

Credentials Framework: An Overview



On September 1, 2004, the Credentials Framework came into effect, and provided Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology with a vehicle for satisfying their responsibilities under the *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts of Technology Act, 2002*. Through this legislation, colleges were given responsibility for the credentials they were granting. An important principle was that the "[c]redentials awarded in the college system must be credible and meaningful for, and understood by, students, employers and the general public."¹

To support this goal, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities created the Credentials Framework, a document they continue to maintain in consultation with the college system. Under the jurisdiction of the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS), the Credentials Validation Service (CVS) reviews all programs of instruction against the Credentials Framework to ensure that programs:

1. include the necessary curriculum components for the credential being granted,
2. enable the reliable demonstration of curriculum outcomes of a similar breadth and depth as other programs leading to the same credential, and
3. follow accepted titling and nomenclature principles.

In short, CVS ensures that programs of instruction conform to the Credentials Framework so that "credentials awarded ... [are] credible and meaningful".

The Types of Credentials

The Credentials Framework provides a wealth of information about the credentials that are granted by the community colleges in Ontario. The credentials are organized in the framework in ascending order from left to right based on both the complexity of knowledge and the typical duration for completion. There are seven credentials in total. It should, however, be noted that the Applied Degree is listed to provide a point of reference and that information about Applied Degree Standards can be obtained from the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). Their web site is <http://peqab.edu.gov.on.ca>.

The remaining six types of credentials discussed in the Credentials Framework are:

- Non-Credit,
- Certificate,
- Ontario College Certificate,

- Ontario College Diploma,
- Ontario College Advanced Diploma, and
- Ontario College Graduate Certificate.

The Credentials Framework, then, speaks to the spectrum of credentials that recognize successful completion of programs of instruction in the college system.

An Interview with Tim Klassen, Manager, Ontario College Quality Assurance Service

In late August, 2007, Tim Klassen, Manager of the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service participated in a brief interview on the subject of the Credentials Framework.

If you had to choose one word to describe the Credentials Framework, what would that one word be?

Tim Klassen: AVANT-GARDE
Why?

T.K.: I believe this is an apt descriptor for the Credentials Framework as the definition (and usage) in both French and English speak to something that is *groundbreaking, vanguard, innovative, progressive*, etc. The Credentials Framework is all of this to colleges and the programs they offer, as it provides two fundamental changes: the way credentials are defined and the way credentials are titled. These changes are among the most substantial changes to college programs since the creation of the system 40 years ago.

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Does the Credentials Framework represent an evolution of work begun in the early 1990's with CSAC (College Standards and Accreditation Council) or is it a change of direction?

T.K.: For the most part I would say it represents a change of direction more than an evolution, although in reality, on the spectrum of *evolution* to *revolution* it would be somewhere in the middle.

Why?

T.K.: The work begun through CSAC required colleges to think about program completion in terms of specific *outcomes* for program areas covered by the Provincial Program Standards. The introduction of the Credentials Framework required colleges to think about all their programs in terms of program-
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¹ "Framework for Programs of Instruction," *Minister's Binding Policy Directive*. Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Issued: April, 2003. Revised: April 2005. p. 2.

The Credentials Framework

	Non-Credit	Certificate	Ontario College Certificate ▼	Ontario College Diploma ▼	Ontario College Advanced Diploma ▼	Ontario College Graduate Certificate ▼	Applied Degree
1. Scope of Curriculum Outcomes: Breadth and Depth							
1.1 Complexity of Knowledge and Vocational Outcomes	Locally determined	Complexity of knowledge may focus on preparing graduates to begin postsecondary studies or may focus on targeted vocationally specific skills.	Meets all specific vocational learning outcomes as defined by provincial program standards , where these exist.	Meets all specific vocational learning outcomes as defined by provincial program standards , where these exist.	Meets all specific vocational learning outcomes as defined by provincial program standards , where these exist.	Meets all specific vocational learning outcomes as defined by provincial program standards , where these exist.	Degree level standards established by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) are applied by PEQAB when it makes recommendations to the Minister under the authority of the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000.
			Breadth, depth, and complexity of knowledge would prepare graduates to perform in a range of varied activities or knowledge application situations where the range of contexts in which the choice of actions required is usually clear, and complexity in the range of options to be applied is limited. Complexity of knowledge prepares graduate for further Postsecondary studies. Performance of a prescribed range of functions involving known routines and procedures and some accountability for the quality of outcomes.	Breadth, depth, and complexity of knowledge cover the planning and initiation of alternative approaches to skill and knowledge application across a broad range of technical and/or administrative requirements; coordination; and evaluation. Performance of a range of skills, with associated knowledge, showing substantial depth in some areas where judgment is required in the planning and selecting of appropriate equipment, services, or techniques for self and others.	Breadth, depth, and complexity of knowledge involve analysis, diagnosis, design, planning, execution, and evaluation across a broad range of technical and/or management functions. Opportunities may exist for new/additional applications of technical, creative, or conceptual knowledge to practical and/or real world situations. Performance of a significant range of skills associated with fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts in relation to either varied or highly specific functions. Contributions to the development of a broad plan, budget, or strategy are involved, as is accountability for self and others in achieving the outcomes for a team.	Breadth, depth, and complexity of knowledge would enhance the ability of graduates to perform a more specialized range of activities, most of which would be complex or non-routine. Leadership and guidance may be involved when organizing self or others, as well as when contributing to technical solutions of a non-routine or contingency nature. Performance of a prescribed range of skilled operations that includes the requirement to evaluate and analyze current practices and develop new criteria, and may include the provision of some leadership and guidance to others in the application and planning of skills.	
			▼ Portions of the above section are reproduced by kind permission of the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Australia.				
1.2 Essential Employability Skills		Locally determined	Graduates have achieved the basic fundamental, personal management, and teamwork skills to get, keep, and progress in a job-of-choice, or to enter further postsecondary studies. There is an appropriate depth of achievement, consistent with the essential employability skills learning outcomes, identified for this level of credential.	Graduates have achieved the basic fundamental, personal management, and teamwork skills to get, keep, and progress in a job-of-choice. There is an appropriate depth of achievement, consistent with the essential employability skills learning outcomes, identified for these levels of credentials.		Locally determined	
1.3 General Education		Locally determined	Locally determined, however it is desirable that graduates at this level will have been engaged in learning that incorporates some breadth beyond the vocational field of study, especially in programs of instruction intended to lead to further postsecondary study in a related field.	Consistent with the general education policy for colleges of applied arts and technology, graduates have been engaged in learning that exposes them to at least one discipline outside their main field of study and increases their awareness of the society and culture in which they live and work. This will typically involve students taking 3 to 5 courses (or the equivalent) designed discretely from vocational learning opportunities. This learning would normally be delivered using a combination of required and elective processes.		Locally determined	
2. Typical Duration for Completion			Specific design, delivery, and duration of curriculum is locally determined and may vary among programs and disciplines, recognizing that some colleges may use a system other than hours (e.g., credits) to determine program completion.				
			It is understood that a range of hours may apply to the achievement of program learning outcomes leading to any particular credential.				
		This framework outlines the typical duration of a program at this level for students entering with the minimum admission requirements.					
		Locally determined	Typically the duration to achieve this credential is 2 academic semesters or approximately 600 to 700 equivalent instructional hours.	Typically the duration to achieve this credential is 4 academic semesters or approximately 1200 to 1400 equivalent instructional hours.	Typically the duration to achieve this credential is 6 academic semesters or approximately 1800 to 2100 equivalent instructional hours.	Typically the duration to achieve this credential is 2 academic semesters or approximately 600 to 700 equivalent instructional hours.	
3. Admission Requirements	Locally determined	Locally determined	Admission requirements are established in O. Reg. 34/03 and Minister's Binding Policy Directive on Admissions Criteria.			Ontario College Diploma, Ontario College Advanced Diploma, Degree, or equivalent	
4. Name of Credential	Locally determined, excluding the use of the words contained in any Provincially approved credential titles. May use such terminology as Attestation, Award, Statement, etc.	Certificate Certificat	Ontario College Certificate Certificat d'études collégiales de l'Ontario	Ontario College Diploma Diplôme d'études collégiales de l'Ontario	Ontario College Advanced Diploma Diplôme d'études collégiales de l'Ontario – niveau avancé	Graduate Certificate Certificat postdiplôme de l'Ontario	

Professor Of The 21st Century

The content of this Lifesaver is related to the following Professor of the 21st Century Teaching Competency:

7. Designing Courses and Programs.

level learning outcomes. In this sense it is *evolutionary*. However, to take the college system from a *time-based* way of thinking about programs and credentials to an *outcomes-based* way of thinking is *revolutionary*. It represents the first time that the system has embraced the notion of outcomes-based learning and credentialing.

The second *revolutionary* aspect of the Credentials Framework is the re-titling of the credentials offered by the system. It represents the first time the public colleges have credentials that identify the source (i.e., Ontario College credentials) and it also distinguishes, in title, levels of learning; something that was not previously available as credentials were titled and conferred on the basis of program length.

Throughout the Credentials Framework, the term "locally determined" appears in a number of places. What, if any, impact does this have on ensuring consistency across programs with similar names?

T.K.: The Credentials Framework represents the *minimum provincial requirements for credentials to be awarded and applies to all programs of instruction, regardless of funding source*. The Credentials Framework establishes these minimum requirements in 3 areas: Scope of Curriculum Outcomes; Typical Duration; and, Admission Requirements. The references to the parts of this framework that are "locally determined" allow colleges to set requirements that are clearly within their jurisdiction (e.g., programs that are offered on a non-credit basis, programs that build on the attainment of other postsecondary credentials, or programs that are preparatory in nature) and will have no impact on the consistency of other programs offered on a more system-wide basis. The core of the Credentials Framework, and in fact the core of activity within the colleges, is within the programs leading to the conferring of an Ontario College credential (i.e., postsecondary programs of instruction). Within these sections of the Credentials Framework there is no area that is locally determined except that related to the inclusion of General Education courses in programs leading to an Ontario College Graduate Certificate.

Based on your experience in the college system, how would you rate the contribution of the Credentials Framework to the overall quality of college curriculum?

T.K.: I would say that in many respects it is too early to answer this question in any definitive manner. However, I

do believe that the results of the introduction and implementation of the Credentials Framework is a first step in contributing to the quality of college curriculum.

Why?

T.K.: As the framework focuses on program outcomes, the colleges are in a position to think clearly about "outcomes" before they think about "content". This means, that *what* a graduate is able to do takes some precedent over *how* they get there, thereby designing and delivering curriculum more clearly related to the program-outcomes. The Credentials Framework provides a "*framework*" for the first time against which to measure and evaluate programs. However, this represents just the "front-end" of a quality measurement or quality assurance system for the colleges. Until the Program Quality Assurance Process Audit has had full implementation there is no way to provide the "back-end" of the quality process. It is for these reasons I suggest it is too early to provide a definitive answer to the quality curriculum question.

The Credentials Framework seems to provide the greatest guidance for the development of curriculum for programs that do not fall under a provincial program standard. If that is a fair assessment, how familiar do you think that program developers should be with the Credentials Framework?

T.K.: I would take some exception to the assessment stated above in terms of the direction provided by the Credentials Framework. It is true that the Credentials Framework makes reference to programs meeting the requirements of provincial program standards where they exist. However, there are standards for only a fraction of programs offered by the system and as a result there is a great deal of program development that occurs outside of these program areas.

The other factor at play is that as provincial program standards are developed and revised they too must meet or exceed the minimum requirements set out in the Credentials Framework. It is my belief that program developers and curriculum designers must become intimately familiar with the Credentials Framework and that this work will become enhanced as this understanding of, and familiarity with, the framework is also passed along to all faculty in the colleges.

Given your role with CVS (Credentials Validation Service), if you could give program developers one piece of advice about the Credentials Framework, what would that advice be?

T.K.: Think long and hard about the creation (development and articulation) of program-level learning outcomes as the absolute starting point in any exercise of program development, program renewal or program revision.

The single most important piece is getting the program-level outcomes correct (not from a *content perspective*; rather from an *articulation perspective*) right from the beginning.

QUESTIONS??

For more information, contact Learning & Teaching Services.