

**Post-Secondary Education Review: Comments**  
**11 April 2007**

Below I provide my personal comments regarding two documents concerning Post-Secondary Review in New Brunswick: (1) “Saint John Post Secondary: A Strategic Framework” (Background and Discussion Paper), and (2) “Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick” (Discussion Paper – March 2007). The comments are personal and do not necessarily reflect the view of my discipline or my employer. I have included comments upon both papers and directed my reply to Dean MacKinnon and the authors of the second report. I believe it is crucial that the commentators and commissioned authors become aware of all the discussion taking place. An informal survey of UNBSJ professor suggests that morale is extremely low.

**Personal Information:-** provided for statistical purposes as part of March 2007 Discussion Paper Comments

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**Comments on**  
**“Saint John Post Secondary: A Strategic Framework”**  
**(Background and Discussion Paper)**  
Board of Trade/City of Saint John

I found this document to be hastily constructed with little in the way of input from key stakeholders. It focuses upon the need for training for various elements in the business sector. I believe this to be an extremely short-sighted discussion paper.

There are a number of questions that I feel should be asked and answered.

- 1) The consultants writing this report have adopted the City’s notion of “true growth” but I am not even sure that the residents of Greater Saint John have a common idea of what this means. What is the personal understanding of the “true growth” concept by the report’s authors?
- 2) Of the stakeholders interviewed, how many were professors at UNBSJ, instructors at NBCC, or students at either institution?
- 3) Of the stakeholders interviewed, how many were Irving employees, employees of Irving subsidiaries, or in the management of key firms which largely (sub)contract for aspects of the Irving conglomerate?
- 4) There is a general worldwide decrease in business degrees (BBA, B. Comm., MBA). Have the report’s authors considered why this is the case?
- 5) What percentage of Saint John’s healthcare needs (a priority sector) is manufactured (e.g., respiratory problems)?

- 6) On page 9, there is a list of solution possibilities. At one point we are told that a University is meant to create workers/train employees. I respectfully disagree. I think that the role of a University is to foster the growth of the next generation of thinkers and critics. The list continues to state where education can be improved, but there is little mention of how business might be improved. For instance;
  - a. How can business improve employee loyalty?
  - b. How can business guarantee pensions in the event of bankruptcy?
  - c. How can business improve wages?
  - d. How can business work towards lowering the wage gap?
- 7) On pages 11-19, there is a list of all the things that various business sectors do that is “right” and some of the issues these sectors are facing. Where are the complementary pages for UNBSJ/NBCC (patents filed, peer-reviewed papers published, books published, employment placement successes, etc.)? Later, on page 36, it is concluded that in its current form the education sector is currently unsustainable. While I may not disagree with the point, how can you tell if you have no measurement criteria?
- 8) I have a problem with documents that refer to students as a customer/client of an institution (especially an institute of higher learning). At a university, students have purchased the right to a university experience, but not necessarily to a grade (passing or otherwise).
- 9) On page 38, there appears a list of key personnel who were consulted in the course of this project. In addition to the mislabeling of an individual as a principal of UNBSJ (there is no such a position), I was shocked to note that there was no representation by the Dean of Arts office. Academic study has shown that often Arts graduates move through corporate hierarchy faster and to higher management positions than Business graduates. Why then is Arts not consulted?

**Comments on**  
**“Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick”**  
**(Discussion Paper – March 2007)**  
Jacques L’Écuyer and Rick Miner

This is an interesting document with some useful insight. That said, I feel that there is a fundamental flaw in that it seems that the role of a University has been assumed when in fact it is the very role of a University that must be questioned. As a university graduate and professor, I will largely restrain my remarks to this topic, though I believe that by carefully defining the role of a University, we can better define the complementary role of community colleges, training institutes, and apprenticeship programmes (the latter of which seemed to be left out of the report).

What does a University do best?

- 1) It imparts knowledge from the “expert” to the student. This simple statement identifies to two key stakeholders in this arrangement – businesses, administration, and all else fall to the wayside.
- 2) That said, it isn’t really “knowledge” that is imparted as knowledge is a dynamic term. Instead, it is a two-part process of exchange involving (a) the desire to know, and (b) the ability to conduct critical research to answer questions. In my opinion we all need to remind ourselves of this fact.
- 3) Most importantly, a University is *not* about training; yes, there are skills development components at the University, but these skills must be developed in such a way as to promote point 2 above. Those aspects of a University which are primarily concerned with training (e.g., some aspects of business, education, nursing, engineering, and so forth) might best be housed in a Faculty of Professional Studies. In such a faculty, the Dean would need to understand processes of accreditation and certification, and research peers would be in a better position to understand what constitutes research.

I appreciate the accessibility issues raised by the authors but was a bit disappointed to see that tuition rates were raised solely as part of financial issues. High tuition rates and a lack of needs-based scholarships often restrict some of our brightest minds from the University experience. Students from lower income families may go to regions with lower tuition rates or may voluntarily withdraw from applying to University at all. I believe it would be interesting to see tuition-free policy alternatives explored in a future document. One could adopt a model of free tuition like Ireland/Australia, or perhaps a first-year free with scholarships available for those willing/able to continue. This province desperately needs an education boost and a population that thinks critically about larger issues. I am not suggesting that we necessarily promote a tuition-free policy, but it is important that we study the possibility in a fair manner.

On a more technical note, I don’t recall reading about the role of apprenticeships. New Brunswick is rapidly heading into a trades-people shortage. This necessarily will increase the wages paid to a master carpenter, a plumber, or an electrician. To take these skilled people out of the labour force and into an instructor position will likewise require higher pay. Moreover, it will further deplete an already depleted supply of skilled labour thereby ensuring at least a short-term upwards wage spiral. An appropriately designed apprenticeship programme could keep skilled labour on the job, where they are needed, while at the same time training a new crop of labour. Moreover, trainees would reasonably be paid a lower salary (as part of their education costs) and yet still receive valuable training. An appropriately designed plan would limit the cost impacts of large projects on the horizon in New Brunswick.

While I saw mention of transfer credits, especially across New Brunswick institutions (University and Colleges alike), I would also like the authors to comment upon international transfer credits from other provinces and, more importantly, from other nations. Given the number of times I am asked to deal with transfer credits personally (upwards of 50 times a year), there cannot be a campus-wide standard, let-alone a

University-wide or province-wide standard for handling such transfer requests. Likewise, we should look carefully at online credits.

I was a bit dismayed with the suggestion that Senate may have outlived its usefulness with collective bargaining becoming the norm. I must respectfully disagree. That said, I feel that the Senate has been sadly misdirected into focusing upon the unimportant (the minutiae of data analysis, checking for typos in course descriptions, etc.) and has not been asked to look at larger issues (a vision for a campus, the costs and benefits of internationalization, etc.). In some ways, the irrelevance of the Senate has been manufactured.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the report's authors look carefully at community involvement of both University professors and College instructors. An important direction for New Brunswick Universities especially may be to focus on civic engagement – providing our expertise in research skills to the public. I am not suggesting conducting research for the public, although that may be a result, but rather imparting the methods of how we go about conducting critical research. In my mind, this has the potential of increasing domestic enrolments that have dropped precipitously of late.

For example, suppose we use a class from Media or Information Communications Studies to video tape some first year courses (a professor's entire lecture series given to an *in situ* class that year). The media class can earn a practicum credit for taping and producing these lecture series. (The tapes would become joint property of the University and the professor). The series can be made publicly available through a partnership with Roger's Cable, internet video streaming, or as DVDs/VHS tapes that can be withdrawn from the public library system. Members of the public who watch the lecture series (or claim to) can register for a 100% final exam at the scheduled testing time for some nominal fee, and thereby begin their University education. The University could partner with the New Brunswick government to provide assistance to low income earners and those on social assistance who have proven their ability to pass some courses (an educational credit check if you will). Such a plan would improve the overall education of the population and provide an additional channel for domestic enrolments.

I hope these informal comments have been helpful. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at [rmoir@unbsj.ca](mailto:rmoir@unbsj.ca).