

**Brief - Commission on Post Secondary Education
Post Secondary Education Concerns
At New Brunswick Community Colleges**

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Post Secondary Education Concerns At New Brunswick Community Colleges

As students at New Brunswick Community Colleges we are faced with many concerns for, with and during our post secondary education. These concerns range from Financial Aid to Child Care to Housing for Students and these are to name a few. This brief will look into many of these concerns, and maybe provide possible solutions for some of them.

Child Care

Child Care for the student and instructors of NBCC would be another concern. Many students that attend NBCC campuses are parent(s). Child Care that is close to the campus would help attract and keep students at the college. Parents want their children to be safe and close to them, and if something goes wrong then the parent is forced to leave the school to attend to their child or children. This means that they might miss a class or more if the child care provider is not close by. Every minute that it takes the parent to get to their child, it is another minute of their education that they lose. If the parent is unable to find child care were they are located, and then they might think twice about going back to school to further themselves.

Providing lists to students whom are parents with local day-care providers in the area would be beneficial to them. This list could include the exact location of the day-care, the background of the staff that work in the facility, the types of activities that are done to help educate, or develop social skills in their child/children. It would also include what the costs to the parent(s) would be. This would also let the parent know the payment schedule, if it is for the day/week/month, and what the parent needs to provide for the child to be accepted into the facility (vaccinations, and meals that are needed to be brought).

Recommendation:

NBCC-Saint John at one time had the facilities to provide a day care on site. The building is still there, but does need some repairs to make it a functioning building. This could be used as a selling point to parents whom wish to upgrade their education, and still be close to their children. If the building was upgraded, and the proper staff hired, this would be an excellent opportunity.

There is the Early Childhood Development Course at NBCC-Saint John, and they could take their course and apply it on a day to day basis. If this were to happen, then these students could possibly receive a reduction in their tuition and/or other

costs of their materials they would need. It does require them (students) to have a criminal background check done to ensure that the children are going to be free from any potential harm. This could be added into what the parents are to pay to have their children looked after.

Looking into the possibilities of day-care businesses being close to each of the campuses would be something to look into. To see if this could be something worthwhile to look into do surveys of the students and instructors that have children that need to be in child care, to see what they would feel a fair rate would be.

Financial Aid

Financial Aid for student is another growing issue. Where many of the students choosing to attend NBCC are mature students, it is not always possible for them to obtain a student loan, or other financial aid, and they rely on the help of family or possibly resort to signing a personal loan at the bank (Student Line of Credit). Even if they can receive help from family or obtain a Student Line of Credit, it may not always be enough to cover personal bills or pay for the costs related to furthering their education.

Making it easier for students to obtain finances would be something to look into. Some of the mature students coming back to better themselves are not granted student loans because of their living situation (either living at home with a parent or a spouse or being a single parent). The ability to pay for school then becomes the responsibility of the working person in the home or the sole responsibility of the single parent whom is trying to better themselves for their child.

The government does not take into consideration that the working family member is perhaps paying the rent or mortgage, and the majority of the bills. The government wants to know that the income that the person makes and does not factor these into consideration when either saying yes or no to the applicant. In the case of the single parent, they do not look into the benefit of what the parent is wishing to do for themselves and their family, but yet what income they have previously earned. This shouldn't be the case, if someone applies for a Student Loan through the government, it would be nice that they are granted one, even just to cover the cost of tuition and books for the academic school year.

Bursaries' and Scholarships are nice as well, but when applying for these, they are not made known to the student until they have enrolled into the college or a week before the deadline comes due. So this makes it hard to know what funds you have to rely on.

Recommendation:

Having this on a website for potential students to access with all the possible scholarships and bursaries would be beneficial. This list could be broken down by the Month and then sub-divided into categories of Colleges and Universities, listing the name of the financial provider, what the qualifications are to receive such an award, the amount, and the date the application is due. Looking up this information and submitting it would then fall on the shoulders of the potential student to look at the website. They would have to find the learning intuition they are looking to attend and see what scholarships and bursaries are available to them and what the requirements are to possibly put their name on the list.

“Grandfathering” Courses, Programs and Marking Schemes

When students come to a campus, the system of how to market courses should not change half way through a program. This may mean having to “Grandfather” the method that the student had been introduced to at the start of their program, and have it continue through to the end of their program. “Grandfathering” would only have to stay in place for the length of the course, whether it be one year, sixteen months or two years. If the student come in under the credit system, and has chosen a two year program, and half way through the first year the credit system is being replaced with credit hours, then that student would stay under the credit system until the two years is over. If the student has to come back because for some reason the credit was not earned, then they would be under the new system of credit hours. “Grandfathering” would only cover what the program would normally take to complete.

“Grandfathering” should also include programs. If a student comes to the college in the hopes of taking a program, and it was available at the start of their enrollment, then it should still be there for them to take. Cutting programs should wait until the next intake of potential students, that way the program isn’t offered to them, but is still there for the student of the previous intake year.

An example of this would be when Business Administration Program had gone from Credit Hours to Credits, and cutting an option of E-Commerce from the curriculum. Students whom came to the college at the start of the 2005 academic year should have remained under the Credit Hours and still had the E-Commerce option to choose, and have the new system in place for students coming in for the fall 2006 Academic year. These new students would be under Credits and not have the E-Commerce Option.

Recommendation:

Even though most of the changes have been effective for more than a year now, this is something to think about if changes need to be made in the future. If a student comes to the college when a program is being offered or if the courses

are offered as either a credit or hours, then there should be NO changes made until the student has finished what they started. This is where the “Grandfathering” would come into place. Once the advised time period of the course is over, then things revert over to the new way. If the student needs to remain longer than what the normal program length is, then they will no longer fall under the “grandfather” clause.

Housing

Many of the students attending the different NBCC campuses are coming from all over the province to study at the various locations across New Brunswick. With daily travel ranging from a five minute walk to an hour or two drive to the campus of their choice. This can be difficult for a student, especially with the rising cost of fuel. Affordable housing would be a beneficial investment to students who wish to stay close to the campus they are attending, and then drive the hour or two home for the weekend (if they choose).

There use to be a housing list in the Student Council office to help students find accommodations’ in peoples homes, but this has become something of the past.

Recommendation:

Perhaps there could be a master list for each city or town that potential students could research to see what is available for the upcoming academic year. This could also be in the form of a website where students could choose their city/town of choice and view potential housing options, and then they can call the location of their choice to learn more details of the location.

Technical Elements / Materials

Technical Materials that students use in the day-to-day classroom, are either outdated, or they just don’t work properly. If students are required to pay a “Technology Fee” then the equipment should work, and work well.

One of our campuses experienced a technical problem for three months (September to November). This problem could have been avoided if the IT staff was given the go ahead to purchase the necessary materials to keep the schools network running. The staff knew that with the second wave of wireless laptops coming into the school, it would overload the outdated network system, and cause delays but nothing was done until the middle of October. When the parts were finally ordered, and by the time the parts had been installed the network was up and running, it was the end of November. Students and Staff alike were both very upset at the wasted time in the classrooms, by not being able to teach and learn their subjects properly. Currently things are running a little bit smoother. However with the fall 2007 Academic Year around the corner it could

potentially cause problems again, especially where students will be allowed to bring their personal laptops to the school.

Other technical issues are the rules and guidelines for using of the laptops. Guidelines for the various NBCC campuses are different, depending on the school, depends on what the student has access to, at one campus they might have access to MSN Messenger or be allowed to download and store music files on the computer, but at an other location they are not allowed to have such things running on their machines, and if they are found on them, then the materials are erased. Students are paying \$1200 per year to use the laptop, and they should be allowed to use what ever programs they feel would be beneficial to them. Many beneficial websites that are excellent learning tools for the students have been blocked, and cannot be accessed. Blocking these sites causes delays in the teaching atmosphere, and forces instructors to potentially change their learning plan. Examples of these websites are the XHTML sites that are being produced to teach people how to write an XHTML website, instructors wish to show students how the pages operate on the web, but cannot access them to show during class time. This means the student needs to view them from home, making the learning experience a negative one.

Another issue is the cost to lease of the laptop, an additional \$1200 per year to too much, especially with the rising cost of tuition and books. A question posed to IT staff when the laptop program was put into effect was if the student could bring their own machine into the school and pay a network fee. This was not an option, but now for the upcoming fall 2007 Academic Year, the students are going to be given the option to bring their own machine in for \$300 or lease one for \$800. Students that were the "Pilot Project Students" for this project should be either given a rebate for \$400 each year they had to lease the laptop, or should be given the machine (with the bare operating system in place). The current option if for them to purchase the machine at an additional cost of \$411.83 plus HST, this doesn't seem fair especially where they have paid for the machine at three times its cost to purchase a brand new one.

Recommendation:

If high technical fees are to be paid by the students to cover the laptops and materials being used in the classroom, then the overhead projectors and other class equipment should be maintained and have regularly scheduled maintenance preformed on them. Any wireless networks should be put through the highest testing possible to prevent another system failure. Three months with limited or no access is unacceptable, it does not matter if you are a student or an instructor, three months is too long to have an interruption in learning.

Having the IT staff spend less time monitoring what the students are doing on the network, and spending more time making sure the equipment is working properly would be something to look into. Having the network open for the students so

they can have a positive learning experience, and have access to the beneficial websites that are out there.

For students that have been used to further test the laptops in the classroom, and had to pay \$1200 each year for two years should be given either a \$400 dollar rebate each year they had to lease the machine, or they should just be given the laptop. Do not make them pay \$411.83 plus HST to purchase a two year old laptop that could be bought for less than \$600 (taxes included) new.

Transportation

Before a student decides which NBCC campus they wish to attend, they have to decide how they will get there; drive or walk. If they walk, that means they have found a living location close to the campus of their choice. However if a student drives, they need to either own a vehicle or have access to one. This can sometimes pose problems for students, whom live with someone with only one vehicle, and they cannot use it or they cannot afford to run the vehicle while attending school. Looking into alternative methods for the students to arrive at their chosen campus would be something to look into.

Recommendation:

Currently there are bus routes for some students to take, but these only work if you live on the prescribed bus routes. More routes and better times would help students get to and from school. Another option is for NBCC was to have a website operational for students to post their messages on. This way students can post messages that they are looking for transportation to and from certain locations or a student could post that they have room in their vehicle and are looking to car pool with others within their living location.

Tuition & Book Costs

With the rising cost of tuition and book costs, a payment plan would be a beneficial option to student, because if they have to work to afford tuition (no student loan or other financial aid), they should be given an option to either make monthly payments on the \$2600 Tuition and other fees. Students become stressed over high bills and the inability to pay for them, and with this fear, they sometimes drop out of their chosen program and end the dreams of bettering themselves.

Recommendation:

Having a payment schedule in place for students who do not receive financial aid to cover the rising costs of tuition and books is something that would be beneficial to the students and possibly reduce the drop out rate. When a student is given an option on how to pay for something whether it be; monthly, semi-

monthly, weekly then the student will have to ability to better plan their finances for the academic year. By giving them a payment plan option they can look at their finances and visually see if attending school will be a reality for them or just a dream.

Summary

Being a student should be an exciting and beneficial time in our lives, but with these concerns this time in our lives has become quite stressful and upsetting. Making changes to the way things have been going could help make current students feel at ease. These changes could also help attract students to the various campuses across the province.