

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Quality of college programs given thorough review

When you go to buy a new car or a blender, as a consumer you're probably thinking that somewhere along the

line, the product has had the benefit of some quality control.

It's in the interest of the manufacturer—and some-

times the government as well—to make sure the product you're buying will do what it is supposed to, is safe, and is well-made.

The same things apply to public post-secondary education. When students enrol in a program in a college or university leading to a credential, there's usually a lot that has gone on behind the scene to ensure the program's quality.

Where to start in trying to describe all the quality control mechanisms that can shape and apply to programs?

First, there's the integrity of the people who develop or seek to alter a program.

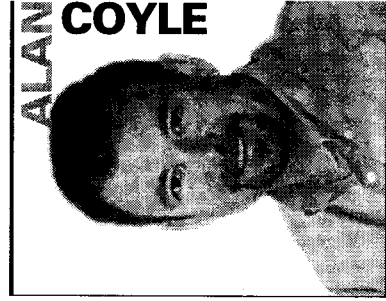
As educators, they have their professional ethics and interest in serving students to guide them. Don't ever discount that.

The professors I know care deeply about their subject matter and if they're creating or proposing a new program, they've done a lot of homework to make sure it is the best it can be.

Then there's the scrutiny of their colleagues. That occurs at the departmental level, at the faculty level and then finally, at an institutional level. In B.C.'s colleges, the formal role of curriculum and program review is the mandate of the institution's Education Councils. These are established in the legislation that governs colleges, in the same way that universities have senates.

But if you think all that quality control is in-house, it isn't.

There are several external bodies and agencies that re-



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School's In

view program proposals and pass judgment.

At Okanagan College, for example, many of the credential programs that are offered have Program Advisory Committees.

These are composed of people associated with the industry and agencies that are linked to the program.

The engineering technology programs, the business program, health care, dental assisting, the trades: You can find program advisory committees for virtually all of them.

They serve a very important purpose; a sort of reality check for the program's curriculum, with experts in the field offering advice on how to change, alter or add to a program's content and even the way it is taught.

But wait, there's more! External agencies, such as the College of Licensed

Practical Nurses of B.C., often have to review and approve programs before they can be offered.

Agencies such as the Canadian Technology Accreditation Board review programs (in their case it would be the engineering technologies at Okanagan College) and decide whether to accredit the program.

It's not a once-and-you're-done kind of thing either. Agencies such as CTAB usually grant accreditation for a specific time (three, five or seven years) and then the institution and the program has to go through the process again.

There are also a whole host of provincial and government mechanisms that work to ensure program quality (but that's a topic for another column).

The fact is, whether you're taking nursing, water quality and environmental engineering technology, a business diploma or degree, a teaching degree or a trade, you can enrol in those programs knowing that along the line, a lot of people and organizations have looked at what's being offered and have signed off on the quality.

If only that kind of quality had been present in the first car I bought. But let's not go there. This column is not about pre-history.

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