiation of the postsecondary system prevents mandate creep” as a result of clarity around approved mandates of institutions and the ways in which institutional performance will be evaluated and funded (p. 11). Their analysis also offers a useful framework to help understand the multiple ways in which the term differentiation is often used.

Most notably, Weingarten and Deller (2010) conclude that: “Greater differentiation of the postsecondary sector is one of the most powerful levers available to government, especially in resource constrained times, to achieve its goals of greater quality, competitiveness, accountability and sustainability” (p. 9). The HEQCO report urges the Ontario government to implement a differentiation strategy that would include several key components: a differentiation policy; individual mandate agreements between each institution and government; funding levers tied to the signed mandate agreements; and an annual reporting of progress towards institutional goals that is both incremental and seamless. (Many of these elements were subsequently introduced by government as components of the formal differentiation policy announced in 2013, as discussed later in this paper.) Finally, the authors suggest that any move towards greater differentiation in Ontario in the future won’t be an easy one, requiring tough choices by both institutions and government. I believe this to be pertinent to Ontario’s ongoing, broader system design
discourse, even though the focus of this particular HEQCO discussion was on the university sector. Given the growth in both the Ontario college and university sectors during the period of this thesis, the protracted (and disrupted) attempts by some colleges to increasingly differentiate themselves since the PECE Act, 2000, and the politics and dynamics surrounding our historical binary design, it may be that the best solutions for Ontario are systemically perceived to be “too tough” for policy actors to push forward. This premise is examined further later in this enquiry.

The authors of the HEQCO report also offer several overarching principles of differentiation, including two in particular that seem to bridge the differentiation discourse across the two sectors in Ontario’s binary system. They emphasize that a successful differentiation strategy must recognize that all functions of a postsecondary system need to be seen as “equally valued”, even though they may be very different (p. 12). In addition, they note that “(t)he path and nature of greater university differentiation will be affected by any future changes in the college sector” (2010, p. 13). They go on to explain:

Current discussions exploring whether colleges should have a greater role in degree delivery and the creation of a more effective transfer credit system are particularly relevant to the issue of university differentiation. We also believe that the analysis of differentiation provided here, including the identification of benefits to students and the public, may be equally applicable to the college sector as it is to the university sector. (p. 13).

To support the HEQCO authors’ recommendations, a number of appendices are included in the Final Report showing how other jurisdictions (including the other Canadian provinces and other countries) have organized their postsecondary systems using
differentiation to increase quality, sustainability and competitiveness.

Consistent with the directions suggested in the HEQCO, 2010 report, the provincial government introduced a new “Strategic Mandate Agreement” initiative in spring, 2012, intended to guide its publicly-funded postsecondary institutions through a “transformation process” as part of a planned, broader system reform (Correspondence from Deputy Minister Deborah Newman to Executive Heads and Presidents, August 7, 2012). Each college and university was required to submit a “Strategic Mandate Agreement” (SMA) to the government according to a prescribed template, in order to articulate that institution’s unique strengths, vision, proposed goals and plans for the future. The new SMA process was intended to ensure that each institution’s mission and activities were aligned with Ontario’s broader goals and priorities, with the promise of performance metrics and incentive funding to follow. According to Deputy Newman’s correspondence, the process when fully implemented would “strongly inform future decisions, including allocation decisions and program approvals” (2012).

HEQCO was asked by government to convene an “Expert Panel”\(^2\) to review and comment on this first round of SMA submissions. In the Panel’s final report (2013), the value of system differentiation in Ontario is emphasized: “....(D)ifferentiation is a tool...its benefits are to maximize quality of the overall system by enabling each (sector) to make an optimal and distinctive contribution to the province’s higher education system....” (in Hicks et al., 2013, p. 23).

\(^2\) The author of this thesis served as a member of HEQCO’s Expert Panel appointed in 2012 to review the first round of SMA’s.
2.18 System Diversity in Ontario

In order to better understand the baseline that exists in Ontario’s postsecondary sector, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) subsequently published two consecutive papers that provide useful data sets to describe the then current activities and diversity of Ontario’s universities and colleges (respectively). The objective in doing this, according to HEQCO, was to inform the development of an effective differentiation framework. In Weingarten et al. (2013), the authors find that the current universities in Ontario could be clustered into three distinct groups based on variables used to differentiate institutions in other jurisdictions. They further suggest that the best differentiation frameworks enable institutions to build on their strengths and use their own resources more strategically, such that students have clearer choices based on their interests and aspirations (p. 6). Consistent with conclusions by other scholars and the aforementioned HEQCO reports, the authors note that the decision to implement a differentiation strategy for Ontario (in this case, clustering the universities in like groupings) will be a controversial one – and therefore, to be successful, must be tied to funding levers and clear government direction regarding the roles, rights and responsibilities of institutions in each cluster.

In an attempt to describe the extent of current diversity in the Ontario college sector, a corresponding report by Hicks et al. (2013) examines differences among the colleges based on key variables related to degree granting involvement and programming. Based on the data, they suggest a framework to assist in moving Ontario towards a more differentiated postsecondary system. The authors conclude that programmatic diversity is a distinguishing factor among the Ontario colleges and that degree granting “emerges as
the most important distinguishing feature in contemplating formal differentiation between colleges” (p. 3). They go on to explain that, although degree granting is still young, “nothing comes a remote second as a distinguishing feature for the purpose of contemplating formalized college differentiation” (p. 16). They propose that there is an opportunity for government to set provincial objectives for college differentiation that define desired growth and direction for college degrees, and to use bilateral mandate agreements with each college to ensure institutional goals align with provincial direction. These provincial objectives, according to the authors, should include the types of college degrees to be offered in the future and at which institutions (p. 3).

Hicks et al further observe that there are “three key leaders in the four-year degree movement, on a combination of volume, breadth and momentum” (Humber, Sheridan and Seneca) (2013, p. 16), and given this GTA concentration, they argue that any examination of future growth and direction for college degrees should also involve the GTA universities (p. 17).

2.19 Proposed Solutions for Ontario: Funding

A number of funding policy changes have been discussed in the literature that could increase Ontario’s diversity in the university sector. Piché (2013) concludes that the extent and nature of institutional differentiation in a higher education system is a “design choice” that must be considered by policy makers when they are either developing a new system or when introducing policy changes to an existing system (p. 1). In his analysis of diversity in the Ontario university sector, Piché observes that the momentum for policy (and structural) change in the current context, is driven by projected student numbers, increasing societal demands and fiscal pressures (p. 177).
According to Piché (2013), the funding formula and tuition fee policy are seen as the most powerful tools government can use to affect change. Discussions with interview participants on what provincial levers could be used to promote diversity in Ontario’s universities revealed that there was no support for legislative solutions, and strong agreement that funding initiatives would have the most steering effect on institutional behavior (p. 167). Most participants agreed that structural changes to the existing funding model would be needed to increase diversity in the (university) sector. “The current egalitarian funding model will need to be altered to include more diversity objectives either through incentive funding or increased differentiated funding” (p. 186). Clark et al (2009) also suggest a more differentiated funding mechanism for Ontario, one that balances public interest and institutional autonomy. They suggest that a redistribution of a significant portion of the operating funding envelope to enhance distinct missions for institutions (e.g. teaching missions for some, research-intensive missions for others) could provide “real” incentives for institutions to excel in different areas. (p. 191). Interestingly, this approach would increase systemic diversity but could also threaten the closely held values of ‘equitable treatment for all’ identified by the university presidents who participated in Piché’s (2013) study. “While there were no objections for institutions to be measured and accountable, the possibility of dislocating current funding from one institution to another was seen as untenable and against the value of equity that we share in Ontario and Canada” (2013, p. 170). This closely held “equity” value provides an important backdrop for this historical case study, especially in its potential applicability to the college sector and college differentiation.
2.20 A New Type of University – or a New Sector?

A number of structural policy choices have been proposed in recent system design literature in order to increase Ontario’s systemic diversity and address the anticipated demand for increased access to baccalaureate programs. In Jones and Skolnik (2009), the authors review a number of policy alternatives, including the creation of teaching-oriented institutions that focus on undergraduate education, adding satellite campuses of existing universities, mandating an expanded degree-granting role for some colleges, the designation of some colleges as polytechnic institutions, and a more formalized transfer role for colleges to offer basic university subjects in the arts and science area (p. 1). In their analysis, Jones and Skonik identify three major “gaps” in Ontario’s postsecondary system at the time: teaching-oriented, degree-granting institutions that focus on undergraduate level education; an open university; and effective pathways for college to university transfer for students in career programs (p. 9). The authors also provide a detailed analysis of “polytechnic” as a descriptor of a type of education, as opposed to a type of institution (p. 5). Jones and Skolnik conclude that there was insufficient evidence to support the designation of some colleges as polytechnic institutions. They further conclude that:

...the greatest gap in institutional types in Ontario postsecondary education may be that of a university level institution that concentrates on undergraduate education and on the teaching function. Such an institution would provide students an opportunity for a type of education that presently does not exist: the opportunity to be taught by professors whose responsibility is teaching and in an institutional environment that unequivocally places students first. (p. 6)

Underscoring the urgency of increased post-secondary differentiation in Ontario, Clark et al. (2009) identify a similar list of gaps in the types of institutions that currently exist in Ontario: there is no university that is limited to offering undergraduate programs only; no university that concentrates mainly on teaching (vs. research); no degree-granting
institution other than Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU) that concentrates only on a particular field or study or discipline; none that are controlled by and focused solely on the educational needs of aboriginal people\(^3\), as is the case in other jurisdictions; and no “open” university dedicated to an educational philosophy of open admissions and increased accessibility (p. 152). They conclude, however, that the greatest impact for Ontario would involve the creation of a new teaching-focused, baccalaureate level, university sector. In fact, they refer to this aspect of differentiation as the “primary decision” that must be made in Ontario: “...the province’s post-secondary system needs a layer of four-year, degree-granting institutions that concentrate on teaching” (p. 182). Clark et al. stress the importance of defining clear limits to the academic mission and mandate of this new category of institutions, so that there is no drifting over time such that they can evolve into research-oriented universities like their more established sister universities (p. 182). The authors note that “(s)uch institutions could be newly created or formed by transforming existing institutions” (p. 182) and further emphasize that it would be “healthy” to have variation even within this new category of institution. By way of example, they suggest that some institutions in this new category could offer only baccalaureate degrees, while others might also include the full range of sub-baccalaureate credentials. Some might focus only on career-oriented programming while others could also offer liberal arts programs. Interestingly, the authors observe that a teaching focused, baccalaureate-granting institution that offers mainly career-oriented programming (with complementary strength in the arts and sciences) comes close to fitting the description of

\(^3\) In 2008, Algoma University was established as a teaching oriented university with a particular focus on the needs of northern Ontario, including a specific mission to cultivate cross-cultural learning between aboriginal people and other communities.
“polytechnic institutions” as advocated by Polytechnics Canada (p. 183). This observation by Clark et al. is particularly interesting given that the authors envision this new or transformed type of institution to represent a new “university sector” (emphasis added), whereas Polytechnics Canada describes its member institutions in Ontario as representing a “third” sector in an otherwise binary system. (As an aside, Clark et al. are clear in noting that their proposed new category of institutions should not offer any post-graduate programming, consistent with Seneca’s proposed polytechnic model at least at its early stages, but contrary to some advocacy efforts by Polytechnics Canada that were in play at the time of this study.)

In both Jones and Skolnik (2009) and Clark et al. (2009), the respective authors offer analyses of the potential advantages and risks of creating brand new institutions vs. converting some existing institutions into this new institutional category, including issues of history, culture and identity. According to both sources, there are outstanding questions and challenges surrounding the creation of a new institutional type, including some politically-charged questions such as how many such institutions are needed and where these should be located - but these are roadblocks worth tackling. As noted by Clark et al. (2009): “...creating degree granting institutions that are highly focused on undergraduate education is the design change that would do the most to enhance the current system” (p. 181). Interestingly, according to Jones and Skolnik (2009), “the absence of mandated differentiation among the colleges heretofore has in some ways worked against the development of the foundation that could justify some of the options we would like to consider” (p. 29). They suggest that a “plausible argument could be made for more meaningful differentiation within the college sector than the ITALs have provided” (p. 30).
They emphasize, however, that the mandate of most colleges should not change; most colleges should not be mandated to play a substantial role in baccalaureate programming, but rather, continue to focus on the important traditional college role in providing high quality, career-oriented, diploma level programming. To reinforce this, they further argue that even the small number of colleges that might be included in a possible “third sector” should continue to offer an “appropriate balance” of certificate, diploma and degree programming. “In Ontario, it is not functional or programmatic differentiation that should determine membership in a new sector, but capability and readiness to offer a range of high quality baccalaureate programs” (p. 30). They conclude by observing that a number of institutions in the college sector already closely resemble the kinds of institutions that they believe are needed to increase diversity and opportunity in Ontario (p. 30).

Piché (2013) examined some of these policy options being proposed for Ontario during his interviews regarding system diversity with university presidents. He found that most of his interview participants (university presidents) were opposed to the idea of a teaching-only undergraduate university sector. “The link between teaching, research, and community service was viewed as sacrosanct and should not be broken, as without these, the institution is not a university” (p. 173). Codling and Meek’s (2006) paper makes frequent reference to the differences between the “traditional” university and a “new” type of university, often referred to as universities of technology (as these have evolved in Australia and New Zealand), with historical roots in the vocational education, trades and technician training. Codling and Meek underscore the resultant, different emphasis on pure research in traditional universities vs. applied research (which in turn informs both teaching and practice) in many newer universities. Jones and Skolnik (2009) note however,
that legislation is probably the most effective means, and possibly “the only” way, of
directing universities to limit their mission to certain activities and not others (p. 5).

2.21 The Intersection of System Design Policy and Institutional Decisions

Fallis (2013) provides a comprehensive analysis of Ontario’s post-secondary system
design at the time, offering strong arguments in favour of increased institutional
differentiation and specific recommendations for achieving this without compromising
quality across the province. With references to Trow (1995), Codling and Meek (2006) and
others, Fallis describes the differences between institutional differentiation by mandate
(typically dictated by legislation and usually with different governance, accountability and
funding) and differentiation by program, (largely determined by institutional decisions
within government policy) – and the important intersection between these two (2013, p.
52). In Ontario, he observes, differentiation by mandate is binary but “...(the) interaction
between government policy and institutional choice can lead to institutions with the same
mandate (and even with different mandates) becoming more similar, a process of
isomorphism” (p. 52). This is particularly interesting given the efforts by some colleges in
Ontario to push the differentiation envelope beyond what may have initially been
envisioned by the enabling legislation in 2002.

Fallis’ (2013) reflections are based on the argument that, although government
policies are the primary influence on system design, the most effective higher education
systems and outcomes are created as a result of the interaction between government policy
and institutional decisions (p. 67). Acknowledging that these reflections are university-
focused, the author further notes that it is typically the senior administration, faculty and
students who together shape decisions at the local institutional level. “It is the interaction
of these four groups – government, the senior administration of each university, professors, and students – that determines the current level of institutional differentiation and program diversity in Ontario’s system of higher education” (p. 85). This is consistent with Rhoades’ (1990) contention, as cited earlier, that the “pace and path of differentiation” is influenced by the political interests and values of various stakeholders (in Huisman, 1995, p. 29).

Fallis references organizational behavior theories of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) noting several hypotheses that predict when organizations will tend to become more similar, often seeking to model themselves after other organizations in their field that are perceived to be successful (see also Pizarro Milian, R., Davies, S. and Zarifa, D., 2016). Fallis observes that, in every case, these hypotheses match the conditions and circumstances often surrounding universities, concluding therefore that universities will typically strive to be similar (p. 88). In a related discussion of the barriers to differentiation in Ontario’s higher education system, Pizarro Milian et al. (2016) take this one step further. Defining isomorphism as the “tendency of colleges and universities to emulate high-status universities” (p.2), the authors argue that where there are hierarchies in a higher education system, perceived or real, there will be forces in play that promote homogeneity rather than differentiation. “Any preoccupation with rankings, prestige or status can pose a significant barrier to differentiation” (p.12).

“The universities of Ontario have become more similar, in many dimensions, over the last ten years”, observes Fallis (2013), noting specifically that all of Ontario’s universities grew at the undergraduate level during this period, and then universally received Ministry funding to increase spaces at the graduate level during the second phase
of the Reaching Higher Plan (p. 85). “At the end of the exercise, the universities had become more similar in terms of the share of total enrolments at the graduate level, as well as in the range of undergraduate programs and the relative size of these programs (p.85). Fallis concludes that "...it is clear that universities will not become significantly more differentiated, operating as they have been, making institutional decisions as they have been, within the current government framework. Change will require a changed government framework, a more intrusive government" (p. 88). His conclusion seems particularly prescient in the context of Ontario’s current system design, including the ongoing discourse around strategic mandate agreements (SMA’s) and accountability frameworks for both the university and college sectors. The effects of human nature, academic culture and institutional dynamics on postsecondary reform (including institutional differentiation) are explored further in Clark et al. (2011).

Fallis’ recommendations include a new vision of a differentiated Ontario system which includes two categories of mandate within the university sector and two within the college sector, using mandate and accountability agreements to designate which grouping each institution is authorized (and funded) to operate within. In the university sector, the two categories would include a doctoral/research intensive grouping as well as a non-doctoral group. For the college sector, the ITAL’s would form their own grouping, with up to thirty percent of their offerings at the baccalaureate level (including 3 year degrees) plus an increased research mandate, related increases in funding and workload changes for faculty engaged in research (p. 268). Fallis argues that implementing his recommendations for increased differentiation would involve significantly greater effort for the colleges than for the university sector, calling for a full review of the mandate of the CAATs and their
governance structures. He further recommends that the province should seek advice from HEQCO in this regard, after a review of the evidence from other jurisdictions and consultations with the Ontario colleges and universities (p. 268).

Fallis’ recommendations do not support the creation of polytechnics or, contrary to Clark et al. (2009) and others, new teaching-only undergraduate universities. His vision of differentiation is within the binary system, and each of its sectors. He defends his conclusions by pointing to demand forecasts and fiscal trends, and also stresses that any new categories would need a critical mass of like institutions to make them viable in any event - and recognizable as a distinct grouping. Otherwise, according to Fallis, they would inevitably end up drifting back into the mainstream, binary groupings.

2.22 Moving Forward

In a report written for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Hicks et al. (2013) outline the next steps they believe are necessary to effect system transformation in Ontario (and address projected degree capacity concerns). The HEQCO authors conclude that a degree growth and differentiation plan must be the starting point (p. 20). In addition, Hicks et al. note that a strong, universal credit transfer system must be in place to complement the degree strategy, in order to sustain “any meaningful level of differentiation” (p. 20). With respect to the growing role Ontario colleges are playing in applied research, the HEQCO report notes that Polytechnics Canada identifies degree granting and research activity as “twinned defining characteristics that differentiate its members as a distinct type of educational entity” (p.8). Hicks et al. suggest, however, that the importance of research as a distinguishing feature of differentiation is not supported by some sector leaders, who argue that applied research is considered an integral component
of all college programming, which by nature is expected to be hands-on, integrated with industry needs (p. 8).

The HECQO report closes with a note that may be most relevant to my examination of Seneca’s journey towards greater differentiation: “These are directions that the government itself must set. They will not coalesce from the actions or evolution of institutions” (Hicks et al., 2013, p. 20). Hicks et al. emphasize that the government has an “important foundational choice” to make regarding its college degree-granting strategy: whether to focus this activity in a few selected colleges (hence further differentiating them formally within the system) or whether to introduce degree granting more universally as a new layer of significant activity at all colleges (p. 20). Finally, Hicks et al. conclude that: “...a key decision government will need to consider regarding differentiation is the utility of maintaining the strong college-university dichotomy that now exists in Ontario” (p. 4). In my opinion, these closing conclusions frame the most critical questions around institutional differentiation within and across the two sides of the college-university divide - and whether it is time to start thinking about the “blurring of the lines” as a good thing (rather than an evil) that might better meet the needs of Ontario’s future students and society in general.

2.23 Summary

This chapter presents the key concepts that emerge in the literature on diversity and differentiation, in order to establish a theoretical backdrop for this historical case study. The first half of the discussion focuses on the scholarly works that are most relevant to this enquiry, with a focus on the literature related to differentiation processes including institutional convergence, isomorphism and the political dynamics that are often in play in
such processes. The tendency for academic institutions to resist differentiation in the absence of government intervention or direction emerges as a core dynamic. The second half of this chapter presents some of the more recent literature on postsecondary system design in Ontario, including an examination of the ongoing policy discourse and emerging recommendations for system reform. Much has been written and debated regarding Ontario’s system design over the past two decades, as scholars, practitioners and government seek to understand options, opportunities and risks for the province. Together, these two components offer an important theoretical context for this research enquiry.
CHAPTER THREE: Research Design and Methodology

3.0 Introduction

With the literature on system diversity and differentiation as a backdrop, this chapter provides a detailed overview of the research design and methodology used in this inquiry to address the overarching research questions. Using a historical case study approach, the thesis sought to develop an in-depth understanding of Seneca’s differentiation goals and institutional positioning during the study period. This included an examination of the perceptions and understanding of internal and external stakeholders who were aware, to varying degrees, of Seneca’s evolving mandate, academic focus and positioning over the study period – and may have influenced (and/or been influenced by) Seneca’s actions and decisions. As noted by Ramdas (2011): “...environments have an effect on institutions. However, the converse is also true; institutions also have an effect on their environments. Organizations are not passive and can work as actors in the change process” (p. 32).

This thesis was guided by a worldview that uses a social constructivist lens, with research questions that were open-ended, broad and general so that participants could construct their own subjective meanings of the situation, based on their contextual experiences, observations and interactions with others (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The social constructivist worldview is typically associated with a qualitative research design or, as described by Morse & Niehaus (2009), a “qualitatively-driven” mixed method approach (p. 9). In both instances, the research is collaborative and inductive, with the researcher developing a pattern of meaning from the data collected and analyzed (including theories
or interpretations of events), rather than starting with a theory to be tested through the
inquiry (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The inductive approach was consistent with both the intent
and focus of this case study, and supported a variety of related data collection methods and
strategies (a mixed method) as described below.

3.1 Research Questions

Consistent with the social constructivist worldview, the direction and focus of this
research inquiry was informed and refined by data collected throughout the research
process. Areas for further examination were identified, for example, as a result of data
collected during early interviews and document review that helped add focus to later
interviews. The collection and analysis of data, however, was guided from the onset by two
overarching research questions:

*What was Seneca’s intent and rationale in pursuing institutional differentiation
during the period 2001 - 2012?* [And]

*How did the college’s institutional positioning during this period contribute to
Ontario’s evolving system design?*

To assist in exploring this enquiry, the following secondary (supporting) questions were
also examined:

1. How did Seneca College evolve during the period from 2001 to 2012 as a result
   of its differentiation goals? How was the college’s institutional positioning
during this period different from other Ontario postsecondary institutions?

2. What was Seneca hoping to achieve?

3. How was Seneca’s journey towards increased institutional differentiation
   impacted by the college’s historical roots and institutional identity?

4. What impact did Seneca’s role in the delivery of college baccalaureate degrees
have on the college’s institutional positioning related to differentiation? How was Seneca’s degree-granting strategy perceived by various policy actors?

5. How did Seneca’s involvement in credit transfer and university collaboration impact its institutional positioning related to differentiation? How compatible was Seneca’s credit transfer and pathways agenda with the college’s institutional differentiation goals?

6. What impact did the external political environment (e.g. changes in government, responses of stakeholders and policy actors, relationships with external partners, and the actions/reactions of other Ontario institutions) have on the decisions Seneca made in its institutional journey towards increased differentiation?

7. How did the change in presidential leadership at Seneca between 2001 and 2012 impact the college’s institutional journey during the study period?

8. How significant was the ongoing question of what “kind” of institution Seneca was aspiring to become (e.g. ITAL, polytechnic, university)? Was there clarity and support among policy actors (internal and external) in this regard?

9. How successful was Seneca in achieving its differentiation goals? What conditions/factors might have changed the outcome?

10. What impact, if any, did Seneca have on the differentiation and system design discourse in Ontario?
3.2 The Research Design

According to Creswell (2009), case studies are a qualitative “strategy of inquiry” intended to explore an activity, event, process or group of individuals in depth, so as to better understand the phenomenon under study (p. 227). In this historical case analysis, the process to be explored was Seneca’s institutional journey towards increased differentiation from 2001 to 2012. What was unclear and warranted investigation was the college’s intent and rationale during this process, i.e., what was Seneca attempting to differentiate itself “from” and “towards” -- and why? The goal was to develop a clearer picture of whether Seneca’s institutional positioning during the study period was a deliberate, strategic path designed to lead to a new institutional identity for the college, or rather, a series of unrelated but significant academic and administrative decisions that cumulatively placed the college on a path to increased external differentiation, whether intentional or not, despite some potential contradiction and ambiguity regarding where that path was leading. Yin (2009) supports the use of an explanatory case study approach when the research inquiry is intended to develop an understanding of the “how” and “why” of a contemporary social process. Merriam (1988) agrees, adding that a case study strategy provides the researcher an important opportunity to use multiple data collection techniques in order to achieve triangulation (in Yin, 2009, p. 69). Triangulation is defined by Yin as the process of studying the same phenomena using several sources of data, so that the researcher can develop a converging line of inquiry (p. 67).

The historical case study approach also allowed the research process for this thesis to benefit from my first-hand, in-depth familiarity with Seneca College over the period of this study, and my involvement as a practitioner in related provincial initiatives and policy
discussions surrounding institutional differentiation and system design at the time.

Triangulation of data using multiple sources was a critical element of the research design, therefore, in order to offset any conscious or unconscious bias stemming from my personal involvement in the case being examined.

In order to benefit from multiple sources of data, this inquiry relied on a sequential, “qualitatively-driven” mixed method approach as described by Morse and Niehaus (2016, p. 9), and reflecting an extension of Creswell’s (2009) “sequential explanatory strategy” (p. 234). According to Morse and Niehaus (2016), there is ambiguity and ongoing debate among scholars and researchers in terms of the definition of “mixed method” inquiry and its component parts. Whereas Creswell (2009) defines mixed method inquiry as the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies, Morse and Niehaus (2016) emphasize that a mixed method design can use two (or more) qualitative or quantitative methods, or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (p. 9). Morse and Niehaus further argue that, in a mixed method design, there is typically a “core” component and a “supplemental” component, both of which must contribute to the study theoretically. The supplemental component is regarded as complementary to the core component of the project (but of equal importance), providing data that will “enhance description, understanding, or explanation of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 16). According to the authors, “the use of a mixed method design makes the study more comprehensive or complete than if a single method was used” (p. 9).

In this case study inquiry, the mixed method approach began with the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from a document review phase (the “core” component) including publically available historical documents and reports as well as
institutional data regularly produced at Seneca, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data through interviews with key informants in the second phase (the supplemental component). The upfront institutional data analysis provided a qualitative and quantitative “jumping off” point for the follow-up qualitative inquiry. The interviews provided opportunity for a more detailed exploration of the findings as they emerged from the document and data analysis.

Consistent with a social constructivist worldview, the second component of the research was designed to give voice to the participants through unstructured, open-ended interviews. The shape and focus that the research took, therefore, relied as much on the participants’ shared (and opposing) views of a given situation, as on the document and data analysis. The interview questions were adapted and evolved based on other participants’ input, and new areas of exploration or focus were added to subsequent interview discussions. In some instances, participants’ interpretations were further examined in the context of personal correspondence released and authorized for use in this inquiry by various participants. The subjective meanings that the interview participants developed to explain Seneca’s differentiation journey were formed based on their respective historical, cultural and contextual realities; my role as researcher, according to Creswell, was to make sense out of those meanings (p. 8), cognizant at all times of my own “insider” bias. “The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

According to Merriam (1988), documents offer several significant advantages as sources of qualitative field data, in that they are typically accessible and cost effective for the researcher, may contain detailed and technical information, and can be more objective
than other sources since they are not subject to respondent or interviewer bias (in Yin, 2009, p. 105). These advantages were important in this particular case study, helping to offset any real or perceived bias in the interview process due to my “insider” perspective. The combination of internal and external document analysis, followed by key informant interviews, also assisted in determining whether there was a match between the apparent “intended” differentiation plans and goals that guided Seneca during the study period (as evidenced by institutional data and document analysis), and the “perceptions” of Seneca’s goals, internal and external (as evidenced by interviewees’ responses). Merriam (1988) also identifies a number of disadvantages of document analysis as a data source, including incomplete information, inconvenient formats and lack of authenticity; in this inquiry, I attempted to mitigate these potential disadvantages through the triangulation process (in Yin, 2009, p. 106).

3.3 Research Method

The sequential mixed method approach chosen for this inquiry followed two phases, building from a document analysis phase (quantitative and qualitative data sources) through to a qualitative, discovery phase using key informant interviews.

**Phase I: Document analysis.** At the earliest stages of this inquiry, a broad review and analysis of relevant external documents was undertaken, including government and institutional publications and reports that are generally available to the public and/or have been widely distributed within the broader post-secondary community. The purpose of this phase was to collect data to establish the external environment and policy context within which Seneca was operating during the study period, so as to inform the interview process. The external documentation helped to supplement data gaps in the Seneca documentation,
including for example, related differentiation strategies and actions by government and other Ontario institutions. The data analysis at this initial stage also served to identify any relevant, emerging trends affecting the Ontario postsecondary sector at the time.

To complement these data sources, a more detailed, comprehensive review and analysis of relevant Seneca documentation (including planning documents, institutional statistics, meeting minutes, internal communications) was undertaken, except where such documents were deemed to be of a sensitive or proprietary nature (e.g. containing competitive intelligence) and/or confidential. To assist in confirming whether specific documents should be excluded due to their sensitive or proprietary nature, ongoing contact (in person and email communication) was maintained with Seneca’s Office of the President, and specifically with the Chief of Staff/Associate Vice-President. The purpose of this component of the document analysis was to inform the interview process by identifying specific lines of inquiry where the interview process could be helpful in further understanding the data, and providing valuable institutional data as context for participants while, at the same time, grounding the subjective nature of the interviews through the use of empirical data.

**Phase II: Unstructured, open-ended interviews.** In the second phase, key informant interviews were conducted with both internal and external participants. External participants were selected from other Ontario CAATs, Ontario universities, government and the broader postsecondary community. Internally, current and former senior administrators from Seneca were interviewed, including the two Seneca presidents who served terms during the study period. The purpose of the interviews was to fill gaps in the information from other data sources, dig deeper on data threads and insights that
emerged throughout the data gathering process, and confirm reliability of other interviews.

Only those persons who gave their specific written consent were included in any aspect of this study. Individuals who agreed to participate were asked to sign the approved, Informed Consent form. The rights of the participants to anonymity (non-identifiability) and to freedom of choice (to participate or not; to answer all or some questions, or not; to withdraw at any time in the process) were outlined explicitly in the Invitation to Participate (See Draft Interview Guide, Appendix B.) Interviews were attributed based on current or former roles in the Ontario postsecondary landscape and/or relationships to Seneca, but the names of interviewees were not disclosed, except for the two Seneca presidents. Given that the two presidents were critical policy actors during the study period, it was important to develop a clear understanding of their respective interpretations and perspectives, and attribute these accordingly. The Informed Consent in these two cases, therefore, included an explicit note that their identities would likely be transparent and attributable as a result of their responses to certain questions, and a signed waiver from each indicating their willingness to proceed as participants with this understanding, up to and including attributed direct quotes. (Both presidents were given the option of remaining anonymous, with their perspectives included instead in the broader category of current and former Seneca administrators; both declined this alternative approach and chose instead to sign the waiver, allowing full identifiability and attribution.) Examples of the Informed Consent Letters reviewed and signed by all interview participants are provided in Appendix D and Appendix E, representing the non-presidents’ version and the Seneca presidents’ version respectively.

A “purposeful sampling methodology” was used to identify both internal and
external interview participants (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p. 173). According to Creswell and Plano Clark, this is a useful approach for qualitative research when the intention is to select individuals or groups that are knowledgeable about/or experienced in the research phenomenon. Potential participants internal to Seneca were identified based on their current or former positions at Seneca (e.g. presidents) and/or on relevant Seneca committees such as the Deans’ Committee, the Degree Implementation Committee and the College Executive Committee. External participants were identified by their current or former positions as senior executives or managers at other Ontario colleges and universities, or at relevant higher education organizations and agencies in Ontario such as the Council of Ontario Universities, Colleges Ontario, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, the College-University Consortium Council (now Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer), and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. In some instances, additional potential internal and external interviewees were identified as a result of discussions with other participants, even though a “snowball” recruiting method was not intentionally part of the process. When new, potential interviewees were identified by another participant, these were considered in the context of emerging data gaps, and invitations to participate were extended as appropriate, consistent with the approved ethics protocol.

Consistent with the planned interview process, invitations to participate were sent to a number of current and former presidents and vice-presidents academic from other Ontario colleges and from the university sector, including some from sister GTA (or Central Region) colleges and other colleges with approved “differentiated status”. These latter individuals were expected to bring a unique and comparative perspective on Seneca’s
institutional strategy. It was hoped that participants from the university sector would bring unique perspectives on Seneca’s degree strategy as well as college-university collaboration and credit transfer issues. A number of current and former managers and executives from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and other higher education organizations were also invited to participate, specifically individuals who likely had first-hand knowledge of policy discussions during the period of this study, and would therefore have an important perspective of Seneca’s differentiation strategy from an emerging policy context.

A total of seventeen interviews were conducted spanning a data collection period (including ongoing document review and analysis) from November, 2016 to June, 2018. Consistent with the planned research design, approximately one-half of the actual interview participants came from within Seneca, including current and former members of the Deans’ Committee and College’s Executive Committee, the two most senior committees likely to be well informed about the college’s differentiation strategy and related institutional decisions and directions during the study period.

A broad listing of key informant categories is provided in Appendix B. The interviews were scheduled to last no longer than 90 minutes in duration. In addition to the open-ended questions, participants were given the opportunity at the end of each interview to make additional comments or provide perspectives on related issues at their preference. This is consistent with a constructivist worldview, allowing the participants to assist in shaping and reshaping the research process and giving meaning to the phenomenon being studied. With the permission of the interviewees, all interviews were audiotaped so as to facilitate subsequent data coding, analysis and review.
3.4 Data Collection

Data sources for Phase I (document review) included government, agency and institutional publications, policy directives and correspondence, discussion papers, media releases, websites and reports normally accessible to the public and/or the broader postsecondary community, as well as Seneca documents, reports, strategic and business plans, meeting agendas and minutes, publications, institutional data and statistics, budget documents and internal communications, except where such documents were deemed to be of a sensitive proprietary nature (e.g. containing competitive intelligence) or were confidential and/or contained personal data. Permission to access the broad spectrum of Seneca archival and historical documents was sought from the current president (and confirmed through the college’s chief operating officer as well as through the ethics review process) as an explicit component of the formal request to use Seneca as the focus of this case study. Approval to name Seneca as the institution being studied was also explicit in this request. This component of the data collection process contributed contextually to the overarching research questions and all of the secondary questions, but especially, to an increased understanding of research questions #1 through 5, #7 and #8.

Data sources for Phase II (interviews) included participants’ perceptions and interpretations of the policy context, internal and external environment, and Seneca’s institutional positioning during the study period. Interview data was particularly helpful in developing a deeper understanding of why Seneca and other policy actors in Ontario’s system design discourse acted in some ways and not in others. The interview process also assisted in understanding what interviewees knew, or believed they knew, about Seneca as a differentiated college and their perceptions of Seneca’s success in achieving its
differentiation goals. A broad list of interview questions and areas that emerged for further probing is provided in Appendix C. Not all questions or probes were appropriate/applicable for all informants. The interview phase in the data collection contributed to a deeper understanding of both the overarching research question and all secondary questions.

In Appendix A, I have mapped each of the research questions identified to support this inquiry against the various data sources relied on during the data collection process. As demonstrated in this appendix, and consistent with a sequential mixed-method approach and the intent of data triangulation, each research question was addressed through multiple data sources.

3.5 Data Analysis

Consistent with a qualitative inquiry, and specifically with unstructured, open-ended interviews, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, reviewed and coded for key phrases and themes, and categorized as part of a content analysis process. Based on the early content analysis stages, new or revised questions and/or areas for in-depth probing were added to the Interview Guide, for exploration at subsequent interviews with internal and/or external participants as appropriate.

Qualitative data collected through the document analysis phase was similarly coded for key phrases and themes, reviewed for common threads with the interview data, and categorized within the same content analysis process. Triangulation principles were followed within and across data gathering components. In other words, perceptions and interpretations of key informants gathered during the interviews were tested with other informants in order to identify convergent (or divergent) themes. Information gathered
and conclusions drawn during the document analysis phase were similarly based on data from several sources. The data analysis stage also included “connecting” the quantitative, (institutional and system data) with the qualitative data, as part of the triangulation strategy.

3.6 Methodological Challenges, Limitations and Assumptions

The success of this research design was dependent first and foremost on the assumption that Seneca’s current president would provide formal approval and ongoing support in terms of using Seneca as the central focus of this historical case analysis, including facilitating access to documents, identifying key informants, and offering his own candid perspectives as an interview participant. President Agnew’s unqualified support, in turn, set the tone for both internal and external informants, as well as for those who assisted in identifying additional interview candidates and relevant institutional data sources. Given normal limitations of time and competing priorities of participants, explicit support by the president sent valuable signals that this was an important inquiry that warranted attention from already busy people.

In reaching out to potential interviewees, I remained conscious of the fact that some interview participants, specifically those who were cognizant of my former role as an advocate practitioner and policy actor in the differentiation discourse, may have been hesitant to speak freely and in contradiction to what they perceived to be my interests. Indeed, this circumstance could have been further compounded by my ongoing professor emeritus status at the college, given that emeritus status has only been awarded on three occasions at Seneca and is therefore not well understood. In order to mitigate these potential limitations and consistent with the interview protocol, I clearly identified myself
to potential interviewees as an OISE doctoral candidate for purposes of this study, and reiterated this in the follow-up Invitation to Participate, on the Informed Consent form, and at the beginning of the actual interviews. The interview protocol was a critical component, therefore, in assuring all participants of the anonymity of their input (except for the two Seneca presidents), their non-identifiability except for broad participant categories, and the importance of obtaining perspectives that were completely independent of my own.

Aspects of this research that focused on the change in presidential leadership during the time of the study posed some specific, potential methodological challenges. It was important to be aware, in exploring the impact of these two institutional leaders on Seneca’s differentiation journey, that interview participants brought their own previously developed, personal biases regarding the two presidents to the interviews. In addition, fears of repercussions related to a participant’s employment status and/or ongoing relationship with these individuals could have come into play - especially given how closely I had worked previously with both Seneca presidents and, as noted above, uncertainties regarding the nature of my professor emeritus status at the college. These potential constraining factors are most typically prevalent in a qualitative, constructivist methodology that seeks to explore and understand the meanings that participants assign to a situation, and relies on participants to assist in identifying further questions to probe and/or new issues or areas for investigation. Again, by adhering to a carefully developed interview protocol including detailed questioning and social constructions that were evidence-based, I attempted to mitigate these risks. In addition, “neutral” locations for the interviews were selected as much as possible, especially for internal participants, (e.g., not on campus and/or in high-profile areas).
By choosing a historical case study as the methodology for this study, there is an inherent limitation in terms of generalization of findings to other institutions or situations. This is consistent with Creswell’s (2009) presentation of the case study approach (along with other qualitative methodologies which are bound by time and activity), suggesting that these methodologies are not typically intended to produce results that are replicable or generalizable (p. 13, 193). Further, since the interview process in this inquiry included participation by only a cross-section of internal and external informants, the results cannot be generalized to represent the views of all relevant stakeholders and policy actors in the system design dialogue. The detailed description of the research design, however, including the interview protocol, questions, documentary data sources, and content analysis model, would facilitate the process of replicating the case study analysis at other institutions. This supports Yin’s (2003) suggestion that case study results can be generalized to some broader theory by studying additional cases (in Creswell, 2009, p. 193). It is not apparent, however, whether this would add incremental value to the Ontario system transformation dialogue beyond the findings of this inquiry.

In designing this research inquiry, it was important to acknowledge that the process of interviewing key informants and analyzing resultant data can be a time-consuming one. It was important to find the right balance between interviewing enough informants to make the data meaningful and useful (attaining data “saturation” as described by Glaser and Strauss, 1967, where additional data no longer results in additional perspectives or information), without causing undue delays in completing the analysis thoroughly and addressing the critical research questions. This was arguably more challenging when, as in this instance, there was a perceived timeliness to the research from some practitioners’
(and policy actors’) perspectives at various stages in the process. My hope in conducting this study was to contribute to the scholarly literature on system design and differentiation, while also possibly informing the recurring, dynamic (and arguably urgent) system transformation dialogue in Ontario. It was important to keep this tension in mind as the data collection unfolded, bearing in mind the potential need to adjust or refine the volume of data sources (e.g., number of interviews to be conducted and/or documents to be reviewed) depending on data saturation, data collection challenges (including scheduling limitations, time constraints, logistics), and/or any pressing, emerging policy issues that might have warranted adjustment to the plan.

Although I was originally intending to include some faculty and students (or at least student government leaders) in the interview process, I concluded in consultation with my supervisor that this was beyond the reasonable scope of this study, and possibly warrants a separate study of its own. The perspectives of students, faculty, parents, secondary school teachers and counselors on the expanding mandate of some Ontario colleges is a potential research gap that could be very informative to the current system transformation and capacity dialogue.

3.7 Ethical Issues and Considerations

This historical case study methodology required formal permission from the current Seneca president, David Agnew, to name Seneca as the subject of the study, putting the college under the spotlight in this regard. There were potential risks that President Agnew may have considered before granting this approval, perhaps reinforced by the “on again/off again” political context in which system design and institutional differentiation have resurfaced over time in related policy discourse. Notwithstanding any concerns the
president may have had, however, he was extremely supportive of, and interested in, the planned research inquiry and provided formal administrative consent without qualification. Consistent with Seneca’s research policy and protocol, the proposed study was presented and approved by the college’s Research Ethics Board and subsequently also by the University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Board. The research protocol was refined as required to fully satisfy the requirements of the Ethics Review Boards of both institutions.

The use of my former institution as the subject of this case study presented the advantages of familiarity including first-hand knowledge and relationships, convenience and ease-of-approval/access to institutional data. This also created challenges and risks, however, associated with my role as a direct participant and key policy actor in the phenomenon being examined, including questions of objectivity, inadvertent and/or inappropriate access to confidential and/or proprietary information, potential errors of memory, and unintended influence on interview participants who could feel constrained in their remarks by our previous professional relationship. Skolnik (1987) discusses the challenges of “role conflict” when the researcher has inside knowledge and potential vested interests in particular research outcomes. I believe the risks of this kind of conflict were lessened in this case by my retirement from Seneca, although admittedly, some could argue that I have ongoing vested interests related to lingering professional ego. On the other hand, as a longstanding Seneca employee with experience as a faculty member, chair, dean and senior executive member, I have developed an intimate knowledge of the college and its history. Further, as the senior vice-president and vice-president academic (VPA) for the duration of the examination period, I was actively involved in ongoing discussions with Ministry staff and senior-level colleagues from other Ontario CAATs regarding system
design and differentiation, and with university partners in the development of formal articulation agreements and broader forms of provincial college-university collaboration. In addition, as a practitioner involved in several related provincial initiatives during this period, I was able to bring a first-hand, broad understanding of the political context to this inquiry that other researchers may not have had in a similar investigation. It was important to recognize, however, that my own background and experiences could shape my interpretation of the data. It was critical to acknowledge this potential bias as I situated myself in the data collection process both as interviewer and data analyst, and to validate my interpretations through third party check-in and subsequent interview probes. In order to ensure that other voices were more prominent in the research than my own, I attempted to confirm, dispute or expand my perceptions and understanding of events with empirical data from the document analysis, and through detailed examination of the views and perceptions of others from within and beyond the college. As emphasized by Creswell (2009):

> In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature. (p. 175)

All data collected for this study and the focus of all interview questions, was regarding one institution only, Seneca College, except where references to other institutions came up as a result of the iterative interview process, and/or these were offered for general comparison purposes. In instances where identifying the names of these institutions would inadvertently identify the respective interviewee, the institution’s name was kept anonymous consistent with ethical review guidelines. These and other issues related to protecting participants’ rights were discussed as appropriate and resolved with
both the Seneca Ethics Review Board and the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board as required. Permission to access historical institutional data, reports and other relevant documents was sought from Seneca’s president and the college’s Research Ethics Board for data collection purposes. Similarly, permission to proceed with key informant interviews with designated internal and external participants was sought, and the proposed interview protocol and interview questions were submitted for review and approval as per the Seneca Research Ethics policy and procedures.

In both the Invitation to Participate and in the Informed Consent Form, interview participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary, that they had the right to decline to answer any question(s) they did not wish to answer and the right to withdraw from the process at any time, and that their answers would be non-identifiable in any reporting of the findings. Participants were also assured that all raw data collected would be kept confidential and secure in my personal home office and destroyed after five years, consistent with University of Toronto policy and in accordance with the specific requirements of the ethical review processes for both institutions.

3.8 Summary

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this thesis, including a two-phased mixed methods approach consisting of document review and analysis, as well as interviews with key informants both internal and external to Seneca. Consistent with a social constructivist worldview, all interviews were open-ended and unstructured allowing participants to develop their own meaning to questions and events, and to identify additional areas on which to focus for deeper examination. This chapter also presents the ethical challenges, limitations and opportunities resulting from my dual role as researcher.
and former senior executive at Seneca, and the strategies used in the research design to deal with these. In the upcoming three chapters, the research findings relating to Seneca’s differentiation are presented, beginning with an examination in Chapter Four of Seneca’s goals and intent in seeking formal differentiated status at the beginning of the study period.
CHAPTER FOUR: Seneca’s Differentiated Status

4.0 Introduction

This chapter, the first of three which presents the research findings, examines data gathered from interviews with internal and external participants as well as from supporting documentation, in order to develop an understanding of what Seneca’s formally approved differentiated status looked like, and what the college’s intent, goals and underlying rationale were in seeking this differentiation. Specifically, the question of what Seneca was attempting to differentiate itself “from” and “to” is considered.

4.1 Background and Context

When Dr. Rick Miner joined Seneca in August 2001 as the College’s fourth president, he engaged faculty, staff, student leaders and the broader community in a college-wide dialogue and consultation process, intended to confirm the college’s strengths and opportunities and develop a strong, shared vision for the institution going forward. In May, 2002, the Board of Governors approved President Miner’s vision for a “New Seneca”, as well as a framework for implementation including the creation of Task Forces to consider options and make recommendations for moving forward (Seneca Board of Governors, Public Session Minutes, May 29, 2002). Immediately following Board approval, Dr. Miner released Future Seneca: Leading the Way Again (2002) which declared Seneca’s intent to become “the first of a new type of post-secondary institution”, a new institutional form that crosses the college-university divide and “has the potential to revolutionize Canada’s understanding of how post-secondary education and skill acquisition could operate in this country” (pp. 2-5). In this same document, Dr. Miner noted: “we are only at
the beginning of a long process” (p. 5).

In August, 2002, the presidents and chairs of Ontario’s Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology received a formal communication from then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Diane Cunningham, providing a “framework and process for colleges that are interested in seeking approval for a greater degree of differentiation”, and inviting colleges that wished to differentiate to submit a Business Case (email correspondence from The Honourable Dianne Cunningham to Board Chairs and Presidents, August 19, 2002). In the President’s Report to the Board in September, 2002 (Public Session), Dr. Miner informed the Board that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities had announced that the “doors are open” for colleges to submit proposals for differentiated status, and that Seneca was in the process of developing a Business Case for submission to the appropriate Board committees for review, prior to seeking full Board approval at its October 30th meeting (Seneca College Board of Governors [Public Session], September 25, 2002). According to Dr. Miner, aside from the “increased stature involved”, the primary benefit of seeking differentiated status would be to “allow Seneca to develop its own applied degree strategy, separate from a competitive process”, including the ability to offer up to 15% of programs at the degree level. At that time, Seneca had just welcomed the first ever Ontario college degree students into its new Financial Services Degree program, as a result of a competitive, pilot initiative. (Seneca had submitted and been approved for the maximum number of baccalaureate degree proposals permitted during the pilot process, and it was unknown what plans there were for college degrees in the future.)

At the same Board meeting, President Miner also reported on a meeting he had attended with then MTCU Deputy Minister Kevin Costante, the Assistant Deputy Minister,
and a Senior Policy Assistant, along with the Seneca Board Chair and Vice-Chair and the Vice-President Academic of the college. The purpose of that meeting, according to the President’s Report, was to discuss the New Seneca vision with Ministry officials and seek their input. In Dr. Miner’s words: “I think it would be fair to say that the Ministry was quite impressed with the vision and how it complemented the Ministry’s educational objectives. They said they would be receptive to a proposal from Seneca” (President’s Report to the Board, September 2002).

In November, 2002, the chair of Seneca College’s Board of Governors submitted *New Seneca: A Business Case for Differentiated Status* to Minister Cunningham for review (email correspondence from R. Atherton to The Honourable Dianne Cunningham, November 7th, 2002). In April, 2003, Minister Cunningham wrote to President Miner: “I am pleased to inform you that the Seneca College business case to differentiate by expanding the choice of education credentials including applied degrees, expanding partnerships with degree-granting institutions, and creating centres of excellence, has been approved” (email correspondence from The Honourable Dianne Cunningham to R. Miner, April 8, 2003).

Thus started Seneca College’s journey towards increased differentiation within the broader context of Ontario’s postsecondary system design.

### 4.2 Formal Differentiated Status: Seneca’s Goals and Intent

During the interview phase of this research, President Miner was asked about his intent and goals for Seneca in pursuing formal differentiation. Dr. Miner referred to the

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4 For purposes of this chapter, references made in the documentation and/or the interviews to the Vice-President Academic and/or the Senior Vice-President are referred to in the third person, in order to assist in creating “distance” between the data presented and the author. In addition, references made to “internal participants” exclude the two presidents’ perspectives. Consistent with the approved interview protocol, data gathered from the interviews with former President Miner and current President Agnew are attributed individually to each as appropriate, and separated from the views provided by other internal interviewees.
visioning consultations he had held with faculty, staff and student leaders throughout the college in Fall/Winter 2001, in response to the new legislation. According to Miner, he received approximately 400 responses to his invitation for input during the consultation period, which had involved “extensive consultation with students, faculty, staff and the external community” (Seneca College Board of Governors Meeting Minutes [Public Session], May 29, 2002). In describing his vision of a “New Seneca” during his interview, Dr. Miner pointed to the discussion document he produced in Spring, 2002 as a result:

I’m not sure I used the word (differentiation), but it talked about changes in the postsecondary system that I thought needed to occur, that a new type of institution was needed, one that would provide better career opportunities for students by expanding their credentials (by that I mean baccalaureate degrees), improve their pathways and laddering, expand applied research and more importantly, use students as part of the applied research delivery...So that’s what I had in my mind in terms of what differentiation looked like...but I think it was equally important to say what it was not supposed to be, and that was, it was not to be a university.

It is interesting in this response that Dr. Miner pointed to the need for changes in the postsecondary system in Ontario (and nationally), rather than focusing on Seneca and its changing needs as an institution. When asked more specifically during his interview what Seneca was trying to differentiate itself “to”, Dr. Miner reiterated: “To a new type of postsecondary institution”, consistent with the vision he had articulated in Seneca: Leading the Way Again (May, 2002). According to that document, “New Seneca” was to be a new institutional form, “the first in Canada to deliberately cross two traditional barriers – one being an historical geographic focus and the other being the college-university divide” (p.2).

The new institution being proposed will avoid the constraints of old. It will be neither a college nor a university; it will, instead, be devoted to integrating practical and conceptual work, hands-on experience coupled with a usable understanding of broad social and economic issues, and short-course training programs along with intensive, long-term study (diploma and degree programs). (p. 2)
The 2002 vision document went on to describe the critical components of this new type of postsecondary institution, including a comprehensive range of credentials (spanning apprenticeship to graduate certificates), expanded degree granting capability, accessibility programs/options, applied research that would be of direct benefit to students’ learning, a national interest and focus, pathways and partnerships with other post-secondary institutions, and more entrance and exit choices for students to support lifelong learning:

*New Seneca* seeks to enhance students’ choice, both in terms of entry and exit options. Creating educational opportunities that complement the learning and credentialization needs of our students over their lifetime will need to be a priority. It...is rooted in creative new partnerships with the private and public sectors, and offers a new model for research-based cooperation between the post-secondary system and the business community. (p. 2)

These same, core institutional priorities for Seneca were outlined in the Business Case for Differentiated Status that was submitted to Minister Cunningham in November, 2002. In a section entitled “Our Vision for the Future: An Overview”, the Business Case describes Seneca’s differentiation goals including: an expansion in programming to create a comprehensive but cohesive range of education and training offerings; greater accessibility “as a means of helping learners achieve their personal objectives”; a multidirectional approach that included multiple entry and exit points, multiple transition opportunities and clear pathways “that support rather than impede a student’s educational aspirations”; and a “critical mass of applied degree programs, supported and sustained by applied research activity” (p. 7). (The document does not define specifically what was meant by a “critical mass” at the time, although Appendix C includes detailed year-over-year projections that forecast total degree enrolment to exceed 4400 students in 14 programs.
by 2009/10). The Business Case further notes that Seneca would continue to develop a range of graduate credentials to facilitate career mobility of post-secondary graduates (New Seneca: A Business Case for Differentiated Status, 2002).

The most compelling evidence of Seneca’s intent and goals in seeking differentiated status, however, can be found in the final Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement that was negotiated with government over several months, and jointly signed by President Miner and then Deputy Minister Kevin Costante in January 2004. This document, framed around the goals Seneca had proposed in its Business Case, includes a list of commitments to which the college was bound in accepting formal differentiated status:

• A comprehensive range of programming (applied degree and non-degree) to meet the needs of both high school graduates and adult learners.

• A maximum of 15% of total programs at the degree level

• Enrolment management to ensure that non-degree enrolments levels are maintained at or above the audited enrolment levels at November, 2002

• Increased accessibility to degree education for current and future Ontario college students through degree completion pathways for diploma graduates within the college system into Seneca’s degrees.

• Partnerships and alliances with universities and other degree-granting institutions to increase pathway options for students.

• Apprenticeship in-class training at levels consistent with previous activity (which was/continues to be minimal at Seneca).
• Applied research to complement degree and diploma programs, with funding to come from non-MTCU sources; creation of a national profile through centres of specialization that respond to economic/sector needs.

• Ongoing quality assurance strategies that ensure above average KPI’s and continuous improvement in all elements.

• Continued financial health, including commitment not to budget for an accumulated operating deficit.

It is perhaps noteworthy that the signed Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement included an additional Ministry-initiated notation that was not included in the Business Case as submitted by Seneca: “the College will continue to operate as a college within the system of colleges of applied arts and technology with the same regulatory, collective bargaining and funding framework” (2004, p. 1). This may have been related to the fact that the college had explicitly asked for an open-ended differentiation model, as noted by the Board Chair in her cover letter for the Business Case: “…the specific model most suited to our students/communities’ needs (e.g. corporate title, organizational structure) to be determined through ongoing dialogue with the Ministry” (New Seneca: A Business Case for Differentiated Status, 2002), a request that the Ministry may have wished to ensure had some boundaries. Another interpretation of the Ministry’s added notation could be that the government wished to signal, early on, that legislative or regulatory changes (e.g. to university status) were not contemplated as part of any of the colleges’
Differentiated Mandate Agreements. This would be a reasonable inclusion, for example, if there was concern in the government that differentiated colleges might expect to “migrate” to university status. This is discussed later in this chapter under the heading “University as a Hidden Agenda”.

Seneca’s signed Differentiated Mandate Agreement also committed the college to participate in a performance review process no later than March 31, 2008, after which the Ministry and college would jointly review the results and make any updates deemed necessary to the agreement. This suggests that the Ministry anticipated that formal differentiation of some colleges could be an ongoing initiative, at least beyond 2008. Indeed, in a section in the agreement labeled ‘Duration’, it is noted that: “This agreement is effective on the date when signed by both parties and continues in effect until revised or concluded by mutual agreement of the two parties” (Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement, 2004, p. 2). Finally, there were two provisions in the signed agreement that spoke to funding, both designed to ensure the college was aware that there would be no new or targeted funding to support the differentiation initiative (other than the incremental degree funding already provided for in policy directives related to college degrees) (p. 1).

4.3 How well were Seneca’s goals for differentiation understood internally?

When asked whether he felt that Seneca’s differentiation goals were well understood internally, Dr. Miner was confident that the management team at Seneca had a clear idea of what the institution was seeking from the beginning, since they had been

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5 In 2003, MTCU issued an updated Operating Procedure as part of its Governance and Accountability Policy Framework for Ontario CAATs that included a new Appendix E, entitled Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITAL) Reports, which set out specific expectations for the ITALs annual reports.
actively involved in the proposal development. He added that management had also discussed the potential “pitfalls” of pursuing a change in institutional nomenclature, with “university status being one of the pitfalls”. This seems to contradict perceptions of Seneca’s aspirations for university status among some external colleagues. According to several interviewees (internal and external), including some government officials, there was an external perception, if not a suspicion, that Seneca’s hidden agenda was to become a university. This contradiction is explored further later in this chapter.

Miner acknowledged that the broader internal community (i.e., beyond mid-senior management) may have had limited understanding, in the early stages, of why Seneca was interested in differentiated status or what it might mean, since the process was “competitive, secretive and the timelines were very short.” He noted that it was challenging enough in those timelines trying to ensure the Board was fully informed and supportive of the proposed differentiation strategy. In speaking about the college community at large, he explained: “the institution is huge and there just wasn’t time for broad consultation.” He noted, however, that the initial visioning consultations, plus the creation of internal Task Forces to develop strategies and implementation plans once the New Seneca Vision was approved, allowed for broader participation and understanding of the specifics.

Responses to related interview questions by internal participants confirmed Dr. Miner’s belief that the management team had a solid understanding of Seneca’s differentiation goals. The components of Seneca’s approved differentiation were well understood, and supported, by all of the internal interviewees, although some added that the college’s initial, primary focus was baccalaureate degrees. Almost all participants were quick to clarify that this didn’t just mean stand-alone degrees, although the college’s intent
was clear in terms of moving aggressively in this area consistent with legislative parameters. According to some senior administrators who were interviewed, they were uncertain at the beginning in terms of how the college would manage an expansion of its mandate without impacting its longstanding commitment to its historical, access roots. In each of these cases, however, the participants went on to indicate that, within that first year, the specifics became clearer. As articulated by one former dean, “(S)ome of the goals [such as degree-granting] were pretty clear and became more clear over time. But the big picture re: how comprehensive we were going to become wasn’t immediately clear. Then the pieces started to emerge.”

Consistent with the above, all internal interviewees confirmed that Seneca was interested in expanding access and options for students seeking baccalaureate education, including references to degree completion opportunities for Ontario college diploma students, internal pathways into Seneca’s own degrees, joint degrees, partnerships and transfer arrangements with other postsecondary institutions, and multiple entry and exit options for lifelong learners. References to applied research were less prominent in their responses, although several internal participants understood this as being an integral academic component of advanced, applied education.

Several internal participants confirmed Dr. Miner’s perception that there may have been initial uncertainty regarding Seneca’s differentiation goals within the broader internal community. One former dean suggested that staff and faculty understood what the college was trying to do, “in pockets”, and were on board, “in pockets”. Almost all participants noted that it was well understood among the internal community that differentiated status was about expanding the college’s mandate to include baccalaureate degrees, but some felt
there was limited understanding in the early months of other academic components such as increased applied research, more pathways and credit transfer opportunities for students. Dr. Miner specifically acknowledged that there was early, internal confusion and anxiety, in certain faculty corners, around the college’s declared intention to pursue applied research - which he felt was tied to a lack of understanding of the proposed model:

Our emphasis on applied research also frightened people. That’s when I did some trooping around, internally, to say ‘it’s a different model, it’s not a university model where everyone has to do research. It’s a group effort, it’s a team effort, it’s working with industry; it’s applied research and you don’t have to have a Ph. D to do it’...We tried to assure them it was not a ‘publish or perish’ model. That’s why we kept saying, ‘It’s not a university; we are not going the university route.’

In response to interview questions related to what Seneca was striving to differentiate itself ‘to’, almost all internal participants used language similar to this former dean: “To the kind of institution Ryerson used to be, before it became a university”. This same participant continued:

I think we were trying to get into this middle ground. We were not going to be a university; we weren’t trying to be a university. At that time, we all felt a university was a little more theoretical than we wanted to go. We were trying to bring together theory and actually putting theory into practice within an education. There was that middle ground. The colleges (until then) were more applied perhaps, with not enough theory in some people’s minds...So I think that’s where we were heading...where Ryerson once was and then they went on to be a university so now there was a “gap” in Ontario.

The response above suggests an interesting contrast between internal and external participants’ perceptions, in general. Many participants, both internal and external, made references to Ryerson as they thought about the kind of institution Seneca was seeking to become (along with some other differentiating colleges). Several external interviewees interpreted this negatively, since Ryerson eventually migrated to university status. Most internal participants, however, saw Ryerson’s evolution to a university as leaving an
unfortunate gap in choices for Ontario students, therefore creating an opportunity for Seneca:

So Ryerson around that same time had moved from being a polytechnic with a lot of strength and a great reputation, to being a university. And in this shift, they had to change; they were actually trying to get away from that ethos of whatever negativity or perception existed, that it was ‘less than’ a university. And so they were moving obviously into graduate studies and trying to position themselves as Ryerson University rather than polytechnic institute. So there was a “hole” particularly in the GTA for this space. And Seneca, we felt, could really occupy that space with a lot of strength.

According to one internal participant, Seneca was trying to differentiate itself not only from other colleges, “because we were known as a college that did advanced programs”, but also from the universities, because “universities were looked upon as giving a certain level and kind of education, but we felt we were offering something different”:

I think we saw that other provinces had very successful polytechnic institutions that combined both applied learning with academic learning. That was really impressive and was certainly recognized well in the rest of Canada. And Ontario didn’t have that at all. We had either colleges - and colleges were colleges - or we had universities, and no one saw that there could maybe be a place for what was once-upon-a-time, at Ryerson. But with Ryerson changing to a university, it really lost its ability and, I think, a great strength it gave Ontario, in the sense of high quality, advanced applied education. I understand why Ryerson did it; lots of advantages for the institution and for their students. But I think it created a gap.

4.4 How well were Seneca’s goals for differentiation understood by the external community?

During his interview, Dr. Miner was also asked how well he thought the external community - government, institutional leaders, higher education organizations - understood Seneca’s rationale and goals for differentiation. He noted that some external stakeholders did not understand that Seneca’s polytechnic agenda was consistent with the college’s differentiation goals. For many, he felt, Seneca’s differentiation strategy was solely about polytechnic status – and even that was seen as simply a stepping stone, noting this
was because “they migrated back to the Ryerson thing – that it (polytechnic status) was simply a strategy to become a university.”

According to one university executive, Dr. Miner’s perception was an accurate one, at least in terms of the Ontario universities’ reactions, but the suspicions of a “hidden university agenda” were not reserved for Seneca:

I could see, clearly, that the three [colleges] were polytechnics, wanted to be polytechnics, and wanted to live in that space... The rest of the university presidents absolutely believed this was a stepping stone, really believed that this was a back door way to become a university.

4.5 University as a (Perceived) Hidden Agenda

Most internal participants shared Dr. Miner’s perceptions of the external community’s perspective, as articulated by these (former and current) senior administrators:

It [polytechnic pursuit] was perceived as a goal to become a university. I think they, the universities, pointed to other jurisdictions where becoming a polytechnic means you’re becoming a university – and we already had enough universities in the province. It was argued to be a duplication of resources.

Similarly:

People always compared it to what happened with Ryerson. They started offering degrees, they became a polytechnic, and then they became a university. And so that was the one contemporary example that people could point to, and that was the one that people at Seneca would use to counter emphasize, ‘No, that is not what we are trying to do’.

In describing, specifically, the Ontario universities’ response to Seneca’s differentiation pursuits, internal and external respondents used language such as “suspicious”, “threatened”, and in some cases, “disinterested, at first”. Dr. Miner’s preferred descriptor was “largely negative”:

They saw us as a threat, as one GTA university president told me explicitly: “You are now a competitor”. They thought this was the Ryerson route to a university. They
didn’t want any new universities popping up on their doorsteps, especially when four of five differentiated colleges were metro-centered. Their perceptions may have been partially justified because we know at least one of the other differentiated colleges did see differentiation as a route to university…but Seneca was a bit different. But the Ontario universities didn’t understand what differentiation was about - all they could focus on was the degrees.

Some external participants, however, including those from other differentiated colleges, seemed clear that Seneca was not interested in becoming a university. There was a perception among several participants (internal and external) that Seneca and Humber had similar goals, and these did not include any interest in becoming a university. An external participant with both government and institutional experience offered this explanation of Seneca’s (and other differentiated colleges’) goals:

I think they were trying to differentiate themselves into a new kind of post-secondary institution. I don’t think they really wanted to become new universities, but I think they wanted to be recognized as sort of a new tier, a new class, that offered a different kind of…maybe on the German model or something, where, if you couldn’t have the name polytechnic, you could have the characteristics of a polytechnic. But, the name had become an issue (emphasis added).

Another former, senior government official had a similar understanding: “I don’t think Seneca was trying to become like any other institution in Ontario”. This same individual, however, added a caveat that the differentiation goals (and university aspirations) of the “three” GTA institutions weren’t necessarily the same:

I think Seneca was trying to do a partnership thing which was fairly new at the time; not sure anyone else was trying to build in the same way, it was almost before that ‘kind of thing’ was really kindled…So maybe this was kind of filling a void, by taking a different route to connecting yourself to the ‘A team’, whereas the other guys were trying to recreate the ‘A team’ environment, and the ‘A team’ credentials and programs.

This notion that there was a perceived “A team” (and by extension, a “B Team”) in the Ontario postsecondary system arose in discussions with several participants, and points to the literature on hierarchical positioning in higher education and the resultant
implications for differentiation efforts. This is examined further in the analysis offered in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Perceptions among (current and former) senior government officials interviewed for this study varied significantly in terms of Seneca’s perceived “hidden” university agenda. As noted by one senior official:

He [Dr. Miner] had a vision. When you hear about a highly skilled workforce now, this is where we are at. So Rick actually, in so many ways, was ahead of the game. He was ahead of the curve. And ironically, now you’ve got universities hurrying up in order to demonstrate that their programs actually translate into skills... I really felt that this was, for him, part of his vision. He was extremely well informed by what was going on, and no, never... I never felt that this was about Rick wanting to be president of a university.

One government colleague had a contrary view: “Frankly speaking, I think that Seneca was trying to become a university.” This same participant continued:

We had lots of conversations around colleges wanting to be different and differentiation. If I was to look at it in terms of, which ones were really pushing, I think Humber wanted to become a university for sure...I think the second was Seneca, and then third would have been Sheridan. Rick already seemed to have a roadmap, and this was just... ‘how quickly can we get there? (It was like...) ’Fine. For government, we can start with some (small) steps, but ultimately, you know we could become a university. We’re the largest. We have the highest-quality programs.’ So that was my sense looking from the outside in.

Interestingly, in referring to the government’s understanding of Seneca’s goals, President Miner noted:

The Ministry had very few people with college experience... They equally could not understand that this was a new type of institution that some of us were trying to create, that it was not a threat to universities, not a threat to the historical college system, but because it had degrees (included in the model), it was seen as a threat.

He went on to offer a further explanation:

They didn’t get it because there was no model in the world for what we were trying to do. There was none. Not in the States, not around the world. In the States, the evolution of applied institutions was very different, it came mostly from the engineering schools and they therefore turned into Institutes of Technology or
something. In Europe, there were Institutes of Technology but they were very specialized – so they were technology-based and had a real depth of programming as opposed to breadth. But what we said was, we want breadth, we want access, we want laddered credentials, and we’re going to be different.

One external participant with both government and institutional experience had a counter argument, however, of what the government should have recognized, or understood, in Seneca’s differentiation goals:

Let’s face it. It was government that asked the colleges to submit proposals for differentiation. So obviously, government was looking for sort of a new breed of institution that could fill a niche that was not being met, because the gap between colleges and universities was never being successfully addressed, despite all of those talks and all of those councils and everything else about enhancing collaborative programs.

Another senior government official had a similar recollection, noting that there was a momentum at the MTCU in the early-to mid 2000s in favour of increased college differentiation and the potential designation of polytechnics:

Within the ministry at least, there had been a sort of policy conversation going on about differentiation, I would say at a very high level. Within the context of that general policy conversation around differentiation, the case of Seneca came up because...I think this was a strategic direction that the president at the time had set out... I had not been privy to any previous conversations but I definitely got the sense that for Seneca this was a real strategic direction. So there was a differentiation conversation, which was a broad conversation within the ministry, but when it came to Seneca in particular, it was clearly about polytechnics.

4.6 How well was the connection between differentiated status and the polytechnic agenda understood?

Responses from both internal and external participants indicated some confusion in terms of the relationship between formal differentiated status in the college sector, degree-granting authority for some colleges, and the pursuit of polytechnic designation by some presidents. In some cases, interviewees referred to these interchangeably. Some external participants were unaware that there had been a formal, government-initiated process
attached to college differentiation; they understood differentiation as being solely a by-
product of certain colleges’ degree-granting capacity and success. For others,
differentiation was totally about the efforts by some college presidents to become
polytechnics. Overall, internal participants had a much more complete and clear
understanding of the formal process for seeking formal differentiation, and the specific
components of Seneca’s approved, signed Differentiation College Mandate Accountability
Agreement with government.

According to several internal interviewees, there was a “lag” in understanding (and
buy-in) regarding the polytechnic agenda and how it fit into the overall differentiation
package. One participant suggested this may have varied along Faculty lines, since
polytechnic translates literally into “many technologies” and therefore “speaks in spades to
science and technology, but wasn’t’ really resonating so much with community services and
business”. As noted by another senior administrator:

I think Seneca’s motivation – as well as Humber’s and the other ones who did get it
(differentiated status) – was to be able to offer more degrees...But then there was
the belief that there was another opportunity in the Ministry too, for polytechnic
status. And I understood differentiation to be separate and sort of the precursor to
eventual polytechnic status.

This last comment seems to support the notion that seeking formal differentiation
(from the other CAATs) and then towards polytechnic status were logical, sequential
components of a natural institutional progression for Seneca. This viewpoint is supported
by the time lag that occurred between the date when Seneca’s formal Business Case for
Differentiated Status (Fall, 2002) was submitted - with no explicit reference to polytechnic
status - and the college’s subsequent, active use of the polytechnic language (up to and
including its explicit inclusion as a Board-approved priority in the Strategic Plan 2008-
The perception of a ‘staging’ or sequencing is also supported by the timing of Seneca’s formal proposal for polytechnic designation as submitted to the Deputy Minister in July, 2008. The context leading up to this submission is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

The interviews with internal participants confirmed that there was some confusion or uncertainty as to how, or whether, the “polytechnic piece” was part of Seneca’s differentiation strategy. The college’s decision not to include a request for a change in institutional nomenclature in its Business Case seems to have contributed to this confusion. To this point, the formal document states that: “(t)he vision is deliberately broad, to allow for consideration of a variety of means for its realization” (p. 6). By decoupling the institutional nomenclature question from its formal Business Case, Seneca may have created some unintentional ambiguity about the context for pursing polytechnic status. According to several senior administrators, the connection between the two wasn’t immediately obvious to the internal community. As expressed by one former dean:

At one point, there were different agendas happening concurrently. The polytechnic piece wasn’t really part of the differentiated piece, and yet it was an overlay for everything that was going on, and certainly was Rick’s goal at the time, so a lot of focus and attention was put on that…. It was not clear in my mind whether some of the institutional decisions we made were to do with differentiation or with polytechnic. They were occurring concurrently; they weren’t necessarily related, but they were intertwined.

Another senior administrator at Seneca offered a possible explanation as to how these two were ‘intertwined’:

The idea of being a polytechnic seemed to be less from the government, and more from the colleges themselves, like ‘let’s take the next leap’, so to speak. There was a belief that there were people within the government who were seriously looking for the ‘third leg on the stool’. But I recall differentiation being different than the polytechnic agenda. Polytechnic was sort of the next step beyond differentiation. I
think the big difference is the government seemed really willing to do differentiation but had to be coaxed into polytechnic, which of course never happened.

One senior administrator at the college had a completely different recollection, however, noting that the positioning of Seneca as a polytechnic came from the president and was “part and parcel” of the differentiation piece:

And it became part of an ongoing conversation at the deans’ table. We talked about ‘what is a polytechnic’? What does that mean? What’s included and what isn’t included? We talked about the full range of credentials from apprenticeships through baccalaureate, and that some polytechnics (in other jurisdictions) offered Masters. We talked a lot about the term polytechnic and how inclusive it really was, how people would perceive that. So it (differentiation) really, was about polytechnic and that came along around the same time as degree granting.

4.7 Seneca’s “No-name” strategy

As noted earlier, when the Board of Governors approved Seneca’s formal Business Case for Differentiation in October, 2002, it included an open ended, broadly defined strategy that allowed consideration of multiple institutional models. Leading up to the Board approval, President Miner provided a summer update on the visioning process to the college community, in which he explained: “I don’t want Seneca to be limited by any pre-defined titles or others’ ideas of what postsecondary education should be. I want us to come to our own conclusions in our own time, without preset deadlines” (Seneca College corporate files, August, 2002). These same messages were delivered separately by the President and Vice-President Academic at various Fall Semester Welcome Back meetings for faculty (Seneca College corporate files, August 2002).

A number of interviewees added that the college decided on this open-ended differentiation strategy (i.e., “seeking no name change at this time”), in recognition that the internal community was still debating alternatives. According to several senior administrators who were interviewed, the earliest months of the differentiation journey
were used to research, examine, consider and debate institutional models:

I remember at the time that the [college] library was very involved in researching this for us. The name polytechnic was always linked with Ryerson, but I think Ryerson was already a university by then. The only thing in Canada and the US we could compare to, was Ryerson. Polytechnic meant different things around the world – sometimes it was very technical, and sometimes it was not as ‘post-secondary’ as we would have liked... Because it meant so many different things, we believed that no one would know what it meant here. And in order to keep our options open we wanted to remain Seneca College – we weren’t even using the “Applied Arts and Technology” anymore. (In the beginning), we didn’t want to tie ourselves to “polytechnic” because we believed people didn’t fully understand what it was. There were a lot of unknowns about polytechnic. It was misunderstood. We still wanted the differentiation however, because it had all the characteristics that we knew we wanted, without tying us to any nomenclature... We wanted to keep everything associated with it (polytechnic status) but knew the name was misunderstood.

Another senior, internal participant noted:

I recall rejecting ‘university-college’ because it was new in BC at the time, and no one knew where that was going either. It was a time when names/labels were being tried, and no one fully understood what was going on. People understood ‘college’; people understood ‘university’. One of the reasons we favoured ‘college’ – even though it’s used differently in the U.S. vs. Canada as well, was because, in our minds, we knew the other names were so misunderstood. At least ‘college’ gave us a status that a ‘community college’ didn’t.

In Dr. Miner’s post-consultation visioning document (Seneca: Leading the Way Again, May 2002), the president used the name “New Seneca” for ease of reference in describing the new institution and its emerging priorities - noting that this should be seen as “a working name until we can agree on a new one” (p. 2). The possibility of pursuing polytechnic status is explicit in this early document, but only as one of several potential strategies for the college to consider in order to optimize its degree-granting capability - alongside other possible approaches such as applying for “institute” status, partnering with existing universities within Ontario or beyond, or forming a new university independently or in partnership with an existing entity (p. 3). It is worth noting, as well, that this list of
potential degree-granting strategies included a notation that internal support for the polytechnic name at that time was low. In the visioning document, Dr. Miner acknowledged that the question of institutional nomenclature was one about which the internal community had multiple, seemingly opposing views – and he mused about one way in which the college might reconcile these:

The ‘what we should call ourselves’ question has been clearly one where people have both concern and passion. Some like it the way it is. A few prefer we become a polytechnic. Another group likes the term ‘institute’. Still others have a vision of a university. Clearly, all these divergent views are not easily compatible under one name. But perhaps they are. I increasingly think we should be branding ourself (sic) as simply Seneca. We should be the comprehensive institution that delivers a wide range of quality programs and credentials enhanced by a variety of corporate partnerships and research activities. Then, under the Seneca brand, we create complementary sub-brands such as Seneca College, Seneca Institute, Seneca University, Seneca... These “sub-brands” could then be changed as we evolve, leaving the overall brand (Seneca) in place as changes are made. (p. 5)

A number of internal participants indicated that they had served on one of the five task forces created by Dr. Miner to move the New Seneca vision forward, after Leading the Way Again (2002) had been released and endorsed by the Board. Members of the “Task Force on Degree Granting Options” indicated that they had spent a fair amount of time as a committee looking at various institutional models and nomenclature. It was also this group that was responsible for developing the Business Case for Differentiated Status that was ultimately approved by the Board and submitted to the Ministry. When asked why Seneca had decided on an open-ended (“no-name”) approach in its Business Case, one former Task Force member noted:

There wasn’t consensus on our Task Force (about nomenclature). Probably not even at the Executive level, let alone the college. So we were being tentative. We didn’t want to close any doors until we knew our options. We knew we wanted to be a college that offered degrees; we didn’t know what we wanted to call ourselves.

Another internal participant who had served on the same Task Force stated:
I don’t think any of us wanted to say “Seneca University” – I think that was one area that we were able to reach consensus pretty quickly. Polytechnic had some supporters, but other names were also bantered about: a university-college model, and/or the U.S. model with two year college programs flowing into upper levels. We talked about all those things, but I don’t think any of us wanted to be Seneca University.

When asked why the Task Force members felt so strongly about not pursuing university status, this committee member responded: “We weren’t happy with what the universities were doing. There was always that gap: they were in the clouds and we were on the ground. I don’t think we wanted to be in the clouds.”

We never said we wanted to be a university. We never went that route. We weren’t even asking for polytechnic at that time. We were looking for the opportunity to offer degrees in limited program areas, and spent a lot of time talking about the models that were out there, to see if there were any we wanted to adopt.

An August 8th, 2002 email communication to the Seneca community from President Miner supports this perception. In this email, Dr. Miner provided an update on Seneca’s visioning task forces and included a section entitled, “Provincial Developments”. In this section, he indicated that members of the college executive had met with senior officials of MTCU and received some “encouraging news”:

The ministry will support a variety of models for post-secondary institutions, there will be no time-limit on the application for these models and there will be no quotas. All of this is good news as we begin to look at Seneca’s role in the future of education. (Miner, personal communication, August, 2002)

Dr. Miner further advised the community that he was aware that some other colleges had already made submissions to the government:

...to seek status as polytechnics or institutes of technology and advanced learning. I think that Seneca will be best served by taking the time to look at all the models that are available; we can then plan without the limits that may be placed on us by those models. In other words, we will be free to think of innovative new ways to deliver education, and this will allow us to create the strongest possible vision for the future of Seneca. (August, 2002)
4.8 A Historical Snapshot: The momentum for college differentiation and polytechnics in Ontario

The belief that a new type of post-secondary institution was needed in Ontario, and that Seneca was ideally positioned to evolve into this new model, was not a notion that President Miner developed independently and without consideration of Ontario's postsecondary history. Indeed, the momentum for Dr. Miner’s vision for New Seneca, as articulated in Leading the Way Again (2002), had been building both within the college, and the sector, for several prior years. In referring to Bills 132 and 147, this external participant with both institutional and government experience noted: “The legislation certainly had an impact on the college sector. (But) I have to think that alot of the thinking behind differentiation and polytechnics originated well before the legislation....” Another senior government official had a similar recollection, noting that by 2002, “there were four or five colleges that had already been trying to become polytechnics”. This is also consistent with details provided in President Miner’s speaking notes for the August, 2002 Welcome Back meetings (Seneca College corporate files, August 2002).

Dr. Miner’s vision for New Seneca was also aligned with postsecondary predictions made by his predecessor, former Seneca president Stephen E. Quinlan, in an interview with D’Arcy Jenish, a Maclean’s reporter, in November, 2000 (Seneca College corporate files, November, 2000). In preparation for an upcoming issue of Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities, then President Quinlan was asked to consider what trends and developments he saw for postsecondary education in the future. His interview notes offer some interesting foreshadowing of the system transformation that would take place in Ontario over the next 10 years: “The polytechnic gap in Ontario will have to be filled. We have a
strong university system and a strong college system, but we are lacking in-depth applied education resources. That’s why Seneca is focused on advanced applied education” (pp. 4-5).

The former president’s comments were consistent with a dominant discourse among institutional leaders especially in the large, GTA colleges over the latter part of his term (mid-late 1990s), in response to advocacy by individual institutions and various provincial reviews and commissions appointed by government. During the Vision 2000 review of the Ontario Colleges’ mandate, for example, initiated by government in the late 1980s, Dr. Stuart Smith (1989) wrote a report that stressed the need for an advanced level of “polytechnic education” in Ontario, and examined various options for meeting that need (Stuart, 1989). In 1991, former Ryerson president Walter Pitman was appointed as chair of the Task Force on Advanced Training, which was mandated specifically to consider the recommendations of Vision 2000 that pertained to the need for advanced education. The Task Force reaffirmed the significant need for degree-level, polytechnic-like education in Ontario, but recommended an “institute without walls” as the most promising model through which to achieve this (Pitman, 1993). In July, 1996, an Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education was appointed by then Minister of Education and Training, John Snobelen (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1996). The Panel’s Report, entitled “Excellence, Accessibility, Responsibility”, argued that the basic structure of Ontario’s postsecondary structure at that time was sound, but needed to evolve in a way that permitted “the emergence of differentiation in strengths among colleges and universities in order that the multiple purposes of the postsecondary sector can best be attained” (p. 3). Recommendation 12 in the Panel’s Report specifically stated “secular
degrees should continue to be a responsibility of universities at this time. It should be possible, however, for a college to transform to polytechnic degree-granting status and from there to a university” (p. 46).

Each of these reviews and reports (and others) stimulated robust debate among policy actors in institutions and in the broader postsecondary sector. In October, 1998, Seneca’s then Vice-President Academic (VPA) Tony Tilly issued an internal “white’ paper on degree-granting options for the colleges entitled Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology Background Paper on Applied Degrees: Alternatives for Ontario and for Colleges (Tilly, 1998). In Dr. Tilly’s discussion paper, the former VPA noted that there was a prominent “polytechnic” thrust occurring in many other parts of the world, and “in this context...Seneca College must make a significant contribution to the blueprint for Ontario’s higher education in the year 2001 and for its own future” (p. 3). In April, 2000, then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Dianne Cunningham issued a consultation paper entitled Increasing Degree Opportunities for Ontarians, which signaled the government’s interests in exploring system transformation as a means to provide more opportunities for excellence in education, innovation and flexible choices. In her covering letter introducing the paper, Minister Cunningham reiterated these goals, stating that the purpose of the government’s consultation was to ensure there would be a place in postsecondary education for “all willing and motivated Ontario students who wish to attend” (Ontario MTCU, April, 2000). She continued in this same communication: “We have been exploring all possible options to increase choices for getting a degree, including some groundbreaking new approaches” (April, 2000). In September, 2000, the Ontario government appointed an “Investing in Students Task Force” to consult and consider
emerging student needs, trends and policy issues facing postsecondary education at the
time. The Task Force report, *Portals and Pathways - A Review of Postsecondary Education in Ontario* declared the need to “expand the vision for the 21st century by recognizing the
differentiated missions for postsecondary institutions…. Polytechnical and other
specialized institutions could foster advanced training and skills...” (Ontario MTCU,
February 2001, p. vi). Noting that “one size does not fit all” (p. 43), the report included a
section entitled “A New Breed of Polytechnics” which emphasized that “polytechnic
institutes may well emerge as another form of specialized expertise...” (p. 43).
The early efforts by Seneca’s previous president (S. E. Quinlan) and other college leaders to
move the polytechnic agenda forward (i.e. before the study period) were highlighted by a
number of interview participants for this thesis, including one external participant who
brought both government and institutional experience to the discussion. This participant
recalled a general lobbying effort that started in the late 1990s and included letters and
meetings with ministers setting out this new vision for some colleges, “Seneca being one of
them.”

It certainly wasn’t all the colleges. There were some colleges that were quite happy
to keep their old traditional mandate...but there were some seeking out a different
role with different credentialism....It evolved over a long period of time, but I think
what changed was the receptivity of the government to do something in this regard.

In late winter, 2001, Seneca hired a former VPA from the Ontario college sector to
develop two background documents, one entitled *Research on Polytechnics for Seneca
College* (Sawyer, March 23, 2001) and a subsequent paper entitled *Developing the Seneca
Case for A Change in Status* (Sawyer, September 10, 2001). The first paper provided an
overview of polytechnic institutions, trends and experiences in other jurisdictions. The
second document offered a framework of considerations to guide Seneca as it examined the
rationale, benefits and evidence to support a change in institutional status. With reference to Minister Cunningham’s April, 2000 degree consultation paper, Ms. Sawyer emphasized that “(i)t is important that any change in status that a college undertakes must demonstrate how it meets the government agenda” (Sawyer, September 10, 2001, p. 2). Relevant to the findings of this research, the closing paragraph in Ms. Sawyer’s September paper offered particularly telling advice:

In developing the case, it is important to remember that the decision to position the institution as a polytechnic, a university college, a technical university or some other type of institution of higher education will be a political one. This means that, in addition to making a strong case on the basis of merit, equal attention will have to be given to advocacy and communications, particularly with regard to Seneca’s current internal and external stakeholders and the leaders who will influence the final decision. (p. 12)

In April, 2001, according to Seneca’s Board of Governors’ meeting documentation, a presentation was made to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board (ASA) by then Director of Government and Corporate Relations, Liz Thoms, on the Investing In Students Task Force Report (Portal and Pathways), providing an overview of the recommendations and issues identified therein and seeking Board input and reaction. According to the minutes from that meeting, Senior Vice-President Tilly spoke at the end of Director Thoms’ presentation noting that, “it would be in the College’s best interest to investigate polytechnic status as an outgrowth of the strategic direction already established” (Seneca College ASA Committee, April 10, 2001, p. 3). Dr. Tilly also advised the Board that “four to five proposals by institutions within the province will be moving in the polytechnic direction” (p. 3).

In late Spring, 2001, prior to Dr. Miner’s arrival at Seneca but following the enactment of Bill 132 (PECEA Act, 2000), Director Thoms asked the senior library team at
Seneca’s Newnham Campus to develop an informational backgrounder on the potential options and models of differentiation that Seneca might consider. Entitled *Post-Secondary Educational Models: Possible Options for the Future of Seneca*, the final, comprehensive package included critical analyses on four possible models including “institutes of technology”, “polytechnics”, “private universities” and “university colleges” (Seneca College, Strachan and Bolan, 2001). In their discussion of polytechnics as a potential model, the authors cited Skolnik (1989) in noting that the polytechnic term was used in varying contexts at the time to describe both a type of institution (such as in Europe), and a type of education that was independent of the particular institution (as in Ontario). “Though elusive of definition, polytechnic education has been portrayed [in Ontario]…as a form of education which is intended to bridge the gap between the theoretical emphases of the university and the applied emphases of the CAATs…” (p. 3). Strachan and Bolan’s package also noted that, despite this ambiguity of definition, Sheridan College had already submitted a formal polytechnic proposal to MTCU (“Transformation: Becoming Sheridan Polytechnic”, June, 2001), with an editorial comment that “(i)t is evident that whatever model Sheridan proposes, they would like it to be the province wide template for polytechnics” (Seneca, 2001, p. 6). In this same package, the Seneca authors note that Conestoga College had also publicly declared its intentions and made a submission to government for polytechnic status, with Humber and others close behind, stating (at least) preliminary interest.

In May 2001, under then President Quinlan’s leadership, the Board of Governors of Seneca submitted a formal response to the Portals and Pathways report through ACAATO (the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, now Colleges Ontario). In their
response, the Board included a statement of intent regarding differentiation and the possibility of a polytechnic model: “Seneca College intends to submit a position paper and proposal in this regard to the provincial government” (Seneca College corporate files May 16, 2001).

At the October 24th, 2001 meeting of the Board, Seneca’s Director of Government and Corporate Relations made another, follow-up presentation to the governors entitled: Positioning Seneca in the Changing Postsecondary Educational Environment (Board of Governors’ Meeting, October 24, 2001 [Public Session]). According to the minutes from that meeting, a commitment was made by the director to prepare two follow-up documents for the Board: 1) An update on the case for a change in status for Seneca and 2) Research on polytechnics and implications for Seneca. New president Dr. Rick Miner then outlined his plans for “next steps” towards a new vision and direction for Seneca, including focus groups of faculty, staff and Board members to be set up from November through January, as well as invitations for online student input. A formal motion was carried that “All members of the Board be encouraged to attend” one of these focus groups. (Seneca College Board of Governors Meeting Minutes, October 24, 2001, [Public Session], p. 6).

The polytechnic discourse was alive and well, therefore, when The Postsecondary Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 (Bill 132), and The Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002 (Bill 147) were passed by the then Conservative government. Dr. Miner stressed that he and members of his management team, (along with other GTA presidents who had similarly declared their polytechnic interests), were encouraged especially by the “New College Charter”. Among other provisions, the Charter provided legislative authority for some colleges to seek and be granted “differentiated status”. The
formal invitation by Minister Dianne Cunningham in August 2002, therefore, for individual colleges to submit a business case for differentiation was a long anticipated and welcome one, consistent with the expectations of those institutional leaders

Ontario colleges began to submit (or resubmit) formal Business Cases for Differentiated Status immediately following the government’s invitation. In fact, according to Dr. Miner, ‘the word on the street’ by the time the formal call was issued, was that both Humber’s and Sheridan’s polytechnic proposals had already made their way through the MTCU bureaucracy to the Deputy Minister’s desk. Later that same month, President Miner provided another update to the Seneca community: “In the coming months, I fully expect to see the face of post-secondary education change across the province. We could see several colleges change to polytechnic status or a similar designation” (Seneca College corporate files, August, 2002). In Fall, 2002, however, the Ministry notified the colleges that the institutional nomenclature that would be offered to those approved for differentiation would be “ITAL” (Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning), rather than the polytechnic nomenclature for which the respective presidents had been advocating - and anticipating - and which had dominated the discourse in the preceding years.

Three colleges that were approved for formal differentiated status (Humber, Sheridan and Conestoga) immediately accepted the government’s alternative offer of the “ITAL” nomenclature nonetheless - albeit begrudgingly, according to some interviewees. Sheridan College became Sheridan ITAL, for example, with the full, legal name of Sheridan College Institute of Applied Arts and Technology. Seneca and George Brown College stood out as outliers in deciding not to adopt the ITAL name. (Still, by receiving formal, approved differentiation, both colleges were included by the government in the ITAL category for
practical and policy purposes.) This decision by Seneca was overwhelmingly supported by internal participants in this study, and given the “thumbs up” by most external interviewees. Almost all interviewees believed that the ITAL nomenclature added virtually no value to the institutional names or reputations of those colleges that did accept it (some government interviewees chose not to offer an opinion). In describing the impact of the ITAL name on those colleges that chose to take it, this internal interviewee noted:

I don’t think it made any difference to them...I think it might have given them a week of internal pride, or maybe a month, but in the end, people say “Seneca”. They don’t even say “Seneca College”, and the same with Sheridan, or Humber. So I think, actually, the partnerships that we had with universities did more for our reputation than having the ITAL nomenclature would have.

The most commonly held opinion among participants (internal and external) was that the ITAL designation was not a desirable option. One internal interviewee described it as “very offensive”. Other descriptors included “silly”, “not helpful”, “an insult”, “almost laughable”. Another internal participant, who was supportive of Seneca’s decision not to rush into any specific nomenclature, clarified: “We’re just talking about names here, but I would have preferred polytechnic over ITAL because ITAL had no meaning – it was like a made-up name.” One former senior government official had a similar perspective: “Nobody knows what an ITAL is... One hundred people in the world, maybe”.

Reflecting on the ITAL designation, this same individual suggested that it was a “saw-off”, i.e. between the colleges’ interests in a polytechnic nomenclature, and those who feared the ‘polytechnic’ name was an inevitable stepping stone to university status. Another participant with both institutional and government experience concurred that the name had, indeed, become an issue.
I think if you asked any person on the street, ‘what’s an ITAL?’ they’d all look at you like you were... It killed the polytechnic idea, but it didn’t really achieve any kind of noticeable level (or recognition) for the public.

An internal interviewee who had participated in focus groups with Seneca students, parents and the general public offered a similar perspective:

Nobody knew what an ITAL was. It had no brand significance. No one had any idea what that meant. Polytechnic had some; the general public thought they understood what a polytechnic was, perhaps because the provinces out west had polytechnics... There was a certain level of understanding. It is a brand that people understand has a certain level of technical education that’s pretty sophisticated.

One former dean noted: “Everybody knew in the Toronto area what Ryerson was about.

And I would hazard to say that everybody in British Columbia understands BCIT’s role.”

This same internal participant provided an additional perspective on the college’s reaction to the ITAL name:

We really wanted to be polytechnic. I mean, Rick Miner really wanted us to polytechnic. And (by then) we were really all on that polytechnic train. There were some sensitivities around the name, polytechnic, but we had come to a place where it meant comprehensive, it meant this and that. And I think as an institution, we were okay with it. And if we pointed to Ryerson, no one was going to say, “Oh yeah, Ryerson, it was only about technology,” because it certainly wasn’t. So we were in a good spot and then the government pulled it and said, “No, we’re not ready to talk about polytechnic or to have you called polytechnic. But we’ll let you be called Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITALs).” And at the Dean’s table, we went: “Huh? ‘ITALs?’” Because we knew branding was important and although people would have different ideas about what a polytechnic was, for sure they wouldn’t know what an ITAL was.

This same participant concluded: “So that was one government decision that, really, I can remember us being quite surprised and actually very disappointed in, because we had been marching along and building the narrative internally, along with the support.”

In what could be seen as an ironic twist therefore (and perhaps a backfire of intent for government), it seems that the internal community at Seneca became more convinced of, and committed to, the polytechnic nomenclature once that option was removed from the
table, with the only available alternative being “ITAL”. There was no consensus, however, among external participants as to whether the term polytechnic had recognizable meaning.

This one former government official explained:

The problem for government is that the polytechnic concept has no centre to it that they can grab on to -- it can be whatever you want it to be, kind of slippery. We had Ryerson and looked what happened... “Polytechnic” suffers from a lack of essence, and that's not helpful to the movement because then people just use it for a variety of things, whatever way they want, everything from ‘it's halfway to a university’, to ‘it’s a comprehensive spread of things from a to z’, to...'well, that makes us just a little better than the institution down the road, i.e. the community college’.

4.9 Polytechnic Education vs. Polytechnic Designation - The challenge of creating a new identity: What’s in a name?

According to one senior executive from the university sector, Seneca's decision to reject the ITAL name was perceived as “really troubling” by some in that sector. Noting that there was initial “celebration” by the university presidents that the differentiated colleges were not going to be designated as polytechnics (paraphrased by this participant as “whoopee, we've won!”), this individual went on to suggest that, immediately following that initial reaction, the presidents became increasingly suspicious about what Seneca was up to. By not accepting the ITAL nomenclature as other differentiated colleges had done, it reinforced the view that Seneca was not going to give up on the idea of being a polytechnic: “I would say that might have been the most brilliant act, you know....there was more suspicion about that than there was about anything else that had happened.”

One senior administrator at Seneca emphasized that, regardless of the nomenclature, the college had already “become” a polytechnic, enabled by the expanded mandate of differentiated status.

We already had all the characteristics of a polytechnic, and in my mind that was
what we were trying to achieve with differentiation. In our strategic plans we did not shy away from using the word polytechnic, and I know from speaking with scholars, they assumed we were polytechnic just by association. Rick was front and centre in Polytechnics Canada, and talking about polytechnics all the time. People assumed we were a polytechnic. It was smart that we didn’t do it (ITAL)….I don’t think it hurt us in terms of the perspectives of others and the government.

It is important to understand why President Miner came to favour a polytechnic designation, and so aggressively so (as evidenced by how active and high profile he was in advocating for such for the duration of his term), despite the college’s original strategy of a seeking an open-ended, “no-name” institutional positioning in its Business Case for Differentiated Status. In discussing his polytechnic agenda, and more specifically why Seneca landed on the polytechnic nomenclature (as opposed to other options) as such a critical component of its differentiation goals, Dr. Miner responded:

We needed a nomenclature that said what our differentiation looked like. “ITAL” was, in my mind, not it. “Institute of Technology” was ruled out because of UOIT (University of Ontario Institute of Technology). “Polytechnic” had been there but it’s unfortunate that Ryerson kind of screwed that name up. But ‘polytechnic’ became the nomenclature that best described what we were trying to do, because there was no other nomenclature to use. I personally was fearful of anything that had the university name in it. So we didn’t want “applied university’ or anything like that.

According to a former senior executive at Humber, Seneca was not alone in reaching the conclusion that polytechnic was the nomenclature that “best described what we were trying to do”:

In my mind, the polytechnic was the most accurate definition of what we wanted to be, that being an institution that offered certificates, diplomas and degrees, with pathways that flowed through and between, and in particular with a focus on technical and business and health education, with the applied activities leading to the workforce.
When asked whether there were polytechnics elsewhere that were close to what Seneca was aspiring to become, Dr. Miner was emphatic in saying there were not:

In the U.S., there are community colleges, a couple that give degrees, but not on the scale we were. This was the first case where a college was evolving to be something different (than a university) that included both degree-granting and (applied) research. Those that had the polytechnic name in the States were universities...had always been universities, they just named them wrong - Rochester Polytechnic, Caltech Polytechnic, MIT Polytechnic for example. They have a senate, they have a research agenda, and had pretty well been that way for decades. It was the same thing in Europe. The polytechnics tended to be specialized by function, with everything from diplomas to PhD’s, but they were vertical.

As one former Seneca dean explained, the college’s objective was to evolve:

...to the next phase, possibly to what traditionally used to be polytechnic, but our only reference point was what Ryerson used to be – and Ryerson wasn’t really as comprehensive in its programming as the colleges had been historically, and as we were trying to remain.

Dr. Miner noted the same concern:

That was part of the problem. There was nothing to point to where we could say, ‘we want to be like that’. There was no ‘that’, there! We could point to some that had some similarities, but they had trappings that came with them; we could have pointed to Ryerson, for example, but it brought the (recent history of) evolution to a university along with it. The naming inhibited the ability to create that new kind of institution we wanted to become...They (government) had to give us a name other than ITAL.

Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the early, internal debates about institutional nomenclature, the senior administrative team under President Miner’s leadership came to favour a polytechnic designation over any other alternative, and to believe that this would be an important enabler to the realization of the other components of their differentiation journey. The ‘no-name’ strategy had apparently served the college well in terms of creating time and space for the Degree-Granting Task Force (and by extension, the internal community) to consider various models of differentiation. According to almost all internal
respondents, however, once this exploration process was complete, the need for a clear institutional nomenclature, and specifically a polytechnic designation, became critical to the journey’s success.

Apparently, Dr. Miner’s colleagues at other differentiated colleges agreed. Miner spoke of regular discussions and meetings with the ITAL presidents (most frequently with Humber and Sheridan), and with officials at the Ministry, confirming their shared interest in pursuing polytechnic status for their respective institutions. (It is interesting that both of these had already accepted the ITAL designation, but their institutions rarely used it for practical purposes.) These same institutions were leaders of the charge in Ontario to collaborate with polytechnic-like institutions out West (SAIT, NAIT and BCIT) to form the Association of Canadian Public Polytechnic Institutes (subsequently renamed Polytechnics Canada) in 2003. External interview participants noted that these three colleges were the most active in advocating for polytechnic designation, and in some cases, they preferred to answer interview questions with “the three” in mind, as a collective. Still, there was a backdrop of unknowns surrounding their shared efforts, including questions related to the number of colleges the government might be willing to designate as polytechnics, if and when they moved forward, especially given that all three of these were in GTA. As a result, Dr. Miner and others acknowledged that there was always an understood element of both collaboration and competition as they worked together towards their shared polytechnic goals. To this point, several participants (internal and external) emphasized that, in their opinions, Seneca and Humber were perceived to have the strongest positioning for moving forward on the polytechnic agenda.

In speaking of Dr. Miner’s passion and commitment to differentiation and
polytechnic status, one senior administrator from the university sector noted:

I think he was given the label of Mr. Polytechnic. He actually carried the charge, I think, for the three. All three were engaged in it, but he was seen as the president who was pushing that agenda most significantly. And I think people were frightened by the label, rather than understanding that Seneca was already differentiated, probably more than the other two, and was actually living and breathing these things. But somehow I think people had this impression that Rick hadn’t finished. That there was more to come, and they were frightened of it because he was very passionate.

The need for a clear definition of ‘polytechnics’, and more specifically, a “made – in- Ontario” version of the word, was identified by several interviewees. According to one internal participant, it was actually helpful when a number of the legally designated ITALs continued to use polytechnic as a descriptor in their advertising, e.g. “the leader in polytechnic education”, because:

...people who cared, understood that this was what they (Humber, Sheridan and Seneca) were trying to get across. ‘We’re still in the diploma and certificate business but we’re also in the degree business, and we’re big and we’re broad and people can come to us because we can offer you anything that you want, and pathways in between.’ It described the middle ground...somewhere in between a college and a university.

As noted earlier, Seneca’s commitment to the pursuit of polytechnic status was ongoing, persisting alongside the college’s parallel efforts to achieve the various components and criteria outlined in its formal Differentiation Accountability Agreement with the government (See Chapter Five). Dr. Miner indicated during his interview that he remained committed to, and actively involved in, advocating for polytechnic status throughout his term as president, both internally and externally, including his participation in outreach activities on behalf of Polytechnics Canada, as a Board member for the Ontario Innovation Trust, in speeches and presentations to business and community partners, and in ongoing meetings with senior Ministry officials, presidents of the other GTA colleges, and
on two occasions, the GTA college and university presidents together. It is interesting to note, therefore, some dissonance in the perceptions of various interview participants (especially in external views) regarding how sustained the polytechnic discourse was in Ontario after the initial ITALs were designated. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

4.10 The underlying motivation: What was the rationale behind Seneca’s drive for increased differentiation?

Having examined the data to help understand what Seneca’s goals and intent were in seeking formal differentiation, and more specifically what Seneca was seeking to differentiate itself “from” and “to”, this next section looks at the question “why?”. Why was Seneca interested in embarking on this journey, knowing from the beginning, as Dr. Miner noted in his Vision paper, it would be a long journey and not one without resistance? What were the underlying drivers that motivated Seneca to seek increased differentiation and, eventually, to focus on polytechnic designation as an important enabler to that journey? Was it about institutional status and reputation, as was suggested by some onlookers (and interview participants)? Was it simply an inevitable, natural evolution for an institution that had fulfilled its historical mandate for almost forty years? Was it a case of “mission creep”, with the accompanying risk of abandoning historical college mandates and values? Or, was it part of a bigger, more altruistic interest in contributing to some much needed change in Ontario’s postsecondary system design?

Several respondents, internal and external, indicated that Seneca’s pursuit of differentiated status was a natural evolution (for Seneca and some other Ontario Colleges), after having responded successfully and aggressively to their historical mandate for over thirty-five years. According to these participants, the colleges had been mandated to
respond to the education and training needs of their local communities, but over time, their ‘communities’ expanded, both geographically and demographically, and therefore the nature, scope and range of programming also expanded. This natural evolution was likely accelerated, they suggested, as a result of the approval of the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act (2000), as well as the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act (2002).

In Seneca’s Business Case for Differentiated Status, it is noted that Ontario’s colleges had grown and evolved significantly since their inception, in response to profound social, economic, demographic and technological changes in the province (p 5). It also states that, throughout this evolution “…Seneca has distinguished itself as a system leader, both in exceeding the traditional CAAT mandate and in forging ahead in new areas of activity, most recently advanced applied education” (p.5).

This notion of differentiation as a ‘natural evolution’ was supported by comments from both internal and external participants, including this senior government official: “I don’t think Seneca saw itself at the time like a regular college…(It was) evolving from, basically, the classic mandate of a college…”

As one former dean at the college put it, “Seneca believed that we were a leader in all kinds of different ways.”

We wanted to be different from a regular college of applied arts and technology, which people often refer to as a community college. There was a lot of discussion around, ‘so who is our community?’ For smaller colleges, the community is fairly distinct and it is part of the fabric. But for a large urban college, it’s more much amorphous. And at the time, of course, we had as we still do, a large number of international students and international activity and international partnerships.

According to one senior university executive, Seneca’s pursuit of formal differentiation didn’t come as a surprise:
There was a real sense that they were, actually, different from some of the other colleges. There wasn’t an explicit statement that they were going to be differentiated; I think all of my administrative experience has been with the understanding that they were differentiated.

In speaking collectively of Seneca, Sheridan and Humber, this same participant added:

To me, it was a natural progression. It wasn’t anything astonishing. These were the three colleges that had the greatest focus on education rather than training. I don’t mean they were not training but that there was a greater focus on education. And that the record was perfectly normal that they might move into a world where they would naturally want to have a wider range of programs, which included degrees.

According to this participant, those were the three colleges that “already had polytechnic status”:

They had a polytechnic view of the world and I was advocating really strongly from my position that, indeed, the government should simply acknowledge that...I did not have the impression that there was an effort by the colleges, the three, to move into a sphere. I just felt that they were in that sphere.

4.11 The Access vs. Mission Creep debate

As noted in Chapter Two, charges of “mission creep” or “academic drift” often accompany the expansion of a traditional college mandate to include baccalaureate degrees (Skolnik, 2011), along with suggestions that the increased mandate will inevitably lead to neglect or abandonment of other important aspects of the historic mandate. Skolnik observes, however, that there are often positive outcomes that result from these changes in institutional mission, including increased accessibility for non-traditional student populations. For purposes of this study, all interview participants were asked whether Seneca’s pursuit of formal differentiation, including the ongoing pursuit of polytechnic designation, was a contradiction of its historical roots, or complementary. Internal participants unanimously agreed that differentiation (at least as Seneca was defining it) was intended to enhance the achievement of its historical access mandate. Interestingly, a
number of external participants shared this same understanding. Participants from both groups, however, indicated that they were aware of colleagues who perceived it as simply ‘mission creep’. As one university president indicated:

I felt that they were actually living closer to the access agenda because they were providing a wider range of options for people rather than being completely focused... (But) I certainly got the impression that there was internal pressure (i.e. from the other colleges) that ‘the three’, were moving away from the access agenda, which just seemed to me to be bizarre, because it was broadening access, not moving away from it.

Another external participant with both institution and government experience had a similar perception:

We always mentioned that the colleges' traditional role is a very important one... and they're going to give it up. They're going to switch to polytechnic degree-type programs, and they're going to give up their traditional base.

This same interviewee referred to the evolution of polytechnics into universities in other jurisdictions as adding fuel to these perceptions: “That was the history in Britain. That was the history in the other provinces. It was just back to that point the universities were trying to make: ‘This is proof that they will give up their college role’.”

Internal interview participants were clear, however, in their conviction that Seneca wished to remain true to its access mandate. Their consistent perception of Seneca’s intent in pursuing greater differentiated status, was to differentiate itself from other colleges in the system by evolving from its historical roots - but not abandoning these - and “moving on to the next phase”. They acknowledged that there was a perceived, heightened status for Seneca in becoming degree-granting and receiving federal funding for applied research, but all internal participants believed this was not the primary driver. There was unanimity in their understanding that Seneca’s fundamental motivator in seeking increased differentiation was an interest in increasing access to baccalaureate education, including
improved transfer pathways and degree-completion strategies for Ontario’s postsecondary students (not just Seneca’s). As one former dean said: “It was about access, choice, pathways. Differentiation had to do with all of that. It came out of the PECE Act, and access and pathways were all part of that.” This participant went on to suggest that Seneca saw itself becoming the “big brother” to some of the smaller colleges that were unable to successfully get into (and/or sustain) degree offerings – suggesting that this would allow students from those colleges as well, to enjoy increased access and pathways to baccalaureate programs.

Dr. Miner emphasized these same points during his interview, stressing that the underlying rationale for seeking formal, differentiated status for Seneca was to increase access to educational opportunities for Ontario students, offer more choice, and increase mobility. As noted earlier, Dr. Miner’s comments also reflected the language he had used 16 years earlier in his *New Seneca Vision* document (2002): differentiation was about increasing accessibility “as a means of helping learners achieve their personal objectives” (Miner, 2002, p. 9), and offering a comprehensive range of programs, including a critical mass of degrees, in order to increase choice and mobility for students, a multidirectional approach that would include multiple entry and exit points, multiple transition opportunities and clear pathways (p. 7). The suggestion that Seneca’s commitment to accessibility and mobility might reach *beyond* Seneca, e.g. on behalf of other CAAT students, and/or to support university-to-college transfer, is also supported in other documentation. In June, 2003, the Seneca Board of Governors unanimously approved *A College in Transition: The Consolidated Task Forces’ Report* which marked the beginning of a new strategic plan development process, to be built around the recommendations of the five
Task Forces created during the visioning process. In a section entitled “Articulation Agreements”, Recommendation 6 and 7 are particularly relevant:

> That the College make it an immediate priority to develop articulation strategies (e.g. bridging semester) between Seneca diplomas and the new applied degrees [And] That similar articulation arrangements be extended to diploma graduates from other CAATs. (Seneca College, 2003, p. 31)

This expanded transfer role for Seneca is explored further in Chapter Five, in a detailed examination of indicators of change during a decade of differentiation.

### 4.12 The Postsecondary Hierarchy

As noted in Chapter Two, Codling and Meek (2006) speak of the “inevitability of institutions which perceive themselves as being of lower status (despite plaintive government protestations of being ‘equal but different’) seeking to raise their status by becoming more like their more illustrious alternatives” (p. 10). A number of participants for this historical case study (internal and external) made references to the “second tier” or “poor cousin” sentiments that are sometimes articulated by Ontario College faculty and staff (and students) when lining themselves up alongside the universities. This may have contributed to a perception among some that one motivator for Seneca (and other differentiated colleges) in pursuing polytechnic designation was the pursuit of “status”, i.e. as a means of moving up the system hierarchy. As noted earlier, Dr. Miner acknowledged in one of his very early reports to the Board that there would be an “increased stature involved” in receiving formal differentiation. One former government official agreed, noting that “(h)igher education is a hierarchical venture in Ontario whether we like to admit that in Ontario or not”.

Reflecting back on the origins of the Ontario College system, the same official explained:
When Bill Davis got up (in the legislature) and introduced the colleges, he made it clear that he was thinking about different and separate systems serving different needs of the economy, serving different clients and students but in ways that situated them side by side... And there’s a lot to be said for that story. But, on the ground, it’s not the story that high school students tell to each other...and it’s not the story that college administrators and other personnel feel when they are walking through their lives, right? And I think that had/has as much to do with the foray into polytechnics and ITALs (whatever that is) and degree-granting, as does stuff around labour market needs and credentials and serving the population... and I’m not passing judgement when I say that.

Another senior official from the college sector agreed:

In the world of higher education, the desire of institutions to move up the credential food chain is pretty common... I’m not ignoring the legitimate questions of student demand and employer demand, but there’s certainly a cache of branding, a status, associated with degree granting that doesn’t come with those institutions that are not in degree granting...I don’t believe competing was the goal in itself. But by getting into the degree business it did begin, I think, to change the perception of the hierarchy between colleges and universities.

In referring to the early advocacy for degrees and institutional differentiation in the 1990s, this same official noted that it was impossible to be certain if status was the driving force, but then continued:

I’d be shocked if it wasn’t at least an implicit goal, to help strengthen the image of college education by, in a sense, giving more legitimacy to the diplomas and certificates by having degrees. Now you can argue that the other way too as some people do.

This question was pursued with interview participants during discussions related to Seneca’s rationale and underlying motivation. Most acknowledged that differentiation from the other colleges was expected to bring increased reputation along with it, but emphasized that it was other institutional values such as a commitment to access, student mobility and pathways that were the underlying motivators. Several internal participants expanded by speaking of their frustration in seeking articulation agreements with Ontario universities as one strong motivator for differentiation, i.e. the inability to negotiate “good”
degree-completion pathways on behalf of their diploma students. As explained by this senior administrator at Seneca:

It was this notion of having capacity, having interest and wanting to have the recognition. Alongside that was some frustration in and around articulations for our students and a lot of frustration with trying to get due recognition of credit. And so, having a polytechnic status, we felt, would help us.

The president of another college had a similar understanding, adding that it would have been difficult for the colleges to get internal buy-in for differentiation and polytechnic designation if it had been simply “a status thing”:

The novelty of offering degrees was enough at the beginning, at least, just to prove that we could do it, were capable of it. But a couple of years in, it was much more important to create a framework that explained why we were doing this...Status may have been an early driver, but for me personally as a president, it was never about status. It was always about the students, providing opportunities for the students. And I think in that context, it made much more sense, it became much more of a positive piece within the institution...Developing a framework helped make the “why” clear. That was absolutely helpful in terms of internal buy-in.

In considering whether the pursuit of differentiation (from the other colleges) and/or more specifically, the polytechnic agenda, was fundamentally driven by a desire for status, another senior government official explained:

Rick was really opinionated and definitely, this was a strategic agenda. But I think he fundamentally believed in it. When you look also at some of the work he did subsequent to his being a president...my perception was not that this was about status. Now, status comes along...but I don’t think that was the primary driver.

If one was to accept the argument that a primary motivator for Seneca in seeking greater differentiation was to move up the postsecondary hierarchy, then one might have expected the college to have set its sights, if not immediately then eventually, on university status. As noted earlier, however, Dr. Miner (and all internal participants) repeatedly emphasized that Seneca was not interested in university status. When asked to expand on why he felt so strongly at the time that Seneca should not seek to become a university, Dr.
Miner explained:

I spent more than twenty years in a university environment and recognize its good and bad points. We would have lost access; we would have lost the pathways. The academic side of things (e.g. rules, policies, rigidity) would have taken over to the detriment of the student. You would have ended up going down the faculty credentialization route, favouring academic success rather than applied knowledge.... It just would have changed the place into something other than what I think we wanted in terms of a new type of institution.

The interviews with all internal participants supported Dr. Miner’ s conviction that university status was not what Seneca was interested in (after some early exploration of a private university “arm”) and they all believed that President Miner, personally, shared that conviction. As one former dean put it: “Well, I was at the table; we never discussed that...That was never the piece.” In probing why the internal community was, in general, not in favour of seeking to become a university, this same participant indicated:

I think because of what our roots were. It was about access; it was about teaching first. I think we were also realistic in terms of what that would mean from a research point of view... We had a collective agreement that’s very, very different... So I think we were realistic but it wasn’t just the realism. I don't think we had that aspiration because we were really all about student pathways and student learning. And we knew our roots, what our roots and our strength was, and our strength was in applied learning. And that isn’t what the raison d’etre of a university is.

These responses from both internal and external participants are consistent with the observations of Jones (2009) in his examination of structural reforms in other Canadian provinces. Increased access, choice and degree-completion options for students are frequently cited in Seneca documentation as the rationale for seeking formal differentiation (and eventual polytechnic status), including in Seneca’s visioning documents, the Business Case for Differentiation, and the Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement. Indeed, according to an email communication to the Board of Governors from the Chair of the Academic and Student Affairs Board Committee and the Vice-President Academic in
October 2002, differentiated status would allow Seneca to benefit from increased degree-granting options for students, and more successfully negotiate partnerships with other educational institutions (personal communication, October, 2002). This senior administrator from another differentiated college agreed:

There was always a belief...that the issues the institutions were facing, the challenges and more so the opportunities that Seneca and Humber had, were greater than the set of regulations and rules allowed us to explore....And there was a need to make some changes so that you could take advantage of the opportunities that existed (on behalf of the students).

4.13 A Broader Rationale: Seneca’s push for system design change

As noted earlier, in discussing Seneca’s underlying rationale for differentiation, several participants (both internal and external) raised the idea that Dr. Miner’s interest in polytechnic designation went beyond Seneca’s own institutional status. This was reinforced by Dr. Miner’s personal responses during his interview, and also evident in the excerpts cited earlier from the 2002 Vision document he developed soon after his arrival. As one former senior administrator from Seneca noted,

I remember Rick having very direct and long conversations with Philip Steenkamp, the Deputy Minister at the time, about the idea of changing the entire system. So Rick wasn’t moving from an interest solely in polytechnic status for Seneca, but trying to change the whole system of what institutions could look like, and develop the kind of graduates we needed for the workforce of the future.

This broader system interest was further reinforced in Seneca College’s Submission to the Post-secondary [Rae] Review (Miner, 2004). In this submission, Dr. Miner began by declaring the college’s full support of the submission made by ACAATO (now Colleges Ontario) earlier that same month, in which the association argued that solutions related to increased postsecondary access, system redesign, and reinvestment by government were the key elements necessary to revitalize the postsecondary system in Ontario. Seneca’s
submission endorsed each of these key elements, but then went on to offer additional
commentary on the topic of system redesign:

Currently, we have two silos that have few areas of cooperation and
integration...there is little external competition and the students get caught in the
middle...We advocate for both increased choice and predictability (of credit
transfer)... (W)e also need to have a more market-oriented (deregulated) system
that significantly increases the ease with which both private and public institutions
can respond to educational and training needs in both the degree and diploma
area...Choice needs to be our mantra. (Miner, 2004, p. 3)

In this same submission, Dr. Miner listed a range of sample institution types that
could help create a “mosaic of opportunities” for students in Ontario, a system design that
he argued would be “far more desirable than our existing two silos”. His list included,
among other examples, a university-college partnership where students could do their final
year of study at a college; a research-intensive university that specialized in graduate
education; a polytechnic institution that was specifically mandated to bridge the gap
between the university and college sector; a local community college that would respond to
the specific economic and social needs of the community; a college that specifically
addressed the province’s access concerns, including language and academic upgrading
programs for pre-college and pre-university paths; a university that specialized in
undergraduate education without aspirations to be a research intensive or graduate
education institution; and a variety of private institutions (p. 5).

Dr. Miner’s interest in contributing to change in Ontario’s postsecondary system
design is also consistent with the key messaging in several presentations he made during
the study period. For example, according to speaking notes used by Dr. Miner at a breakfast
seminar for financial professionals in Markham on Dec 5th, 2007, the president suggested
that there could be changes coming to the postsecondary system that would assist in
meeting the projected needs in the region for highly skilled workers in new technology-based companies. “In the coming years, polytechnics may well become a recognized new level of post-secondary institution” (Seneca College corporate files, December, 2007, p. 2).

A chronological snapshot of key events and activities related to Seneca’s polytechnic journey, was presented to the Seneca Board of Governors in March, 2008. In this chronology, it was noted that President Miner was invited to participate in numerous provincial and federal think tanks on public policy issues over the period 2004-2007, with explicit requests “to provide a polytechnic” perspective” (Seneca College corporate files, March, 2008, p. 2). In this same document, it was noted that President Miner was also invited in August, 2007 to “participate in meetings with representatives from the Ministry, the Council of Universities (COU) and the Council of College Presidents (COP) to discuss system design issues including polytechnics” (p. 3). In meeting notes that Dr. Miner took (and subsequently shared as part of his interview for this study), after a meeting he attended in August 2008 with then Deputy Minister Steenkamp (and some other differentiated presidents), Dr. Miner reported that the Deputy indicated that “the policy framework for system redesign should be through cabinet by the end of September…” (Miner, personal correspondence, August 26, 2008). More specifics about this meeting with the Deputy, as evidence of the persistent polytechnic discourse over the study period, will be discussed in Chapter Six. Each of these examples, however, supports the perception that Dr. Miner’s intent in pursuing polytechnic status for Seneca was part of a larger professional interest in affecting change in the broader postsecondary system design.

As an interesting aside, the suggestions by some interview participants (internal and external) that Dr. Miner’s concerns went beyond Seneca’s own interests and were
more broadly about the workforce of the future, are consistent with directions Dr. Miner took in his own research as he transitioned into his retirement from Seneca in 2009. As an independent consultant (Miner Management Consultants), and with limited administrative and research support from Colleges Ontario, Miner released a “groundbreaking” research report in 2010 entitled *People Without Jobs; Jobs Without People* (Miner, 2010). In this report, Miner predicted a significant labour market skills gap created by the intersection of the emerging knowledge economy with demographic shifts and labour shortages caused by the pending wave of retiring baby boomers, and called for urgent action by business, educators and government to collectively find solutions to address this critical collision of labour market circumstances. According to Miner, “...by 2031 we will need 77% of our workforce to have post-secondary credentials” (p. 1). Based on the findings of this thesis, it is perhaps not coincidental that some of the recommendations in Miner’s 2010 publication suggest that postsecondary system design and policy are critical components of the solution (p. 14).

Reflecting on Miner’s broader system objectives during the study period, one external interviewee, a senior administrator from another other differentiated college, agreed that polytechnic designations should be seen as part of a broader strategy to increase diversity in Ontario’s postsecondary system, thereby increasing opportunities and choice for students:

There was an opportunity here to provide for greater diversity of institutions and institutional capacity in the province than currently existed, and it was not about, as some people thought, (and perhaps continue to think), creating more universities...but rather about creating a different type of post-secondary institution that we see in much of the rest of the world, but we don't see in the province of Ontario.

This participant further explained:
I think there was a spirit of excitement, and there was an opportunity for a win-win-win; a win for the institutions, a win for government, a win for taxpayers and obviously a tremendous opportunity for students and employers. So I guess that that’s actually a win-win-win-win.

Despite this “spirit of excitement”, however, and a strong conviction that this new type of institution would create the kind of postsecondary system Ontario needed to meet the educational and labour market needs of the future, Miner acknowledged that this aggressive plan for Seneca (and some other colleges) was not without contention, both internally and externally:

When Bill Davis created the two silos, they were very distinct silos. Universities did degrees, colleges didn’t. Colleges did applied stuff, universities didn’t. It was just everybody’s view of the world, and it was pretty well set for over 30-40 years.

One former, senior government official put it succinctly: “There’s only two labels that work in Canada: ‘college’ and ‘university’”. 
CHAPTER FIVE: Seneca’s Differentiation Journey

A Decade of Change

5.0 Introduction

In Chapter Four, it was noted that many participants in this study (internal and external) made references to Ryerson (when it was Ryerson Polytechnic) as they described their perceptions of Seneca’s differentiation goals and intent. On Ryerson’s library website, there is an interesting overview of Ryerson’s historical evolution from a polytechnic institute to a polytechnic university, including a description of the institutional energy that resulted when Ryerson was awarded degree-granting authority (Doucet, 2007). Despite the financial realities of the mid 1970s and the resultant fiscal constraints faced by postsecondary institutions in general over that period, the overview indicates that Ryerson experienced a “renewed sense of purpose and direction” and underwent a “decade of frenetic activity” to expand its mandate and operations. The list of organizational changes and expansions in mandate is extensive, including initiatives such as the creation of a new Office of Applied Research, a Centre for Advanced Technologies, an Open College, accreditation of Ryerson’s Engineering programs, and expanded partnerships with government, business and industry. Interestingly, according to data collected for this study, there was a similar internal excitement at Seneca during the study period at least among management (“We are setting foot on an exciting new path”, [Strategic Plan 2004-2009]) and very similar operational and organizational changes. Several parallel Seneca examples emerged in the data, including: the creation of the Office of Research and Innovation in 2003, headed by a new Associate Vice-President, Research and Innovation position (the
first in Ontario to appoint a dedicated, senior academic position to lead this charge); a dedicated Degree Transfer Office (the first among Ontario colleges); two new “centres of specialization” including the Centre for Financial Services, which created a focal point for related degrees, diplomas and corporate training in partnership with the Toronto financial services industry; the college’s first Academic Plan; a new Director, Academic Instructional Technology position; a first ever college-wide eLearning Plan; the creation of a new Centre for the Development of Open Technologies (CDOT); a number of new academic policies to support baccalaureate degrees; a renewed quality assurance policy and program review protocol, including external program accreditations; the creation of a formalized Degree Implementation Group; a new Government Relations department; and numerous strategic partnerships with business, industry and other educational institutions (Seneca College, MYAA Report Backs 2006-07, 2009-2010; Differentiation Performance Review, 2008).

This chapter is the second of the “research findings” chapters of this thesis, and provides a detailed examination of how Seneca evolved over the study period in the context of the formalized differentiation goals articulated in the college’s Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement. This includes an examination of evidence found in institutional planning documents, as well as data extracted from internal and external documentation and correspondence. The perceptions among interview participants of Seneca’s success in achieving its differentiation goals are presented, as is their understanding of Seneca’s institutional changes during this period.

A significant section of this chapter is dedicated to Seneca’s role and success in improving credit transfer and pathways on behalf of Seneca students and beyond, as a key component of Seneca’s Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement. Participants'
perceptions and understanding of how (and/or whether) this component of differentiation “fit” with Seneca’s other differentiation goals, is also discussed.

According to President Miner, there was ongoing dialogue regarding the need for system design reform in Ontario (including polytechnic designation for some colleges) throughout his tenure, but in the two-year period just before his retirement, i.e. 2007-2009, the momentum for change began to peak, due in large part to support from then Deputy Minister, Dr. Philip Steenkamp. Dr. Miner’s interpretation and understanding of related developments during that period are examined in the final section of this chapter, in the context of internal and external participants’ perceptions as well as relevant correspondence and documentation.

5.1 Interviewees’ perceptions: How successful was Seneca in achieving its Differentiation Goals?

Having considered the perceptions of interview participants in terms of what Seneca’s differentiation intent and goals were, all interviewees were then asked how successful they felt the college was in achieving those goals. Given the lack of clarity among some participants in terms of differentiation vs. polytechnic goals (as identified in Chapter Four), and the assumption among some external participants that Seneca’s hidden agenda was university status, the responses to this question were surprisingly consistent. In virtually all instances, both internal and external participants focused immediately on Seneca’s success in offering baccalaureate degrees, and in forging pathways and credit transfer arrangements (on behalf of incoming and outgoing) students, as the defining factors. A number of participants, however, pointed to the lack of polytechnic status as the definitive indicator of success, given the priority Dr. Miner was understood to put on this
goal. Several internal participants offered a detailed “report card” of Seneca’s success, based on the differentiation components included in the formal Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement. As described by this senior administrator:

I think on the degree piece, Seneca was successful but not over-the-moon successful. We did the degrees but there’s so much more work to be done. Pathways and partnerships, I think we hit it out of the park. We continue to hit it out of the park. We’re known for our strength in pathways and partnerships... In applied research, we’ve had some funding successes (in certain program areas) but not again, to the depth or breadth that we would have liked... So I would say we were moderately successful in applied research but did watch other institutions surpass us.... certainly the George Browns of the world. And then on the last one, comprehensiveness, we’ve never deviated and I think we’ve continued to build (a continuum) of credentials, with a lot of grad certs (sic). We’ve done it from a credential mix point of view, and from a program cluster point of view.

This former dean agreed:

I think we were quite successful. You can check off the different pieces from the differentiation agreement...We certainly moved into degree-granting. There were lots of bumps along the way, but a number of degrees are doing well and we are developing a solid reputation (in this area). In applied research, we are doing well enough, still probably experiencing some issues, but ten years is a drop in the bucket in terms of the universities’ experience. In terms of apprenticeship, I’m not sure we have put a lot of energy or resources into that but...where opportunities have arisen, Seneca continues to pursue those. In terms of pathways, there has certainly been a LOT of work done in this area. We have pathways into all of the degrees now, but the issue is (still) the pathways out --although in certain areas, the interests of many of our students seems to be less on graduate study and more, to seek professional accreditations, designations in a specific field or industry where we have made some very good progress.

One interview participant, a former executive from another differentiated college, offered this assessment:

I think both Seneca and Humber were as successful as it was possible to be, relative to the constraints and opportunities that existed at the time. There were more constraints than were needed; it could have been a more free environment, politically, to move forward. There needed to be some constraints, but...PEQAB wasn’t really the constraint, I think it was more the Ministry. Just my view... Seneca is one of the pre-eminent colleges in the country. And known for its commitment to pretty well all the things that it said it was committed to, and wanted to be known for, during that time. In all of the areas that Seneca committed
to in their vision, they are well known and successful. Seneca moved as fast as they could towards that vision.

This same participant added one important qualifier: “Given that there was no strong momentum from the government to go with the colleges (along this journey), Seneca did well”. The perception that the government may have played a role (implicit or otherwise) in limiting the colleges’ success in differentiation, was articulated by several participants in this study, both internal and external. (This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven and Eight.) One senior administrator from Seneca offered this additional reflection:

We got the (differentiated) status. We became known as one of the colleges that offers degrees. We became associated, if not by name, with being a polytechnic - nationally as well. From that perspective, I think externally, we were viewed as an institution that was headed in that direction and was a polytechnic.

One university president offered an overall summary of Seneca’s success in differentiation that went much further:

Successful in reputation and successful in influence. I think it provided a model for people to begin to think differently about the post-secondary system, by virtue of the steps that Seneca was taking and (the fact that) the world didn't collapse. It illustrated that there was a lot of hot air being generated about the way this would destroy the education system but, in fact, it was working extremely well. And I think it opened the door for the universities to appreciate that they were not under threat, and that, indeed, there was real value in having a differentiated college system, in the same way that there is a differentiated university system.

The question of whether Seneca’s efforts at increased institutional differentiation (along with other ITALs in the GTA) had any ongoing impact on post-secondary system design will be examined further in Chapter Six.

5.2 Differentiation Progress and Outcomes: An evolution of planning documents

5.2.1 Strategic Plans. During the eleven year period covered by this study, Seneca was guided by three consecutive strategic plans, in effect from 2001 - 2003; 2004 - 2009;
2008 - 2011. The evolution of those plans, and most notably the vision statements and core priorities articulated within each, offers a valuable framework for assessing the college’s ongoing commitment to differentiation – and/or any changes to its differentiation goals. A review of corresponding Academic Plans, Board Meeting Minutes, Board Planning Retreats and Business Planning/Annual Reports offers additional insights.

By the beginning of the study period, Seneca had formalized its strategic planning processes, including variations of local/departmental action planning to support college goals and priorities. After two prior planning cycles, an internal, senior staff member was appointed by then President Stephen Quinlan to a newly created Director, Strategic Planning position - signaling the significance of these processes for the college’s long-term direction (Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting, May 23, 2001, Public Session).

The first strategic plan in effect at the college during the study period was approved by the Board of Governors in November, 2000, entitled: Seneca College...The Global Leader in Advanced Applied Education, Strategic Plan 2001-2003. The timing of this Plan offered a bridge during the “changing of the guard”, as then President Stephen Quinlan retired, and Seneca’s fourth president took office at the college in August, 2001. This timing also overlapped with the two pieces of major PSE legislation identified in the previous Chapter, as triggering significant changes in the college system and enabling Seneca’s differentiation aspirations (PECEA, 2000 and the “New College Charter”, 2002),

Seneca’s Strategic Plan 2001-2003 identified three strategic directions for the college, including “Advanced Applied Education” (encompassing applied degrees, applied

6 The 2012-2017 Plan was under development during the study period but not in effect until the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year.
research, university linkages, professional and industry partnerships at the local, national and international level, and technology-based programming that combined advanced technical skills with an enriched academic experience.) By tracking the wording in this and subsequent Plans as well as references in other internal documentation, the commitment to “advanced applied education” appeared to lay a foundation for future, related differentiation initiatives. Examples of this can be found in ongoing strategic initiatives and institutional goals related to baccalaureate degrees, pathways between credentials, applied research, formal differentiated status and the pursuit of polytechnic designation. In a section of the Plan entitled Key Results 2001-2003, a number of specific goals were listed including an increase in the “amount and complexity of applied research”, the introduction of applied degrees, and the development of new and enhanced local, national and international partnerships (Seneca, 2001). Despite the fact that the 2001-2003 Strategic Plan was developed and approved prior to Dr. Miner’s arrival at Seneca, these specific accountabilities are consistent with the framework for the New Seneca Vision that Dr. Miner developed soon after his tenure as president began, and just prior to seeking formal differentiation. This supports the earlier observation that Dr. Miner considered the college’s historical momentum, as well as broad stakeholder input during his consultative, visioning process.

Seneca’s Strategic Plan 2004-2009, as noted earlier, was based on Dr. Miner’s New Seneca Vision and the Consolidated Task Force Report, with many of its priorities and strategies flowing directly from the Task Forces’ recommendations (Seneca, 2003). As a result, the same core components of Seneca’s differentiation strategy were explicit within the 2004 – 2009 Plan, including comprehensive programming, increased degree-granting
capacity, multiple pathways and supports to enhance student access, and applied research in collaboration with business and other partners. In an Executive Summary of the Business Plan 2006-2007 as submitted to government, it was further noted that:

The Strategic Plan envisions the college being a transformational leader in the national educational community, focusing on student success and access, providing excellence in education and skills development, developing a capacity for applied research and innovation, and maintaining a commitment to enhancing our diverse workforce, college and people. (2006, p. 1)

Although there was no explicit mention of differentiation nor polytechnic status in the strategic goals and vision articulated in the Strategic Plan 2004-2009, according to the Business Plan, the college’s Strategic Plan “sets Seneca upon a path that allows Seneca to contribute to society through capacity-building, differentiation, innovation, and continuous improvement” (2006, p. 5).

Consistent with the Board of Governors’ approved work plan, the college initiated a midterm review of the 2004-2009 Strategic Plan in November, 2006, including a series of facilitated consultation sessions with internal and external constituents, key informant interviews, a Board Retreat in April, 2007, and a dedicated, follow-up Board meeting in May, 2007. According to contextual materials prepared by an external facilitator, the college wished to review the existing Plan because (in addition to good planning practice), a number of important milestones and business plan results were ahead of schedule (e.g. eleven program reviews completed, two centres of excellence approved, Office for Research and Innovation established, several new degrees submitted and approved), and their impact on Seneca’s future strategic direction needed to be more fully considered (Seneca College, 2006, p.1). In addition, the backgrounder noted that some government decisions had altered the educational landscape within which Seneca was operating.
(including multi-year funding shortfalls, and a projected GTA capacity “crisis” to be discussed later in this Chapter), and as a result, an updated environmental scan was needed. Finally, the facilitator’s note indicated that the Board was interested in reviewing/ extending the Strategic Plan as part of the pending presidential succession planning process (p. 1). According to a cover note from President Miner to the Board, “It is not anticipated that there will be a major overhaul of the plan, but rather extension of the current plan by two years, taking into consideration major shifts or opportunities” (Miner, 2007).

The supporting materials prepared by the external facilitator also included a contextual paper entitled A Polytechnic Education in Canada (Seneca, 2007). This included an overview of the foundation for polytechnic education, an emphasis on how education and training could be enhanced through applied research, technology transfer and innovation, and a reinforcement of the commitment to laddered credentials and programming that was typical in polytechnic-like institutions. In addition, the paper noted that Seneca had been a founding member of Polytechnics Canada, an alliance at that time of eight large, internationally-recognized, comprehensive degree-granting institutions committed to “producing career-ready graduates who combine critical thinking with theoretical understanding and practical competence” (p. 1). As observed by one senior administrator at Seneca:

At that time, there was the birth of Polytechnics Canada as the club of, what I would call, really strong institutions of the likes of BCIT and NAIT and SAIT and Seneca….saying we are a different group of institutions and this is what defines us. And that caused a ripple because we were (essentially) saying to ACCC (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, now CICAN), ‘We don’t think that you can represent us’. We had interests that were different and opportunities that we saw as being different.
The external facilitator's paper further emphasized that Seneca was committed to the academic priorities and results that defined a polytechnic education, even though it had chosen, until then, not to specifically seek the term polytechnic as part of its formal nomenclature (p. 1). Most notably, the paper articulated the benefits of a polytechnic education as being “anchored in three pillars”: strength in academic offerings (including a comprehensive range of credentials, programs and delivery modes); industry connections; and applied research (Seneca, 2007, p. 1).

After the consultation sessions, concentrated discussions and review, the Board of Governors approved a renewed and extended Strategic Plan 2008-2011: Seneca Changes You in November, 2007, which reaffirmed the College’s Mission Statement but included a new, explicit priority to “Transform our Institution...as the Canadian Model of Polytechnic Education” (Board of Governors’ Minutes, Public Session, November, 2007). Other than some updated priorities and reframing of ideas, the explicit reference to polytechnic education was the most obvious and significant difference between the 2004 - 2009 Plan and the updated, extended 2008 -2011 Plan.

Seneca’s Strategic Plan 2008-2011 was the college’s first formal plan, therefore, to explicitly identify polytechnic education as an institutional priority, although there were references to Polytechnics Canada and/or polytechnic education in earlier college documents (e.g. Business Plan 2006 -2007; Multi-Year Accountability Agreement Report Backs 2003; 2007). In a jointly signed covering letter at the beginning of the 2008 -2011 Plan, then Board Chair Jean-Anne McLeod and President Miner emphasized that the explicit nature of the additional priority was new, but the polytechnic direction itself, was not:
While stating this priority in these terms is new to Seneca, we have in fact been moving in this direction for almost ten years. As guided by our previous Plan, we have sought differentiation from the Province, expanded our degree offerings and joined with other institutions across the nation to form Polytechnics Canada – all of which are committed to producing career-ready graduates who combine critical thinking with theoretical understanding and practical competence. Achieving this goal will address the programming mix that Seneca will offer and, in turn, how it is perceived by college stakeholders, students and employers. (Seneca College, 2008).

5.2.2 Institutional Mission. Seneca’s Mission Statement was revised slightly after formal differentiation was approved in 2002, but then remained consistent throughout the college’s differentiation journey for the rest of the study period, sustained throughout three strategic planning processes, two academic plans and a change in presidency. According to the Strategic Plan 2001 – 2003 approved prior to formal differentiation, Seneca’s mission was “To provide career-related education that prepares our students to succeed in the global economy” (Seneca College, 2001). Seneca’s Strategic Plan 2004-2009, as approved by the Board in November, 2003, revised the Mission Statement to reflect the leadership role Dr. Miner envisioned for Seneca in terms of post-secondary reform: “To contribute to Canadian society by being a transformational leader in providing students with career-related education and training” (Seneca College, 2004). This expanded version of the Mission Statement was consistent with the open-ended differentiation strategy discussed in the previous chapter, and was sustained in the succeeding Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011 (Seneca College, 2008). As noted later in this chapter, there were some subtle changes in the college’s strategic direction and institutional goals towards the end of this study period, but the core foundation of Seneca as articulated in the college’s Mission Statement remained the same. Indeed, five years beyond the period of this study, it is noteworthy that even in the most recent Strategic Plan (2017 - 2022), the mission has evolved only slightly, and remains true to those origins:
Our core mission – providing a great education for our students – remains our lodestar. That has been fundamental to Seneca since we opened our doors in 1967. A Seneca education is a valuable combination of practical and sophisticated skills underpinned by theoretical knowledge. It is polytechnic education, enriched by technology-enabled learning.

5.2.3 Academic Plans. The college’s first, formalized Academic Plan was not developed until 2004, after formal differentiated status was approved and the first baccalaureate students had been accepted. **Seneca’s Academic Plan (2004 - 2009)**, entitled “An Academic Community Engaging Students for Success”, was timed to coincide with the strategic planning process:

The five-year Academic Plan (2004 - 2009) is a vital framework for the planning and implementation of Seneca College’s “core business”, our academic programs...The Academic Plan is the framework through which the college’s mission and strategic goals are to be achieved. (p.2)

In its introduction, this first Academic Plan reinforced the college’s overall priorities and direction, noting its institutional commitment to teaching and learning above all else. Although the word “polytechnic” was not used therein, the description of the college’s academic model appears consistent with Dr. Miner’s early vision for New Seneca, and with his description of the kind of institution he believed was needed in Ontario:

Seneca College is an Academic Community dedicated to student success. Seneca College is also a community where creativity is nurtured and innovation flourishes; where applied research is embraced; where the industries we serve are our partners; where students of diverse backgrounds are welcomed; and where faculty and staff embrace learning in all aspects of their lives. Education and training are our core focus. (p. 3)

Each of the components articulated in Seneca’s signed Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement could be found in Seneca’s Academic Plan (2004 – 2009), with specific strategies identified to assist in moving each priority forward. For example, the Plan committed to a comprehensive programming mix and range of credentials (from
entry-level certificates to diplomas, advanced diplomas, degrees and graduate certificates) and to ensuring excellence in curriculum, a focus on teaching and learning, and regular program review cycles as part of a broader quality assurance platform (p. 5). It further committed to the pursuit of “strong, equal partnerships with universities and other postsecondary institutions”, a national network of articulation agreements that allowed for a transfer of credits in multiple directions, and applied research initiatives that “benefit society nationally and internationally” (p. 4). Through a new Technology-Enhanced Learning Institute (TEL), the Plan described the college’s intention to engage in pedagogical research to ensure excellence and innovation in teaching and learning, and to examine critical retention strategies that responded to a wide range of student needs (p. 6). In a section dedicated to access strategies, the Plan spoke of a diverse student body with varying learner profiles and academic preparedness, and identified a range of college responses such as increased advisement, redirection, “second chance” opportunities, catch-up and fast-track strategies, on-line and distance learning options, and targeted “success semesters” (p. 9). Through these and similar examples, the college’s first Academic Plan reinforced institutional directions and specific strategies that were not only consistent with its formal differentiation goals, but could reasonably have been expected to move the institution forward towards those goals. In turn, the college’s subsequent Academic Plan (2009 -2013) continued to commit the institution along this same academic journey, but with a more explicit commitment to differentiation and polytechnic status:

...this Academic Plan reflects the changes in the college’s Strategic Plan and the cumulative learning of our collected experiences. With the inclusion of the college’s more focused goals, new priorities and expressed core values, the 2009 -2013 Academic Plan will engage the entire community to succeed in becoming the leader in polytechnic education.
The 2009 – 2013 Academic Plan reaffirmed Seneca’s commitment to applied and theoretical learning including comprehensive programming, laddered credentials and pathways within Seneca and in partnership with other institutions, applied research opportunities for students in collaboration with business and industry, and scholarly activities to ensure excellence in teaching and learning as the central focus (Seneca, 2009). The final section of the updated Plan reiterated the core priorities articulated in the Strategic Plan, leaving no doubt as to the college’s overarching goals:

The Academic Plan will have been successful when we have

- Transformed our institution into the internationally-respected Canadian model of *polytechnic education* [emphasis added]
- Built organizational capacity to support our educational philosophy
- Created a climate of innovation and continuous improvement as part of a high-performance organization.

**5.2.4 Academic Policies.** On May 28th, 2003, based on a recommendation from the Human Resources Committee of the Board, Seneca’s Board of Governors approved an addition to the college’s faculty hiring policy entitled “An Amendment/Addendum for the Recruitment and Hiring of Faculty Teaching in Applied Degree Programs” (Seneca College Board of Governors Meeting Minutes, Public Session, May 28, 2003). As noted by the HR Committee, this amendment aligned the hiring policy and practices with the faculty credential requirements outlined in the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board’s (PEQAB’s) Degree Standards. This change was also highlighted by Ramdas (2017), who indicated that Seneca made the Ph.D. the preferred credential for hiring in general areas of study that could possibly support a degree program (so as to maximize future
degree development options) (p. 274). Seneca’s policy for faculty hiring, however, also included a Statement of Commitment, which noted: “Qualifications vary by discipline, program requirements and type of program, and may include related industry experience, relevant academic credentials, industry certification and professional association membership” (Seneca, 2003). This supplementary Statement reinforced Seneca’s ongoing commitment to a range of credentials (not all of which would warrant a Ph. D. as the minimum hiring standard), as well as the conviction among internal participants for this study that Seneca was not interested in becoming a university.

A number of new and amended academic policies related to admissions, promotions, graduation and program review were approved by the Board at its June 26th, 2003 meeting, following recommendations and approval by the college’s Academic Council and the Academic Planning and Student Affairs Committee of the Board (APSA) (Seneca College Board of Governors Meeting, Public Session, June 26th, 2003). In supporting these motions, the Board noted that the new/amended policies were required in order to conform to PEQAB’s degree benchmarks. At the November 26th, 2003 Board meeting, a new Intellectual Property Policy was introduced and approved, again following approvals at Academic Council and APSA. Finally, Academic Council and APSA supported several new research policies, approved by the full Board of Governors in December, 2007, in order to ensure compliance with Tri-Council requirements for research ethics and related protocols (Seneca College Board of Governors Meeting, Public Session, November 26th, 2003).

5.3 College Differentiation Performance Reviews (Year Five)

On April 4, 2008, the then Director of the Postsecondary Accountability Branch of MTCU wrote to the presidents of each of the six differentiated colleges, to update them on
the status and terms of their Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreements (MTCU, 2008). According to the Director’s correspondence, the Ministry planned to work with each of the colleges to complete a midterm performance review, based on the agreed-upon criteria in each signed agreement, which would in turn, “inform future agreements” (p. 1). In addition, the Director indicated that the signed agreements currently in effect would all be extended by one year to 2009, in light of the Ministry’s “planned work on postsecondary education policy” (2008, p. 2). It seems reasonable to infer from the Director’s references to “future agreements” and “planned work” that the government intended to continue with formal, differentiated mandates for some colleges, and that the future shape and direction these might take would be tied to some broader policy work on postsecondary education. This conclusion is further supported by subsequent amendments to MTCU’s Annual Report Operating Procedure, Section 1.0 Governance and Accountability, which was issued on April 1, 2003 and then updated in September, 2010. In Appendix E: Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITAL) Reports, it is noted that each college designated as a differentiated institution would be expected to incorporate the specific measures outlined in the Operating Procedure into its respective Annual Report:

This reporting process will replace and simplify the previous reporting requirements for institutions through the accountability agreements while maintaining the Ministry’s ability to track each institution’s progress as a differentiated institution. (MTCU, 2010, p. 10)

In September, 2008, in follow-up to the Director’s May, 2008 communication, the Manager, Colleges Unit, Postsecondary Accountability Branch issued an invitation to each college president (or senior designate) to attend a half-day working session with Ministry staff to discuss their performance reviews and to provide “an opportunity for input based on five years of respective experiences as differentiated institutions to the Government’s
strategy for transforming postsecondary education in Ontario" (Seneca College corporate files, 2008, p.2). In preparation for this discussion, each college was invited to prepare a concise, written summary of its performance review to share with colleagues at the session. The Manager further noted that the intention was to have an “informal and frank exchange”, and that attendees would be welcome to raise any issues related to college differentiation that they felt would be pertinent to the discussion (p. 2).

On October 29, 2008, Seneca’s Vice-President attended this session along with VPAs and senior designates from the other differentiated colleges. Seneca’s written performance summary was presented at that meeting, entitled: Differentiated College Mandate Report on the Accountability Agreement Between Seneca College and MTCU, dated Dec 9th, 2003 (Seneca College corporate files, 2003). According to the performance summary, the college had made notable progress, as of that date, in each element listed in its signed Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement as follows:

- **Comprehensive Range of Programming and Credentials** - 130 discrete programs ranging from entry-level and pre-apprenticeship to graduate certificates, with 58% at diploma levels, 7.6 % degrees (including the collaborative nursing program); and 22% graduate certificates;

- **Applied Degrees** - Ten degree programs approved and one pending; Ministerial Consents renewed for all four Seneca degrees approved during the pilot phases. Fall 2008 “Day 10” degree enrolment at 772 students or 5.5%. (Differentiation commitment was movement towards 15 degree programs within 5 -10 years and up to 15% activity at baccalaureate degree level.)

- **Enrolment Levels** - Non-degree “Day 10” enrolment as of Fall, 2008 at 14,007,
compared to audited non-degree numbers in 2002, at 13,429. (Differentiation commitment was that non-degree enrolment would be maintained at levels the same or higher than at the onset of differentiation.)

- **Applied Research** - Early infrastructure and human capacity developed to position Seneca “as a national leader in applied research” (p.2), including new Office of Research and Innovation created in 2003; one of the first colleges in Ontario to dedicate a senior academic position (associate vice-president level) to applied research and innovation. Early indicators of applied research success including CFI and OIT funded initiatives (awarded to Seneca beginning in 1999, previously only to universities), collaboration in gaming research with Simon Fraser University, British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and York University, and the lead college role in “CONII” (Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation), a network of eight colleges offering collaborative applied research opportunities for SME’s. (Differentiation commitment was to complement degree and diploma programs with applied research opportunities for students, with funding to come from non-MTCU sources; creation of a national profile through centres of specialization.)

- **Partnerships with Universities** - Increased partnerships developed with institutions across Canada and globally, including pathways from Seneca graduate certificates such as Corporate Communications into Masters programs in Europe and Australia, and a new collaborative Bachelor of Technology agreement signed with York University. (Differentiation commitment was to form partnerships and alliances with universities and other degree-granting
institutions to increase pathway options for students.)

- **Accessibility** - Bilateral agreement signed with Lambton College to facilitate seamless transfer of 2 year Computer Studies Lambton diploma graduates into third year of Seneca’s Advanced Diploma program and/or bridge into upper semester of Seneca’s Bachelor’s Degree in Software Development. All approved Seneca degrees structured to include pathways and/or bridging from high affinity diploma programs, built from provincial diploma standards so as to ensure transferability for students across the Ontario college system. Agreement reached at the provincial VPA’s table that all future CAAT degrees would ensure pathways built from provincial standards to maximize access and create consistent system-wide solutions. Provincial “Change Fund” project “College to College Mobility” (funded by MTCU), involving system-wide inventory of pathways from college diplomas to college degrees, and identifying gaps where apparent demand exists, and/or barriers evident along the continuum from upgrading and apprenticeship to post-secondary studies. (Differentiation commitment was to increase access to degree education for current and future college graduates through the pursuit of pathways within the CAAT system and with Ontario universities.)

- **Apprenticeship** - Activity levels maintained, with a number of proposals at various stages of exploration or development, including pre-apprenticeship and bridging. Pathways introduced from the precision skills pre-apprenticeship program and the early childhood apprenticeship program into the relevant diploma programs. (Differentiation commitment was to maintain activity levels
consistent with previous levels or expand, with commitment to develop learning pathways to diplomas)

- **Quality Assurance** – Participated as one of the initial pilot colleges in the new Program Quality Assurance Process Audit (PQAPA) with very positive outcome. Formal program review process (three-tiered) integrated into operational planning cycle. KPI’s monitored on ongoing basis and commitment to continuous improvement. (Differentiation commitment was to ensure ongoing quality assurance strategies in place to contribute to above average KPIs and continuous improvement in all elements.) (Seneca College, 2008)

In addition to summarizing Seneca’s success in each of the differentiation components, there were two other notes in the college’s differentiation performance report relevant to this study. First, the college noted that there were persistent, systemic barriers for graduates of college degrees who wished to access graduate studies in Ontario universities. The report suggested that the early success of individual degree graduates entering out-of-province/out-of-country universities, and a handful of graduates who had successfully gained admission into Masters programs in Ontario universities, would be important indicators to watch in order to counter these barriers. The report also made reference to certain goals and strategies (specifically in the quality assurance section) that needed to be delayed or deferred due to “MYAA adjustments”. This was in reference to the government’s projected cutbacks in multi-year funding allocations that had been announced to all colleges for the 2006/07 to 2008/09 period (Board of Governors Meeting Package, September, 2006 [Public Session]). It is noteworthy that the examples of possible deferrals and adjustments listed in the report did not include degree development and
renewal, pathways or pursuit of applied research opportunities, suggesting that the college continued to place a high priority on its differentiation goals.

Seneca’s 2008 Differentiated College Mandate Report as submitted to MTCU provides compelling evidence of Seneca’s ongoing commitment to, and progress towards, its differentiation goals up until that time. Evidence of Seneca's continued progress beyond 2008, and through until the end of the study period, can be found in later planning and reporting documents (e.g. Business Plans, Annual Reports 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08; MYAA Report Backs 2009, 2010, 2011), in the responses of internal interview participants, and in the findings of Ramdas (2017). Ramdas conducted a comparative analysis of three Ontario colleges, including Seneca, in order to understand the institutional changes each college underwent as a result of the PECE Act (2000) and the “New College Charter” (2002). (Coincidentally, Ramdas’ study period was also 2002 - 2012). Ramdas concluded that the opportunity to engage in the “higher level” activities such as degree-granting and applied research resulted in a practical differentiator for Seneca and others within the college system. Specifically, Ramdas reported that Seneca had submitted a total of thirteen degrees to PEQAB for review during the 2002-2012 period, all of which were recommended by PEQAB and subsequently approved by the Ministry. According to Ramdas, ten baccalaureate programs were running in 2012, with 1110 students (or 7.2% of the student body), attending degree-level programs at that time (p. 258). Ramdas further observed that the number of degrees that Seneca offered reinforced its belief that it was differentiated from many of the other colleges in the system (a viewpoint supported by both internal and external participants in this study), even though the degree level activity was still considerably lower than the limits permitted by its ITAL status (p. 184). This
notwithstanding, Ramdas concluded that Seneca had a deliberate and ongoing intention to
differentiate itself, and “significantly altered its institutional environment” in response to
its degree-granting authority (p. 275). According to Ramdas, degree granting at Seneca “has
had an effect on the college’s organizational structure, its hiring policies, the types of
programs it develops, and its view of itself in relation to other colleges in the system” (p.
258).

Citing responses from Seneca participants who were interviewed for his study,
Ramdas concluded that Seneca “viewed their degrees as an alternative to getting a degree
at a university”. According to one Ramdas participant, “Students can go to any university in
Ontario or they can choose one of these degrees that’s much more focused on some
application with some co-op...” (p. 184). This supports the reported belief by internal
participants for this study that differentiation at Seneca, including the introduction of
degrees, was primarily about access and choice. Further, according to participants in
Ramdas’ study, Seneca’s degrees offered a specific access benefit by creating pathways for
diploma graduates from Seneca and other colleges in the system:

The degrees also play a role in terms of academic pathways because they provide
building blocks. All of our degrees have got pathways from diplomas so for the non-
degree prepared students, there’s now an access route. They provide an access
route not just for our own students but for students from other colleges. (p. 184)

According to Ramdas, Seneca was also successful during the study period in building
applied research capacity across the college and more broadly, on behalf of the college
system (p. 276). Internal participants in this study agreed with Ramdas in observing that
Seneca was committed to lobbying the provincial and federal governments for applied
research funding, not just for Seneca but on behalf of the CAAT system. As noted earlier, for
example, Seneca played a lead role on behalf of other colleges in the system in establishing
the Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation (CONII), eventually growing to include all 24 colleges by the end of the study period and supported by Ontario Research Commercialization (ORC) funding. As another example of this leadership, Dr. Miner wrote “An open letter from Seneca College” in the Hill Times, (an Ottawa-based newspaper that covers the federal government and federal politics) in October, 2006 advocating for increased government funding to support industry-driven, applied research opportunities on behalf of “college and polytechnic” students, in partnership with small- to mid-sized companies (SME’s): “In short, Seneca College wants to ensure the viability of applied research, establish funding mechanisms, and find new areas for our polytechnics, colleges and institutes to play an essential part in realizing Canada’s innovation priorities” (Seneca College corporate files, October, 2006).

On April 15, 2008, in correspondence from Seneca’s Vice-President Academic to the Deans’ Committee, Committee members were invited to provide input and review of a draft backgrounder on potential academic/programming implications of polytechnic designation, to be used at the upcoming Board of Governors’ planning retreat. According to the Vice-President’s correspondence, the intention of the Board’s retreat was “to ensure the Board is aware of the significant, strategic implications (relating to academics, HR etc.) of moving in this direction, and to seek their input, advice and any concerns that we should be addressing prior to and/or during our ongoing discussions with the Ministry” (email communication, April 15, 2008). In response, the Associate Vice-President, Research and Innovation provided a detailed summary of Seneca’s achievements in applied research “despite our challenges in competing with the universities for grants” (email communication, April 16, 2008). The list of success indicators included:
• achievement of NSERC Tri-Council eligibility in December, 2007; Board approved research policies in place to meet Tri-Council requirements;

• approximately 545 participating students in research-related courses and research projects, encompassing all baccalaureate programs and graduate certificates;

• creation of an employee-initiated research fund (self-funded by the college);

• 58 assigned faculty and other volunteer mentors (i.e. assigned to research initiatives).

• total of 120 students and 26 faculty participating in funded research projects directly related to industry-identified challenges and scientific uncertainties;

• almost $6M in funding from federal and provincial agencies between 2004 and 2007, with more than $3M in cash and in-kind contributions from 20 industry partners. (e.g. $600K from CFI and $600K from OIT for BCART lab7 in 2002; first Ontario college to receive CFI/OIT funding).

• multi-year College Math Project (CMP) initiated in 2004–05 to analyze mathematics achievement of first semester college students, relative to their secondary school mathematics backgrounds; CMP was a collaborative project with York University’s Faculty of Education, housed within the York/Seneca Institute for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education (YSIMSTE). (email correspondence April 16, 2008)

7 Seneca’s Biotechnology Centre for Applied Research and Training provides training and research opportunities in collaboration with industry in the areas of genomics/genetics studies/molecular biology, proteomics/protein studies.
The AVP’s report concluded with an editorial comment noting the challenges of working without operational funding for faculty release time, only nominal funds to compensate students, and a skeletal staff in the Office of Research and Innovation. This serves as a good example of the college’s determination to succeed in its differentiation commitments despite the lack of differential government funding (other than a nominal premium for degree students) and ambiguity in terms of the government’s long-range intentions regarding college differentiation and funding.

Although most internal interview participants (and some external participants) agreed that the college made notable progress during the study period towards its applied research differentiation goals, they were mixed in their perceptions of whether Seneca was successful in differentiating itself from among the Ontario Colleges in this regard. According to Hicks et al. (2013), Seneca had the highest research funding among all Ontario Colleges in 2011 ($1.375M) as sourced from the NSERC search engine, and including funding from the College Community Innovation Fund (p. 9). The authors note that applied research in the colleges is at very early stages and “(t)here may simply not be sufficient volume and maturity of research activity to meaningfully measure differentiation on this variable – yet” (p. 8). Hicks et al. further note, however, that the sector leaders that were consulted during the development of their report stressed that college students have been engaged in hands-on, applied projects, including applied research in partnership with business and industry, as an integral component of all college programming since the system’s inception (p. 8). Still, one might anticipate that the nature and role of applied research at a large college such as Seneca might be different from many other colleges by virtue of its size and the number of baccalaureate degree programs offered. This is
reinforced by provisions in Seneca’s Business Plans and Status Reports (2005/06; 2006/07; 2007/08), which committed “strategic initiative” seed funding over consecutive years to support employee-initiated research projects, private-public research collaboration, the creation of three centres of excellence to support collaborative research and contract training (Centre for Financial Services, Centre for the Development of Open Technologies, Centre for the Built Environment), and to “engage all Faculties offering baccalaureate degree programs in applied research projects involving faculty and students” (2006/07, p. 41). According to the 2005/06 Business Plan Achievement Report, there were 76 revenue-generating applied research and contracted research initiatives completed during that year (p. 69). Seneca was awarded its first two major NSERC CCIP grants and started to receive funding from those grants in 2009. Seneca participated in a tri-college, multi-year action research project designed to study student retention and intervention strategies beginning in 2007, entitled “Foundations for Success” with $6.2M in funding from the Canada Millenium Scholarship Foundation and $500K from MTCU.

Given the lack of comparative data for the other colleges, the evidence for this study was inconclusive in confirming whether Seneca’s applied research activity was sufficient to “differentiate” it from other Ontario Colleges during the study period. Based on college planning documents and annual reports as well as various sector reports (HEQCO, Colleges Ontario), it seems likely that Seneca (and perhaps other large colleges such as Sheridan and George Brown) moved more quickly in this area than many other colleges over the study period. The gap between the large, actively engaged colleges and others may have narrowed, however, as eligibility rules changed and best practices were shared, and other institutions built infrastructure and capacity. The aforementioned College Math Project
(CMP), for example, was initiated through the Seneca/York YSIMSTE Institute and included 11 CAATs (and 28 school boards) in 2009, but by 2012, all Ontario CAATs.

5.4 Seneca as the “partnerships and pathways college”

As noted earlier, the Consolidated Task Forces Report approved by the Board of Governors in June, 2003 summarized the key findings and recommendations of the five Task Forces created by Dr. Miner during his early New Seneca visioning process (Seneca College, 2003). The Degree-Granting Task Force submitted a total of thirty-two recommendations designed to ensure students would be able to “access and progress through a variety of degree options to achieve their personal and academic goals” (p. 5). (A number of these recommendations also addressed the institutional nomenclature and positioning debates that were still unresolved at that time, leading eventually to the polytechnic agenda.) Given the sheer number of recommendations, the Consolidated Report proposed a priority order for implementation: “Based on the potential for positive impact on students and the feasibility of implementation, it is the consensus of the task force that the college initially focus its efforts on our current strengths (i.e., articulation agreements, applied degrees and post diploma/degree certificates) while simultaneously and aggressively exploring partnerships” (p.2). In a section of the Report entitled “Building on our current strengths”, Recommendation #2 in Appendix A (Degree-Granting Options), stated: “That the College use the enhanced academic status gained by the approval to offer applied degrees after the rigorous evaluations by PEQAB, as part of its negotiating strategy for enhanced articulation” (p. 3). It seems that the relationship between Seneca’s articulation efforts and its independent degree-granting initiatives was understood by the Task Force members as advantageous in both directions: success in offering the new
degrees would facilitate negotiations with pathways partners, and success in forging effective pathways and credit transfer agreements would enhance the college’s reputation as a high quality, differentiated, degree-granting institution.

The Consolidated Report also emphasized the priority Seneca should put on developing articulation and degree-completion pathways into its own baccalaureate degrees (emphasis added), on behalf of CAAT diploma graduates. As noted in Chapter Four, the two relevant recommendations from the Degree-Granting Task Force stated, “That the College make it an immediate priority to develop articulation strategies (e.g. bridging semesters) between Seneca diplomas and the new applied degrees” (Recommendation #6) and “That similar arrangements be extended to diploma graduates from other CAATs” (Recommendation #7) (p. 3).

Given the Board of Governors’ endorsement of the Consolidated Report and these immediate priorities, it seems that Board members also recognized the strategic advantage of focusing simultaneously on Seneca’s independent degree-granting authority and the development of degree-completion pathways, into and out of Seneca. Still, based on the evidence, there were suggestions among some participants in this study that this may have been seen as a confusing or contradictory strategy.

All interview participants were asked to comment on the relationship between Seneca’s polytechnic goals (including increased degree-granting authority) and the college’s demonstrated commitment to pathways and credit transfer. More specifically, interviewees were asked whether Seneca’s ongoing efforts to develop pathways and academic partnerships with other institutions (consistent with commitments in its approved Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement), and to contribute to credit
transfer and mobility initiatives provincially, were perceived as complementary or contradictory (and/or confusing) to its polytechnic journey. The responses were varied, although most participants (internal and external) saw these efforts as complementary. As explained by one former dean:

I think the pathways piece was huge. It showed our capacity; it showed our ability and it really helped us leverage that. I think it really raised our reputation. And it did establish us as differentiated in certain universities’ minds. So I think it was a key piece of building that kind of capacity and that (differentiation) story, but also in saying, “We’re comprehensive. We give opportunities.”

A former, senior government manager made the same point:

Seneca articulated this in its proposal: ‘We are the pathways institution, come to us and you get to do this, and you get an opportunity to do that…’ You were at a point where all of the colleges were trying to gain credibility in degrees, and it seems to me that the best strategy for doing that, for building up your own degrees, is to be able to successfully partner with the guys who must be doing it “better” because they’ve been doing it forever, i.e. the universities. So it was a nice resonance, rather than a contradiction.

Another former Seneca dean agreed that “Seneca had a big role in this area”, noting that the participation of senior management on the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) and then on various committees leading up to the creation of ONCAT, probably “put Seneca in a bit of a leadership position” provincially. “I think the image we were trying to create was that we were the pathway college. That’s what we were saying with all of those activities.” This same participant acknowledged, however, that Seneca’s significant efforts in pathways and credit transfer initiatives could have created some confusion. Another participant, a senior Seneca administrator, explained:

Yes and No. It’s still a struggle now. What are we trying to do with our degrees? Are we trying to build pathways from our own diploma programs into our own degrees? Or are we trying to build pathways from our diploma programs into university degrees? Or, pathways from other colleges into our degrees…or all of the above? It’s all very confusing. And becomes even more confusing when you start to get into
(broader) partnerships with different colleges or universities. What audience are we trying to capture?

Most external participants noted that Seneca was very successful in establishing a reputation for itself as the pathway college. One senior government official emphasized, however, that this was a strategy that was completely compatible with its degree-granting goals:

(>Seneca was<) a leading institution when it came to that...I remember Rick (Miner) being very articulate about credit transfer, its multiple entry points and exit points. And re-entry points. ...I didn’t see it as a contradiction; I think it’s a red herring. I’ve always felt that. I used to hear this from (the universities) all the time: ‘How can you be highly differentiated, but at the same time pushing for credit transfer?’ Or the opposite. ’If you’ve got colleges that want to become pseudo-universities, why then credit transfer?’ To me this is a red herring... I think it’s a false dichotomy, but I heard that many times. In a way, what you do (by suggesting that transfer pathways aren’t necessary because the degree-granting colleges can do it themselves) is you replicate the “siloloed” structure that, in fact, we’re trying to dismantle.

A university president interviewee had a similar concern, noting that this argument was, in fact, also made by some other (ITAL) colleges (other than Seneca), i.e. that efforts towards improved college-to-university transfer would no longer be necessary, once they had their own degrees. In this participant’s opinion, however, this position actually worked “against the colleges and their students”. This participant explained: “I can distinctly remember discussions around the table with university presidents saying, ‘we don’t need to deal with credit transfer anymore because now they have degrees and they can do their own transfers’.”

In some cases, perceptions of Seneca as “the pathways college” extended to an understanding of “partnerships” as a key strategic priority and differentiating factor for Seneca. As explained by this former senior government manager:

Probably the first indicator that Seneca was doing something different was the Seneca@York proposal – which wasn’t just about a building, but a building with a
concept attached. It was a statement about a willingness to invest in a partnership model... It was almost before that kind of thing was really kindled... So maybe this was kind of filling a void, by taking a different route to connecting yourself to the ‘A team’, whereas the other guys were trying to recreate the ‘A team’ environment and the ‘A team’ credentials and programs.

It is interesting that this participant, along with some other externals, felt that Seneca’s focus on pathways and partnerships was a unique focus of its institutional positioning, not necessarily shared by some other ITALs - despite the fact that Dr. Miner and his presidential colleagues from the ITALs (and especially Humber and Sheridan) had collaborated in their polytechnic strategy throughout the period from 2002 through to 2009 (when Dr. Miner retired). This same former government manager explained:

So Sheridan has said, “Oh, this is actually a journey to become a university”; Humber has sort of said, “this is a journey to become a big picture, comprehensive, we-do-it-all, polytechnic thing, and we’d like to do everything right up to Masters degrees”...and I think Seneca said, yeah, we’re going to do our stand-alone degrees, but we’re also about partnerships and mobility and transfers, and actually hitching up with the existing university system, which the other two didn’t promote. They’ve got partnerships but it wasn’t the model...So there’s some institutional differentiation there, within the (ITAL) colleges as well.

President Agnew added, in reflecting upon his understanding of Seneca’s credit transfer and pathways efforts and the ‘fit’ with the college’s differentiation goals when he first arrived at the college:

I think that part of the challenge for the Board at the time, part of the challenge for most of us even at this time, in terms of distilling the essence of Seneca, is we continue to be proud that we are ‘the number one pathway college’, we provide options for our students... So even as we’re talking the language of polytechnic, we are applauding as students go down to U of T and over to York, we put on the degree fairs in our hallways that basically encourage students to transfer (out), all of which I think is right. But from a pure positioning viewpoint? It leads to confusion.

One external participant, a former senior executive from one of the other differentiated colleges, shared the viewpoint that the relationship between independent degree granting and a focus on pathways was an advantageous one, not only for the
students, but also for the institution: “I think credit transfer notionally is an extremely important part of what a good, successful polytechnic will do. There’s just no question about that. The ‘how do you do it’, and if it requires partners...that’s where the issues arise.”

When asked if their college would have negotiated a degree completion pathway with a university partner even if they had plans to offer that same degree independently at their college, this same participant added: “Absolutely. Because in my mind, the more choice I can provide students, the better it looks. There’s more credibility, more options, more choices. It (the positioning) will be saleable.”

5.5 Summary

Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, Seneca remained committed to, and made notable progress towards, its approved differentiation goals as articulated in the signed Differentiation Mandate Accountability Agreement throughout the study period. Specific targets and indicators of progress in each of the specific elements in the Accountability Agreement were well documented in various college reports (including the midterm performance review report required by MTCU in Year Five) and reinforced in examples provided by internal study participants. Specifically, the findings demonstrate notable progress related to development and delivery of baccalaureate degrees, applied research initiatives, institutional capacity, and partnerships and pathways both within Seneca and with other colleges and universities. Overall, both internal and external interview participants perceived Seneca to be, at the least, partially successful in achieving its differentiation goals during the study period.

As emphasized by several participants, however, the one element of Seneca’s
differentiation journey in which the college was less successful was the one that was an implied “add-on” after Seneca’s Accountability Agreement was signed, yet believed by Dr. Miner and internal participants to be an important enabler to the other goals in the Agreement: the pursuit of system design change including polytechnic status. The next chapter seeks to understand this aspect of Seneca’s differentiation journey, and the outcomes, in more depth.
CHAPTER SIX: The Momentum towards Polytechnics

Round Two

6.0 Introduction

This chapter examines Seneca’s success in pursuing system design change in Ontario, including polytechnic designations, as part of its differentiation strategy. This aspect of the college’s differentiation journey emerges as the one component that was the most challenging and illusive, and therefore preoccupied much of President Miner’s strategic focus, positioned within the context of the need for change to Ontario’s postsecondary system design. For purposes of this discussion, therefore, the pursuit of a polytechnic designation is treated as an understood add-on to Seneca’s Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement.

As outlined in Chapter Four, there were strong indications that the polytechnic discourse in Ontario had been gaining momentum leading up to the announcement of the PECE Act (2000) and the New College Charter (2002), as evidenced by the Portals and Pathways Report (MTCU, 2001); internal research conducted by the Seneca library staff and others on postsecondary models for Seneca (Seneca, 2001); the early polytechnic submissions made by Sheridan, Humber and others (Seneca, 2001); and statements made by then Seneca president Stephen E. Quinlan to the Seneca Board and the media. Based on perceptions among several participants (internal and external), however, this momentum slowed down after the government’s decision to use the alternative “ITAL” designation for differentiated colleges, perhaps due to other circumstances preoccupying the government and institutions over the following years (e.g. the expected “double cohort” of incoming postsecondary students created by the phasing out of grade thirteen in 2003; the Rae
Review in 2004). Still, according to Dr. Miner and senior participants from other institutions, discussions around the need for postsecondary system design change continued in the background, along with ongoing discussions around the need for polytechnics.

Interview participants from government were varied in their recall of this. At least one external participant felt that, by 2007, government had stopped talking about polytechnics “at least from a policy perspective”. According to this senior government official, however, there were several indicators within the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to suggest that college differentiation and the possible designation of polytechnics were part of the ongoing policy discourse throughout the study period, and especially leading up to 2009. Examples cited included the jurisdictional scans that had been done by ministerial bureaucrats, the ITAL policy itself, various reports and reviews by scholars and policy advisors, and between 2006 and 2008, direct discussions between senior staff and then Deputy Minister Philip Steenkamp. According to Dr. Miner and many other interview participants, internal and external, the momentum in favour of system design change and the creation of polytechnics mounted and reached a peak during Deputy Steenkamp’s tenure. Several interviewees, in turn, cited the departure of Deputy Steenkamp in Fall, 2008 as a critical factor in what then seemed to be another slowdown in that momentum.

Given the significance placed on Seneca’s polytechnic goals by Dr. Miner and almost all internal participants, and the strong convictions among several that there was great cause for optimism and excitement during the Steenkamp years, it is important to examine the supporting documentation to confirm these perceptions - and then, in Chapter Seven, to
analyze this and other factors that may have contributed to changes in the discourse. The chronological overview which follows is an expanded version of a similar document developed for internal purposes at Seneca during the study period (and presented to the Board of Governors, as referenced in Chapter Four), and provides an annotated account of relevant “polytechnic-related” events cited by participants and referenced in the documentation - beginning with Dr. Steenkamp’s appointment to Ontario’s MTCU through until the period following his departure.

6.1 A Chronology of Polytechnic Developments

In March, 2006, Dr. Philip Steenkamp was appointed as Deputy Minister of Ontario’s Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (TCU). Prior to his appointment at TCU, Dr. Steenkamp served as Deputy Minister of Strategic Policy and Social Development in British Columbia, and before that, as B.C.’s Deputy Minister of Advanced Education. It is noteworthy that, before assuming his Ontario role, Dr. Steenkamp led the development of a long-term, comprehensive vision for post-secondary education in B.C., designed to address a projected need for some 25,000 new student spaces by 2010 (Ontario MTCU, 2006). Also of interest in the context of this study, the British Columbia Institute of Technology’s (BCIT’s) status as a polytechnic was enshrined in provincial legislation in 2004, during Steenkamp’s tenure in the B.C. government (BCIT website)

On Jan 12th, 2007, then Seneca President Rick Miner (and presidents of other ITAL colleges) received an email from then Sheridan president, Dr. Robert Turner, indicating that Sheridan had submitted a formal request to the Minister and Deputy Minister for an institutional name change, from Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITAL) to Sheridan Polytechnic (Miner, personal correspondence, January 2007).
In this same correspondence, the Sheridan president also asked if any of the other ITAL presidents were interested in joining him for a “conversation on this subject with the Deputy Minister”. Dr. Miner’s response was supportive of Sheridan’s decision, while at the same time noting that he felt Seneca was not quite ready to follow suit at that time:

> We are just starting a midterm review of our strategic plan and I suspect the Board would not want to answer that question until the review is either over, or well on its way (early fall 2007). We would certainly support your “application” if you ever need that type of help. On an unofficial basis, I would be happy to join you in a conversation if you think that would help. (Miner, personal communication, 2007)

In January, 2007, Seneca’s president Rick Miner was appointed by then New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham to lead a provincial Commission on Post-Secondary Education. The scope of the Commission was to review New Brunswick’s postsecondary system design, including recommendations regarding the respective mandates, jurisdiction and roles of all public and private universities and colleges.

In March, 2007, Sheridan College president Rob Turner wrote to Dr. Miner and other ITAL colleagues advising that he had received a phone call from the Ontario Ministry (MTCU) acknowledging receipt of Sheridan’s polytechnic submission, and requesting that they initiate a dialogue with the other college presidents on the matter of polytechnic designations (Miner, personal communication, March 19, 2007). The group discussed a number of strategies for engaging with the other nineteen (non-ITAL designated) college presidents, including seeking time on the next formal Committee of Presidents8 agenda, arranging a special face-to-face forum, initiating an electronic discussion etc. In a private email dated March 19th, 2007 to President Miner only (and released by Dr. Miner for this

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8 The Ontario Colleges’ Committee of Presidents (COP) consists of the presidents of all 24 colleges, and provides direction and advice to Colleges’ Ontario for purposes of system advocacy and issues resolution.
research), one college president cautioned that “the three” should think carefully about any strategy that opened the polytechnic question up to the other presidents: “I would predict they would be against anything which divides/weakens the system as it now exists. Or which gives others an edge etc.” This particular president further suggested that some officials at the Ministry may have insisted on a dialogue with the other CAAT presidents because they didn’t support the polytechnic agenda themselves, and would be able to use the anticipated resistance from the other presidents to block the initiative:

I think we need to make the case that it’s in Ontario’s best interest to move in this direction e.g. a shortage of places for baccalaureate studies, and on the political agenda, i.e. what’s in it for the governing party, if we want to make progress. We should discuss privately before we do anything because there won’t be many kicks at this and if it fails now, you can kiss it goodbye for several years, or at least until government changes. (Miner, personal communication, March 19, 2007)

In May, 2007, Deputy Minister Steenkamp and TCU staff met with Humber and Sheridan presidents and Seneca’s Senior Vice-President/Acting President regarding formal polytechnic status, including initial exploration of an Ontario definition (Seneca’s President Miner was away at the time re: the New Brunswick Commission). In June, 2007, the GTA college and university presidents were invited to meetings with the Deputy Minister and TCU staff to discuss significant, projected enrolment growth in GTA (primarily in demand for baccalaureate programming) over a 10-15 year period, and possible system responses. Again, in Dr. Miner’s absence, Seneca’s Senior Vice-President/Acting President attended these meetings, along with other GTA presidents and senior staff. In August, 2007, the Ministry hosted a “Colleges Ontario Meeting on System Design” with representatives from Colleges Ontario, Committee of Presidents, Council of Ontario Universities and Ministry staff, for a roundtable brainstorming session on system design, projected capacity issues and potential solutions.
According to speaking notes prepared for the Seneca's Vice-President during the All-Faculty “Welcome Back” meetings in August, 2007, the Ministry was projecting an increase in demand for postsecondary spaces in GTA of between 30,000 and 70,000 over 10-15 years -- depending on assumptions made about participation rates and immigration patterns (Seneca College corporate files, August 2007). According to these notes, most of this new demand was anticipated to be for baccalaureate spaces in York Region, which historically had been considered to be in Seneca and Humber’s “catchment areas” and where Seneca, Humber (and York University) already had campus locations. The Vice-President’s speaking notes referred to the meeting with Deputy Steenkamp earlier in June, at which “the Deputy presented some of the gov’t (sic) thinking in terms of range of responses. Specifically we have been invited to consider how the GTA CAATs...can best be part of the solution” (2007, p. 3).

The VPA’s notes also referenced some then recent media coverage regarding a similar meeting the Deputy had held with the GTA university presidents. According to these media reports, the options being considered by the Ministry were “broad and potentially far-reaching in terms of the future of pse (sic) in Ontario”. The list of options, as cited in the VPA’s address, included the creation of a new university in York Region, broader mandates for some GTA colleges, the creation of university-colleges, polytechnic designations, and greater collaboration across and between the CAATs and universities. In terms of next steps, the VPA noted that the Deputy planned to meet with each of the GTA institutions individually. “The posturing and positioning is heating up among some of the players as

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9 Prior to the New College Charter (OCAATA, 2002), the geographic regions from which Ontario Colleges drew their student populations and for which they provided labour market training solutions were formally defined.
you can imagine, so it promises to be an exciting time. We have been asked to be prepared to talk about Seneca’s aspirations in this context” (p. 3).

The closing commentary in the VPA’s speaking notes is perhaps the most relevant to this study:

For all of us at Seneca, this is very good timing. The polytechnic nomenclature has been staring us in the face, on and off again, for almost 10 years...and clearly it is on the front burner again. We are one of eight institutions across the country that belong to Polytechnics Canada – and Rick’s leadership on behalf of P.C. has been noticed by the federal gov’t (sic) and others. Our differentiated status includes a polytechnic placeholder with the Provincial Gov’t to reopen the discussion if/when it is deemed appropriate. At the same time, we want to acknowledge and build on the powerful reputation that the Seneca name has earned both nationally and internationally, so whatever we aspire to, must be respectful of that...Stay tuned. As you know, we have been engaged in a midterm review/reconsideration of our strategic plan, and a draft of the new document will be released for comment and input in the Fall. (This is) a terrific opportunity to consider our strategic goals in the context of the projected enrolment challenges. (p. 3)

In October, 2007, the Liberal government under Premier Dalton McGuinty won the provincial election for a second term, and the Honourable John Milloy was appointed as Minister, Training, Colleges and Universities. That same month, Seneca President Rick Miner participated in a teleconference call with the other ITAL presidents to discuss and develop an Ontario definition of polytechnics.

In November, 2007, President Miner attended a meeting with then federal Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, which was also attended by then University of Toronto president David Naylor. According to President Miner’s meeting notes, the U of T president made a public statement during this meeting, supporting the creation of two or three polytechnics in Ontario, a statement which Miner described as “unprompted” and “a very interesting and forceful position” (Miner, personal communication, November 27, 2007). That same month, the Seneca Board of Governors approved a renewed, expanded
version of the 2004 – 2009 Strategic Plan following an extensive midterm review (as referenced in Chapter Five). Seneca’s *Strategic Plan 2008-2011* reaffirmed the college’s commitment to two overarching goals (“Superior Quality Education” and “Access to Success”) and identified three key priorities intended to enable achievement of those goals. Two of these priorities were an extension of priorities in the previous Plan. The first one, however, was new: to “Transform our Institution...as the Canadian Model of Polytechnic Education”. This represented the first time Seneca’s polytechnic aspirations were so explicit and formalized in a Strategic Plan (Seneca Board of Governors’ Minutes, Public Session, November 27, 2007).

In January, 2008, MTCU’s new Minister, the Honourable John Milloy visited Seneca College as part of an orientation tour of colleges and universities across Ontario, to familiarize himself with the programs, services, issues and challenges surrounding each institution. In an internal package of briefing materials prepared for Dr. Miner and his Senior Executive team by the college’s Government Relations department, the purpose and proposed agenda for the Minister’s visit were detailed, along with a number of supporting background documents including a recap of the Liberal Government’s Reaching Higher Plan. In the covering email, Seneca’s objectives for the visit were explicit: “To provide the Minister with a better understanding of the characteristics of a polytechnic” and “To demonstrate Seneca’s commitment to student support and access programming that can assist them in delivering their Reaching Higher Plan (agenda)” (Miner, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

Also in January, 2008, President Miner received a personal note from a senior official at MTCU (released by Dr. Miner for this research) giving him a “quick heads up” that
there were plans underway to take “the PSE system design piece, including options re: polytechnics” through the government decision-making process beginning that April. This was Dr. Miner’s first definitive (albeit unofficial) indication that there was specific government action underway to move the system design/polytechnic agenda forward (Miner, personal communication, January 2008).

In February, 2008, President Miner wrote an email to Deputy Steenkamp reiterating the critical importance of polytechnics and applied education in increasing postsecondary participation rates and meeting the economic needs of the province (Miner, personal communication, February 7, 2008). In anticipation of pending system design reform, Seneca hired an external consultant to assist in developing a strategy and formal proposal for submission to government for polytechnic status. An action plan was designed to ensure the college had the appropriate internal approvals and documentation in place to seek formal polytechnic designation as soon as this was available. This included a proposed focus on system design and polytechnic positioning at the April, 2008 Board Retreat.

In ongoing correspondence between Seneca’s VPA, President Miner and the external consultant, the preferred institutional positioning and critical components of a polytechnic submission were discussed. In an email from President Miner to the consultant on Mar 17, 2008, the president offered this feedback on an early version of a positioning framework:

I think it is important to say that this will be a Canadian model of poly (sic) education that will respond directly to the needs of Ontario now and in the future. Poly is defined very differently around the world and I want us to be able to ‘plant our own flag’…(Also) I would not talk about a “new governance model” as much as “a governance model that is appropriate for a responsive polytechnic”. (Miner, personal communication, March, 2008)

This seems consistent with comments made by Dr. Miner during his interview for this study, indicating that he was not interested in trying to turn Seneca into a university nor in
adopting university-like characteristics.

In this same email, Dr. Miner asked the external facilitator to add a section to the draft document on the national leadership Seneca had already exhibited in polytechnic education, citing examples such as its various leadership roles in Polytechnics Canada and related committees, numerous policy presentations Dr. Miner had been asked to make in both Ottawa and at Queen’s Park, as well as his appointment as commissioner of the New Brunswick Postsecondary Review (personal communications, March, 2008). Dr. Miner made one final, important suggestion that reinforced Seneca’s preferred strategy of collaborating with other differentiated colleges (rather than competing) as they pursued polytechnic status, arguing that there needed to be “at least 2 if not 3 polys so we can do some co-branding” (Miner, personal communications, March 2008).

Later in April, the Vice-President Academic wrote a follow-up email to the external consultant, offering further advice to assist in institutional positioning based on discussions members of the Seneca executive had had with government:

...we should be prepared to indicate the specific areas that we would plan to move into, in terms of increased degrees, program mix implications etc. It seems we will have to have a section that presents some of the things we could do iff (sic) they gave us approval... e.g. Introduce our own BScN, so we are the ‘+2 part’ of the degree, at the back end, for other CAATs around the province who need a good collaborative partner (to help address the projected shortfall in nurses); create our own Faculty of Education (with a focus on sciences and maths and technologies, i.e. teaching new teachers about college students, technicians and technologists-to-be); perhaps some 2 plus 2’s, in collaboration with U of T ? (since we know they are trying to downsize their undergrad numbers to make room for grad students) etc. (Miner, personal communications, April, 2008)

Spring, 2008 turned out to be a busy period in terms of the polytechnic discourse in
Ontario. As discussed in Chapter Five, the presidents of the six\textsuperscript{10} differentiated colleges were notified by the Postsecondary Accountability Branch of MTCU in April, 2008, that their Differentiated Accountability Agreements would be extended by a year in order to allow time for the government to consider “future policy options” based on a midterm performance review (MTCU, email communications, 2008). This correspondence, including the email’s subject line, “Differentiation/Polytechnics”, supports the perceptions of many interview participants that the polytechnic issue was still on the government’s radar as of that time – despite the perceptions of at least one government participant that this was not the case.

It is also noteworthy that a separate but parallel email was sent to the presidents of the non-differentiated colleges, copied to President Miner and the other ITAL presidents, for information purposes. According to Dr. Miner, other colleges had approached the Ministry asking about the process for pursuing similar, differentiated status, but were told in the April, 2008 correspondence that there would be no further approvals pending the midterm performance review and any resultant policy considerations (Miner, personal correspondence, 2008).

Also in Spring, 2008, the ITAL presidents started to become aware of some divisive reactions to the polytechnic issue among both the university and college sectors. In preparation for a planned polytechnic teleconference of the five presidents, Colleges Ontario staff was invited, unofficially, to share any feedback they had received from the university sector and/or other colleges regarding the polytechnic issue. According to

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\textsuperscript{10} Six Ontario colleges were approved for differentiated status during the study period, including Seneca, Sheridan, Humber, Conestoga, George Brown and Georgian, but Georgian’s approved model was unique and it was not considered an ITAL.
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follow-up correspondence between Dr. Miner and other ITAL presidents, the polytechnic
issue had been the focus of a recent Council of Ontario Universities (COU) meeting, and in
the opinion of one university president, this was the issue “most likely to derail
coopration between the two sectors” (Miner, personal correspondence, April, 2008). This
same university president further suggested that neither the universities nor the colleges
were united on the polytechnic issue, and that “COU was well aware of this” (April, 2008).
In addition, there were reports of concerns expressed by some colleges to government
about the use of the term “polytechnic” in the advertising by other colleges. (This
development was also raised in some internal and external interviews for this study). It
was suggested that a discussion at the Committee of Presidents (COP) table might be in
order, to address these and other polytechnic concerns among the group. According to one
ITAL colleague:

If the college sector is sending mixed messages to government, it will make the
polytechnic “sell” to government more difficult, especially if universities are now
taking more serious note of this issue...(and) if the government is confronted with a
united opposition from the university community. (Miner, personal correspondence, 2008)

In May, 2008, President Miner and other ITAL presidents from GTA met with the
Deputy Minister and senior policy manager from MTCU to discuss the system design
agenda. After attending this meeting, Dr. Miner wrote to Seneca’s senior executive team
summarizing his understanding of what was said at the meeting. According to President
Miner’s notes:

- System redesign is still moving ahead but the time lines are slipping a bit;
presentation to cabinet has slipped to June....position paper on the immediate
horizon and likely consultations in the fall... There is a specific government
direction to do something with polytechnics. This has to be the premier.
• (The Deputy) is concerned that he has to do polys (sic) within a whole system redesign or else the redesign might end with only polytechnics. He thinks there needs to be more.

• There are supporters (I think x and xx) and non-supporters (I think y - seems to be pushing the articulation option instead) in the ministry around the polytechnic issue.

• There is an interest in further understanding what some of the ‘solutions’ are that a poly (sic) might offer; got a bit nervous when we started talking about graduate education...We were asked if BCIT was similar to our concept. We said yes.

• It was pointed out twice that this cannot simply be a branding exercise (i.e. we are one, so give us the name) but rather that we need to help articulate why this is in fact something new and beneficial. We talked about a university transfer option, joint degrees (nursing), increased university cooperation, working with other pse institutions (provincial mandate) to expand access etc.

And Miner’s closing note:

Beyond this meeting, things seem to be heating up. Some of our college colleagues are getting nervous. Some have been lobbying (Colleges Ontario) and wanting to put polys on the COP (Committee of Presidents) agenda. It will be going to COPEX (Executive Committee). Now the universities are starting to get nervous. University x and y are starting to make waves. So the sleeping dogs are now awake. (Miner, personal correspondence, May 1, 2008)

Two other significant events took place around this same time: Minister John Milloy asked the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to examine the issue and provide advice on whether Ontario should create polytechnic institutions; and Colleges Ontario created a new Polytechnic/System Design Working Group of the Committee of Presidents (COP). According to Dr. Miner’s notes, in the supporting rationale for creating the new Working Group, it was noted that the “plans of several colleges to be designated as polytechnic institutions raise several critical policy and funding issues for government and for those colleges not seeking polytechnic status” (Miner, personal communication, June 27, 2008). Meetings of the Working Group were scheduled throughout the summer, with the
goal of having recommendations ready to forward to the Committee of Presidents by the end of September. The Working Group was comprised of presidents from both differentiated and non-differentiated colleges, including Dr. Miner and then president of Humber, John Davies. According to Dr. Miner’s notes (released for purposes of this research), the group believed that it was preferable to develop a framework for polytechnics that met Ontario postsecondary students’ needs and addressed the colleges’ collective concerns, rather than having something “imposed” from another jurisdiction. The Working Group also believed that there wasn’t an appropriate definition of polytechnics that could be “borrowed” from other jurisdictions, and that a made-in-Ontario definition would be needed. To assist in this regard, a preliminary list of distinguishing features for Ontario’s polytechnics was developed including a wide range of credentials from apprenticeship to post-grad; an integrated credit-transfer system built into the polytechnic mandates; structured pathways between credentials; an institutional focus on teaching (rather than research), but with a commitment to student-centred applied research to support the teaching/learning process; and a college governance model (as opposed to university senate models).

According to Miner’s notes, the Working Group also understood that the creation of an integrated college/polytechnic system could represent an important and timely evolution of the Ontario college system, increasing options and access to degree-level programming for students - especially underserved populations - at a time when capacity was a provincial concern. This last aspect of Miner’s notes lines up particularly well with the access motivation for Seneca’s differentiation that was repeatedly articulated during the internal interviews for this study (Miner, personal communication, June 27, 2008).
The creation of the COP Working Group (including the use of the word “polytechnic” in its title), the ongoing discussions with government as documented in Dr. Miner’s notes, and Colleges Ontario’s continuing involvement in considering system design and policy options on behalf of the college system, all seem to confirm perceptions by internal interviewees (including Dr. Miner) that the polytechnic debate was heating up in Ontario over this period.

During late May/early June, 2008, President Miner met individually with the presidents of Ryerson University, University of Toronto and York University to discuss postsecondary system capacity issues, system redesign and polytechnics as part of the capacity solution. In an email update from President Miner to Seneca’s VPA, Dr. Miner noted that there were some initial concerns expressed to him by one of the university presidents, based on an assumption that the polytechnic model being sought was one that would focus 100% of its programming at the degree level. The main worry, according to Miner’s university colleague, was that the colleges’ intended to get out of the traditional college (non-degree) programming – and then “who would pick it up”? This feedback is consistent with the perceptions expressed by some external interviewees in this study. According to Miner, once he clarified that the specifics were still to be confirmed but that the nominal degree target would probably be closer to 40% (consistent with the provisions in Seneca’s approved Differentiated Mandate Agreement), this particular university president was “relieved” (Miner, personal correspondence, May, 2008). Finally, Dr. Miner reported that, according to this same president, all the GTA university presidents were (or would be) supportive given this clarification; but “the northern universities and western are not”.
Throughout the month of June, 2008, President Miner and his presidential colleagues from Humber and Sheridan corresponded regarding their respective discussions with various university presidents, confirming their perceived support for polytechnic designation within GTA. On June 10, 2008, for example, Dr. Miner wrote to the presidents of Sheridan and Humber, indicating that he had met with all three “metro” university presidents. According to Dr. Miner’s email:

To a person they say they are supportive of polytechnics and have told government the same. I stressed that while we were willing to do some 2+2 stuff, this was not our definition of a polytechnic and there had to be a significant expansion of our degree granting capability. All said they understood and could support that position.

According to Miner, the other college presidents reported similar discussions with the presidents of various universities, including Laurier and Waterloo, and that these were also supportive. The college presidents then agreed that they would continue to report the outcomes of these and similar discussions to the Deputy and Minister. As expressed by Dr. Miner: “I think we should be conveying as much good news and agreement as often as we can, from whatever source” (Miner, personal communication, June 10, 2008).

During President Miner’s Report to the Board at its June, 2008 meeting, the final meeting of the 2007-08 academic year, President Miner provided an update on the polytechnic momentum as he perceived it. The president reported that polytechnic discussions were continuing in various quarters, and that he personally had had meetings with the presidents of the University of Toronto, York University and Ryerson -- with follow-up discussions scheduled with both Toronto and York regarding an appropriate polytechnic model: “To date, all three presidents support Seneca being appointed a polytechnic, and support, in principle, the model of polytechnic that Seneca is proposing” and, more broadly, “Seneca has been consistently viewed as one of the new polytechnics”
(Miner, 2008, p. 2). According to Dr. Miner, discussions had also been held by that time with other CAATs to discuss how Seneca as a polytechnic might be helpful in addressing broad system problems and opportunities (p.2). This is particularly relevant given the priority endorsed by the Board in 2003 (and recommended by Seneca’s Degree-Granting Task Force) to develop pathways and credit transfer arrangements on behalf of diploma graduates from other CAATs (Seneca, 2003).

In late June, 2008, at the Seneca Board of Governors’ final meeting of the academic year, a formal document entitled Seneca: The Polytechnic Solution was presented to the Board for approval. The document was developed under the direction of an internal review committee made up of members of the Board Executive, the VPA and President Miner, and presented arguments to support postsecondary reform and polytechnic designations (and specifically for Seneca) as the most effective and efficient provincial strategy for fostering innovation through applied research, increasing advanced applied technological skills, and addressing Ontario’s labour market, economic and social/demographic challenges (Seneca, July 2008). At this meeting, the Board approved a motion to support both the document and the strategy being proposed, and to formally request a change in Seneca’s institutional nomenclature to a polytechnic designation. In July, 2008, Seneca submitted its formal polytechnic proposal to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

In correspondence between the presidents of Seneca, Humber and Sheridan in late August, 2008, Dr. Miner suggested that the three should begin “working on” the legislative changes that would most effectively enable the designation of polytechnics in Ontario. The presidents brainstormed some possible external advisors who might be helpful in this regard, focusing on individuals with a strong policy and/or government background. In an
attempt to frame the legislative questions that would need to be considered, Dr. Miner then
developed an overview that could be used as a reference point in discussions with an
advisor. This overview provides further evidence that the three presidents understood the
polytechnic momentum to be building as of that time:

Sheridan, Seneca and Humber are in the process of requesting the
government formally designate them as Polytechnics. If they agree to do
this, two significant changes in legislation will be required. First, a
decision will need to be made about whether there will be an amendment to the
existing "Colleges Act" to create polytechnics, or a separate act that names the three
institutions as polytechnics and then further defines their role and authority. So we
are trying to think about what such an Act would "look like" and whether one
approach would be better than another, etc. etc.

Related to this is the question of the establishment of an appropriate bargaining
unit. Currently Bill 90 will redefine college bargaining. If polytechnics are formed
they will differ significantly from colleges and they would probably need to have a
separate bargaining unit (either one unit for all three polytechnics or three
separate units), like universities do. How might this be done? What would be best?
(Miner, personal communications, August, 2008)

Also in August, 2008, Deputy Minister Steenkamp announced that he would be
leaving Ontario and returning to work in British Columbia. Subsequent to this
announcement, on August 26th, 2008, the Deputy met with President Miner and other GTA
college presidents who were pursuing polytechnic status. According to meeting notes that
Dr. Miner made for himself immediately following that meeting (and released for this
research), the Deputy indicated that the plan was to have “the policy framework for system
redesign” through cabinet by end of September along with the skills agenda. According to
Miner’s notes, the Deputy further indicated that he would still be in his Ontario role when
the Policies and Priorities Committee reviewed the system redesign framework. Miner
noted that the Deputy had stressed that there would be significant debate on polytechnics,
and that there were no clearly defined views on the political side about whether these
should proceed. “The government is not convinced one way or the other that a new designation would resolve issues like access or an increase in the status and amount of applied learning in the province” (Miner, August, 2008).

According to Dr. Miner’s notes, the Deputy focused during that meeting on the projected “long” downturn in the economy, emphasizing the government’s direction that no new funding would be forthcoming from cabinet, and that any elements of system redesign that would cost money would need to be deferred. In Dr. Miner’s words, the Deputy then pointed to the Algoma experience (i.e. the designation of Algoma university) as one that showed the government “just how costly it can be to change a name”. This aspect of Miner’s notes is particularly interesting given that, up to that point, there was some perceived ambiguity if not inconsistency (and therefore varying assumptions made) regarding the ITAL presidents’ expectations in terms of polytechnic funding. This is explored further in Chapter Seven.

At this same meeting, based on Miner’s notes, the Deputy indicated that operating budget cuts were inevitable (estimated between 2% and 5%), and acknowledged that this reality would create significant challenges for some institutions and would need to be addressed in “creative ways”, including for example, enhanced partnerships and new delivery models. According to President Miner, the Deputy further suggested that “colleges can be demonstrated as a good investment against the province’s labour market needs”. In a handwritten exchange between Miner and Seneca’s VPA on these same documents, the importance of positioning polytechnics as an economic and labour market solution is noted, a strategy that “will create efficiencies, cost savings for both students and taxpayers”. Finally, Miner’s notes indicate that the Deputy stated during this meeting that
he believed there was “a way forward on credit recognition and transfer” and that the government would probably want to “delink this from the polytechnic debate” (p.2). According to Miner, the Deputy believed that the credit recognition issue could be successfully framed as an “efficiency challenge” in the system that needed to be addressed - and that government would need to “act rather than negotiate” if a solution was to be found on credit recognition (Miner, personal communication, August, 2008). This supports the perceptions of several interview participants that credit transfer evolved during the study period as an alternative to broader system design changes (including polytechnic designations), and that any system design change in Ontario would require direct government intervention. Again, these perceptions are explored further in Chapter Seven.

During the summer months of 2008, the Colleges Ontario Working Group on System Design/Polytechnics reviewed the issues and developed a draft policy paper recommending a list of principles to govern the establishment of polytechnics, “should the province indicate a policy intent to create polytechnic institutions in Ontario”. The Working Group’s policy paper and recommendations were intended to support discussions among the college presidents at their Fall planning retreat. As such, these were considered confidential, and therefore not available for broader distribution nor reference for purposes of this study. Based on Dr. Miner’s recollection, however, and that of some other (external) participants, there was “general support” at the retreat for broadening college mandates, but there were a number of outstanding issues to be worked through. According to these reports, the presidents concluded that, should the government decide to move towards formal polytechnic designation(s) for some colleges, the college sector would need to engage in further discussions.
On September 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2008, Dr. Miner wrote to one of the university presidents in GTA asking for an update on planned outreach to the Premier’s Office (as discussed at a prior meeting), and expressing concerns that the Ministry had “lost its vision...and sees no urgency in making the decision or advancing the PSE agenda” as a result of Deputy Minister Steenkamp’s fast approaching departure:

Have you had a chance to get a read from the premier’s office on where they stand on the whole GTA capacity issue and system design (polytechnics)? I had a discussion with (the Deputy) today and he said the premier’s office was the key, and the support of the metro U presidents would be very helpful. Are you three meeting anytime soon? Any chance the three college presidents (Seneca, Humber and Sheridan) could meet with all of you to discuss a strategy? (Miner, personal correspondence, September, 2008).

In response, this university president indicated that connections with the Premier’s Office had only just been made, and that a briefing note was being prepared in advance of a pending meeting (Miner, personal correspondence, September, 2008). The university president added, however:

I think a six-way meeting would be useful, but I can tell you that none of us have seen any clear blueprints for system design. The big missing pieces are still: clarity about articulation/pathways, which means curriculum mapping etc - none of us are going to do that without a clear mandate and funding to do so; and humanities/liberal arts capacity - not clear that the polytechnic plan will get us that tranche of seats.

This response from one university leader suggests that, despite the earlier reports by Dr. Miner (and others) that spring that the GTA university presidents were supportive, there were still lingering concerns (or perhaps conditions) that needed to be addressed in any system design reform, in order for the universities to support polytechnics in a useful way. Dr. Miner’s closing email in this string of correspondence reiterated what he believed was the value of a six-way meeting, “to clarify our joint expectations and needs”. He added:
I am also told the Premier’s Office is so consumed with the economy that they are not even seeing this (expanded grad studies; more science, engineering and technology; applied research and applied learning) as a solution to their economic difficulties.

This notion that government may not have understood, or accepted, that there were potential financial sustainability benefits to be realized with system design reform (including polytechnics), may or may not be related to the departure of the Deputy as the main government champion of this initiative. Regardless, it offers some important learning in terms of the strategic focus and positioning of system design discourse/polytechnic strategy in the future, should this resurface as anticipated by some interview participants. Again, this will be discussed further in the analysis offered in Chapter Seven.

In late September, 2008, in response to the System Design/Polytechnics Working Group’s discussion paper and in anticipation of the pending Committee of Presidents’ retreat, one college president from a non-differentiated college (and not a member of the Working Group) wrote directly to Dr. Miner offering a detailed outline of concerns and objections to the proposed polytechnic direction (Miner, personal communication, September, 2008). According to this email, after discussion with other colleagues, a review of the literature, and individual reflection regarding the establishment of polytechnics in Ontario, this college president had concluded that: “Neither the paper nor the background research demonstrates a compelling case for implementing the polytechnic model” (September, 2008). Further, the surrounding commentary in this correspondence mirrored perceptions among some participants that the underlying motivations behind the polytechnic agenda were likely self-serving ones:

This model may be beneficial to the goals of a few institutions to differentiate themselves from others, but it has very serious risks for the college system and the postsecondary education system as a whole... The primary drivers of this policy
initiative are the lack of transferability of credit among institutions, the growing demand for baccalaureate degree programs in GTA (combined with the position of GTA universities to limit growth in their undergraduate enrolments) and a differentiation goal by some colleges. While all three are legitimate concerns...I am not seeing that a good case has been made for the creation of polytechnics as a cost-effective or sustainable approach to achieving the first two goals.

This college president continued, offering some important insights that could be useful in understanding the assumed “either/or” positioning by some policy actors of credit transfer initiatives when lined up beside the polytechnic vision: “The question is, really, will the polytechnic concept fix transfer, reduce duplication, and increase connection among certificates, diplomas, applied degrees and baccalaureate degrees? And if it does, is this the best way to achieve this goal?”

A number of related concerns were flagged by this same colleague, including the definition of polytechnics as offered in the Working Group’s paper (and its failure to differentiate the proposed polytechnics from many of the other Ontario colleges), and the fact that examples cited in the paper of other jurisdictions, related to systems that did not already have a “successful, vibrant applied education sector” such as was present in Ontario’s colleges. “The issues we face are more to do with successfully integrating the two existing systems (colleges and universities), not a gap that is not being addressed, as was the case in the European systems” (Miner, personal communications, 2008). This last statement is particularly relevant given conclusions in Chapter Four of this study that many Seneca leaders believed that polytechnics would address a perceived “gap” in Ontario between college and university education.

This correspondence to Dr. Miner continued with a counter recommendation that the colleges should focus their efforts instead on building “teeth and momentum” behind credit transfer and inter-institutional mobility, as well as on changes to the colleges’ degree
authority to include “baccalaureate degrees with an applied focus” rather than “applied degrees”. (It is interesting that there was action taken by government on both of these over the next year). The reference by this individual to focusing on credit transfer instead of polytechnic designations was reflective of the emerging argument that the creation of polytechnics in Ontario was an alternative to improved credit transfer, rather than being components of one multi-faceted and much-needed system design reform, as was the position of Seneca and other ITAL colleges. This polarized positioning is discussed further in this chronology as well as in Chapter Seven.

The concluding comments by this college president also suggest some deep-rooted concerns about the post-secondary “hierarchy” in Ontario, and the surrounding politics both within and across the college and university sectors, that will also be explored in upcoming Chapters:

How many levels in the hierarchy are envisioned for the system as a whole? How will the decision be made as to which institutions can be considered for polytechnic status and based on what criteria? Does the further fragmentation of our postsecondary education system really benefit the student, potential employers and the taxpayer? We are considering making fundamental changes to our provincial education system, with far-reaching and long-term impacts in order to address an immediate demand issue in one part of the province. This is a very important policy issue for all colleges and I think we need more work and discussion before a consensus can be reached. (Miner, personal correspondence, September, 2008)

Perhaps because they were frustrated by the “glacial speed” (as described by one of the three presidents) at which progress was being made in moving the system reform agenda forward, and/or because they were discouraged by the expressed resistance and objections to polytechnic designations emerging among both college and university colleagues, the three presidents of Humber, Sheridan and Seneca decided to proceed on their own in October, 2008, and developed and submitted to government, a shared
“Polytechnic Vision for Ontario” including this recommendation for action:

That the three Greater Toronto Area post secondary institutions, namely: Humber, Seneca and Sheridan Colleges receive polytechnic status with the specific roles of advancing the value of applied education, enhancing student transferability and mobility, and increasing postsecondary capacity in Ontario. (Davies, Miner & Turner, 2008)

The Polytechnic Vision document also provided an overview of the rationale behind the recommendation:

- projected demand for 30,000 – 50,000 additional post-secondary seats, (the majority at the degree level), not including additional demand anticipated from increases in participation rates.
- growth of the global economy and projected demand for highly skilled workforce needing specialized, advanced applied education.
- need for greater educational options and student mobility including credential recognition and learning pathways within the college system and between colleges and universities.
- opportunity to build on the differentiation of institutions, emergence of joint college-university programs, and increased choice made possible through degree-granting at colleges and the creation of ITAL designation.

The three presidents’ vision also offered a definition of an Ontario polytechnic for purposes of their recommendation, as deemed appropriate for the province’s proposed new system design. The distinct features would include: a broad range of career focused credentials from apprenticeships through to graduate certificates, including baccalaureate degrees; pathways between its own credentials and other PSE institutions (both colleges and universities); applied research initiatives to support employers and provide
opportunities for students; and a blend of applied and theoretical learning with integrated work experience as “essential”. In a short section entitled “Consideration/Issues/Implications”, the impact of creating polytechnics on access and diploma-to-degree pathways was noted, including improved access for students to baccalaureate and graduate degrees, stronger linkages with Ontario universities, and pathways “particularly from diplomas at other Ontario colleges to polytechnic degrees” (Davies, Miner and Turner, 2008). This latter provision is interesting given current Seneca President David Agnew’s suggestion during his interview for this study (ten years later) that if/when there was to be a renewed polytechnic momentum going forward, the focus should be on system design issues (i.e. pathways and solutions on behalf of other CAATs) rather than the more “self-referential” approaches perceived to be dominant in previous polytechnic efforts. Examples of similar perceptions among some other college leaders are examined later in this chronology and in Chapter Seven.

In mid Fall, 2008, given President Miner’s pending retirement the following spring, the next Seneca presidential search was launched, with explicit indications in the posting that significant postsecondary reform was anticipated, and that the polytechnic agenda was a priority for the college:

This is an opportunity to profoundly transform education in Canada – to create an unprecedented model of post-secondary learning. A national and global forerunner of polytechnic education, Seneca is seeking a savvy, transformational visionary to lead it forward during a time of dramatic change and opportunity within the educational sector. (Seneca College corporate files, 2008)

In October, 2008, Deputy Minister Philip Steenkamp left his position with Ontario’s Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and assumed his new role in British Columbia as the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, and Chair of Deputy
Ministers’ Committee on the 2010 Winter Olympics. In November, 2008 Seneca President Rick Miner sent an email, on behalf of the three GTA college presidents (Seneca, Sheridan and Humber) to the presidents of York, University of Toronto and Ryerson, reporting on a meeting “the three” had attended with then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities John Milloy, to discuss system design reform and their polytechnic submission. Dr. Miner offered this summary of the Minister’s reaction to their university colleagues:

- (he) accepts there is a problem and need to increase capacity;
- does not believe a new university is the solution;
- government is so consumed with economic issues, it is showing little interest in system design, especially if it is likely to require additional funding.
- does not fully understand the poly model (sic) and how it could be used to solve other system problems (credit transfer, declining enrolments in northern and rural areas etc.). (Miner, personal communication, November, 2008)

In response to Dr. Miner’s correspondence, one of the GTA university presidents linked this discourse to a new major PSE capital expansion initiative introduced by government around that same time: “This sounds frustrating... (It will be) important to make this case in discussions around capital – if there isn’t a system design strategy, it’s hard to allocate capital wisely!” (Miner, personal communication, November, 2008).

In January 2009, in a formal submission to the Honourable Dwight Duncan, then Ontario Minister of Finance and Revenue, and Chair of Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet, Seneca’s President Miner provided input to the pending 2009 Ontario Budget on behalf of the college, and more broadly, on behalf of the sector. Dr. Miner’s submission emphasized the impact of budget shortfalls on Ontario’s colleges, especially those in GTA, especially when combined with rising short-term demand for worker retraining, long-term shortfall in capacity, and increased demand for postsecondary education notably in the York Region area. In this correspondence, Dr. Miner recommended three immediate
actions including increased operating grants to colleges (supporting Colleges Ontario’s call for $75M increase in 09/10), immediate capital investment in Ontario’s colleges, and legislative changes to accommodate current and future post-secondary growth, specifically:

- Further differentiation between post-secondary institutions, to expand the options to students through the creation of polytechnic institutions. These institutions would maintain their focus on applied learning, while receiving increased autonomy to deliver a combination of applied and theoretical education at the degree and advanced degree level and an expanded applied research mandate and,

- A review of Ontario’s Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act (PECEA), with the intention of expanding degree-granting authority to institutions such as Seneca.

Dr. Miner concluded his submission with a note emphasizing that this expanded legislative authority for some institutions would enable an increase in the number of degree level programs “at a much lower cost than expanding existing capacity within current universities, or creating a new university to address upcoming post-secondary capacity pressures” ((Miner, 2009, p.2).

President Miner’s budget recommendations to the Finance Minister reinforce several observations noted in the previous chapter regarding Seneca’s differentiation goals and the polytechnic agenda. In speaking of the legislative changes required, Dr. Miner put these in the context of the need for system reform rather than speaking solely of Seneca’s aspirations, and specifically underscored the need and rationale for these solutions beyond Seneca: to provide greater options for Ontario students and to expand baccalaureate
capacity in the province (i.e. access to degrees). His recommendations also offered a fiscal rationale for considering expanded mandates for “institutions like Seneca”, rather than other system design options involving the university sector. This latter point reinforced the strong convictions among many interview participants (including Dr. Miner himself) that Seneca was not seeking to become a university.

In February, 2009, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) delivered its recommendations to Minister Milloy regarding polytechnic designations in Ontario: not to designate any college as a polytechnic at this time, but to seriously consider ways to encourage college-university collaboration as the “obvious alternative” to creating a new institutional form (Iacobucci, 2009). In a cover letter to the Minister from then HEQCO Chair Frank Iacobucci, the scope of the HEQCO review was reiterated and the process used by HEQCO to conduct its review was outlined. This included commissioning two studies, one by Doern (2008) entitled Polytechnics in Higher Education Systems: A Comparative Review and Policy Implications for Ontario and another by Jones and Skolnik (2009), entitled Degrees of Opportunity: Broadening Student Access by Increasing Institutional Differentiation in Ontario Higher Education. As part of the review process, Dr. Iacobucci interviewed 16 Ontario post-secondary presidents (college and university) who were believed to have a potential interest in the polytechnic question. According to Dr. Miner and the president of Humber, Dr. John Davies, neither of them were included in these consultations. There was no available evidence for this study to confirm whether the president of Sheridan was included or not.

The HEQCO report concluded that the evidence available to Council was insufficient to make the case for polytechnics, that no clear definition of polytechnic existed, and that
the relationship of a new class of institutions to the remaining colleges and universities was unclear (as were any resource requirements) (HEQCO, 2009). The report further concluded that the challenges facing Ontario were significant, and that “system redesign will almost certainly be required as part of the response” (2009, p. 8). In considering the options presented in the report and the supporting research, the HEQCO Board recommended that the Minister should conduct a full review of Ontario’s post-secondary system design and, over the short term, take steps to promote better collaboration among colleges and universities (p. 8).

It is interesting that the HEQCO Report indicated that five Ontario colleges had been seeking polytechnic designation (Seneca, Sheridan, Humber, George Brown and Conestoga) at that time, whereas the general understanding presented by Dr. Miner and several external participants was that it was primarily Seneca, Sheridan and Humber that had been leading the charge. (On a related note, the HEQCO Report cited Jones and Skolnik, 2009, in observing that, of the total baccalaureate programs offered in Ontario, 40% were being offered by two institutions, Seneca and Humber.) In examining the various events and correspondence among the college presidents throughout this chronology, there appears to be an inconsistent pattern: in some contexts, the “three” GTA presidents seemed to be working as a discrete trio, (and for some periods in the chronology, alongside the three Toronto-centred university presidents11), whereas in other contexts, all five ITAL presidents were included in the discussions and advocacy efforts. It is unclear, based on the evidence, under which circumstances, or why, “the three” college presidents made

11 OCAD was not officially known as OCAD university until 2010, although it was granted university status in 2002. Based on the evidence for this study, OCAD was not as directly involved in the polytechnic discussions with the GTA colleges as were the other three university presidents.
decisions at certain times to proceed as a smaller group, other than to assume that this was believed to be advantageous and/or expeditious in those contexts.

In April, 2009, MTCU announced the creation of a Steering Committee on Credit Transfer to be chaired by the new Deputy Minister, Deborah Newman, with executive representation from Council of Ontario Universities, Colleges Ontario, college and university student leaders, and MTCU staff. In a communication from Deputy Newman to the presidents of all Ontario colleges and universities, the Deputy indicated that she had been given direction by the Premier to design and implement a 'made in Ontario' credit transfer system (email correspondence from Deputy Minister Deborah Newman to All Executive Heads, Colleges and Universities, April, 2009). The new Steering Committee would be chaired by the Deputy herself, to assist in achieving this goal and affirming it as a "top priority for the government". Representation on the committee included one president and one vice-president from each sector (colleges and universities), student leaders from both sectors, the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) Executive Director, and key Ministry staff. Seneca's Vice-President Academic was appointed as the Ontario Colleges' VPA representative.

The timing of this announcement, and the apparent urgency and importance placed on this new initiative (reinforced by the reference to the Premier and the assignment of the Deputy as Chair), could be simply coincidental with the perceived "cooling off" of the polytechnic momentum within government – or not.

References in Dr. Miner's June, 2008 notes to the Board, and his August, 2008 notes to his Senior Executive, were consistent with perceptions among some interview participants for this study, that the government and other external stakeholders viewed the
polytechnic agenda and the credit transfer/pathways agenda as alternative system design solutions. In other words, if progress was made on the latter, there would be no need to move forward on the former. This was reinforced by the HEQCO (2009) conclusions. As emphasized by most interviewees, however, (both internal and external), the access, capacity and fiscal challenges facing Ontario’s postsecondary sector at the time, required a much more comprehensive, multi-faceted system design reform. Interestingly, this viewpoint was supported in the conclusions of the HEQCO (2013) Report, as well as in the Colleges Ontario subsequent, 2010 System Design discussion paper (as referenced later in this Chapter):

In contrast to Ontario’s approach, other governments have in place systems that are designed to include a wider variety of institutions with specialized mandates and pathways. Through greater differentiation, government and institutions can take advantage of economies of scale, encourage specialization, offer more choice for students, and minimize duplication of credits. By necessity, such systems require well-developed credit transfer pathways and mechanisms to allow for student mobility between institutions. (Colleges Ontario, 2010, p. 8)

In December, 2009, Colleges Ontario released “A New Vision” outlining the sector’s vision and strategic goals going forward, as approved by the Committee of Presidents at its annual Fall Retreat. The Vision document included recommendations regarding pathways and credit transfer, degree-granting, applied research, apprenticeship reform, adult education, enrolment growth, international students and funding stability – but not polytechnic designations. This was one of the first clear, public signals from Colleges Ontario that the polytechnic discourse was losing steam within the sector.

In September, 2010, a new Colleges Ontario (CO) System Design Discussion Paper was prepared for the Committee of Presidents’ consideration, and approved directions were subsequently incorporated into Colleges Ontario’s 2010 Strategic Plan. The
discussion paper included sector options for increasing access to degree programs, college-university collaboration, transfer programs, and enrolment growth in apprenticeship and diploma offerings - but not polytechnic designations. The introductory section of this paper included a valuable overview of Colleges Ontario’s ongoing role in responding to system design issues: “Colleges Ontario has submitted several policy proposals and made representations to government regarding a broad range of system design issues” (Colleges Ontario, 2010, p. 5). According to the paper, the policy changes that had been recommended previously, if implemented, would improve student access and success, establish stronger pathways and mobility for students across the educational sector, broaden degree-granting powers of colleges, and strengthen Ontario’s economy by establishing an improved financial framework for applied research initiatives in the colleges (among other benefits). Included in the list of previous policy submissions were proposals related to credit transfer (including the creation of a joint college-university steering committee to develop a provincial strategy), college-to-college pathways, expanded college degree-granting authority (“to complement, rather than compete with, universities” [p. 14]), applied research investments, and principles to govern the establishment of polytechnics in Ontario, “should the province indicate a policy intent” to proceed in this direction (p.6). Colleges Ontario also identified several system design issues facing the postsecondary sector in this paper, including consideration of the “types of institutions and their roles, functions, and the relationships between one type of institution and another” (2010, p. 3). Noting that access to undergraduate degrees was a major concern for government at the time, the paper further concluded that, “it is unlikely that the university sector alone can meet that demand” (p. 3). This notwithstanding, although
the paper included recommendations related to expanded degree authority for colleges, increased access and choice for non-traditional groups of students, and increased college-university collaboration, there was no explicit recommendation(s) regarding polytechnic designation. According to Dr. Miner, this was a clear shift from the policy paper prepared by the CO Working Group on System Design/Polytechnics in Summer, 2008.

In January, 2011 The Honourable John Milloy, Minister, announced a plan to create a province wide credit transfer system, including a commitment of $73.5M over five years, to facilitate student mobility and effective pathways. This announcement was based significantly on the work of the aforementioned Deputy’s Steering Committee on Credit Transfer.

Based on the chronology of related developments outlined above, it seems reasonable to conclude that there was an increasing polytechnic momentum within Ontario’s postsecondary system, and indeed, support among some within the Ministry, from the early years of this study period until sometime in 2009. As observed by several interview participants, however, both internal and external, the polytechnic discourse in Ontario slowed down after that point, or ceased completely, for the duration of the study period. This timing coincided with the departure of Deputy Minister Philip Steenkamp and the increasingly favoured, alternative discourse around credit transfer and student mobility among many policy actors -- but also with a number of other significant events including important changes in institutional positioning at Seneca, believed by many to be related to the change in presidency around that same time. This is discussed more fully below.

To close off this polytechnic chronology, two other dates emerge as potentially
significant. In October, 2011, The Honourable Glen Murray replaced John Milloy as Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. In June, 2012, in a letter to all postsecondary presidents (colleges and universities), Minister Murray announced “two milestone initiatives” intended to find sector efficiencies and drive innovation in the province: Strategic Mandate Agreements for all institutions, and a consultative process to guide “Sector Transformation”. It was unclear at the time whether this latter reference to sector transformation was a signal that the government wished to resurrect the institutional differentiation/polytechnic discourse, but in the end, the new Minister seemed very focused, instead, on online learning initiatives.

6.2 A New Seneca President; A New Strategic Direction?

As noted by a number of interviewees (especially internals), there were some subtle yet almost immediate, signs of change in institutional direction as a result of the change in presidency, when President Miner retired in Spring, 2009 and incoming president David Agnew took office. Several interviewees observed that, although there was no evident shift in the college's ongoing activities and priorities (including a continued focus on degrees, pathways, access strategies and applied research), the indicators of change were more about what was not being spoken about. As observed by one former dean: “(It was) more around the name -- because David made it very, very clear that he didn’t want anything to do with polytechnics.” Another senior administrator at Seneca agreed:

Rick Miner was pursuing polytechnic status. When David Agnew came on board, the word polytechnic was hardly used anymore. It became very clear that we were not trying to become a polytechnic anymore. That was the most obvious thing. I recall people asking him directly, and the answer was that we would not be using the name polytechnic, but we would continue to differentiate ourselves with certain aspects – we would continue to offer degrees, for example, and be comprehensive. We wouldn’t be pursuing the separate status of being polytechnic. Part of the belief in polytechnic status required different rules and different funding. David Agnew
made it clear that there was no appetite (in government) for this, and we would drop pursuing that aspect of the naming. We would continue to be differentiated in our offering of degrees.

One former senior government manager offered this further, potential explanation:

Well, given his background in government - on the political side of the government, anyway - I can see if somebody had given him the word, "Don't go there," he would be saying, "Well, then, I'm not going to waste any capital on that cause. I'm just not going to go there". That's the best guess. ...And also, I could see that-he might say, "Why should I take the former guy's vision? You know, it may or may not make any difference having a name change, so why would I invest any time in that?"

Another former senior administrator at Seneca agreed, noting that “David was pretty good at reading the tea leaves in government, whereas Rick thought he had it (polytechnic status) and then (Deputy) Steenkamp left. I know there was deflation after he left...in a big way.” Another internal participant, a former dean, offered this description of the perceived, 'new' direction and how the leadership team may have felt as a result:

It was the messaging. The government had (apparently) said polytechnics are off. So - maybe David, having had political experience said, “Why continue to hammer and potentially irk, quite frankly, the people that could impact you by banging this polytechnic drum?” So anything to do with polytechnic was kind of verboten. It didn’t really affect our march towards increasing the number of degrees, or in terms of our credential mix or applied research.... all those components. It was really all about the nomenclature.

This same participant continued:

I think internally, it affected the people that had been really hoping, and were still hopeful, for polytechnic. I remember being a little bit disappointed...because I really felt that this was where we were. And, so now what? So we’re not polytechnics, what are we? ...I don’t know whether other leaders felt the same way, but for me it was like “Oh man, so now what? What does this new leader want from us?” And how much will change? Because there was always that fear, right? You’re going 110 kilometres an hour in one direction and now, are we going to be doing a “180”? But we really didn’t do a 180, we continued on, pushing hard for degrees and grad certs (sic) and pathways and all the rest of it. So our actual day-to-day work really didn’t change. But then the whole notion of taking polytechnics off the table at the institutional level did send a message; it sent a message to me for sure. It was a little bit frustrating.
Another former dean agreed:

I don’t think I heard the “polytechnic” term again, once the new president came - that seemed to have fallen totally off the radar... So what were we? ...We finally understood (under the previous president) that we were marching toward polytechnic, but without another term to replace it, what were we? What were we marching toward? Or were we just going to maintain our current identity? Again, I just didn’t sense the same urgency as before...We weren’t producing as many degrees, we weren’t the ones with the largest arsenal of degrees, we weren’t saying polytechnic anymore. I have to assume people thought we were changing direction.

Some interview participants, both internal and external, offered a different, more straightforward explanation of the perceived change in institutional goals, noting that it was not surprising that a new president might want to reconsider an institution’s overall direction and priorities and put his own ‘stamp’ on it. As one internal, senior administrator noted:

A president makes a big difference. Rick Miner had a pretty clear idea of where he was going, and that’s where he was taking things. When you have a new person, and this is not a reflection on the current president but especially when someone is not coming from postsecondary, of course he would want to take some time to reflect and determine his own direction, would want to put his own mark on it. He’s not going to just accept whatever direction the previous president was going.

One former dean suggested that, indeed, this was likely the most commonly held (and accepted) interpretation among the broader college community: “It’s funny because I think that the rank and file viewed it simply as a presidential decision and repositioning...That’ leader wanted polytechnic and I’m the new leader, I don’t want polytechnic.”

In his interview for this study, President Agnew was invited to comment on these perceptions among some participants. He noted that it was his understanding when he arrived at Seneca that there was “no political support for the polytechnic agenda”, based on advice he had received from a Board member who had political connections:

(Th)e sage political perspective that I listened to, was “x” on our Board saying, “There are three documents you look to, to see if something’s on the government’s
radar. Is it in the platform? Is it in the throne speech? Or is it in the budget?” “Polytechnics” was on none of those. So (this Board member) was basically saying, ‘I don’t get it…. I’ve talked to the premier’s office. This dog, he’s not going to hunt. It’s just not. So why are we wasting our time on it?’

President Agnew went on to emphasize that, given this advice, “for me, it was just a matter of, you get 30 seconds in the elevator with the minister, and you therefore want to choose wisely what your key messages are going to be.” One senior government official supported President Agnew’s understanding of the political mood, pointing not only to Deputy Steenkamp’s departure as an important factor, but also noting that “…at the centre, that is, in the premier’s office”, there were likely different postsecondary interests. Another senior government official offered these further details regarding the broader policy context surrounding the polytechnic agenda:

I don’t recall that it ever came back (after the Deputy left). I know that every time the whole issue came up, we would say, ‘We have applied degrees. We have a differentiation policy’. And that was it, because at the time I recall there was no appetite to create polytechnics. Because you had another thing that was happening at the same time...In fact, Sheldon Levy took over took over as President of Ryerson, and he was fighting right back, because he felt that Ryerson was almost like a polytechnic and that it would confuse people even more...Because Ryerson didn’t see itself as a college. [It saw itself] as a university.

The politics surrounding other college and university reactions to Seneca’s polytechnic efforts are discussed further in Chapter Seven. One senior administrator at Seneca offered some important additional insights, however, in terms of the Board’s support of differentiation and the polytechnic agenda, as a result of the change in presidency:

They were supportive of the differentiation. But once polytechnic wasn’t on the table, I think they felt misled by the Deputy Minister who left, and by the outgoing president perhaps...They were led down a path re: polytechnic, that it was inevitable, and we (senior management) lost a lot of credibility with the Board as a result. He (David) was perceived as being more in tune with the government. The Board welcomed that change.
Consistent with this context, and given that the Board had just renewed/extended the strategic plan (with explicit polytechnic aspirations as noted earlier) when President Agnew arrived at the college in July, 2009, it was perhaps not surprising that the new president would propose an “Addendum to the Strategic Plan 2008-2011” to the Board of Governors shortly after his tenure began (Seneca College, 2010). The Board approved the Addendum in January, 2010. This was one of the first explicit, public indications of President Agnew’s intended strategic positioning for Seneca, and of the Board’s formal endorsement of same.

The new Addendum, Seneca in 2021: A planning framework for student success, January 2010 focused on Seneca as a “college”, proud of its college roots and purpose, with aspirations to stand out, indeed, to differentiate itself among colleges as the best, “the leading college” in Ontario:

- Our opportunities come from the GTA enrolment boom over the next 15 years, our legacy as a high-quality college, the government’s emphasis on education and postsecondary credential attainment, the evolution of the system to recognize differentiation among colleges and the growing sophistication of Seneca itself....We are a critical educational institution, located in the fastest growing region of the province at a time when Ontario needs more college graduates than ever before, and we are acknowledged as being capable of playing an even larger role in the province’s economic and social well-being.

- With the right focus, determination and investment, in 2021 we will be the leading college in Ontario, the preferred destination for students, employers, faculty and staff who are seeking excellence in career-related and professional education. Our brand and reputation will be based on the quality of our teaching and our strong commitment to students. We will provide relevant programs, services and supports that foster student success. Seneca will be considered the first-choice partner by the top-tier universities and a respected competitor by the undergraduate-focused universities. (p. 2)

- The Addendum further emphasized that “while remaining a comprehensive college”, Seneca would continue to focus on previous initiatives and priorities such as centres of
specialization and clusters of programs that are both “deep and wide” (e.g. multiple credentials with pathways between these, related applied research opportunities in partnership with private sector); access initiatives to both postsecondary education and vocational training including academic upgrading, entry-level skills training and retraining, and specific strategies for non-traditional learners; controlled, “smart” growth including a target of 15% -20% degrees and increased numbers of graduate certificates and advanced (three-year) diplomas; international partnerships, pathways and student growth up to 15%. This list appeared to be an extension of the commitments outlined in the college’s Differentiated Mandate Accountability Agreement, although with additional emphasis on international and access initiatives. A number of specific goals were also articulated in the Addendum that, again, appeared to reinforce earlier directions and priorities:

- Playing a leadership role in student mobility within the postsecondary system by building stronger pathways, particularly to the GTA universities. We will be the preferred partner to smaller colleges to provide their students opportunities for transfer and advanced diplomas.
- … being the Ontario leader in applied research in pedagogy, building on current activities in areas such as retention research and the College Math Project (access strategies).
- Increasing the number of reciprocal partnerships with high calibre, international PSE institutions, including opportunities for our students to study abroad.
- In partnership with colleges and universities in the GTA...develop innovative delivery models to address the imminent growth in demand for undergraduate
education. A leading example is more “2 plus 2” degrees in areas such as interdisciplinary arts. (2010)

Notably, the Addendum also offered important boundaries around the new institutional direction: “Implicit in these directions are choices about what we will not, or no longer, be” (p. 4). A number of examples were listed, including statements that Seneca would not compromise its academic standards by lowering admissions criteria, and would not be a major provider of apprenticeship training (“We shed our ‘community college’ label, both in name and in reality, some time ago”) (p. 4). What was not explicit in this list of boundaries, however, was any reference to polytechnic designation. This notwithstanding, the measure of institutional success offered in the Addendum was clear: “This framework sets out a direction for Seneca’s own success: a distinctive positioning in the postsecondary marketplace based on an unapologetic drive to be the best college [emphasis added]” (p. 4).

The Addendum closed with a note that the college’s mission had evolved over time to reflect changes in the education landscape and in the economy, but that the core institutional purpose had not changed, (as noted earlier). Perhaps this next statement was also a subtle signal of the college’s intended shift away from any polytechnic aspirations as the 2012 – 2017 Strategic Plan was being developed: “...at heart we remain relentlessly focused on providing our students with the highest-quality, career-related and professional education possible. And if we accomplish that, then truly Seneca is success” (p. 4).

A new academic plan was under development during the final year of the study period. Although the specific goals and detailed initiatives are beyond the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that many of the academic directions defined in the college’s first Academic Plan were reaffirmed and amplified in the new Plan (applied research, program
quality and academic excellence, pathways and partnerships). One aspect of Seneca’s new
Academic Plan 2012 - 2017, however, was explicit in reflecting President Agnew’s preferred
positioning away from polytechnic goals. The new Academic Plan committed to a
“redesigned approach to high-quality college education” (emphasis added), as opposed to
the frequent references to polytechnic education in previous strategic, academic and
business plans (Seneca College, 2012, p.1). This is consistent with the aforementioned shift
in institutional positioning observed in the 2008 – 2011 Addendum to the Strategic Plan. As
an aside, and extending beyond the period of this study, it is interesting that the most
currently released (2017 – 2022) Strategic Plan reintroduces the concept of polytechnic
education as a core premise of Seneca’s institutional mission and direction (Seneca College,
2017).

Seneca’s apparent “on again, off again” interest in polytechnic status as a critical
component of its differentiation journey, is reflected in the summary of Board Retreat
“themes” provided in Table 1. Historically, the College’s Board of Governors has scheduled
a planning retreat for its members every 2-4 years, with exact timing and focus determined
at the discretion of the Board and typically dependent on surrounding environmental
circumstances and pressing issues facing the College. The retreat provides an opportunity
for Board members to collectively reflect on, and debate, the major priorities, challenges,
strategic directions, and opportunities anticipated for the college going forward, without
the time constraints and operational pressures of monthly meetings. Table 1 shows an
interesting evolution of the respective “themes” of the various Board of Governors’
Retreats which took place during the study period—reflecting Seneca’s differentiation
journey and the college’s changing strategic focus at various stages therein.
### Table 1

**Summary of Board of Governors’ Retreat Themes 2001–2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2001</td>
<td>Board Governance &amp; Executive Development</td>
<td>In response to changes to Regulation 770, New College Charter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Rae Report</td>
<td>Presentations by the Hon. Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of MTCU and Rae Review Panel Member Richard Johnson. Focused on Rae Review themes and directions, Seneca’s submission re system design reform, institutional diversity, new types of institutions including polytechnics, specialized mandates, and need for improved pathways/transfer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>Towards Polytechnic Status</td>
<td>Presentation by Assistant Deputy Minister Marie-Lison Fougère regarding possibility of PSE system design reform including polytechnic designations; follow-up discussions by Board re: potential academic, human resources, financial and marketing implications for Seneca. Led to approval to submit formal polytechnic proposal to MTCU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>Institutional Positioning Options for Seneca</td>
<td>Guest David Trick presented three scenarios for Board’s discussion using Academic Transformation (2009) as a backdrop: comprehensive college, hybrid university-college, comprehensive college with university subsidiary or partnership(s). “Polytechnic” was not one of the scenarios. Board supports university partnerships as preferred positioning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.3 Addressing the (perceived) “Gap” between College and University Education

In Chapter Four, Seneca’s underlying rationale for pursuing institutional differentiation (including polytechnic designation) was presented, based on evidence from
Dr. Miner’s interview and supported by related documentation and essentially all internal interviewees: to fill a perceived “gap” between college and university education in Ontario.

In this last section, participants’ responses (internal and external) as to whether the college was successful, in their opinion, in filling this perceived gap are considered. Responses were varied in this regard, but most (internal and external) agreed that the colleges’ accomplishments in both degree-granting and pathways were important steps forward in this regard. As noted by one former Seneca dean:

I think the colleges have been very successful in offering an alternative to university degrees -- for those people who want a degree but really are the type of learner that does better in a hands-on environment. I think that’s an important piece that was missing from the spectrum of education in Ontario, and I really think that the colleges have done a very good job of fulfilling that need.

But according to another former, senior university administrator:

I think the offering of the number of degree programs that Seneca has, has definitely helped bridge the gap between a sector that had an exclusive monopoly on many degrees, and a sector that wasn’t allowed to grant any. I think the vision of having something different in terms of serving students, there’s been some progress there. But with the public... their perception of the change would be simply, well, colleges can offer degrees now. And that’s it, because the government never got behind any kind of plan to say, ‘hey, we’ve got this differentiated kind of college out there, a different kind of postsecondary institution -- it offers more opportunities than the others...’ Then again, they wouldn’t want to offend the other colleges, right? So, I think it’s fantastic that all those degree opportunities are there for college students, but the vision of having a third option got blurred a bit, I guess... They (government) never really came through on it.

In reflecting on Seneca’s goal of influencing system design change that would address the perceived “gap” between college and university education, one senior executive with broad external post-secondary experience offered this assessment:

Seneca is a college. It partners with universities, but it’s a college. And that’s wonderful. Ontario has 25 colleges and 19 or 20 universities...and that hasn’t changed. What’s changed is some of the relationships between them, and some of the mobility between them; more differentiation amongst the 25 and the set of 20. The colleges have become more differentiated, for sure – look at the degree-
granters. But that’s still a niche corner of what they do. The big bulk of what they do is still a solid college mandate that serves diploma students. I also don’t know what the middle ground is…. So colleges and universities (jointly) own this middle ground. Is there a void? If you want to move somewhere, you have to convince people that there is a void…if you want to fill it. Is it a void, or is it just a lack of mobility?

6.4 Summary

This chapter offered a chronological overview of the increasing momentum towards system design reforms in Ontario from 2002 until approximately 2008/2009, including a mounting, robust policy discourse on potential polytechnic designations in the province. The evidence shows a slow-down in that momentum, however, after Deputy Minister Philip Steenkamp resigned from his Ontario role in Fall, 2008. Based on a review of the documentation, as well as perceptions among internal participants especially, the change in presidency in Summer, 2009 had an important impact on Seneca’s differentiation journey, and most notably, on the college’s polytechnic goals. There was some difference in perception, however, as to whether this was simply a result of a change in leadership and vision, or rather, in response to strong signals of a shift in thinking from government - or both. In the next Chapter, the factors and circumstances that potentially impacted the achievement of Seneca’s differentiation and polytechnic goals are examined. Participants’ perceptions of the ongoing impact that Seneca’s activities and decisions over the study period may have had on Ontario’s ongoing system design discourse and its future direction are also discussed.
CHAPTER SEVEN: Differentiation, Polytechnics and System Design

So What Happened?

7.0 Introduction

Having examined the evidence related to Seneca's intent and goals in seeking increased differentiation and polytechnic status, and the findings relating to its success in achieving those goals, this chapter considers the factors and circumstances that impacted Seneca's progress, including the momentum towards polytechnic designations. Based on the perceptions and analyses offered by interview participants, as well as commentary and analyses presented in various reports and documents, the conditions that might have resulted in a different outcome are also considered. Finally, this chapter looks at whether Seneca's efforts to achieve increased differentiation and system design reform in Ontario (along with other ITALs), has had any ongoing impact on system transformation.

As noted in Chapter Five, the one aspect of Seneca's differentiation efforts that was perceived to be least successful was its pursuit of system design change including polytechnic designations. This area became the one that most interview participants focused on when asked to reflect on the factors and circumstances that impacted Seneca's progress in achieving its differentiation goals. As noted by one external senior executive from the broader postsecondary sector, “I think this is a really good example of how a relevant and valuable policy discussion really went off the rails, and yet it was probably solvable”. Interviewees pointed to a number of challenges and barriers including turnover of individual champions, communication gaps and fundamental trust issues. In some cases, there were notable contrasts in the perceptions of participants from colleges seeking polytechnic status, and participants from other institutions and the broader postsecondary
sector. Most participants, however, (both internal and external) made pointed statements about the sector dynamics, surrounding politics, and government’s role in the outcome.

7.1 Inconsistency and Ambiguity in Polytechnic Positioning

A number of perceived ambiguities, inconsistencies and contentious issues were identified by participants as being contributing factors behind the lack of support for polytechnics among some college and university colleagues, as well as other policy actors in higher education. These included aspects of the polytechnic journey where there was a perceived lack of clarity and/or consistency in college positioning among “the three” who were most aggressively pursuing a change in status (e.g. interest in graduate studies), and issues where external stakeholders had strong, differing views than those who were advocating for this reform.

7.1.1 The Elusive Definition: What exactly did it mean? As noted in Chapter Four, several interview participants (internal and external) suggested that an important challenge to the colleges’ polytechnic pursuits was the perception that there was no commonly understood (or accepted) definition of a polytechnic institution. Indeed, this was one of the issues raised in the aforementioned HEQCO Report to the Minister (2009). Again, as noted in Chapter Four, Dr. Miner and other interview participants from differentiated colleges acknowledged that there were variations in polytechnic models globally (e.g. polytechnic universities, polytechnic institutes), but emphasized that their interest was in a “made-in-Canada” model (or more specifically, “made-in-Ontario”), one that drew from some aspects of polytechnic institutions elsewhere without being bound or limited by
In addition, several participants pointed to the definition that was developed and published by Polytechnics Canada, which defines polytechnic education as:

...committing to a wide range of credentials, including bachelor degrees, diplomas, apprenticeships, certificates, post-graduate offerings, continuing education and corporate training, spanning many fields. Combining theoretical and applied learning, relevant work experience, and the opportunity to participate in applied research and commercialization projects. Offering pathways that allow students to build on their credentials; and recognizing previous learning. (Polytechnics Canada, 2012)

One internal interview participant, a former dean, also noted that there are similar, if not greater, variations in the use of the word “college” globally, but that this, fortunately, has not deterred Ontario from creating its own, unique version in the Ontario CAAT system:

‘ITAL’ had nothing to do with what colleges were really doing; ‘polytechnic’ would work if it were very clearly defined, similarly to the way the other components of Differentiated Status were (in the signed Differentiated Mandate Agreements). That’s all they (government) had to do, so it wasn’t such a hot potato. But they would also have to say: ‘In Ontario, this is what polytechnic means’, because in other jurisdictions, it has other meanings. But that’s OK, because in other jurisdictions ‘college’ has different meanings too.

In response to arguments that the word polytechnic wouldn’t be recognized or understood by the public, another senior administrator at Seneca responded:

Hogwash - particularly in the Ontario context. We had an institution (Ryerson) with a very rich history that was very well respected. I just don’t buy that at all. Yes, polytechnic means different things in different jurisdictions...But it’s about the level of the institution. People knew what Ryerson was about...“College” means different things in different jurisdictions. Think about the “community college” brand. That’s

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12 There were two polytechnic universities in Canada at the time, École Polytechnique (now Polytechnique Montréal), and as of Summer, 2008, Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Although there were aspects of each that were similar to the model being proposed by Miner and his colleagues, neither was close enough in terms of credential mix, program breadth and university affiliation to be helpful. BCIT in British Columbia was the closest match to Seneca’s (and others’) aspirations even though it did not have formal polytechnic nomenclature, and indeed, it was invited to be a founding partner in the Polytechnics Canada (formerly ACPPI) initiative.
why, when people call us community colleges, I always correct them and say, “No, we’re colleges of applied arts and technology.” Because we don’t fit in the US, two-year college frame. That’s pretty evident...But I don’t believe that people were confused about what a polytechnic is. I really don’t think so.

Another former administrator agreed, noting that the name “college” was no longer an accurate reflection, and in fact, a confusing nomenclature, for the kind of institution Seneca had become. Seneca needed a new designation that would more clearly describe its comprehensive nature:

The college system is young, relatively, in Ontario. And it’s different in Ontario than anywhere else. So that in itself...was always quite difficult for colleagues in other jurisdictions to understand. “So, you’re a junior college? Oh, you’re a community college? Oh, so you’re a...”. Well, no, we’re a wonderful combination of all of those things, plus...we also offer this and that and that...

As an interesting aside, the current website for Conestoga College (ITAL) offers a definition of “The Polytechnic Advantage” which includes career-focused degrees, diplomas and apprenticeships; active learning (applied, WIL, project-based courses, hands-on etc.); access strategies including transfer and pathways within and beyond Conestoga; applied research; and community and industry partnerships (Conestoga, 2012). These components align closely with the polytechnic features articulated by Dr. Miner and other Seneca interviewees in this study and by external participants from other differentiated colleges, as well as those outlined in various Seneca planning documents (as cited in Chapter Five). They are also consistent with the characteristics outlined in “A Polytechnic Vision for Ontario” (as described in Chapter Six), the shared vision document prepared by the presidents of Seneca, Sheridan, Humber and submitted to government in October, 2008.

7.1.2 The Elusive Rationale: Why polytechnics? Was there a documented need or was it just about branding? According to some external interviewees, including one
who claimed to have had discussions with several college presidents during the study period, one of the biggest downfalls of the polytechnic agenda during the study period was the inability of the three colleges that were pushing most aggressively for this (Seneca, Humber and Sheridan), to articulate a clear, convincing rationale for doing so. As explained by this same participant, it was important for “the three” presidents to help their colleagues understand why some colleges needed a polytechnic designation, and how that would make them different from the other CAATs. In the absence of this, according to this interviewee, a number of other presidents began to conclude that it was “simply a branding exercise”. “...And then it became, I don’t want MY brand to suffer, because you’ve taken on a different name, and you’re doing all the same things as I am”. As articulated by this senior college executive:

My perception was that the folks who were keen on this had not seemed to successfully make the case for polytechnics to the rest of the system; the biggest challenge seemed to be, what’s the difference between you and the rest of us??

Another former senior executive from the college sector noted that, even after the creation of Polytechnics Canada: “…there continued to be an ongoing debate about whether a polytechnic was substantially different from a college or not...and it’ll probably be an unending debate forever”. Another external participant stressed that the proposed creation of polytechnics represented a significant system design change that was difficult to defend in the absence of a convincing rationale:

What was the problem we were trying to solve? Other than, ‘there’s a group of people here (a bunch of presidents) that want to be something else’. It just seemed like....creep. They weren’t necessarily convincing government that the students or businesses or end customers wanted this...or were about to benefit from it.

As noted in Chapter Six, the absence of a documented need for polytechnics in Ontario was one of the issues raised in the HEQCO (2009) report to Minister Milloy.
President Agnew offered an interesting, alternative perspective during his interview, however, drawing a parallel with the colleges’ more recent interest in offering all four years of the baccalaureate nursing degree (once degree-granting authority had been granted as a result of Bill 132). In offering this analogy, Agnew suggested that the inability to articulate “why” the system needed polytechnics wasn’t as significant in this story as were the underlying dynamics that defended the “why not”. Another participant, a former senior college executive, shared a similar perspective - arguing that the financial advantages of addressing the GTA capacity challenges with a polytechnic strategy were evident:

How can you afford not to? How can you not say we absolutely need to do this, because this is about employment, this is about jobs, this is about access, and it comes back in taxes. This is all about the virtuous circle.

According to the President Agnew, however, the surrounding politics of an issue can often overshadow even a sound rationale, using the nursing example to demonstrate his point:

There is not one public policy rationale that you can offer as to why we wouldn’t offer four-year degrees in nursing. And it’s so ironic...that some of the states have gone down the same (college baccalaureate) road that Ontario has, but started with nursing and education because they’re both applied education. So it’s completely about protecting universities’ turf... And people make the argument, and I buy it, (that) had we had degree-granting status at that point (when nursing entry-to-practice requirements changed)^13, it probably wouldn’t have been taken away.

The surrounding politics of the polytechnic issue, and specifically the dynamics among and between the college and university sectors and with policy actors in government, will be examined later in this Chapter as a frequently cited, underlying factor affecting Seneca’s differentiation progress. Still, the ongoing question of “why” appeared to haunt the polytechnic journey throughout the study period.

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^13 In 1998, the College of Nurses of Ontario approved a change in the minimum requirements for nursing entry-to-practice, to be effective in 2005, requiring baccalaureate degree education rather than the previous Ontario College Advanced Diploma (3 yr) preparation.
7.1.3 The “Ask”: What exactly were they asking for? According to some external participants, it was never clear during the study period what was involved, specifically, in the polytechnic “ask”. As a result, assumptions were made by some stakeholders about various elements of the polytechnic agenda, that were notably inconsistent with the responses by President Miner and others who were directly involved in the polytechnic journey. External participants from the university sector, for example, cited funding implications as a frequent concern among the university presidents, i.e. that these newly designated polytechnics would require a different (and more costly) funding formula. According to most internal participants, however, the biggest components of the “ask” were non-monetary, related to legislative changes (e.g. new regulations, polytechnic designations, formal nomenclature changes) and increased academic autonomy (e.g. streamlined PEQAB approval process, increase in maximum degree activity). In fact, in speaking to interview participants from Seneca and another college seeking polytechnic status, there was inconsistency in their understanding of the funding expectations of such a designation, but several who believed that the incremental funding needs would be minimal.

According to a number of external participants from both the college and university sectors, there was also ambiguity around whether the newly designated polytechnics would remain part of the Ontario college system. Based on personal notes provided by former Seneca president Rick Miner, however, the Colleges Ontario System Design/Polytechnic Working Group (referenced in Chapter Six) discussed this question as well as other potential system design opportunities and challenges associated with the designation of polytechnics in the sector. Dr. Miner’s notes from June, 2008 indicate that
the working group was looking to structure a system that would “ensure strong, direct
relationships between and among all college institutions”, and one that would ensure that
“no part of the pse system (was) negatively affected.” As a result, according to Dr. Miner,
the group proposed a number of guiding principles in Summer, 2008, for consideration by
the colleges’ Committee of Presidents (COP), including a shared understanding that the
creation of polytechnic institutions in Ontario would represent an expansion of the mandate
of the Ontario College system, rather than a parallel, separate (and potentially competing)
sector. As noted in Chapter Six, however, the college presidents decided not to take any
proactive action with government with respect to the polytechnic initiative, so this and
other proposed principles for polytechnics in Ontario that were fleshed out by the CO
Working Group may not have been widely understood beyond the COP table. It is also
interesting to note that, in the Polytechnic Vision for Ontario (2008) that was developed by
the three polytechnic presidents soon after the COP retreat, the presidents were “silent” on
the legislative relationship between the new polytechnic institutions and the Ontario
College system.

Ramdas (2017) observed that a statement on the Polytechnics Canada’s website
indicated that polytechnics represented “one of three pillars in Canada’s post-secondary
education sector” along with universities and colleges. According to Ramdas, “(t)he
mandate of Polytechnics Canada was to create a new classification of institution within
Canada, in effect, stratifying the post-secondary education system by differentiating
polytechnics from other colleges... (p. 150). Informal references by Dr. Miner and others
throughout the study period to polytechnics being the “third pillar” of postsecondary
education in Ontario (as cited earlier in this paper) may, indeed, have contributed to
questions, and perhaps anxieties, about what would mean for the rest of the Ontario college system.

Other areas where there was a perceived lack of consistency and/or confusion regarding the polytechnic agenda included the polytechnics’ intentions regarding graduate programming (e.g. Humber seemed definite in its ambitions for Masters level programming, whereas Seneca had no immediate such intent but indicated it wished to leave this door open for future expansion), and maximum percentages for baccalaureate activity (some externals believed the intention was to offer a majority of programming at the degree level, well beyond AUCC minimums [50% degree students], whereas Seneca’s Business Case for Differentiation and Dr. Miner’s notes indicated a ceiling of approximately 40%). There were also outstanding questions related to collective bargaining implications, i.e. would the new polytechnics remain part of the Ontario Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, in the same bargaining unit as the colleges but with unique provisions - or would they seek a separate bargaining unit?

Interestingly, there is a notable similarity in this list of ambiguities and the list of issues Dr. Miner identified as important ones for “the three” to sort through, when he believed there were signals from the Ministry that legislation for system reform (including polytechnic designations) was forthcoming in 2008. Indeed, several aspects of the polytechnic agenda that were identified by external participants in this study as being ambiguous and/or confusing, were also addressed by the Colleges Ontario Working Group on Polytechnics/System Design – including questions around the rationale, an Ontario definition, funding, governance and legislative implications (including collective bargaining). According to Dr. Miner’s notes, the Working Group believed that legislation
would be needed to ensure that the mandate and responsibilities of the new polytechnics could be clearly defined and understood, and that Ontario’s new polytechnics should be governed by a board of governors, consistent with the CAAT model in place at that time. The group was clear that the designation of polytechnics should not take away funding from the Ontario college system, but rather, should be supported by “new” money that would be distributed through the college operating grant mechanism - with funding for baccalaureate programs that would more fairly represent the incremental costs of developing and delivering such (for both polytechnics and CAATs alike).

Notwithstanding the above framework for polytechnics which was developed, according to Dr. Miner’s notes, by the 2008 Working Group, the Committee of Presidents reportedly concluded in the end that the designation of polytechnics would have to be a government decision, and if such a determination was made, then the presidents would need further time to discuss and recommend specific parameters around that decision. This “wait-and-see” approach may, at best, have contributed to the apparent lack of clarity among some stakeholders as to what exactly the proposed “made-in-Ontario” polytechnic model would look like -- since the Working Group’s deliberations were not made public, and appear not to have been formally endorsed by COP nor submitted to government by the sector. More broadly, the COP’s lack of formal, clear support for the initiative likely contributed to the inaction by government in this regard. The sector dynamics surrounding this issue are further examined later in this Chapter.

7.1.4 Seneca’s partnerships and pathways agenda. As noted earlier, some participants, both internal and external, perceived Seneca’s profile and leadership in forging partnerships with Ontario universities (e.g. Toronto, York, Guelph) as a “double-
edged sword”. Although this factor was raised by participants far less frequently than the aforementioned sources of potential confusion and ambiguity surrounding Seneca’s differentiation agenda, it was nonetheless, identified by some. Almost all participants believed that Seneca’s partnerships offered credibility and validation of the level and quality of Seneca’s programs and students. On the other hand, a few perceived there to be a risk (or at best, confusion) associated with Seneca’s ongoing pursuit of this strategy, i.e. that this could be interpreted as buying into a “junior college” model, or creating a slippery slope in that direction. Although stronger linkages with Ontario universities, and pathways from diplomas at other Ontario colleges into the polytechnic degrees, were specific benefits outlined in “A Polytechnic Vision for Ontario” (2008), there was a perception among some participants that Seneca’s interest in partnerships was much more focused than the others’. As expressed by David Agnew: “...it’s absolutely the right thing to do for the students (transfer pathways and partnerships). It doesn’t necessarily help you with brand or positioning, but it's absolutely the right thing to do.”

As an example of how this unique aspect of Seneca’s differentiation may have been interpreted by some, one external participant with senior government experience referred to the aforementioned efforts of “the three” colleges to forge a GTA college-university collaboration during the 2008 round of polytechnic discussions. According to this participant’s account, York, Ryerson and the University of Toronto were talking to the colleges about a “GTA solution” to the government’s projected GTA baccalaureate capacity issue:

There was that little thought experiment in the GTA, which wasn’t the universities accepting you so much at the time, as the universities figuring out a self-serving way to get what they wanted. ‘We don’t want to grow (in undergraduate studies) but
there’s lots of people here who need degree-level stuff, so why don’t we convince the government to let them (the colleges) take the first two years??’

This same participant went on to suggest, however, that Seneca’s interest in increasing college-university partnerships differentiated it from the other two colleges (Humber and Sheridan) involved in these discussions – perhaps leading to a perception that Seneca would be open to a university transfer model similar to the American junior colleges: “…and maybe the Seneca model is the one that comes to the fore.” Paraphrasing the perceived rationale of the GTA universities that were participating in these discussions, this same participant continued:

‘We (the GTA universities) don’t really have the capacity or the focus in undergraduate growth...Our up-market is graduate study and research... So we’re prepared to talk to you guys about becoming formal 1st and 2nd year kinds of institutions... with a transfer, after that, into our institutions.’ And now that I think about it...that was probably a better theoretical alignment for a Seneca (model) than, perhaps, for the other two.

This perspective is interesting when compared to Dr. Miner’s recollection of the meetings he participated in with the GTA university presidents, as cited in the Chapter Six chronology. According to Dr. Miner, the focus of those meetings was to discuss the impact of designating the three colleges as polytechnics, as a critical component of the GTA capacity issue. In fact, as noted earlier, Dr. Miner specifically reported to his polytechnic colleagues that he had clarified that “2+2’s” were not to be seen as a major element of the proposed polytechnic model and that “to a person” they all said “they understood and could support that position”. Indeed, Dr. Miner was confident enough in this understanding that he included this in his formal report to the Seneca Board (June, 2008) again, as noted earlier: “To date, all three (GTA university) presidents support Seneca being appointed a polytechnic, and support, in principle, the model of polytechnic that Seneca is proposing”.
According to one external participant from the college sector, however, the support by the GTA universities may not have been quite as clear-cut as Dr. Miner believed:

I heard a lot...regarding York and Ryerson and U of T going in with our three colleges and agreeing that there should be polytechnics (in GTA), but then, when the three college presidents put something into the Ministry following those meetings, they (reportedly) ‘overstepped’ beyond what the university presidents were comfortable with and thought they had agreed to. Of course, this could have been the three university presidents backpeddling (after they saw their colleagues’ reactions), I don’t know.

Interestingly, David Agnew’s recollection of his subsequent discussions with the GTA universities in 2010, after his arrival as Seneca president, was more aligned with Dr. Miner’s earlier perception: “We know that the big three universities in Toronto and the big three colleges in Toronto -- although George Brown would object to that -- got together and found common cause”.

The differences in perceptions about the success of these GTA talks among external participants from the college, university and broader postsecondary sectors, and those from Seneca and other differentiated colleges seeking to become polytechnics, are noteworthy. The upcoming section will examine the dynamics and tensions that may have contributed to these differences, among and between institutions and with government, as the polytechnic and differentiation discourse gained momentum.

7.2 Dynamics Within and Between the College and University Sectors

Most Seneca participants believed that their colleagues at other Ontario colleges may have been anxious, initially, regarding the differentiation and polytechnic goals of the larger GTA colleges, but that, over time, they came to understand that there were potential advantages that could result for the college system as a whole, and for individual colleges and their students. A number of external interviewees noted, however, that this was not
necessarily the case at all colleges, at least at the senior executive levels. Some of the suggested reasons for this are identified below. The perception of all internal participants, and most externals, however, was that the polytechnic agenda was *not* supported, (privately if not publically), by the Ontario university sector.

### 7.2.1 The reaction of the other colleges

Resistance among key college stakeholders to differentiation and polytechnic designations within the college sector was documented early in the study period, in October, 2001, in correspondence from then (newly appointed) Seneca president Rick Miner to the Seneca Executive Committee. In this correspondence, Dr. Miner reported on a college Committee of Presidents (COP) meeting he had attended which included updates and reports from the Ontario Community College Student Presidents’ Association (OCCSPA), a voluntary association which represented some but not all of the CAATs (Seneca’s student leaders were not members), and from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). Dr. Miner's email included the following bullets:

- OCCSPA pushing for more student governors on the Boards; no polytechnic status for any college, fearing an extra tier; increased transferability of college credits; (among other things such as increased financial aid and more funding for colleges).

- Discussion with MTCU representatives covered a number of issues and initiatives including an update on the New Charter implementation. Explicit recognition that missions between colleges could differ which might result in different designation, i.e. polytechnics. Most COP members were against the option. They want uniformity across the system. I again ‘voted’ for increased (institutional) discretion. (Miner, personal correspondence, Oct 4, 2001)

One external participant in this study, a senior executive from one of the other colleges that was seeking polytechnic designation, offered this explanation: “I think that there were some colleges, and particularly some presidents in the system, who feared
getting left behind.” As expressed by one senior executive in the broader postsecondary sector, “In the world of higher education, the desire of institutions to move up the credential food chain is pretty common”. Speaking specifically about dynamics within the college sector, this same participant went on to explain: “I’m talking generally about the five (GTA) colleges: that you just had to be in the degree granting game for reasons of branding and public perception, which potentially could affect applications (and the) public image of your institution.”

A number of external interviewees, including participants from universities, government and the broader postsecondary sector, identified a lack of transparency and engagement of other college colleagues in the polytechnic strategy as a contributing factor limiting Seneca’s progress (and others’) towards their polytechnic goals. Specifically, participants cited as examples, various meetings of the three college presidents with the Deputy Minister and other government officials between 2008 and 2012, with the three GTA universities in 2008, and again with the GTA university presidents in 2010 after David Agnew assumed the presidency at Seneca. As one senior, external participant from the college sector put it:

The perception was...’we have three college presidents who want to be polytechnics who are aligned, and we’ll get three university presidents onside, and the six of us will convince the government. And we won’t worry about what others in our system are thinking about us because we have the power of our size behind us.... ‘

According to some external participants, the lack of transparency in the polytechnic discussions led to fundamental trust issues among the college presidents that were not involved in these discussions. Other participants noted that the earliest polytechnic discussions had involved all the designated ITALs, but that Seneca, Humber and Sheridan presidents chose to collaborate as a smaller group as the polytechnic strategy became more
focused, since they were most closely aligned in terms of goals and college profile. George Brown College (GBC), for example, was not included in a 2008 breakfast meeting hosted by then president of University of Toronto, David Naylor and attended by the other GTA university presidents to discuss further degree granting capacity for the three colleges, because it was the understanding of “the three” colleges that George Brown was not interested in degree programming at the time. This notwithstanding, another external participant emphasized that the presidents of GBC and Centennial were not happy with being excluded from this and other related meetings:

So then, a very different discussion had to happen. That behaviour put a wedge between COP (the Committee of Presidents) that made the conversation very difficult -- because then it wasn’t just a conversation about your interests versus mine, or about your efforts towards differentiation... it was about trust.

George Brown and Centennial were also not included in a follow-up meeting of the three colleges with then new TCU Minister Glen Murray and staff in October, 2011 (attended by President Agnew and senior colleagues from Humber and Sheridan) to update the new Minister and his political aides on the colleges’ polytechnic vision. According to at least one external interviewee, however, this exclusion was immaterial, since the meeting reportedly turned out to be a “very unsatisfactory one”, i.e., no decisions were reached one way or the other, because Minister Murray “talked far more than he listened”.

Given the perceptions of some interview participants (internal and external) that there was tension and dissonance within the college sector regarding the polytechnic agenda, combined with fundamental breakdowns in trust and a resultant, behind-the-scenes lobbying of government both “for” and “against”, it seems reasonable to conclude that these dynamics would create barriers and challenges to the three colleges’ differentiation and polytechnic goals. As noted by one senior manager from the broader
college sector: “Presidents were operating behind the scenes against one another’s interests”. To paraphrase the warning cited in Chapter Six by a college president who was a firm polytechnic supporter, it certainly would not have helped the polytechnic cause if the college sector was sending mixed messages to government – especially if the government was confronted “with a united opposition from the university community”.

One external participant from the college sector offered this summary of the dynamics among the colleges that were in play during this period, and the resulting impact on government:

Inevitably (in stakeholder management), at some point in time, there’s always a bifurcation between the bigger and smaller players, and the big players always think they don’t need to bring the small players onside, because they have such a lot of clout and government listens to them because of the number of people they employ, economic impact they have, all the things that make them think they are the bigwigs and important etc. And they never remember that the government just hates controversy and therefore they of course, always defaults to what the small guys are thinking.

7.2.2 The reaction of Ontario’s universities. As emphasized by this former senior executive from the university sector, there was also some “pretty intense behind-the-scenes lobbying” against college differentiation and the polytechnic agenda by the university presidents:

What was interesting was, the universities didn’t go too public about opposing an enhanced role for colleges because they knew it would just look like... wanting to keep all the marbles. And they really didn’t think that the areas where the colleges were looking to have degree-granting powers, were going to threaten what universities did...But, you know, privately, they hated it...

According to one university president: “… anything that strengthened the position of these three (colleges) was a threat to the university institutions... primarily because of their geographic location”. In referring to the university sector’s reaction to the Ontario colleges’ differentiation goals and activities, one former senior manager from the Ministry
described the response as "pathetic", pointing to a “nasty” letter from the Council of Ontario Universities that was sent to MTCU shortly after the government issued its invitation to the colleges to propose differentiation models that would meet individual college strengths and ambitions. According to this participant, this was an official letter submitted on behalf of the university presidents to formally object to the differentiation process, “because they felt that community colleges were there to play a particular role, and universities were there to play a particular role, and this was going to be confusing for the students.” Another external participant referred to a formal, confidential letter (possibly the same one) that was submitted to the government by COU, in which the universities expressed their objections to expanded degree-granting powers for the colleges, increased system differentiation, and polytechnic designations. According to this participant, “…the university consensus was there was no reason for a change in the role for the colleges”. As articulated by another, former executive from the university sector, “The old term we used to use was ‘mission creep’. That was certainly used in the universities’ argument about why you shouldn’t let the colleges change.” According to this former senior manager in MTCU, however, “from my perspective, it was more that the universities saw it as an erosion of (their own) mandate…and the funding would then have to start being divided”. As a result, a number of the university presidents started meeting privately with Ministry officials and others in government: “Yeah, there were lots of meetings taking place.” As this university president noted:

They were just defending the institutions that they were, and any change in the higher education system was a threat. And that came from other universities, (it came from colleges too), and I don’t think it had any logic to it, other than ‘we’ve always been like this, we’ve always been superior, we’ve always delivered the best education, and whatever goes on elsewhere is going to weaken our unique position in Ontario’.
In discussing the risks of “mission creep”, one external participant from the college sector referred to Ryerson’s evolution to university status:

Most people would think the evolution of Ryerson into a pretty sophisticated institution during its polytechnic days was helpful (to Seneca’s polytechnic goals). Mind you, it then became a university, so on the other hand it confirms what happens in many jurisdictions: institutions will keep moving up, and...maybe it takes 10, 20, 30 years, but it’s the same as universities that are not research-intensive wanting to do more graduate studies. It’s a powerful force, and I can actually understand government’s reluctance to potentially, start a chain (of upward pressures).

In addressing the resistance among Ontario universities and other critics to the polytechnic agenda, former Humber College president Robert (Squee) Gordon offered this analysis in a 2007 interview with The Toronto Star (newspaper):

The bottom line is, more education done in creative ways has got to be better for your society than less, or the status quo. So, what I’m saying is that they (universities) should get off the comparisons...and say ‘Gee, these are interesting avenues of approach.’ But it’s easier to defend your turf than to open up new avenues. (May, 2007)

As noted in the polytechnic chronology detailed in Chapter Six, a number of external participants indicated that the university presidents were well aware that there was varying support for polytechnic designations among the college presidents – and that this was referenced in related discussions with government about the polytechnic momentum. According to this senior executive from the university sector:

The perception among the university presidents was (and maybe they wanted to construct it like this), that there had been as much concern from the other colleges as there was from universities, about the direction of the three. If I can paraphrase it...‘it’s silly for “the three” to want to be different; even the rest of the colleges think they’re making a mistake and, getting too big for their boots’.

One senior executive from the broader postsecondary sector noted, however, that “(a)ll of the work in the world (to ensure full support among the colleges) might not have
been able to overcome the university lobby against it...which would never have been transparent”.

7.2.3 Turnover of key institutional champions. As referenced in Chapter Four, there were several institutional champions behind the early push for system design change, including college differentiation and polytechnic designations within the college system. In the 1990s, then President Quinlan worked closely with then Humber president Robert (Squee) Gordon and then president Rob Turner, lobbying for legislative change leading up to the PECE Act (2000) and the new college charter (2002). Participants in this study referenced the turnover of critical institutional leaders as an important factor in affecting the success of the three colleges’ differentiation and polytechnic goals. All three of the aforementioned individuals were cited as playing important roles in supporting the polytechnic agenda, and “encouraging the Conservative government to consider what legislative options might be available”. As expressed by this former senior executive from another differentiated college: “And certainly the President of Humber, Squee Gordon, was a big player in that, because he was a political animal.”

Dr. Rick Miner’s arrival as president at Seneca, was seen by all internal participants as a significant contributing factor in setting the course for Seneca’s institutional differentiation, and providing momentum, focus and strategic direction to the polytechnic agenda. There were contrasting perspectives, however, among external participants, ranging from several who saw Dr. Miner’s appointment as extremely positive, bringing a breadth and depth of “knowledge and experience in post-secondary education” to the system, to one senior government official who believed that Dr. Miner was perceived with suspicion by others in the postsecondary sector, as an “outsider” who brought neither
college experience nor Ontario postsecondary experience. As articulated by this participant, (who emphasized that this was “…what I perceived people were thinking, rather than who he really was”), Miner’s appointment “after a couple of presidents who had a ton of experience or linkages to Ontario colleges had left…was hard…People always saw him as a university.”

In the context of Seneca’s polytechnic journey, Dr. Miner’s retirement as president of Seneca was also identified as a significant factor affecting the college’s success, as discussed in detail in Chapter Six. According to this university president, Dr. Miner had been “tarred with being a provocateur, with being awkward and difficult to deal with” among the university presidents, because of his passion and commitment to making change “…and really pushing the differentiation agenda”:

By the time he retired, however, his pressure and determination had had a significant impact on the system. And so David (Agnew) was able to come in almost as an elder statesman, still with the same drive but with none of the baggage…And so I think it was one of those changes of the guard that actually helped deliver more on the original intent.

Also noted in Chapter Six, incoming president David Agnew reaffirmed the strategic goals and directions outlined in Seneca’s Differentiated Mandate Agreement but decided not to push the polytechnic nomenclature for political reasons. President Agnew noted, however, that the turnover of other key institutional champions of the polytechnic agenda (in addition to Dr. Miner) may have compounded the political challenges surrounding this agenda:

Of course, as I was coming in, obviously Rick was retiring and Rob Turner (then Sheridan president) was on his way out. So it kind of lost a bit of the steam….A couple of years down the road, (Humber’s then president) Davies went too. We did have one meeting with the three university presidents and the lack of enthusiasm was palpable. (It was like) ‘Frankly, this doesn’t really bug us because you’re not our competition’.
Reflecting further, President Agnew went on to clarify: “York, I think it bugged, but I don’t think U of T or Ryerson saw us as serious competition.” This was contrary to the perspective offered by one senior government official (and noted in Chapter Six) who suggested that Ryerson President Sheldon Levy was “fighting right back”.

The influence that various institutional leaders seemed to have had on government during the study period, and the resulting actions (or inaction) by government in the context of college differentiation and polytechnic designations, was cited as important by a number of participants, both internal and external: “I think they frustrated the goals and then they frustrated the strategy”. This is examined further in the following section.

7.3 The Political Environment and the Role of Government

Many interview participants (both internal and external) described various political tensions that they believed were working against Seneca and the other colleges as they sought system design change and polytechnic designations in Ontario during the study period. Several participants spoke of mixed messages and dissonance in the Ministry that coincided with a significant turnover of key policy actors (most notably, Deputy Steenkamp), and a resultant confusion within the bureaucracy that led to an extended period of inaction at a time when government intervention or direction was needed to affect change. Others felt that the forces working against these colleges ran far deeper than the bureaucracy, and were much more dominant than the influence or efforts of any individual champion(s). According to these participants, the most significant obstacles were political: limited support for the polytechnic agenda (if not outright resistance) among politicians, senior policy actors in government, and the broader postsecondary environment including university (and some college) leaders.
7.3.1 Limited (or no) political will. There were strong feelings (among internal and external participants) that there was no political will to tackle such a significant change or to take on the universities. In the words of one senior government official: “One of the things that never ceased to amaze me in TCU was the ingrained fear of universities”. This same external participant went on to explain:

What I found frustrating about this entire episode, and I would imagine I was not the only one, was the mixed signals that were being sent. I got a clear sense on the bureaucratic side, certainly through the deputy, that there had been a series of conversations that had least encouraged people to go down that path (towards polytechnic designation). Politically it was not that clear... I didn't get a sense at all that they wanted to touch it.

Reflecting on the timing of a presentation made by a senior official from MTCU about potential system design options, including polytechnic designations, at the Seneca Board Retreat in April 2008, current Seneca president David Agnew remarked, “That’s fascinating, because I know this: Politically, there was just absolutely no traction for this”. President Agnew pointed to the changeover in government which occurred soon after the PECE Act, 2000 and the new College Charter in 2002, (i.e., from the Progressive Conservatives who were responsible for both pieces of legislation to the McGuinty Liberals in 2003) as the most significant factor in setting the political stage for the differentiation and polytechnic discourse that would persist for many years following:

I think in this story, one of the key inflection points was the change of government... From some of the earlier documents, it was pretty clear that the government that brought in the changes, with Diane Cunningham as the Minister and so on, was interested in making name changes...Had that government continued, there might have been more room (for polytechnics), but...none of those changes were owned by the (then) new government (emphasis added). And I can tell you the current premier still isn’t all that comfortable, I think, with where we are...

14 Subsequent to the data gathering process for this study, there was a provincial election in Ontario (Spring, 2018), resulting in a change in government from the Liberals led by then premier Kathleen Wynne to the
This former senior university administrator offered a similar perspective:

I believe the term is "cold feet". I think there was clearly some bold thinking, real forward-looking thinking, but then there was a solid university lobby to not let this get out of control, and then...cold feet. And of course, a change in government, so some of the people who were behind the initial vision were suddenly gone.

Another senior university executive agreed:

I think, if I go right back to Harris and his closer association with the colleges... there was leadership at the political level to change perspective about the colleges, and the need for colleges and universities to differentiate more strongly....And there were lots of things I didn’t like about Mike Harris, but I actually think that was a really important frame that both encouraged (the three colleges) to feel that they weren’t alone, but also, I think, encouraged the three universities, Toronto, Queen's and Western, to start thinking about exactly what change was going to happen. Then the agenda got a bit lost because of the Harris cuts that really forced people to hunker down, especially the universities, and at certain times when people are threatened, they will draw the wagon 'round...to preserve what they’ve got.

Fast forwarding to the latter years of the study period, President Agnew expanded on the feelings of then Premier Kathleen Wynne:

I could tell the first time I talked to her (about polytechnics). She just said, “Why?” And so I think it was a real challenge, to be honest; it was just wrong at the time to try to push that. Talk about a rock up a hill. It was just not to be. Ironically, I think there’s an opportunity now -- probably not with this (then Liberal) government\textsuperscript{15}, but in time -- but I think we have to come at it a completely different way.

One senior executive from the broader postsecondary sector pointed to the aforementioned, perceived “power of the universities” as the underlying force behind then Premier Wynne’s resistance to the polytechnic agenda, paraphrasing the premier as saying:

‘...this is a sure quarrel with the universities that is going to happen and I’m not having

\textsuperscript{15} There was a provincial election in Ontario (Spring, 2018), resulting in a change in government from the Liberals led by then premier Kathleen Wynne to the Conservative government led by Premier Doug Ford. Given this timing, references by interview participants to the “current” government are intended to refer to the Wynne government.
that.” These interpretations were consistent with those of other participants in their reflections of the earlier, limited support (if not resistance) by former Premier McGuinty, Wynne’s predecessor in the then Liberal government. In describing the political mood at that time, one senior government official described the resistance Deputy Philip Steenkamp likely encountered in attempting to deal with “the centre”, that is, the premier’s office:

Keep in mind that, at the time, x was a key advisor (to the premier), and x was all about universities. (S)he had zero interest in in polytechnics… was not a fan of credit transfer and not a fan of differentiation…. So I think David’s read was probably the right one.

John Milloy was Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, from 2007-2011 (and again briefly in 2012). In describing Minister Milloy’s sentiments towards the polytechnic agenda being pursued by some college presidents, one senior government official offered this explanation:

I think “polytechnic” became a code…a code word for wanting to be a university and as a result, that’s how it evolved. Eventually this is really what it got interpreted as. And the minister…kind of saw this as a “side door entry” into the world of university, and comprehensive universities, and so on. After a while, it acquired a negative connotation.

These last comments are consistent with an account offered by another external participant who had participated in a 2010 meeting with Minister Milloy and a number of presidents (including President Agnew) who were seeking polytechnic status. According to this interviewee, Minister Milloy’s sentiments about the polytechnic agenda were clear when he concluded that meeting by saying: “This is a solution in search of a problem. And when you can find me the problem, come back’.”

A number of respondents, however, both internal and external, referenced remarks made by Minister Milloy in Spring, 2011, at a Canadian Club luncheon, as an important signal of a potential change in his thinking around differentiation. As noted by one senior
government official, the timing of Minister Milloy’s remarks was interesting: “This was towards the end of his mandate, but that speech marked a shift in his thinking around the need for government to pay more attention to system design.”

In his remarks, Minister Milloy indicated that he believed a postsecondary system that enabled institutional differentiation was in the best interests of Ontario students:

There is no question that every college and university should be able to offer a full range of core programming, particularly at the undergraduate and entry level. And there is no question that we need to see the continued growth of graduate studies as well as a strong research agenda within both the college and university sectors. But putting students first means focusing our resources on what each institution does best so that collectively they offer the maximum choice, flexibility and quality experience to Ontario students. (Milloy, 2011)

Some stakeholders may have interpreted Minister Milloy’s remarks as supporting the university presidents’ position as noted earlier, that colleges should stick to their historical, access mandates. Most interview participants, however, interpreted this as recognition that not all colleges (nor universities) were the same as other institutions in their respective sectors – nor should they be.

According to one senior government official, these remarks by Minister Milloy offered a distinct contrast to his earlier disinterest in differentiation and the colleges’ polytechnic agenda. “There were two things he didn’t want to hear: the word differentiation, he was absolutely allergic to that word, and he didn't want to hear the word polytechnic.” This last comment about the Minister’s initial aversion to the word differentiation is interesting given earlier comments from several participants (internal and external) about the perceived “power” university presidents in Ontario had over government. In describing the universities’ sentiments about the colleges’ differentiation journey, one external interviewee explained: “It was a buzzword used by (the bureaucracy)
and central planners, because they were convinced that there was duplicate funding out there...So I think, in some ways, it was the use of the term ‘differentiation’ that irked the universities most.”

**7.3.2 Confusion, dissonance and turnover of key policy actors in the Ministry.**

As noted in earlier chapters, many study participants, both internal and external, identified the departure of MTCU Deputy Minister Philip Steenkamp, as a significant factor in Seneca’s lack of success in achieving its polytechnic ambitions (along with the other colleges).

According to President Agnew: “If there was ever a little flicker of flame of hope, when Philip left it was... done”. One senior university executive agreed: “For me, the next most important thing was Philip Steenkamp...on the bureaucracy end, having a deputy who felt very strongly that the system should be differentiated by acknowledging that the three colleges were polytechnics”.

In describing the impact that Deputy Steenkamp had on the polytechnic journey, this same senior university executive noted: “I’m not sure that people are aware of how much he put pressure on the COP and the university systems, to move towards polytechnic status for the three...but at that point he was blocked politically”.

Several external (and some internal) interviewees shared these same perceptions that the Deputy was being blocked politically at some level, some suggesting it was the Minister, others pointing further up the chain to then Premier McGuinty. And, as noted earlier, there were widespread perceptions that this was, at least partly, tied to behind-the-scenes objections by the universities:

...at the time, I think, the universities had moved to ‘the way we can deal with being threatened by the colleges that are moving into degrees, is to strengthen our graduate programs’, and (the Deputy) felt very strongly that that was inappropriate,
that there were some institutions that had the strength and capacity to engage in
graduate education, but it wasn't increases across the board for all universities.

Another senior university administrator noted: “(The Deputy) had very strong
views about graduate education that were contrary to a lot of (Ontario) universities’.
That really, I think, caused him to be interested in the job back in B.C.” This last perspective is
interesting in light of comments offered by several participants, both internal and external,
regarding the perceived “power” the Ontario universities seemed to hold over government
during the study period. As articulated by this senior government official:

Inside government there was definitely a concern about the way in which
universities would react (to polytechnic designations from among the colleges).
Even though it might have been just one case, they would anticipate that it would be
the thin edge of the wedge, and so there was definitely, rightly or wrongly although
probably rightly so, (a concern that) universities would not see this in a friendly
manner.

Current Seneca President David Agnew shared a similar perspective: “I think part of
government’s reluctance, even today, to talk about the (polytechnic) issue is the reaction of
the mid-size and smaller universities who would see this as... threatening”.

Almost as significant as the impact Deputy Steenkamp had in his leadership of the
postsecondary reform file (including polytechnics) during his term in office, was the impact
he seemingly had after he left his Ontario role. A number of external participants described
the “turmoil” and “chaos” in the Ministry after Deputy Steenkamp left his position, as an
important contributing factor in ending any momentum towards system design change. “So
Steenkamp left in 2008 September, and everybody was surprised because nobody knew
this was coming...It turned the Ministry upside down.” In describing the subsequent
turnover of key policy actors, one senior government official noted: “We had a lot of
changes in the Ministry in terms of senior management....It was just a mad time for the
To compound the situation, some participants noted that there were a number of strikes in the sector that occurred around that same time, including at York University and in the college system as a whole (governed by a central collective bargaining process), so “TCU was just a mess...”. According to another senior government official: “with the former deputy moving on, and Rick moving on, there was a bit of a vacuum...and by the time the new deputy came in, this no longer seemed to be high on the radar”.

Deputy Steenkamp’s impact on the Ontario postsecondary sector during the study period was summarized by this senior government official with experience in the broader postsecondary sector: “I think the Deputy left just before he was actually going to hit the ‘go’ button on a couple of big things... it would be interesting to see in another universe how things might have turned out differently if he’d stayed.”

There were five different Ministers overseeing MTCU during the study period, with the first being Progressive Conservative, (Dianne Cunningham) followed by three consecutive Liberal governments and four Ministers (Mary-Ann Chambers 2003-05; Chris Bentley 2005 -07; John Milloy 2007 -11; Glen Murray 2011-12). In January, 2012 (towards the end of this study period), The Honourable Glen Murray spoke with Steve Paikin on The Agenda, specifically to discuss the new tuition assistance grants for lower income students announced by the new Liberal government, as well as the Liberal “vision for postsecondary education” for Ontario (including references made in an earlier speech by the new Minister suggesting that Ontario would be creating “three new campuses by 2015/16”). During this interview, Minister Murray referred to on-line, experiential and self-directed learning as the “third leg, or third wing”, of postsecondary education – and without any references to
system design, differentiation and/or polytechnic institutions (Murray, 2012).

7.3.3 Lack of postsecondary vision. A number of external participants also pointed to the absence of a cohesive, clear and consistent vision for postsecondary education from government as an overarching system design concern. According to these interviewees, this would have provided a much needed focus and direction to guide discussions about institutional roles, relationships and goals during the differentiation and polytechnic discourse. In the absence of this, most participants agreed that meaningful change or progress in Ontario’s postsecondary sector has been limited, if not slow. As articulated by this former, senior college executive: “Higher education in Ontario has been pretty static for a long time with very few big changes. I think compared to some other places, Ontario’s not used to rapid change and it takes a lot”.

Another former college executive agreed, noting that, in the history of the Ontario College system, the only significant decision the government has made was to introduce degree-granting. “In all that time period, that was the only big decision. And that was a very big piece, if you could take advantage of it.” This same participant emphasized, however, that this major initiative was constrained because there was no surrounding context or vision. “There was no differentiation framework provided, it was all piecemeal; no sense of where the new degree-granting agenda might drive us…and why those places would be good.”

According to one former senior executive from one of the other differentiated colleges, in order to ensure effective system design reform, “…You need a Minister or a Premier who has an idealistic vision”, and according to another, “one who is a risk-taker. It has to come from the top down".
7.3.4 A persistent binary system design. Several participants (internal and external) concluded that the resistance by senior university administrators (and some in government) to the idea of polytechnic designations in Ontario, went deeper than fear of competition or a mistrust regarding possible hidden goals. The belief held by these interviewees was that, in the end, there was an underlying (and perhaps subconscious) resistance to any disruption to the longstanding, almost “sacred” binary system design of Ontario’s postsecondary system. As explained by one senior university executive, this was evident in the university presidents’ reactions when the colleges were first granted legislative authority to offer degrees: “For some reason, they perceived that, if there were more places offering degrees, that would be a threat to the establishment and that somehow, by retaining the original structure, they were defending themselves against competition”.

A senior executive from the college sector noted: “I don’t believe that competing was the goal (of college degree-granting authority) in and of itself. But by getting into the degree business, it did begin, I think, to change the perception of the hierarchy between colleges and universities.” In speaking specifically of the colleges’ polytechnic interests, one former senior university executive with broad post-secondary experience, went on to explain:

In Ontario, certainly, the college-university (bicameral) system is very clearly known in the minds of parents, and among secondary school students. And I think it would have taken some real marketing and selling to say, “but now there’s a whole new kind of institution...”. I think it was an idea that, unfortunately, was doomed right from the beginning.

Another senior executive with broad external, post-secondary experience offered a further analysis:
Right now you have colleges and universities and yeah, there’s a wall that we’re trying to permeate. If you create a situation where there’s a guy in the middle, you now have twice as many walls. You haven’t solved the problem, you’ve only made it worse.

This same participant, reflecting upon Sheridan ITAL’s subsequent aspirations to become a university (after the study period), mused that this could in fact be an easier sell, over time, than its earlier polytechnic pursuits, because “you’re not changing the model, just changing the positioning of one of the players within the model”.

Given the perceptions of both internal and external participants that Ontario’s binary system design was almost sacrosanct, Dr. Miner was asked during his interview if he thought Seneca’s pursuit of a change in institutional status would have been easier (i.e., more successful), if he had been seeking university status rather than polytechnic:

Probably. But I wouldn’t have wanted that. I suppose we could have gone with “university of applied studies”, or “university of some qualifier”, but the (other Ontario) universities would have screamed like hell. But government might have gone with it. The silos had been so engrained; they just couldn’t get their mind around a different kind of structure.

In the HEQCO 2013 report on differentiation in Ontario, Weingarten et al. concluded that: “…a key decision government will need to consider regarding differentiation is the utility of maintaining the strong college-university dichotomy that now exists...” (p. 4).

7.4 Looking Back – What Circumstances might have led to a Different Outcome (Greater Achievement of Seneca’s Differentiation Goals)?

7.4.1 A coordinated and cohesive college effort. In reflecting on what circumstances might have led to a different outcome for Seneca (and the other GTA colleges seeking polytechnic status), several external participants suggested that a more coordinated approach on behalf of the College system might have been more effective.
Noting that government was “gun shy” about taking the universities on (as suggested by several participants and noted earlier), one senior government official stressed that dissonance among the other colleges only made the status quo more likely:

If they wanted to pursue this agenda seriously, it might have been beneficial for them to act more collectively; in other words, to show that there was a meeting of the minds between them (the colleges seeking polytechnic status and the other colleges). In other words, that it was not just about Seneca, or the three; that there was a bit of a GTA strategy. And then they would have had to really lobby the minister and politicians (emphasis added).

Several other participants, both internal and external, noted the critical importance of having strong politicians onside, in order to affect such a substantive system reform. Specific suggestions (from both the college and university sectors) included “a deliberate pattern of representations with government”, “a lot more lobbying rather than isolated conversations”, and “powerful politicians who can influence”.

7.4.2 A change in nomenclature – What’s in a name? All internal participants returned to the institutional nomenclature as a critical factor that could have impacted Seneca’s differentiation success – suggesting that this would have helped bring greater clarity and understanding for potential students, parents, secondary school teachers, guidance counselors and others. As this senior administrator at Seneca explained,

The polytechnic designation...If that had been a real possibility right from the beginning, if we had actually been able to do that and gone in that direction right from the beginning, that would have provided a lot of clarity regarding what we wanted to be, what we had to do, how we had to do it; and we wouldn’t still be in this muddle of what we are, and what do others think we are.

Many interview participants (both internal and external) suggested that the polytechnic designation was an important factor for Seneca and the other differentiated colleges in terms of branding. As described by this former dean at Seneca:
If they had just substituted the word “polytechnic” for ITAL in the Differentiated Status approvals, I think everyone would have been happy. It would have made sense, it would have been clearer to the public than ITAL, and clearer internally - as long as the government had included an addendum in the Differentiated Status agreement that said, “we are using polytechnic as a descriptor for Differentiated Status, both for legal purposes and for branding”. It (also) would have helped in terms of alleviating the internal confusion and ambiguity and fear.

As noted by another external participant from the college sector, “I suspect part of this was also about branding (advanced) career education and giving it a stronger brand... it may just have been one of those cases where it was the wrong title.”

As referenced earlier, a number of interview participants suggested that Seneca may have been more successful in achieving a change in institutional nomenclature/designation if it had been seeking university status rather than polytechnic status - because this, at least, would not have been so disruptive to the binary system design. When asked if this would have been “off the table” at the time, one senior government official noted: “there were lots and lots of options on the table. I think it would have been totally fine.”

When pushed to consider how he would have reacted had the Ministry proposed to change Seneca’s institutional status to “university” (rather than polytechnic, ITAL or even status quo), Dr. Miner reflected in hindsight, “Not then. It would have felt like selling out. But now, looking back and seeing how slowly change is happening, you think...maybe that was the only option.... At least it would have been a nomenclature that people know.”

Another former senior executive from one of the differentiated GTA colleges offered this qualification, when asked the same question: “Polytechnic university, perhaps....but just university? No.”

It seems ironic that perceptions of a hidden university agenda created barriers and trust breakdowns among some stakeholders during Seneca’s differentiation journey,
(despite Dr. Miner’s assurances then and now, along with internal participants, that this was not of interest, as cited in earlier Chapters) and yet, in hindsight, it seems that a change in institutional nomenclature may have been more likely had the college been pursuing some other designation other than polytechnic -- up to and including a university designation. This would also have been more closely aligned with the system design reforms recommended in Clark et al. (2009) and Jones and Skolnik (2009) which point to the creation of teaching universities perhaps differentiated by other specific criteria. It is also interesting that, based on the sector dynamics identified in the previous section of this chapter, there were pressures from other colleges (directly and through Colleges Ontario) to keep “the three” colleges in the college sector even if polytechnic designations were forthcoming, and there were pressures from the university sector to keep “the three” out of the university sector (both immediately, and eventually, due to any evolution as per Ryerson’s polytechnic history). These tensions notwithstanding, the notion of creating a “third pillar” of postsecondary education in Ontario became a stumbling block that that neither the colleges nor universities could readily support.

7.4.3 Government leadership. According to most interview participants, internal and external, there would need to have been significant government leadership in order for Seneca (and other colleges) to have achieved their system design goals for Ontario, i.e. to fill a perceived “gap” between college and university education. This was the most commonly offered answer to the question of what circumstances might have led to a different outcome for Seneca. According to another participant, a former senior executive with both government and institutional experience:

   It would have to be for the government to say, ‘We are creating this new class of institutions. Here’s their role. Here’s how we believe they are different than
universities and different than colleges. And we think it's important.' It couldn't have happened without, or happened well without, the government not only buying into it, but promoting it.

Another external participant with broad post-secondary experience noted that, “It’s really hard for any institution to change the fundamental binary system from the ground up.” This same participant explained:

It would need government leadership. It would need government to say: “We’re not just playing around with mobility - here’s the rules, here’s the money. We’re not just playing around with credentials - here’s how that works. We’re not just playing around with quality and outcomes, - here’s how that works. Not to say we’re going to tell you how to run your classrooms, but we are going to tell you how to frame it.” But we have a government in Ontario that just won’t do that16. It just won’t. Despite all the signals.

In Seneca’s 2004 Board-approved submission to the Rae review, Dr. Miner concluded that the kind of system design change that Ontario needed could best be achieved with a “dual strategy”:

It is believed that market forces, along with appropriate governmental interventions/incentives, should create sufficient diversity to overcome the education gap that will soon emerge and the accessibility issues that face us today. This dual strategy seems to be more viable than simply a bureaucratic approach that tries to respond to ever-changing educational and training needs or to rely totally on market forces. (Miner, 2004)

A number of external participants offered similar perspectives, noting that the government in place during this study period was seemingly not interested in intervening using legislative and/or policy levers. As stressed by one senior government official, however, there were other incentives (or disincentives) including financial levers that

16 There was a provincial election in Ontario (Spring, 2018), resulting in a change in government from the Liberals led by then premier Kathleen Wynne to the Conservative government led by Premier Doug Ford. Given this timing, references by interview participants to the “current” government refer to the Wynne government.
could have been used to stimulate greater institutional differentiation, greater cooperation within and across the sectors etc., but the first accountability measures that were introduced (the MYAA’s) appeared not to have any teeth.\textsuperscript{17} This reality notwithstanding, several participants noted that government leadership would have to start with a bold vision, and strong political support. As one external participant, a former senior college executive, put it: “The dream was big and the legislation was modest...and the results were, in my view, actually less than modest, for a number of reasons”.

\textbf{7.5 Ongoing Impact on System Design}

This final analysis examines how participants’ perceived the overall, ongoing impact, if any, of Seneca’s differentiation and polytechnic efforts (along with other GTA colleges) on postsecondary system design in Ontario. Having heard from both internal and (some) external interviewees that they believed that Dr. Miner’s intent and rationale, in pursuing increased differentiation for Seneca, went beyond the individual college’s interests and sought to affect system design change, it is important to consider the broader implications of those efforts.

Several participants suggested that the overall impact on system design was minimal, in the context of the binary system: “It’s still an experiment that pushes up against the system foundations: a binary system, with a wall between the two parts of the system, and pretty distinct missions and mandates for each. That citadel has not fallen.”

Most participants (both internal and external) referred to increased access to baccalaureate degrees, institutional cooperation, pathways and partnerships as significant,

\textsuperscript{17} Eventually these evolved into the Strategic Mandate Agreements (piloted in 2012), but participants had varying degrees of confidence in terms of whether these were being used effectively to achieve the government’s stated differentiation goals (MTCU,,November, 2013).
ongoing system design consequences of Seneca’s differentiation efforts. As articulated by this external participant, a senior executive from the college sector:

I think it helped to shake things up. I think it helped to move the higher education system from two systems, going back to Davis’ original image, that have very few connections to a much more interconnected system than people would have been talking about 15, 20 years ago... I think it has helped to reshape our sense of what higher education is.

According to one former senior university official with broad post-secondary experience, however, what started off as potentially, a significant system transformation, ran into roadblocks and challenges that were highly political:

I would think, if you asked people in government at the time the legislation was passed, “what did you expect the system would look like in 20 years?”, they would probably be very disappointed. They thought this was a huge move. But, again, the limit on the percentage of enrolment in degree programs made sure it wasn’t going to be a big move. And the minimal funding changes made sure it wasn’t going to be a big move... So what looked like potential game-changing legislation has had a positive impact for students, more options for them, which is all good. But... were they (government) really going to upset the university monopoly? No. Sorry. That just didn't happen.

In reflecting on whether the differentiation journey that Seneca and others embarked on during the study period has had any ongoing or long-term impact on the system, another senior government official responded:

Unfortunately people have very short-term memories... But within the context of the strategic mandate agreement conversations, which is really the primary instrument for differentiation, I think there’s a clear connection. And, the need to differentiate didn’t go away. So do you go a step further in saying ‘okay, now let’s get serious about this? All colleges cannot be the same, just as all universities are not the same. And this is where government gets very gun shy. But a lot of this can be steered by funding, by capital.

This same participant offered this conclusion: “I always say we have all of the levers, and we need to activate those levers. And my biggest disappointment about the early years, is that there was no political will to do this.”
7.6 Looking Forward: What does the Future Promise?

7.6.1 Polytechnics in Ontario - Towards round three? According to David Agnew and other interview participants from the college sector, the institutions’ interest in polytechnic designations has been building once again in recent years, specifically relating to Seneca’s and Humber’s ambitions. In fact, Seneca and Humber announced a new Humber-Seneca Polytechnic Partnership (HSPP) in May, 2018, to promote cooperation and collaboration between the two institutions....and “widen (the) reach of polytechnic education” (Seneca, 2018). In a statement jointly released by the two colleges, the Seneca and Humber presidents emphasized that the time was right for the HSPP initiative:

This is a partnership of choice, not of necessity, and reflects a long-term perspective that sees differentiation, interdependence, critical mass and deep, shared expertise as keys to continued success for Ontario’s publicly assisted postsecondary institutions.

This former senior administrator from Seneca agrees: “I think we’ve had some delay in the original differentiation plan, lost some of the momentum, and took a break from the polytechnic trail. But I truly believe we are going to get back on that trail. “

In reflecting on the future of postsecondary education in Ontario, however, David Agnew noted that, “Post-secondary reform does not seem to be a hot headline issue for the province.” Speaking of the former (Liberal) provincial government, President Agnew noted that the Liberals’ response to the increasing, renewed interest in polytechnic status among some colleges was uncertain:

I don’t have a high level of confidence that we know what the government’s view of differentiation is. We’ve had very direct discussions recently with the deputy, with the minister, about the polytechnic issue again, and seeing if there was some appetite for it, this time trying to take a perspective that it’s not just all about us. It’s also part of your system solution, right? Because sustainability is the word of the year. But our colleagues (both colleges and universities) are unenthusiastic.
The current (Conservative) government’s openness to postsecondary system reform remains to be seen, as the government establishes its roots and new policy actors embrace their roles. The pressure for significant change may be increased, however, by an aggressive fiscal agenda and a desire to reduce public sector infrastructure and spending.

Reflecting on the political history over the study period, with successive, consecutive Liberal governments in power immediately following the initial (Conservative) legislation, one former senior college executive mused, “We started the path and got the greatest impetus from the Conservatives”.

President Agnew believes that system design reform, including the designation of (a limited number of) polytechnics in Ontario, offers a strategic solution to the persistent, significant fiscal challenges facing the system today:

And so the burning platform that is staring us all in the face, is called sustainability. I think there’s a solution, but if we don’t look at it as a kind of holistic picture... unless you start thinking in system terms (and whole system terms), then we’re not going to see that kind of positive change.

According to the same former senior executive at Seneca, the need for reform is also tied to labour market needs and the students: “I think some people are finally looking out there and saying, ‘The gap is Ryerson’ (ie. before it became a university), so we need to fill that.” Another former, senior executive from a differentiated college agreed: “There’s a heck of a lot of room in this province for more than one polytechnic, or polytechnic university...The success of Ryerson (polytechnic) should be a marker on the highway in huge neon letters that says, we need more of this, sign me up!”

President Agnew reflected on the historical, natural progression of other postsecondary institutions in Canada, including Ryerson, OCAD U and BCIT, with a specific note that BCIT has “long been BCIT, but it now offers Masters’ degrees”.

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According to Agnew, having polytechnic institutions as part of a well-integrated college system in Ontario would not only ensure important credit transfer/mobility benefits for college students, but important access and sustainability solutions for the province. “So this is essentially a third option (for Ontario), right? And I don’t see that you have to leave the college system to achieve it, because that’s actually part of the strategy.” President Agnew went on to qualify, however, that: “Anything that’s going to disturb the firmament of the university universe, I suggest, is going to be very challenging.”

It is perhaps relevant, therefore, to look back once again at Ryerson’s history and evolution from Ryerson Institute of Technology in the WWII and post-war era, to Ryerson Polytechnic Institute in 1963/64, with degree-granting authority added in 1971. The institution was then granted university status in 1993 and renamed Ryerson Polytechnic University, including the authority to offer graduate degrees, but the economic downturn and related sector constraints meant that it wasn’t until June, 2002 that the new name of Ryerson University was approved by the provincial government - some thirty years after receiving initial degree-granting authority (Ryerson, 2018).

It has been almost two decades since the Ontario Colleges were granted authority to offer baccalaureate degrees on a pilot basis. Based on Ryerson’s experience, the evolution of an institution in Ontario takes time and significant operational and mandate expansion - and external acknowledgement of same - prior to legislative change. Ryerson’s historical timeline supports the perception by some interview participants that significant system design change in Ontario, up to and including legislative changes in institutional nomenclature, is more apt to be the result of a slow, evolutionary process rather than a sudden and wholesale decree (as has occurred in some other jurisdictions). This also
supports the perception of several interview participants (both internal and external) that the policy discourse around system redesign in Ontario, including possible polytechnic designation for some colleges, may indeed resurface sometime in the near future – but will need definitive government action ("bold" and "gutsy" action) if it is to be realized in a reasonable timeline. One university president went so far as to predict, “...the only way this will actually happen is if there is a change in government (other than the then Liberals) that has polytechnics in its platform”.

According to President Agnew, if there is a renewed momentum, it should focus on a new institutional type with an explicit name change that defines the nature of the institution, whether this is the “polytechnic” nomenclature or something else: “If we want to maintain distinction from the universities, which I think we do, then the question is...Is there a label that would signal to the public that we’re different?”

According to most internal and several external participants, the resurfacing of the momentum towards formal polytechnic status for some institutions would be a good thing for Ontario. And, for at least one external interviewee, the potential evolution of one or more of the new Ontario polytechnics, over time, towards eventual university status should not be seen as a threat to the system. In the words of this university president:

I happen to believe that polytechnics are different and are an important component (of a higher education system) ... but in the same way that the three colleges have grown from their original mandates, now being polytechnic-like, it’s entirely possible that in 10 or 15 years, one or more of them would want to migrate as Ryerson and OCAD did, into becoming a university. And what’s wrong with that?

7.7 Summary

Seneca’s (and others’) efforts towards polytechnic designations in Ontario were impacted by several factors, including a number of gaps and misunderstandings in
rationale and intent; a lack of overall support and buy-in (and trust) among non-polytechnic colleges; some underlying competitive dynamics between the Ontario universities and the CAATs; the turnover of key champions within government and in the institutions; changes in government and a lack of political support for previous government initiatives; and a perceived power relationship between the then Liberal government and university leaders that resulted in unwillingness by government to tackle system reforms. Although Seneca’s pursuit of increased differentiation is seen to have made an important contribution in terms of access to baccalaureate degrees, college-university partnerships and credit transfer in the province, significant changes in system design beyond Ontario’s current binary model would require “bold and gutsy” government vision and leadership, direct intervention and (very) strong political support.
CHAPTER EIGHT: Overview and Concluding Reflections

Pursuant to the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence (PECE) Act, 2000 and the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, the then Progressive Conservative provincial government announced in August, 2002, that the “doors were open” for colleges to submit proposals for formal differentiated status. In November, 2002, in response to this invitation, Seneca College proposed a business case and strategy for formal differentiated status. The resultant “Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement”, co-signed with government, committed the college to an expanded mandate including increased baccalaureate level programming (beyond that of non-differentiated colleges); an ongoing focus on access strategies for underserved populations; multi-directional pathways between Seneca credentials and with other postsecondary institutions; and applied research partnerships with both the private and public sectors. The Agreement also noted that the specific institutional model that would define the “New Seneca” would be determined in ongoing discussions with government, but with the understanding that the college’s overarching goal was to become a “new type of postsecondary institution” in Ontario, one that would “cross the college-university divide”. Thus began a persistent differentiation journey for the institution, which included an “on again, off again” pursuit of polytechnic status throughout the study period, 2001-2012.

Using a historical case analysis, this thesis seeks to develop a deeper understanding of Seneca’s institutional journey during this period, including its goals and rationale in pursuing increased differentiation, and related strategic decisions and priorities established therein. Based on documentary analysis and interviews with key internal and
external informants, the research also examines the perceived congruence between Seneca’s differentiation goals and its historical access roots. Seneca’s success in achieving its differentiation goals during the study period is considered, including the pursuit of polytechnic status as the college’s preferred strategy for system design change that would “cross the college-university divide” in Ontario. Finally, the study considers whether Seneca’s institutional positioning during this period has contributed to Ontario’s evolving postsecondary system design.

8.1 Key Findings

Based on the evidence presented in this study, Seneca’s rationale and intent in seeking formal differentiation (and eventual polytechnic status) was to increase access, choice and degree-completion options for Ontario’s postsecondary students. The findings indicate that Seneca made considerable progress towards each of the commitments outlined in its formal Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreement, including the development and delivery of several baccalaureate degree programs; the creation of an institutional infrastructure and research policies as required to support applied research initiatives and access Tri-Council funding; the establishment of several applied research partnerships with business and industry; and a significant increase in the number and range of transfer agreements and pathways both within and beyond Seneca. Seneca’s (and others’) efforts during the study period towards polytechnic designations was the one area of differentiation where the college was less successful. The college’s polytechnic goals became an implicit part of the differentiation journey subsequent to the formal Accountability Agreement, but were seen to be integral to the realization of Seneca’s differentiation goals.
This thesis concludes that the college’s ability to achieve polytechnic status during the study period, and more broadly, to influence system design change in Ontario, was impacted by several factors. A number of gaps and misunderstandings in rationale and intent were identified, most notably regarding what “kind” of institution Seneca was aspiring to become, and what polytechnic status would really mean. This research also identified an overall lack of support and buy-in (and in some cases, trust) among non-polytechnic colleges; some underlying competitive dynamics between the Ontario universities and the CAATs; a loss of momentum and focus caused by turnover of key champions within government and in the institutions (including a change in presidency at Seneca); a change in government and lack of political support for previous government initiatives; and a perceived power relationship between the then Liberal government and university leaders that resulted in unwillingness by government to tackle system reforms.

The evidence also suggests that Ontario’s binary postsecondary system design creates a firm and persistent backdrop against which system reform is contextualized by some policy actors, either consciously or subconsciously. During this study period, potential changes in the relationships and roles of the two distinct sectors in Ontario’s postsecondary design, colleges and universities, were seen by some to be threatening to individual institutions and to the stability of the system overall. The evidence further suggests that any future postsecondary reforms that might be perceived to alter the strength and clarity of the binary structure would be resisted, if not actively protested, by policy actors in both sectors.

Finally, based on the evidence, Seneca’s increased differentiation during the study period has had an important, ongoing impact on postsecondary education in Ontario by
expanding degree-granting options for students, and providing significant leadership in the area of college-university pathways and partnerships, and improved credit transfer. The evidence also points to the college’s role in increasing public-private partnerships in applied research on behalf of the system. More substantive changes to Ontario’s system design, however, beyond the current binary model would require a bold government vision and leadership, direct government intervention and strong political support. These findings are consistent with the aforementioned conclusions of a Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario report (HEQCO, 2013) which focused on diversity in Ontario’s Colleges, and in which the authors note: “...a key decision government will need to consider regarding differentiation is the utility of maintaining the strong college-university dichotomy that now exists in Ontario” (p. 4).

8.2 Contributions to Scholarly Literature

This research contributes to the literature on system diversity and differentiation, and specifically those aspects related to the processes of differentiation, institutional convergence and isomorphism as described by Birnbaum (1993), Trow (1995), Codling and Meek (2006), Van Vught (2007), Morphew (2009), Fallis (2012), and Piché (2013). More specifically, the reactions of various policy actors in Ontario to Seneca’s (and other colleges’) polytechnic goals, specifically, offer important insights into the dynamics of institutional isomorphism and convergence in a binary system. As noted by Morphew, “(l)eaders promoting greater differentiation at the system level, or innovation at the institutional level, must be aware of the incentive for homogenization on the part of college and university actors and create disincentives (or contrary incentives) to thwart these outcomes” (2009, p. 263).
8.2.1 A college perspective. This research also contributes to the literature by broadening our understanding of college motivation and institutional intent, as colleges seek greater differentiation in a binary system. Most of the literature in this area has not focused on the college sector, but rather, on the perspective of universities (or a broader, postsecondary system perspective) in examining diversity and differentiation processes. This research makes an important contribution by offering an Ontario college perspective, telling a story that is unique in this context.

The thesis focuses on the ways in which Seneca became different than other higher education institutions in Ontario (and/or more similar to some) in an attempt to increase system diversity, in order to increase access to higher education opportunities for Ontario's postsecondary students. The evidence indicates that Seneca changed over time in a “natural”, “evolutionary” way, in response to changing demands and expectations of students as well as employers, reflective of Birnbaum’s (1983) use of the natural selection model for studying changes in populations of institutions over time (p.27). Seneca’s documented differentiation goals during the study period were built on the foundation of that natural evolution, and were stimulated by a system design that was seen to be lacking in external diversity (i.e. beyond the historic binary divide), at a time when environmental forces were demanding increased access and choice for students -- leaving a perceived gap or “niche” that the college believed needed to be addressed.

The findings regarding Seneca’s motivation and rationale for seeking increased differentiation support Stadtman’s (1980) argument that a more diverse higher education system enables that system, collectively, to respond to varied student profiles, academic backgrounds, learning styles and capacities, and Skolnik’s (2012) conclusions that college
baccalaureate programming increases student access, choice and mobility. Further, Seneca’s two-pronged strategy of pursuing increased, independent degree offerings alongside increased degree pathways and partnerships with universities, reinforces Birnbaum’s (1983) conclusion that the benefits of a diverse postsecondary system are optimized when institutional diversity is coupled with system integration that facilitates credit transfer and mobility. Jones (2009) notes that where the boundaries between colleges and universities have become “blurred” in other jurisdictions, this has often been motivated by an interest in increasing accessibility to higher education, and especially to degree programs, for non-traditional student populations that otherwise would not typically attend university. Consistent with Jones and others, including Baker’s (2009) description of Mount Royal’s institutional transformation in Alberta, the findings in this research indicate that Seneca’s pursuit of increased differentiation and polytechnic status during the study period was characterized by a ‘continuity in underlying purpose and values” that enabled the institution to embrace an expanded academic mandate while staying true to its student-focused, historical access roots.

The evidence in this thesis suggests an important alternative to the more frequently concluded “status argument” found in much of the differentiation literature, by revealing an institution that sought to be different in order to further the access goals of the system, and to address the needs of students. The suggestion that an institution’s motivation for seeking institutional differentiation might be driven more by student needs and system goals than by institutional status is further reinforced by evidence that indicates that Seneca was disinterested in university status as a differentiation goal.

8.2.2 A hierarchy of institutions. The tendency towards “de-differentiation” or
convergence in postsecondary education is reinforced, according to Codling and Meek (2006) and others, when there is a perceived hierarchy among the institutions within the system. The authors speak of the “inevitability of institutions which perceive themselves as being of lower status ...seeking to raise their status by becoming more like their more illustrious alternatives” (p. 10). A cited “second tier” or “poor cousin” image associated with the Ontario Colleges in general, supports the assumption by some that Seneca’s (and others’) polytechnic aspirations during the study period were most likely motivated by status. As noted above, however, the evidence indicates that Seneca was driven as much, if not more, by a historical institutional value that sought to increase postsecondary access, choice and mobility for students through system design change.18

Much of the literature on diversity in a binary structure speaks about the tendency for isomorphism between the two sectors, (most typically in the form of academic drift by colleges and vocational drift by universities), and within the university sector (e.g. academic drift by undergraduate universities into graduate studies and research), unless there is government intervention or direction to prevent it (Codling and Meek, 2006; van Vught, 2007; Fallis, 2012). A number of scholars and policy actors (see Trick, 2005; Piché, 2013; and others) have focused specifically on the political dynamics that have led to decreasing diversity among Ontario’s universities, for example, since the 1980s. This thesis

18 In a recently published book edited by Cantwell et al. (2018) and building on Trow (1973), High Participation Systems in Higher Education examines comparative, global trends and societal impact as participation in higher education expands to near-universal levels. Supported to varying degrees by case analyses of conditions in eight countries including Canada, the editors and contributing authors propose (as one of several related propositions) that the combination of expanding participation in high participation systems, along with increased competition for status and scarce resources, will typically lead to increased vertical stratification, decreased horizontal diversity, a convergence of institutional mission (decreased system diversity) - and a reproduction of the prevailing patterns of societal inequality that universal opportunity strives to address (pp. 106 – 109).
offers initial insights into the dynamics that may have contributed to a parallel isomorphism within the Ontario college sector.

The findings suggest that there was a perceived hierarchy of institutions both across and within each of the two sectors in Ontario’s binary system, which likely constrained Seneca’s (and others) efforts towards a new institutional designation. Consistent with van Vught’s (2007) “reputation race” theory and Pizarro Milian et al.’s. (2016) discussion of isomorphism, where institutions in either sector perceived themselves (or feared they were perceived) as being lower on the status hierarchy than others within their sector, these institutions may have been motivated by an underlying desire to protect or better their respective positions both within and across the sector boundaries. The “reputation race” lens is a useful one through which to consider the objections of the non-differentiated colleges to the polytechnic agenda, and the resistance by some universities that may have felt threatened by Seneca and other ITALs that were perceived to be in the top echelons of the college sector. As articulated by one senior college official in describing the sentiment among other institutional leaders: “I don’t want my brand to suffer, because you’ve taken on a different name…”

Ironically, in the case of the Ontario colleges, the resultant tendency towards “intra-sector” convergence contradicts the very premise of a sector that was designed to be responsive to the diverse and ever-changing educational and training needs of each local community.

**8.2.3 The interaction between government and institutions.** As noted by Jones (2013), increasing diversity within the university sector in Ontario would require government policy that would *reduce or restrict* mandates among some institutions; in the
college sector, in order for institutional diversity to be increased, government would have to take steps to *expand* the mandate of some institutions, with regulations/policies to prevent others from following (p.112). Other than the original enabling legislation that allowed limited degree granting and ITAL status for some colleges, it appears that the government was unwilling to do either during the period of this study.

Trick’s (2005) and Piché’s (2013) studies offer valuable insights into the dynamics and relationships between Ontario’s universities and government as pressures mounted for system design reform during their respective study periods. Piché concludes that resistance to structural change among Ontario’s postsecondary institutions stems from a “desire to have policies that treat everyone equitably” (p. 176).

As articulated by one university president and cited by Piché: “We always avoid issues that would allow a particular institution or group of institutions to emerge into a dominant position...” (p. 165). Based on the evidence in this study, it seems that the Ontario Colleges, too, may favour a structure that allows them to remain as a sector of “like institutions” with equal treatment for all by government (e.g. policies, funding, mandate), rather than evolve into a diverse sector with common roots and values but differentiated mandates and status. As noted by one senior executive from the college sector, “...I think there were some colleges, and particularly some presidents in the system, who feared getting left behind”. Given the limitations of this thesis, this is a line of enquiry worth exploring further.

**8.2.4 What’s in a name?** This thesis concludes that, subsequent to the enabling legislation, policy actors in Ontario struggled to reconcile the evolution of a new “type” of institution with an expanded academic mandate alongside their historical assumptions
regarding (or predisposition for) Ontario’s binary postsecondary design. This challenge appears to have become magnified when the differentiated colleges decided to resurrect an earlier, and more aggressive, differentiation goal -- an institutional nomenclature and designation as “polytechnics”.

The new type of institution envisioned by Seneca (and other ITALs), was a close match to the descriptions of “a new type of institution” proposed for Ontario by several scholars and policy advisors in subsequent years: teaching-focused, offering undergraduate degrees, accessible to under-served populations, committed to transferability, focused on applied rather than academic research (See Clark et al., 2009; Jones and Skolnik, 2009; Clark et al., 2011; Fallis, 2013 and others). Where there was divergence, it seems, was in the proposed positioning or categorization of this new type of institution within Ontario’s binary system: as a differentiated university, a differentiated college, or in some other classification, i.e. a new “third” sector. Indeed, in Jones and Skolnik (2009), the authors suggest that a handful of Ontario colleges were already close, at that time, to the kind of institution they believed was needed in the province to increase diversity, arguing that the capacity and readiness to offer a wide range of baccalaureate level programs should be the main, differentiating factor. The result would be a potential “third sector” that would continue to offer a balance of certificate, diploma and degree-level programming, increasing access and opportunity in the province (p. 30). Despite the striking similarities to Seneca’s (along with Humber’s and Sheridan’s) differentiation vision, it is interesting that there was little public, formalized support for the new institutional types proposed by Jones and Skolnik (or others) from among the Ontario colleges themselves, differentiated or not. The findings in this study suggest that this may have been because the polytechnic
identifier became the defining “label” for the colleges’ ambitions during that period – and policy actors across both sectors were unable (or unwilling) to recognize the similarities between those polytechnic ambitions and the other, proposed institutional models, because of that label and the various assumptions associated with it.

As an interesting aside, Doern (2008) notes that BCIT in British Columbia is legislatively an institute of technology but refers to itself as a polytechnic institute for branding purposes on its website and in its planning documents. Indeed, according to Doern, BCIT has successfully “used the polytechnic label to enhance its brand and also to position itself nationally and internationally as well as in its provincial home base” (p. 13).

Based on the findings of this thesis, Seneca (along with others) was seeking a recognizable branding for its differentiated status (i.e. more recognizable than ITAL and one that would differentiate it from both the CAATs and universities), but the word “polytechnic” proved to be politically problematic -- bumping up against Ontario’s binary system paradigm and the institutional identities (and coveted intra-sector equality) embedded therein. The evidence further suggests that, had these polytechnic-like institutions focused on a different nomenclature for their differentiated status, up to and including a specialized (e.g. teaching focused, undergraduate) university designation, this may have resulted in a less challenging journey perhaps because it would have been less disruptive to Ontario’s historical, binary structure. As articulated by former Seneca president Rick Miner, however, pursuing a university designation would have been inconsistent with the college’s culture at the time, and with its rationale and intent in seeking greater differentiation -- and therefore, a “hard sell” among the internal community, including the Board of Governors. It is somewhat ironic, he acknowledges, that
it may have been an easier sell, and a more palatable outcome, for the broader higher education community.

8.3 Further Research

There are several related research enquiries that are beyond the scope of this study but would be both helpful and timely in contributing to the ongoing system design discourse in Ontario. Building on the findings of this study, one area that warrants further investigation is how (or if) the relationship among Ontario’s colleges, and between the colleges and government, has changed as the mandate of some colleges has expanded. This thesis suggests that some heightened, hierarchical dynamics are emerging within the college sector as it faces increased sector differentiation and potential system transformation. By examining the nature of these relationships, we will be in a better position to understand their impact on higher education policy and system design.

Given the limitations identified in Trick (2009) and Piché (2013), it would also be valuable to examine in more detail how the relationship between government and Ontario’s universities may have influenced system design reform (including the polytechnic discourse) immediately following Trick’s study period and up to current days. The evidence in this thesis suggests that a “dominant paradigm” about Ontario’s binary system design, its desirability over other models, and the foundational role of the CAATs therein (as vocational, non-academic institutions) may have shaped, or indeed restricted, the range of system reform options considered by policy actors during this study period. In addition, building on Piché’s conclusions regarding Ontario universities, the evidence suggests that (at least some) Ontario colleges would prefer to protect the current binary system, where the institutional hierarchy is defined solely by the college-university divide,
rather than introduce a new diversity in the college sector that might create institutional inequities. Further examination of this phenomenon and its persistence in both sectors, despite social, economic and political pressures for structural change, would be useful to future system design discussions.

Finally, this thesis provides a limited overview of Seneca’s institutional transformation as a result of its differentiation strategy, based on document analysis and perceptions of senior executives, (internal and external). It would be valuable to examine the perceptions of a broader population of stakeholders, including faculty, students and employers. The impact of Seneca’s institutional changes on the internal culture and identity would also be worth examining in more detail.

8.4 Potential Policy Implications for Ontario

In the years leading up to the PECE Act (2000) and the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act (2002), and for two decades thereafter, policy actors in Ontario have engaged in discussions, consultations and debates around system transformation and institutional differentiation. The policy discourse around polytechnic designations, specifically, in the late 1990s was compelling enough for the then Conservative government to initiate a process for formal differentiation among the colleges in 2002. (The evidence in this study suggests that some colleges’ had submitted polytechnic proposals well before this.) The subsequent “Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreements”, negotiated and co-signed between Seneca (and some other individual colleges) and the incoming Liberal government in 2004, suggest that the Liberals were willing to accept the former government’s commitment to differentiation in the college sector and, based on the evidence in this enquiry, they saw this as a means to increase access to baccalaureate
degrees and options for students beyond those presented by the status quo.

The backtracking from potential polytechnic designations for the newly approved, differentiated colleges, to the alternative offering of an “ITAL” nomenclature, however, was one of the first signals that Ontario was hesitant to move forward with “bold” reforms – preferring, instead, not to upset the historical binary system, nor its stakeholders. The ongoing resistance to polytechnic designations by both sectors, despite growing momentum and pressure for change during Deputy Steenkamp’s tenure, sheds further light on the political dynamics in play at the time. (The parallel discourse surrounding university differentiation during the same decade and the strong resistance by most universities, reinforces those dynamics.)

As noted earlier, the government released the province’s first formal Differentiation Policy Framework in November, 2013 (almost immediately after this study period), “setting the foundation for broader postsecondary transformation” (MTCU, 2013). The intent of the new policy framework, as articulated in the Deputy’s backgrounder, was to increase access and choice for students while benefiting from the differentiated but “complementary” roles that each of Ontario’s institutions could play (Ontario, 2013). This was a clear signal that the then Liberal government continued to see institutional differentiation as an important goal for the province. The framework included a policy statement, a vision for postsecondary education, and guidelines and principles for operationalizing this vision through Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA’s) with all colleges and universities. The SMA’s were intended to state clearly how each institution’s mission and activities would align with Ontario’s vision and goals as articulated in the Differentiation Framework – with the promise of performance metrics and incentive
funding to follow, to ensure that the new policy had “teeth”. The inclusion of an accountability framework in the government’s differentiation strategy suggested that government understood that, without mandated direction and accountability measures, its differentiation goals would not be attainable.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the ongoing discourse around college differentiation during this study period contributed, at least in part, to the eventual announcement of a broader differentiation policy framework for Ontario, finally, in 2013. One could also argue that the early Differentiated College Mandate Accountability Agreements negotiated between government and each ITAL were a precursor to the current SMA process. The context, process and specifics surrounding the early College agreements, however, were quiet ones – a well kept “secret”, off the radar of many policy actors in the province. Based on the evidence in this study, this was perhaps the safest way for government to minimize negative reactions from other colleges and universities.

Whether the current SMA process will, indeed, serve to increase, and sustain, system diversity in Ontario remains to be seen. It will, indeed, require “bold” government measures to ensure restriction of mandate among some institutions, and to facilitate expansion of mandate for others (Jones, 2013). In Spring, 2018, Ontario experienced a change in government back to the Progressive Conservatives -- the same government originally responsible for the enabling differentiation legislation (PECE Act, 2000; Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts & Technology Act, 2002), and the same government that had engaged actively in the polytechnic policy discourse in the late 1990s.

Early in 2018, presumably in response to renewed advocacy by some college presidents (including President Agnew), to have the question of polytechnic designations
revisited in Ontario, the then Liberal government appointed an independent consultant, Dr. David Trick, to review the issue and provide advice (Ontario, 2018). Unfortunately, when the changeover in government occurred later that Spring, Trick’s assignment was ended. According to some college practitioners (and participants in this study), the current Conservative government has made it very clear that it has “zero interest” in the polytechnic agenda. In addition, significant capital investments in new college-university partnerships in Ontario have also been cancelled.

A cynical view could interpret these recent directions as solely political; in less than a year, the new Conservative government reversed or cancelled several initiatives introduced by the previous Liberals. The rejection of the polytechnic discourse, however, seems particularly ironic, given that formal college differentiation and the surrounding polytechnic momentum was a Conservative initiative in the first place -- and one that the Liberal government was slow to warm up to, based on the findings of this thesis, for two successive terms in office and throughout this study period.

The journey towards increased system diversity in Ontario has been a long and persistent one, but with the introduction of a formal differentiation policy in 2013, it appeared to finally take a much-anticipated turn in the “right” direction - defined, at least, as a direction consistent with the conclusions of many scholars and informed advisors engaged in the ongoing policy discourse, as well as with the trends in other jurisdictions facing similar challenges. Once again, however, it appears that meaningful policy discourse around system reform will be stalled in favour of other government priorities – and politics.

Amid promises to find significant savings in the public sector, the Conservatives
have sent clear signals that this government is interested in charting its own course, rather than accepting the directions and commitments made by the previous Liberal government. It will be interesting to see whether higher education system transformation emerges as a priority agenda item for the Conservatives, if not as an access or capacity strategy then as a fiscal one, and whether this government will be willing to challenge the primacy of the binary system discourse and the political dynamics surrounding it, in this context. Based on the findings of this thesis, it seems a safe bet that there will be objections, public and otherwise, to any reform which is perceived to threaten the relative positioning of other institutions. This study points to some critical questions around institutional differentiation within and across the two sides of Ontario’s college-university “divide”, including whether a binary system design continues to be the best one to serve an increasingly diverse postsecondary demographic, and society in general - or whether it is, instead, simply the path of least resistance.

Acknowledging that the system changes that are necessary in Ontario will be both difficult and controversial, Clark et al (2009) concluded even then that: “...the time is right for sustained government action, supported by enlightened institutional leadership, to guide Ontario's post-secondary education system through its next transformation” (p. 203). Based on the “on again, off again” story of polytechnic momentum that is revealed through this research enquiry, it seems reasonable to anticipate that system transformation discourse will resurface in Ontario in future years, including proposals for new institutional

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designations such as polytechnic, if not by name then by nature of the institutions and their positioning. As articulated by one external participant who brought broad policy experience to this study, “In politics, timing is everything”.

In underscoring the urgent need for system leadership in Ontario’s postsecondary reform, Clark et al. (2011) reference the vision, wisdom and courage of early institutional leaders in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. presidents of York University, University of Toronto) as well as government leaders Premier John Robarts and Minister Bill Davis (University Affairs), noting that “…they had the courage to begin” (p. 242). According to Clark et al., the pressures for, and benefits of, system reform in Ontario warrant a “major public policy initiative” going forward:

Governments need to take a broader view...It is not too late for Ontario to create teaching-oriented institutions that provide student-focused education that provides more options for a diverse student population, at a cost that is more affordable than the traditional model. Just as the new universities and colleges created in the 1950s and 1960s proved to be a lasting legacy, so too could the creation of new institutions today alter the shape of higher education in Ontario for decades to come. (p. 142)

“The new institution being proposed will avoid the constraints of old. It will be neither a college nor a university” (Miner, 2002).
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Data Sources Used to Address Each Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Proposed Data Source(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overarching Questions:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially with Seneca presidents and other senior admin; government/policy officials. <strong>Specific documents:</strong> Seneca’s Business Case for Differentiation; Miner’s “Leading the Way Again” discussion paper; strategic and business plans, internal publications; Deputy’s correspondence and approved differentiation agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was Seneca's intent and rationale in deciding to pursue increased differentiation during the period 2001 – 2012? (How did the college’s institutional positioning during this period contribute to Ontario’s evolving system design?)</td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially with colleagues from other CAATs and Univs. <strong>Specific documents:</strong> Seneca’s annual business plans, annual reports, institutional research data; publications from Seneca and other institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How did Seneca College evolve during the period from 2001 to 2012 as a result of its differentiation? (How did the college’s institutional positioning during this period differentiate Seneca from other Ontario postsecondary institutions?)</td>
<td><strong>Internal interviews</strong> especially with President Miner, President Agnew and other current/former senior administrators; <strong>Specific documents:</strong> Seneca’s Business Case for Differentiation; Miner’s “Leading the Way Again” discussion paper; strategic and business plans, internal publications; Deputy’s correspondence and approved differentiation agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What was Seneca hoping to achieve?</td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially with Seneca presidents, senior admin and members of the Access and Degree-Granting Task Forces. <strong>Specific documents:</strong> strategic and business plans; Business Case for Differentiation; approved differentiation agreement, Seneca publications and correspondence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How was Seneca’s journey towards increased institutional differentiation impacted by the college’s historical roots and institutional identity?</td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially with Seneca presidents, senior admin and government officials, other CAAT and university colleagues. <strong>Specific documents:</strong> Business Case for Differentiation, strategic and business plans, annual reports, publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did Seneca’s involvement in credit transfer and university collaboration impact its institutional positioning related to differentiation? (How was Seneca’s credit transfer/pathways agenda perceived by policy actors, both internal and external, in the context of institutional differentiation?)</td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially with Seneca senior administrators, government officials, other CAAT and university colleagues. <strong>Specific documents:</strong> Business Case for Differentiation, strategic and business plans, annual reports, publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What impact did Seneca’s role in the delivery of college baccalaureate degrees have on the College's institutional</td>
<td><strong>Internal and external interviews</strong>, especially Seneca presidents, senior admin, government officials, other members of Polytechnics Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>Proposed Data Source(s)</td>
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<td>positioning related to differentiation? (How was the college's degree-granting strategy perceived by policy actors, both internal and external, in the context of institutional differentiation?)</td>
<td>(i.e. differentiated colleges); VPA colleagues from other CAATs. Specific documents: publications from Polytechnics Canada, business plans, annual reports, Seneca’s Business Case for Differentiation, approved differentiation agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What impact did the external political environment have on the decisions Seneca made in its institutional journey towards increased differentiation?</td>
<td>Internal and external interviews, especially Seneca presidents, colleagues from other CAATs and Ontario universities; government officials; other members of Polytechnics Canada (i.e. other differentiated colleges); Specific documents: publications and position papers from Colleges Ontario; Council of Ontario Universities; recent Ontario literature on system design; HEQCO publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How did the change in presidential leadership at Seneca between 2001 and 2012 impact Seneca's institutional journey during this period?</td>
<td>Internal and external interviews especially President Miner and President Agnew, government officials, senior Seneca administrators, colleagues from other CAATs and universities. Specific documents: Business Case for Differentiation; Annual Business Plans; internal communications (Seneca executives) and personal correspondence (Miner).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How significant was the ongoing question of what &quot;kind&quot; of institution Seneca was aspiring to become?</td>
<td>Internal and external interviews especially Seneca presidents, senior administration, colleagues from other CAATs and universities, government officials, other policy actors. Specific documents: Board of Governors' agendas, presentations; Business Case for Differentiation; Annual Business Plans; publications from Polytechnics Canada; internal communications (Seneca executives) and personal correspondence (Miner).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How successful was Seneca in achieving its differentiation goals? (What conditions/factors might have changed the outcome?)</td>
<td>Internal and external interviews especially Seneca presidents, senior Seneca administration, colleagues from other CAATs and universities, government officials, other policy actors. Specific documents: Annual reports, Seneca institutional data, Colleges Ontario and Council of Ontario Universities, HEQCO publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How did the college's institutional positioning during this period contribute to Ontario's evolving system design?</td>
<td>Internal and external interviews; Specific documents: Government announcements and media releases, Colleges Ontario and Council of Ontario Universities publications, recent Ontario literature.</td>
</tr>
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APPENDIX B: Categories of Key Informants for Interviews

Category 1: Seneca presidents (current and immediate former)

Invitations to participate were issued to the current president (D. Agnew) and the most recent past president (R. Miner) as key policy actors during the study period.

Category 2: Seneca senior administrators who were actively involved in planning, supporting and/or implementing new degrees and/or other aspects of differentiation

Invitations to participate were issued first to current and former members of the Deans' Committee (likely to be most informed on the research topic) and then to members of the current and former Senior Executive and/or the Degree Implementation Committee (including chairs and directors) as required to complete 6 - 8 interviews from this category.

Category 3 - External colleagues and policy actors from other Ontario colleges and universities

Invitations to participate were issued to presidents and vice-presidents academic (current or former) of other Ontario colleges (including some selected from other differentiated colleges) as well as presidents or VPA's/Provosts (current or former) of Ontario universities, as required to complete 4 - 5 interviews from this category.

Category 4 - External colleagues and policy actors from government and other higher education organizations

Invitations to participate were issued to senior-level government officials and policy managers, as well as current and/or former senior administrator(s) from Colleges Ontario, the Ontario Council of Ontario Universities, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) or its predecessor, CUCC) and/or the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) as required to complete 4 - 5 interviews from this category.
APPENDIX C: Interview Guide for Key Informant Interviews*

*Template adapted with permission and as appropriate from Interview Guide for Faculty. (Janzen and Watson, 2009).

Opening: Introductions and thank-you to participant for agreeing to be interviewed for this case study; responses to any questions about the Information Letter or the Consent Form previously signed by participant etc.

Preamble Script (As read out to each interviewee):

“This interview is expected to last no longer than 90 minutes in duration, and will consist of open-ended questions that do not have any “right” or “wrong” answers. Depending on the direction the interview takes, I may ask some additional questions for clarification and/or in order to probe a particular line of thought further. In addition, you will have the opportunity to make any additional comments or provide perspectives on related issues that you identify during our discussion. Please note that, if there is any question(s) that you are uncomfortable answering, you have the right to choose not to answer it. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped so as to facilitate data analysis and review afterwards. Do you have any questions or concerns about the Interview protocol?”

Interview Questions

Note: Not all questions were asked of all interviewees, and some lines of questioning were expanded based on data and meaning that emerged as a result of earlier stages in the data collection process. Examples of probing questions that evolved during the process are provided below, with specific triggers and prompts identified in advance as appropriate. The specific Research Questions to which each interview question was intended to contribute are identified in brackets.

1. When did you first become aware that Seneca was seeking to become “differentiated” institution? (RQ # 1, 2)

   Probe: How did you learn this? What were the indicators that told you this?

2. What was your understanding of Seneca’s differentiated goal(s)? (RQ #1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)

   Probe: What was your understanding of what this meant for the college? Were these goal(s) clear? Consistent or changing over time? Too modest, too aggressive or reasonable?
Probe: If applicable, what were the underlying causes of a lack of clarity, consistency and/or changes over time? Why do you think the college was too modest (or aggressive?)? What was the driving force behind this?

3. How did Seneca’s pursuit of increased institutional differentiation impact your daily operations, activities, interactions with others and/or decision-making? (RQ #1, 2)

Probe: Can you give examples of some institutional decisions or changes (e.g. academic, administrative, structural or resource allocation decisions) that were made as a result of the college’s differentiation strategy? Was the motivation behind these decisions well understood and accepted internally?

4. Based on your understanding, what was Seneca attempting to differentiate itself “to” and “from”? (RQ #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

Probe: Was the college attempting to differentiate itself from its historical college roots? From other Ontario CAATs? Other Ontario PSE’s? Would you please explain why you think this?

Probe: In your opinion, was Seneca striving to become more “like” any other institution(s) in Ontario, or was Seneca’s goal an independent one (and/or an independent path to getting there), i.e. one that was unique to Seneca?

5. Were the college’s differentiation goals complementary or contradictory to its historical values and identity? Why do you think this? (RQ #1,2,3,4,5)

Probe: How did the college’s historical CAAT roots and commitment to postsecondary “access” impact the college’s progress towards differentiation?

Probe: Was the internal culture conducive to a change in institutional mandate and mission? Why or why not?

6. In your opinion, what if any impact did Seneca’s actions and decisions related to differentiation have on the other Ontario CAATs? On Seneca’s relationship and interactions with the other Ontario CAATs? (RQ # 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9)

Probe: How did the actions of other CAATs that were seeking differentiation impact Seneca? And those that were not? Can you give some specific examples?

7. In your opinion, what impact did Seneca’s relationship and interaction with Ontario universities have on Seneca’s differentiation journey during the study period? (RQ#1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9)

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Probe: How did partnership dynamics and/or related successes, barriers or tensions impact Seneca’s decisions and actions regarding differentiation? Can you give some specific examples?

Probe: How do you think the universities in Ontario perceived the differentiation goals of some Ontario colleges? Was there anything different about their perceptions of Seneca’s goals?

8. In your opinion, how did the actions and policy decisions of the government impact Seneca’s differentiation goals and strategy? (RQ# 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10)

Probe: Can you give some specific examples?

9. During the period of this study, Seneca was active, both locally and provincially, in promoting improved credit transfer for students wishing to move between colleges and universities. How did Seneca’s role and involvement in this area impact its institutional positioning related to differentiation? (RQ# 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Probe: How do you think Seneca’s credit transfer and pathways agenda ‘fit’ with its differentiation goals? Was there a contradiction or conflict in this regard? Why do you think this? Do you think colleagues at other colleges and/or universities agreed with your perspective?

Probe: How did Seneca’s role in credit transfer impact perceptions among other stakeholders relative to institutional identity; compatibility with the College’s degree-granting agenda; compatibility with its commitment to accessibility, educational quality?

10. Although a handful of colleges received degree-granting authority at the same time, Seneca was the first of the Ontario colleges to accept students into a standalone baccalaureate degree; one of only three colleges in the province to develop and submit a critical mass of successful proposals for additional degree-granting approval over the period of this study (HEQCO, 2013); and one of the first to develop collaborative, applied research initiatives to complement its program offerings (e.g. CONII, CFI funding). What impact did Seneca’s leadership in the delivery of college baccalaureate degrees and applied research initiatives have on the college’s differentiation journey and its institutional positioning? (RQ# 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

Probe: How did you perceive Seneca’s degree-granting strategy in the context of its credit transfer agenda and differentiation goals? Were these compatible? Do you think other stakeholders agreed?

Probe: How did Seneca’s role in degree-granting and applied research impact perceptions among other stakeholders relative to educational quality;
institutional identity; compatibility with the College’s pathways agenda?

Probe: How did Seneca’s commitment to increased degree offerings ‘fit’ with its historical commitment to access? Was this relationship widely understood and accepted?

Probe: What role did Seneca’s applied research efforts and achievements play in its differentiation journey and perceptions thereof?

11. What impact did the change in presidency during the period of this study have on Seneca’s differentiation journey? (RQ# 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Probe: Was there any noticeable shift in the college’s differentiation goals or strategy as a result of the change in presidency? What were the indicators that told you this? Can you please provide some examples to elaborate?

Probe: From your perspective, what were the operational and/or strategic consequences of this change in direction (related to differentiation) either for Seneca or for the system?

Probe: How important was the “polytechnic” agenda in terms of Seneca’s differentiation journey? What were the operational, strategic and/or political consequences of Seneca’s shift away from the polytechnic agenda with the change in presidency (internally and/or externally)?

Probe: What’s in a name? How significant was Seneca’s strategy of not identifying a consistent, explicit, preferred change in institutional nomenclature or classification (e.g. ITAL, polytechnic, university) as one of its differentiation goals? What was the impact of this?

12. In your opinion, how successful was the college in achieving its differentiation goals during the study period? (RQ #1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Probe: From your perspective, what were the barriers (internal and external) facing Seneca in its differentiation journey? What internal and/or external forces were acting against Seneca’s differentiation goals? What makes you think this?

Probe: What factors/circumstances might have resulted in a different outcome for Seneca? Did Seneca need anything in particular from the government in order to achieve its differentiation goals?

13. In your opinion, what impact (if any) did Seneca’s goals, strategies, and actions related to institutional differentiation have on overall higher education
system design and/or policy in Ontario during the study period? Can you provide some specific indicators to support your conclusion? (RQ #1, 2, 9, 10)
APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Letter (Non-presidents’ version)

OISE
ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

October 20, 2016

To the participants in this study:

The purpose of the study is to provide an historical examination of Seneca College’s journey towards institutional differentiation between 2001 and 2012, following the formal invitation by then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to the Ontario colleges in 2001, to propose a differentiated strategy in response to the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act (PECEA, 2000). Using documentary analysis and interviews with key participants, the thesis will attempt to develop a deeper understanding of Seneca’s goals in embarking on this journey, and related strategic decisions and priorities established therein. The influence of Seneca’s institutional positioning on system design in Ontario at the time, and the simultaneous, evolving relationships between Ontario’s universities and the Ontario CAATs, will also be considered. The focus is on postsecondary system design in Ontario, and Seneca’s positioning within that system.

Approximately thirteen to sixteen interview participants are being selected from among mid/senior administrators who are likely to have knowledge of, or who participated directly in, Seneca’s differentiation initiatives, strategies, policy development and/or implementation at that time. Interviewees will include both current and former administrators drawn from Seneca’s Deans’ Committee, the Degree Implementation Committee, and/or a number of other relevant Seneca committees; as well as current or former senior administrators from other higher education institutions in Ontario and/or other higher education agencies, organizations, government ministries. I especially hope to interview the two incumbent Seneca presidents during the research period.

This research enquiry will seek to increase understanding among the scholarly community of the dynamics of system design change from an institutional perspective. Given the current government attention to differentiation and strategic mandates, participants will benefit from the opportunity to contribute to evolving policy development discourse and/or capacity building in this context, and in so doing, increase access for postsecondary students beyond that currently provided by Ontario’s binary system design.

This research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Glen Jones of the
Department of Leadership in Higher and Adult Education at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data is being collected for the purposes of a PhD thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles.

The interview is expected to take between 60 and 75 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions about your perceptions and understanding of Seneca’s rationale and goal(s) in pursuing greater differentiation, and any impact you feel that the political environment, institutional values and culture, and changes in senior leadership at Seneca during the study period may have had on the college’s institutional positioning. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to your views, experiences, and the reasons you believe the things you do. It is my intention, with your permission, to audio-tape the interview and later transcribe it to paper; if you agree, there is an explicit sign-off below to so indicate. You have the option, however, of declining to have the interview taped, in which case I will take notes instead.

The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored in a locked cabinet in my home office. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. Seneca will be named as the subject of the study, as will the two incumbent presidents, subject to their informed consent. Except for the two presidents’ responses, all data will be merged in such a way that individual participants, their opinions, quotes and specific organizational affiliation cannot be traced back to you. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed four years after the completion of the study.

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and you may, at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process without consequence, penalty or judgment. At no time will value judgments will be placed on your responses nor will any evaluation be made of your performance as a practitioner. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it, and may request a summary of the findings of the study. In addition, an electronic copy of the final thesis will be kept in the University of Toronto Research Repository (T Space) at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [phone] or at [email address]. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Glen Jones at [phone] or [email]. Finally, if you have complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact either the Seneca Research Ethics Board at reb@senecacollege.ca (416-491-5050) or the U of T Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca (416-946-3273).

Thank you in advance for your participation.
By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name: ____________________________

Institutional or organizational affiliation (current or former):

______________________________

Signed: __________________________ Date: ____________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion:

__________

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio taped: __________

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Letter (Seneca Presidents’ version)

OISE
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

October 23, 2016

To the Seneca Presidents participating in this study:

The purpose of the study is to provide an historical examination of Seneca College’s journey towards institutional differentiation between 2001 and 2012, following the formal invitation by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to the Ontario colleges in 2001 to propose a differentiated strategy in response to the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act (PECEA, 2000). Using documentary analysis and interviews with key participants, the thesis will attempt to develop a deeper understanding of Seneca’s goals in embarking on this journey, and related strategic decisions and priorities established therein. The influence of Seneca’s institutional positioning on system design in Ontario at the time, and the simultaneous, evolving relationships between Ontario’s universities and the Ontario CAATs, will also be considered. The focus is on postsecondary system design in Ontario, and Seneca’s positioning within that system.

Approximately thirteen to sixteen interview participants are being selected from among mid/senior administrators who are likely to have knowledge of, or who participated directly in, Seneca’s differentiation initiatives, strategies, policy development and/or implementation at that time. Interviewees will include both current and former administrators drawn from Seneca’s Deans’ Committee and the Degree Implementation Committee, and a number of current or former senior administrators from other higher education institutions in Ontario and/or higher education agencies, organizations and government ministries. I especially hope to interview the two incumbent Seneca presidents during the research period.

This research enquiry will seek to increase understanding among the scholarly community of the dynamics of system design change from an institutional perspective. Given the current government attention to differentiation and strategic mandates, participants will benefit from the opportunity to contribute to evolving policy development discourse and/or capacity building in this context, and in so doing, potentially increase access for postsecondary students beyond that currently provided by Ontario’s binary system design.

This research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Glen Jones of the
Department of Leadership in Higher and Adult Education at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data is being collected for the purposes of a PhD thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles.

The interview is expected to last between 60 and 75 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions about Seneca's rationale and goal(s) in pursuing greater differentiation, and any impact you feel that the political environment, institutional values and culture, and changes in senior leadership at Seneca during the study period may have had on the college's institutional positioning. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to you speak about your views, experiences, and the reasons you believe the things you do.

It is my intention, with your permission, to audio-tape the interview and later transcribe it to paper; if you agree, there is an explicit sign-off below to so indicate. Alternatively, if you decline to have the interview taped, I will take notes instead.

Seneca will be named as the subject of this case study. For all interviewees except the current and previous Seneca presidents, the information will be reported in the final thesis in such a way that individual persons, their responses, direct quotes and specific organizational affiliation cannot be identified. As one of the two incumbent presidents during the period of this study, however, I anticipate that your identity will be transparent as a result of your responses to some questions (by virtue of the unique position you held at the college at that time). In addition, there may be some answers and quotes that I will want to attribute to you, with your permission, in order to assist in understanding the data. If you are comfortable proceeding with this understanding, there is an explicit sign-off below. Alternatively, you have the option of remaining anonymous and having your perspectives included in the broader category of “current and former senior Seneca administrators”.

The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location (locked cabinet) in my home office. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed four years after the completion of the study.

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and you may, at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process without consequence, penalty or judgment. At no time will value judgments will be placed on your responses. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study. In addition, an electronic copy of the final thesis will be kept in the University of Toronto Research Repository (T Space) at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [phone] or at [email address]. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Glen Jones at [phone] or [email address]. Finally, if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant in this study or if you have complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant,
please contact the U of T Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, and/or the Seneca REB at reb@senecacollege.ca or 416-491-5050.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Cindy Dundon Hazell
Ph.D. Candidate
Leadership in Higher and Adult Education
OISE/University of Toronto

Dr. Glen Jones.
Professor
Leadership in Higher and Adult Education
Dean, OISE/University of Toronto

By singing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name: ______________________________

Institutional or organizational affiliation (current or former):

__________________________________________________________________________________

Signed: ____________________________ Date: __________________

Please initial to confirm your understanding that your identity as the current or former president at Seneca may become transparent by your responses, and to confirm your willingness to have your perspectives and/or quotes attributed directly to you as appropriate: ______

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio taped: ______

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: ______

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.