

# JACFA NEWS

MARCH 2015

## EDITORIAL

### *A Modest Proposal for John Abbott 2020*

By Roy Fu- HPR

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JACFA  
GANERAL  
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I see John Abbott culture slowly but surely changing, and not necessarily for the better.

Early on in my CÉGEP career, roughly thirteen years ago, there came a moment when I had to choose between continuing my career at Abbott, or moving on to a different English CÉGEP where I also had hiring priority. I distinctly remember choosing Abbott because of its markedly different, more people-centered culture. The place felt less like an institution of anonymous individuals, and more like a village where people knew and cared about each other. Amongst colleagues, between teachers, support staff and administrators alike, there was a noticeably greater sense of collegiality.

In the intervening years, I have come to appreciate the fact that this more people-centered culture was not merely a product of people being kind, kind as they may all be. Rather, this culture could be attributed to the various institutional practices that recognized the contributions and professionalism of individuals, particularly teachers. In other words, the College was organized in such a way that teachers' input was valued. Via our departments, we had a lot of say in how things were done with respect to departmental budgets, pedagogy and scheduling that went above and beyond what was accorded in the Collective Agreement. Consequently we felt valued, because we *were* valued. In terms of employee recognition, it was the real kind, more than any "Employee Recognition Program" will ever be.

While I still see residual pockets of this John Abbott culture around campus, I am also seeing a significant and accelerated erosion of the institutional practices that have sustained it over the years. In its place we have seen the gradual implementation of a more bureaucratic culture, where decision-making is centralized, and rules take precedence over people.



JACFA teachers deliver their anti-austerity message to the office of local MNA Geoff Kelley, on February 24.

You can watch a video of this message on YouTube : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp8Pc\\_6lyuM&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp8Pc_6lyuM&feature=youtu.be)

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In the last couple years alone, we have seen various attempts to centralize and bureaucratically rationalize a host of well-functioning projects and/or organizations. For instance, last year the academic administration decided to “streamline” the student tutoring programs on campus. This resulted, in many cases, in students tutors being compensated with a reference letter, or with gift certificates that work out to roughly \$10 per hour, instead of their previous, cash wage of \$16 per hour plus benefits. It would surprise no one that several departments had trouble recruiting tutors after the policy change.

In other instances, we have seen the College assert centralized control of the college website. The College first disallowed departmental websites, and then after much “feedback,” now dictates the acceptable format and scope of content. Our colleagues invested significant time and effort building these websites and many were not even told they would be removed. Most recently, the College took away departmental control over office space. All office allocation decisions must now be approved by the Associate Deans. This was followed by department visits by the Dean team on a “fact finding mission” to ensure compliance with departmental policies and practices and the promise to return with “recommendations.” On the horizon, we have the prospect of centralized scheduling, currently being proposed by the draft document of the Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

In the classroom, we are seeing more and more rules and growing checklists being imposed by the College that do little to actually support teachers in improving their pedagogical practices, but do go a long way toward helping administrators tick off bureaucratic boxes. All this is done in the name of “quality assurance,” “continuous improvement,” and “in the interest of students” - implying teachers either do not have a clue about or are unwilling to act for students’ interests.

Bit by bit, we are moving away from a people-centered culture to a bureaucratic one.

### *Our past as our guide not our destination*

The point of my observation is not to wax nostalgic and call for a return to the “good old days.” A more informal, people-centered institutional culture is potentially subject to its own forms of problematic practices and abuses. Over the years, in my own department, I have witnessed my share of latter. But credit to the Humanities/Philosophy/Religion Department is due as we have come a long way in terms of transforming ourselves into a more democratic and transparent organization. Moreover, it should be duly noted that none of the positive reforms came as a result of edicts from management; they were brought about by the efforts of individual teachers who were empowered to push for change.

Instead, my reflections are meant to suggest that, as we look forward to the next five or ten years, we consider taking an approach that diverges from the current trend of centralization of power and bureaucratization. In this new direction, we could place the development of human relationships before the compilation and enforcement of rules; we could set up decision-making processes and consultative bodies that take into account all employees’ input, not only in name, but in practice; and in our decisions, we could be guided by the values of creativity, adaptability, and peer accountability, instead of uniformity—often promoted under the guise of “equity,” the endless drive for efficiency, and top down management. Above all, in this direction, we could remember that education, at its core, is a human enterprise, and not a mechanistic one, whose excellence cannot be guaranteed by the mere manipulation of data and administrative control. It should instead be encouraged by the fostering of personal growth, respect and dare I say it...caring ■

## A NEW/OLD VISION FOR EDUCATION AT ABBOTT

DEBBIE LUNNY, HPR

### GET AN OLD SCHOOL EDUCATION AT JAC

*Where teachers know their students' name*

*Where books and people matter*

*Where syllabi are road maps not contracts*

*Where face-to-face classroom learning is at the center of your education*

*Where the focus is on old school skills, such as reading, writing and arithmetic, only spelled properly*

### COME TO THE OLD SCHOOL AT JOHN ABBOTT!

*Get to know your teachers, classmates, and the staff!*

*Learn how to learn through discussing ideas, asking good questions, and solving difficult problems, together!*

## DOES DEMERS KNOW BEST?

*The Demers Report wants to reorganise the offer of courses in the college systems, to the detriment of General Education.*

By [Jean-Marc Beausoleil](#) -French and [Mark McGuire](#) -HPR

### 2020

Studies show that, if current trends continue, two jobs out of three will be of a technical nature by 2020. The Demers Report was put forward to help CÉGEPs adapt their offer of courses in view of this anticipated new reality. Containing ninety recommendations, the Demers Report wishes to accelerate the adaptation of technical programs to meet the ever-changing demands of the job market. In doing so, however, the Report also puts forward new concepts and ideas that seem to be direct attacks on General and Pre-university Education, not to mention the founding spirit of the CÉGEP system.

### GOOD

Some of the recommendations of the Report are very positive. Confronted by the fragile state of certain programs and even certain institutions in certain regions, including decline in enrolment caused by shrinking population, the Report suggests policies to facilitate student mobility. Students who agree to study at a CÉGEP in another region, for example, could receive scholarships.

Certain programs could also be made exclusive to certain regions, like media technologies at Jonquière. A single Internet portal for the offer of courses in all CÉGEPs could be created, permitting more efficient distribution of

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information to the general public.

### NOT SO GOOD

But many of the recommendations are imprecise and worrisome. The creation or promotion of many different diplomas- CECT (Certificat d'Enseignement Collégial Technique) or AET (Attestation d'Étude Collégiale) - appear to be shortcuts enabling technicians to be trained without having to take General Education courses (Humanities, English, French, Physical Education). This goes against the founding spirit of CÉGEPs and could mean decreasing workloads in General Education.

The prerequisites of certain other programs, like Math courses for Electronics program, are also put in question. The Demers Report even suggests the redefinition of RREC (Règlement sur le régime des études collégiales) to permit each establishment to replace ministerial competencies with its own individual competencies.

Although some believe this will give each CÉGEP more autonomy, it is perceived by FNEEQ as a direct attack on General Education. What is to become of Humanities if it is left to individual colleges to decide if it is important or not? And how can the director general of a particular college defend a course or many courses if economic pressure dictates otherwise?

The Report also states that "Continuing Education" is a very small portion of the global offer of CÉGEPs and will have to become more important in the future.

### ONLINE

"Distance learning" is presented in the Demers Report as a way to save certain programs and develop CÉGEPs in general. Distance learning already takes many forms in the CÉGEP system. Some courses are synchronized or "live": students in one CÉGEP class watch a teacher giving a course to another group in another CÉGEP. Some courses are asynchronous: students watch pre-recorded lessons given by teachers on their personal computers at home. Rosemont College generates 1.4 million dollars per year with its Dis-

tance Learning program, which employs non-unionized instructors. Questions of copyright are also unclear: to whom does the intellectual property featured in the recorded online courses belong? Thus, the deployment of Distance Learning is not necessarily good news for teachers.

### \$ 300,000

Instead of nurturing critical citizens, which is the first objective of CÉGEPs, the Demers Report wants to train workers that respond to the demands of the job market and to the needs of society in general. It even suggests that programs with immediate links to specific jobs of specific employers could receive more government grants. This is public money financing private industry.

It's also extremely short sighted. Public college education as we know it could be transformed to support the immediate and fleeting needs of industry. And what will happen when the inevitable industry shifts and shutdowns leave these highly specialized workers unemployed? Without the kind of broadly transferrable skills previous generations of CÉGEP student learned in their General Education courses (critical thinking, reading and writing), will the children of this Demers Report be able to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances in 21<sup>st</sup> Century society?

The government has hired three consultants, at the cost of more than 300,000 \$, to implement the Demers Report. But it is not clear if the Minister of education has the man power to put in action all 90 recommendations and which ones will be chosen.

The Report raises the need for a reorganization of the menu of courses at the CÉGEP level, warning that simply allowing the forces of offer and demand to determine which program will survive could create a feeling of depression in the system. This is a reality that probably needs to be addressed.

Even so, The Demers Report appears to be a direct attack on General and Pre-university Education in favor of technical programs. Is that what we want as a society? ■

## TWO VIEWS ON JOHN ABBOTT'S 2015-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

### *1-Moving Toward Greater Commodification and Privatization?*

By [Luba Serge](#) -Sociology

Since last fall John Abbott's Administration has undertaken an elaboration of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. This process must be commended for its openness to consultation. Thus far there have been two well-attended Town Halls, the creation of an editing committee composed of representative from each union (including JACFA), and a survey of students and an upcoming survey of faculty and staff.

As noted elsewhere in this issue, the orientations put forth thus far, because they are general and unspecific, are somewhat indisputable. That is the nature of orientations, I suppose. Who can be against flexibility or global citizenship? But upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that much of the language used to articulate certain objectives comes from provincial policy orientations that are moving public education in Quebec toward greater commodification and privatization. The implications become much clearer when the mechanisms that underpin the orientations are analyzed.

Faculty will be asked to vote on the orientations that they believe are priorities in March. The JACFA executive urges all teachers to assess these orientations with a focus on the broader stakes. Below we highlight a few of our concerns.

**ROLE OF GENERAL EDUCATION (#207)  
RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF THE LA-  
BOUR MARKET (#204)**

*Orientation 204: All programs are designed, and continuously updated, to ensure that our student's knowledge and skills are aligned with the expectations of university and the world of work.*

It is important to situate these objectives in the context of the Demers Report, which calls for greater alignment between education and the needs for the marketplace, while all but ignoring the role of general education. Despite recent studies demonstrating that North American employers emphasize the importance of general education to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Demers Report insists that public education respond to the labour market. Such recommendations fly in the face of a 2009 survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities that found that three quarters of employers recommended a solid general or liberal arts education<sup>1</sup>. Further, the same study found that, "an astounding 89 percent said they were looking for more emphasis on 'the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing,' and almost as many urged the development of better 'critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills.'"<sup>2</sup> Seventy percent of employers said they were on the lookout for "the ability to innovate and be crea-

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tive.”<sup>3</sup> These are precisely the skills cultivated in general education classes at CÉGEP, but which the Demers Report appears to devalue. Harmonization with the needs of industry alignment may enable graduates to participate in economy, but will not adequately prepare them to act fully as citizens. It also reduces education to something that is purchased and seen as “investment”, i.e. a commodity.

### **GREATER FLEXIBILITY (#206)**

While flexibility to meet the needs of students who do not fit the traditional CÉGEP profile (e.g., single parents, or individual who work full-time), is a valid and laudable goal, JACFA has concerns that some of the mechanisms that result from this orientation will facilitate the adoption of increased use of programs such as “Recognition of Acquired Competencies” (RAC). RAC’s not only require that the assessment be “purchased” by the potential student but they permit core education to be bypassed, thereby intensifying the commodification of CÉGEPs.

***Orientation #207: Pre-university and career programs continue to include strong General Education content.***

### **JAC IS LESS VULNERABLE TO GOVERNMENT CUTBACKS (#227)**

A short-term reaction to the ongoing cuts to public education is finding other funding sources to support and sustain college activities (e.g. a proposed mechanism is ancillary services revenues). Such a response can easily push the college to privatize elements that are part of the public good and that have been paid for with public funds. As noted

elsewhere in this issue, opening the College to franchises such as Tim Horton’s has not improved access to healthy food or provided well paying student jobs, but has instead delivered a captive audience to a large (now non-Canadian) corporation. This goal of protection from governmental disengagement can easily accelerate privatization of elements of the College and could well be in opposition to the other objectives that have been put forward such as sustainable operations (#209), affordable classroom materials (#215) and the promotion of health and wellness (#231).

The mechanisms that accompany the orientations merit careful consideration. Centralized scheduling (#221), for example, removes departmental autonomy and could seriously threaten our work-life balance and quality of life while alignment of pedagogical processes and approaches between Day Division and Continuing Education (#210) could encroach on teacher autonomy and undermine allocation and employment in the Day Division.

In the 1990s New Zealand transformed its educational system in the context of broad neo-liberal policy changes. Many of the policies adopted in that context are echoed in the shift we are witnessing in Quebec, including economic objectives rather than citizenship as the purpose of education, a discourse of managerialism that incorporates so-called “quality assurance” and an emphasis on efficiency and accountability. The impact on the teaching profession in New Zealand has been profound and has reduced teachers to “little more than skilled technicians” and “managed professional”<sup>4</sup>. The JACFA executive urges all faculty to examine and consider the Strategic Plan’s orientations and mechanisms conscious of these broader implications and experiences elsewhere. ■

1- Ungar, Sanford J, (2010) “Major Misperceptions About the Liberal Arts.” Chronicle of Higher Education Vol.56, Issue 25.

2- Ibid.

3- Ibid.

4- Codd, John (2005) “Teachers as ‘managed professionals’ in the global education industry : the New Zealand experience,” Educational Review, 57:2, 193-206

legitimizes current government priorities of commerciali-

## *2- Innovative Initiatives Risk Distracting Us From Our Core Mission*

By [Roy Fu](#) - HPR

The current draft version of the Strategic Plan proposals contain objectives that are both ambitious and eclectic, ranging from international cross-cultural exchanges (orientation # 203), to a language school (#211), to a becoming center of excellence for applied research, (along with pedagogical research) (#223). While each of these initiatives have the potential to enrich life at the College, we need to ask important questions about whether they can be properly undertaken without compromising our core mission of providing quality education to DEC students. This concern is particularly important during an era of government cutbacks.

Even though many of these auxiliary initiatives appear to be motivated and designed by the desire to cover the funding shortfall following government cutbacks, their net impact on our ability to carry out our core work may not be necessarily positive. This is because they would require the diversion of non-monetary resources such as physical space and administrative support. Moreover, as our experience with non-credit, international students has taught us, using daytime courses to earn supplemental income does not come without costs. Our teachers have regularly reported lack of student motivation, inadequate language and academic skills as recurring problems with certain aspects of the non-credit program. These draw backs subsequently affect our ability to deliver quality education to our regular daytime students.

The consultations are about to enter their final round, where the entire college community, excluding students, will get to vote for the top eight of 31 orientations and corresponding mechanisms. Based on the information gathered from their personal involvement and that of other teachers, there is growing doubt amongst JACFA executives that the consultation process is capable of incorporating teachers' real preoccupations and priorities; it is more likely to result in a document that largely

legitimizes current government priorities of commercialization and fragmentation the CEGEP system, as advocated by the [Demers Report](#) and the current government demands in the collective agreement negotiations.

Nonetheless, the JACFA executive would like to encourage all teachers to send in feedback on the current proposals, through both the official process – the pending Omnivox poll, and through unofficial channels such as letters and emails to the office of the Director General. Please feel free to carbon copy [jacfa@johnabbott.qc.ca](mailto:jacfa@johnabbott.qc.ca) ■



Sasan Ghinani (Physical Education) signs anti-austerity postcard to Premier Couillard at the JACFA faculty soup lunch on February 11.



Photo by Julian Schattauer, 2015. Used with permission.

## **A NEW RESIDENT ON CAMPUS**

*Sudden appearance of Tim Horton's on campus is a reflection of the new reality of college education.*

By [Jean-Marc Beausoleil](#) –French

### **BYE-BYE MUNCH-BOX**

Many have been dismayed by the long lines of students waiting placidly to buy a coffee or donut each day, ever since a Tim Horton's franchise took the place of the old Munch-Box in Casgrain. "We were disappointed that it wasn't something more like Twiggs, a sort of student coop café with healthy options," declares PE teacher Melissa Hunn, who pointed out that having the Tim so close to the physical education facilities is something of a paradox.

When last checked, John Abbott's new Tim Horton's is an express version of the Tim, which means no soup and no sandwiches are served. Since the cafeteria closes at three o'clock, it leaves few options for students and personnel in the afternoon and evening when Cont Ed classes are offered. You can have a donut or a bagel.

"There is nothing healthy to eat on campus after 3 pm," complains History teacher Catherine Humes, who taught from morning till late in evening last semester.

"It's a work in progress," explains Director of Student Services Denis Waide, who promises soup and sandwiches are coming to the Tim and insists that the new franchise is making students happy.

JAC's Tim Horton's franchise is owned by Aramark, the College's new food service provider, and came as a kind of package deal with the new contract. For the College, it is certain to be more profitable than the old Munch Box, very much so, which seems to be a very important argument in these times of austerity. General cutbacks in the budget of higher education have forced institutions like Abbott to seek other means of financing (Please see the article in this issue about the Demers report).

**OTHER CHOICES?**

Last September, Vanier College opted to ban all fried foods and all soft drinks from its campus. Bottled water has been banned for three years already and so-called Vitamin Water is next on the list.

“We had the cooperation of the student association all the way,” says Monique Magnan, Vanier’s Director of Student Services.

Vanier also has a franchise, a Subway that serves no fried food or soft-drinks. “The Subway is making money for the college, without a doubt,” confirms Ms. Magnan. But Vanier also has a student food coop, a café that offers soups and sandwiches that are made on site, a healthy choice that is proving a wise business decision since the coop is also making profits. “We decided to follow the same model as in francophone institutions,” explains Ms. Magnan, who worked extra hard on the project.

**YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT.....**

John Abbott’s Food Services plans to put up a TV screen next to the Tim where information and health tips will be shown, a sort of last chance “head’s up” filled with good intentions. Customers can learn how many minutes of exercise it takes to burn off a donut. It is hard to believe this will help them make healthier options.

Then again, with all the time students stand in line to get their donuts, they will have ample opportunity to memorise whatever flashes in front of their eyes.

Bon appétit!



Anti-austerity march in Montreal, October 31, 2014.



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Please contact us if you wish to contribute to the next issue.

## MEMBER'S RESEARCH

**M**urray Bronet (Chemistry) wrote to inform us that two of his research projects have been accepted for presentation at an international conference in Sweden this summer on "Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL)." The conference homepage is available here: <http://www.isls.org/cscl2015/>.

The two projects for which Murray received either a research grant or funding from volet III release, are as follows:

1. Bridging the cultural and pedagogical gap with seaweed (Poster).
2. Connected Biology: A Usability Study of Web 2.0 Tools (Full paper)

For more details on Murray and his students' research projects, see the following abstracts:

### ***CONNECTED BIOLOGY: A USABILITY STUDY OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS***

We incorporated traditional conceptual knowledge in an introductory Biology course into a web 2.0 learning environment, which we called Connected Biology. We subsequently investigated whether faculty and students using it for 15 weeks found it useful. We used Crazy Egg (a commercial tracking site) to track students' use of Connected Biology and their use of the Web. Students found Connected Biology useful (Learnable, memorable, satisfying, and error-free) but not efficient. Although they accessed Connected Biology over 16 weeks, they tended to use it primarily to get feedback on their understanding of course content and not for exploratory activities. Interviews with faculty teaching introductory science courses indicated that most hold to a perspective learning model. The paper argues that we need to attend to the prevailing culture of introductory science courses (both student and teacher) before introducing Web 2.0 tools. Only then will the affordances of Web 2.0 tools be attained.

### ***BRIDGING THE CULTURAL AND PEDAGOGICAL GAP WITH SEAWEED***

Online, collaborative, project-based, eLearning, rural/urban cohorts: how much more innovative can one get? Students from John Abbott College and the CÉGEP de la Gaspésie formed collaborative teams to solve "real-life" problems within a laboratory. The two colleges were 950 kilometers apart so teams of 4-5 students were established. Teams used a Wiki to create a formal lab report using several Web 2.0 tools: chat, forum, and Google Docs. In the process they were transformed from past followers into future leaders. Students reported favorable perceptions of the Problem Based Laboratory (PBL) exercises, especially the importance of acquiring skills in using online collaborative skills. They also thought that these skills would either be or become important in the workplace.

Congratulations to Murray and his students!