

Brief on the More Effective Employment of Intellectual Resources

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I have experience in two areas which are relevant to improving the ability of New Brunswick's universities to maintain, and improve, their standards during a period of falling enrollments. Both are related to the division of resources between universities, and within universities. For universities to maintain, and improve, their capacity to provide cutting edge education they need to retain the services of people engaged in research at the highest levels, and who can pass on their expertise to their students, but the universities need to do it on a falling budget. The only answer is the more effective use of expertise available in sister institutions, and in the general community. The former calls for more effective networking, and the latter for improvement in the status and compensation offered casual and adjunct faculty.

Over the last two decades I have struggled to develop a distance education approach to graduate education, and am in fact offering at the University of New Brunswick a graduate seminar through the College of Extended Learning. This has not been entirely satisfactory because of the guarded attitude to the means of delivery in the university, which has prevented students enrolled in my department actually taking the class. The issues are complex. They range from a concern that the form of delivery could become standard, and thus increase the burden on teachers, to a concern that the form of delivery precludes the maintenance of the highest standards, and to the proprietary attitudes many teachers have about "their" graduate students. True, the typical content of distance education systems has more relevance to training than to graduate education, but it is a mistake to jump to the conclusion that more traditional methods cannot be delivered by modern means. If these concerns could be addressed, it would become possible for New Brunswick universities to establish a single "virtual" graduate school in which the advantages of personal, face-to-face, contact between teachers and students could be supplemented by distant contact with special expertise available in other institutions. Once the system had been perfected within the context of New Brunswick institutions, it could profitably be extended to other universities, through the Atlantic region, Canada, and the world.

At the same time as the divisions between institutions need to be bridged, so do those within the institutions themselves. The universities needs to address the question of the status and compensation of its adjunct and casual employees so that they can take a more important place in the academic work of the university. This should be done in ways that promote their influence within departments, and provide a serious incentive, but also supports their continued participation in the non-university pursuits which ultimately gives them their credibility.

There are many vectors that bring casual faculty to the university. Some are working in the traditions of the Maritime economy in which individuals traditionally have engaged themselves in several different and usually seasonally driven employments. For them, the level of compensation is important, but so is the opportunity to employ their scholarship. Others are in full time employment, in government and elsewhere, which does not allow them to develop their

full intellectual potential, and who seek academic work for personal satisfaction. For the latter, academic snobbery is a major bar to their continuing to offer their services.

Because of the diversity of paths that lead to adjunct and casual faculty employment, there is no one corrective to the problems now faced by the university, but I can suggest from experience at the University of New Brunswick several important and mutually complementary developments.

1. In the first place, all faculty appointments of any sort should be considered as giving the individual a formal role in an academic department, which would entitle them to a voice in departmental governance.
2. Secondly, teaching appointments through the College of Extended Learning should be accorded the respect of a firm commitment and not dependent upon a last-minute tally of enrollment.
3. Thirdly, casual faculty should be able to develop their teaching expertise without concern that they will be displaced without warning by regular faculty who decide they would like to take over that subject matter.
4. Fourthly, multi-year contracts should be developed for casual faculty.
5. Fifthly, the university should create a number of fellowship positions only available for those not in full time employment at the university or elsewhere which would provide prestige and compensation to their holders, who would be required in return to pursue the scholarship appropriate to their discipline, and provide specialist tuition in graduate fields.

A healthier academic community, in which the deep division between full time and casual faculty was minimized, would be able to arrive at a more cost-effective work force which would make better use of the intellectual resources of the province. At the same time, if in meeting this goal opportunities were increased for the wider community to balance their careers with a degree of participation in post-secondary education, it is to be expected that retention in the province of graduates would be increased, and that their expertise would enrich its business and culture.

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