

Submission to the New Brunswick Post Secondary Education
Commission, April 29/07

Trust is a simple underlying issue that the Commission on Post Secondary Education cannot ignore in its considerations of the various provincial universities. Once a sense of trust is established and reinforced by very specific detailed rules of fair practice, then the cooperative, harmonious, and productive interactions visualized by the most optimistic will characterize the institutions in the province.

Establishing trust will take real effort because of past and current practices in dealing with higher education both amongst the Universities and with the province. Regard the present commission to see how delicate the issue of trust can be. The commission is studying a relatively poorly funded set of institutions that have ‘...to be smarter than our competitors’ and answer questions of accountability, quality, and efficiency. There are really two sets of answers here. One set is of answers would be to the somewhat flippant questions: “By whose standards?”, “What do you want for so little support or recognition”. The other set of answers reflect what Universities do on an ongoing basis. It is not just by accident that Mount Allison is a top ranked University. It is through their internal judgments and processes in spite of two decades of a diminishing proportion of provincial support. The University of Moncton is an amazing institution that helps tie the country together in supporting our bilingual nature by recognizing the Francophone population of Atlantic Canada. It is a jewel almost by its existence. It is well supported in a relative sense by the Province even though that proportion of government support has eroded somewhat. St Thomas is also an amazing institution. Again, even with erosion of Provincial support in the proportional sense, it has maintained a respected level of quality by the standards of the country. Three examples of Provincial Universities show that by the standards of anyone else these are wonderful institutions. Do these Universities under the

circumstances of alleged crises and under-funding trust the commission and the province to be smart or at least smart enough to be able to recognize quality when they see it and is it smart to keep continually reducing the proportion of provincial funding for these fine institutions?

UNB presents a complex case. On the one hand, the Fredericton campus is, within the context of the province, relatively well funded. Roughly, through internal budgetary maneuvers the Fredericton campus has for the last twenty years managed to keep themselves at about the same proportion of government funding as the U of Moncton. Unfortunately, this has been at some cost. The commission graph shows on page 10 of their document the overall proportion of student contribution to the University has grown to about 40% but as seen in the Betts-MacDonald report the cost of the relative erosion of government funding has been borne by the Saint John campus. This situation has resulted in a complex set of affairs that call for some examination. The Fredericton campus with funding at an average level for a Canadian University is recognized for its respectable national record and reputation. The Saint John campus is not so strongly recognized but on a funding basis is another amazing success story for New Brunswick. With less than 40% of a Provincial contribution to the campus overall and almost 0% to the Arts Faculty, the campus has grown, matured, and contributed to the city of Saint John, the Province and the University in general. On the level of financial efficiency, I would challenge anyone to find a publicly funded campus that stands on the three necessary pillars of Science, Professional programs and the Arts at such a small cost to any Province. The campus has not been treated fairly or in a right manner but it has still achieved a miracle. Just as St Thomas University is justifiably proud of its quality, financial efficiency and on the National scale of accountability Saint John can be even more so.

The commissioners need look no further than to the heroic efforts made by the various Vice-Presidents of the Saint John

campus in conjunction with a dedicated faculty to address chronic under-funding and to design viable programs on a shoestring. The ability to be efficient, effective, and accountable is second nature to the Saint John campus. Again, the commission must consider the issue of trust. The taxpayers of Saint John and of the entire province have not been permitted to adequately support with their tax dollars this particular vibrant, dynamic institution. Those taxpayers are the ones who recognized the importance of education for the city. They recognize that the city needs a strong University presence to attract new workers for industry and they recognize that a Saint John campus that is funded fairly has the most potential of any institution in the province. Can these taxpayers trust that the amazing story of the Saint John campus and their solid support will be rewarded and recognized by the commission? I don't know because I have in twenty years of unfair funding developed a certain lack of trust.

At first blush, you could dismiss an instance of unfairness as simple grouching at a very local level. Wise second thought, however, results in the realization that Mount Allison, Saint Thomas, and the University of Moncton have long been aware of this unfair funding situation. Saint John is a satellite campus. If they become Satellite campuses, will they be involved in an unfair system? Further, can they trust who will control that system and will it be unfair either through orchestration or convenient neglect.

There are many advantages to be gained through various forms of integration but if one campus is claiming some form of seniority and wishes ardently to have or control the meager resources of the other campuses then there might be strong resistance to plans for integration. I believe that many of the commission's recommendations will depend on the definitions of "smarter, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability". If smarter, efficient and effectiveness mean doing more with less it has to be Saint John and St Thomas that walk away with the prize.

Accountability in the sense of a nation building role goes to the U of Moncton helping to unify in the never ending language issues of

the country. Mount Allison as a premier national institution has much to teach the campuses but whether these strengths will be recognized by the commission and ultimately the province comes down to a matter of trust.

At times, being smarter is a matter of not being particularly dumb. With proper recognition, trust and rules of fair play the sense of embattlement would disappear. The Fredericton and Saint John campuses could seek help from Mount Allison and St Thomas on how to be top rated campuses. The U de M could further its rule as a unifying force in Atlantic Canada. The Fredericton campus could learn financial prudence from the Saint John campus right from the simple matters of market pricing it residences or how to maintain infrastructure in hard times to creating the culture of financial prudence. In Saint John, financial prudence starts with the individual faculty member and is coordinated at the administration level and depends on the vision of the leadership and collective wisdom of the faculty to deliver as much education as possible to the city and province.

Smartness, accountability, efficiency, and quality sought by the commission are all before you in institutions that have been tested by the fire of under-financing. They have the answers you seek if their voices are not smothered.

I trust the commission has the wisdom to address issues of trust and propose potential rules to insure proper recognition and fair treatment of the wonderful institutions that are in this province.

Yours respectfully

Michael T. Bradley
444 Ragged Point Road
Saint John, N. B.
E2K 5C7