

Study to weigh viability of establishing university in Timmins

The Northern Policy Institute has commissioned the study, which will be undertaken over the next two months.

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*Dr. Ken Coates speaks at Timmins city hall about the potential of establishing a university in Timmins.
Andrew Autio for TimminsToday*

A new study will examine the viability of establishing a university in Timmins.

Dr. Ken Coates has been commissioned by the Northern Policy Institute to undertake the study. Coates is the Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation at the University of Saskatchewan's [Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy](#).

“I have been asked by the Northern Policy Institute to undertake a fairly quick two-month study of the feasibility of an English language university here in Timmins,” he told city council this week.

Coates, who is based in Saskatoon, Sask., said he was in the early stages of the study. He was visiting Timmins to gather information and had hoped to get some input from council, although he didn't receive any feedback from council during his appearance.

Coates said that post-secondary opportunities need to “align with what the students are capable of doing, what the communities need and want, and where the economy is going.”

Through his career, his research has been focused largely on “Northern issues” and the challenges faced by remote communities. He clarified the term “remote” as including municipalities with fewer than 60,000 people.

“I'm particularly concerned about the sustainability of smaller communities in the age of digitization,” Coates said. “We are in the middle of the fastest period of scientific and technological revolution, and evolution in human history.”

He has been tasked by the institute with conducting an “evidence-based study” on the city, and emphasized he would report on “what makes sense” economically, politically, and educationally.

"My job is not to advocate for any one position, but to find out what works, and what would not work in this particular environment," said Coates.

Options for a community like Timmins include satellite campuses and what Coates calls “boutique universities,” which are focused on regionally relevant programs.

He said people need to think of a university as more than just a series of buildings, and change attitudes about post-secondary education in general.

“There are some really serious problems and misapprehensions,” Coates said. “In fact, something like 40 per cent of the students who go to community colleges in Ontario actually already have a degree.

“They get a degree and then they go back to a community college for advance training in more specialized, market oriented way.”

While university degrees may seem like a higher achievement, many programs realistically have little practical use in today's economy, he added.

“The major challenge we have with post-secondary education is really around people's expectations. If you ask parents, they overwhelmingly want their children to go to university, even if their children would be better served going to college,” he said.

Coates said the idea of a university for Timmins would require the support of the whole community in order to make it work.

Timmins is currently home to Northern College, a highly respected college of applied arts and technology, as well as Collège Boréal and Université de Hearst, which offer programs in French.

Coates said he will be working on the report for the rest of January, which he will then submit to the Northern Policy Institute.