

Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick  
535 Beaverbrook Court, Suite 105  
Fredericton, NB, E3B 1X6

Dear Commissioners and advisory panel,

My name is Mark McLaughlin. I am offering my comments regarding the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick and what I feel is an extremely important part of the larger discussion on the future of post-secondary education in this province. As an alumni of New Brunswick's post-secondary education system, a student who has returned to this system and someone who would one day like to work within said system, I believe I have a fairly unique point of view. As such, I need to share certain opinions and observations with the Commission.

First off, a little more about myself, as outlined in the "Check-list of Issues and Questions" from the Commission's Discussion Paper. I am a male, aged 25 to 34 and I graduated from the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton (UNBF) with a Bachelor of Arts in history, with first-class honours and distinction, in 2003. Upon completion of my BA, I received a Master of Arts in history from the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) in 2004. I have been in full-time attendance of the Doctorate of Philosophy in history program at UNBF since September, 2006 and I am slated to graduate from the program in 2010. My research interests are the development of government and industrial policies regarding New Brunswick's forest industries from the Second World War until the 1980s. Upon completion of my current degree, I wish to enter academia (preferably in New Brunswick, or elsewhere in Atlantic Canada) and continue researching environmental topics and resource-based industries, yet I am also extremely interested in developing more connections between communities and universities. I am not representing any institution or organization, and I am writing these comments of my own accord.

My comments are beyond the questions suggested by the Commission, but I believe they encompass certain issues that are extremely important and need to be heard. I wish to draw the Commission's attention to the plight of arts faculties in New Brunswick, either at UNBF or one of the province's other institutions of higher education. These faculties are facing shortages in the funding needed to provide successful academic programs to future students, despite the successes of many departments within the arts faculties. For example, UNBF's department of history has high rates of class enrollments, a large graduate student program, very successful research projects, and some of the most esteemed historians in Canada as faculty, yet it is consistently under-funded. As part of UNBF's arts faculty, funding levels need to reflect the accomplishments of the history department, and other similar departments in the humanities and social sciences, or we risk losing a valuable and successful part of our post-secondary experience in this province.

Furthermore, in my own experience, I have found that a stigma of "uselessness" can often be associated with an arts degree. Many people believe that if a degree does not give an

individual a group of “identifiable skill sets,” it is deemed as useless and will not help you to get a job. To negate such false notions, I would like to highlight my own life experiences to demonstrate the **usefulness** of an arts degree. As previously discussed, I completed my BA in history at UNBF in 2003. The department’s faculty and staff were extremely helpful, the quality of teaching and supervising was outstanding, and my positive experiences in the department continue to shape my life to this date. I developed confidence, critical thinking, the means to communicate effectively, a variety of research skills, and the ability to draw conclusions and make connections to discover larger themes. The excellent quality of the department is reflected in my consistently good grades at the BA level, the several scholarships that I acquired at UNBF, and my continued success in later stages of my life.

After I completed my BA in early 2003, I spent several months traveling in Europe. I returned to Atlantic Canada that fall and I accepted to continue my studies at MUN under the tutelage of Dr. Sean Cadigan. My MA studies were fully funded and I was a member of the Coasts Under Stress Major Collaborative Research Initiative, a regional development research project that aided rural and coastal communities to develop new and innovative economic linkages, thereby helping to ensure their survival. Once again, I received consistently good grades and I was highly involved with campus and department activities. I credit the success of my MA experiences at MUN directly with my arts degree and the academic background that I received in this province.

Upon completion of my MA in August, 2004, I immediately obtained a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) internship through the College of North Atlantic in St. John’s, and I left to work in India for six months in October of that same year. I was a Rural Development Project Research Assistant on the Periyar PURA (Providing Urban amenities in Rural Areas) project at the Periyar Maniammai College of Technology for Women in Vallam, Tamil Nadu. My duties included helping to gather socio-economic data about the individuals who were the beneficiaries of the project; I supervised the creation of a database for the gathered information, and a project website; and I acted as a liaison between the project’s volunteers and its directors. I regard my experiences in India, and will continue to do so, as some of the most valuable of my life, as they made me more aware of my own society and my place within it, none of which would have been possible without my arts degree background. I was able to adapt to the working environment and conditions of a completely different culture because of the strong background I received at UNBF and the flexibility of an arts degree.

I returned to Atlantic Canada in April, 2005 and I decided to stay in St. John’s, NL, because I was involved in a serious relationship with someone who was living in that city. I was able to find work at a law firm in St. John’s as a researcher for several lawyers. Meanwhile, Newfoundlanders were leaving, and still are leaving, their province in droves due to lack of employment, but I found work due to my research-oriented background and the flexibility of my arts degree. I left Newfoundland in July, 2006 to return to my home province of New Brunswick to continue my studies. As previously stated, I am now enrolled at UNBF in the PhD in history program, where I am fully funded and part of two research projects. The exemplary quality of the history

department at UNBF, reflective of the arts faculty as a whole, helped me to decide to complete my final degree in New Brunswick's post-secondary education system.

Also, I wish to state my opinions regarding the sources of future funding for arts faculties and post-secondary institutions in this province. Part of the Commission's mandate is to investigate the costs of a post-secondary education in New Brunswick (Commission's Discussion Paper, p. 1). It is common knowledge that tuition rates in this province (and all of Canada) have increased several-fold. In my own experience, when my older brother first started attending UNBF in 1991 to when I started my first degree in 1998, tuition had almost tripled. I will not go into any great detail, as the Commission readily acknowledges such increases, but I just wanted to draw attention to rising tuition costs. As such, I do not believe that further increases in tuitions are feasible as future funding sources. Even in the Report for the Financial Review for the University of New Brunswick, 2006, it was acknowledged that New Brunswick is already one of the three least affordable provinces in Canada for higher education. Furthermore, the same report states that UNBF would make itself less competitive on the national level if tuition rates were any higher and that "university graduates (in New Brunswick) owe more in student loans and take longer to repay their loans than the national average" (pp. 18-20 for the entire discussion from the university's report). Clearly, further sources of funding for arts faculties and post-secondary institutions should not be gathered from our already cash-strapped students and recent graduates.

In closing, I am unsure what should be the sources of future funding for post-secondary education in New Brunswick, but it should not be from higher tuitions, as they are already high enough. To make such suggestions was not the purpose of my letter. I simply wanted to draw the Commission's attention to the plight of arts faculties in New Brunswick, either at UNBF or one of the province's other institutions of higher education. Also, I wanted to highlight my own life experiences to demonstrate the strengths and flexibility of a background in the humanities or social sciences. I am certain that my past successes, and soon-to-be future successes, are directly related to my arts education. We cannot neglect arts faculties, because they are extremely important to the future development of the province of New Brunswick and New Brunswickers, as highlighted in my own experiences. I look forward to continuing my research on environmental topics and resource-based industries in Atlantic Canada, an extremely crucial endeavour reflected by today's provincial economy, but that will not be possible without the secure and continued funding of arts faculties and post-secondary institutions. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Mark McLaughlin  
PhD Candidate in History  
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