

Submission to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

April 9, 2007

By the Mount Allison Faculty Association

Introduction

We have two purposes in this brief document and in our coming meeting with commissioners and staff. First, we want to describe our situation and that of Mount Allison University, and the New Brunswick public university system more generally, based on reflection on some of the issues that you raise in your March 2007 discussion paper. Second, we want to express our own vision of higher education in New Brunswick, a vision that focuses on a high-quality, accessible system of autonomous institutions and values teaching, research, creative activity and service, in both pure and applied study in a broad range of disciplines. We express skepticism about the utility of externally-driven teaching evaluations, we believe that to improve research and creative activity more resources must be available for this purpose, and that all academic staff should have the opportunity to participate fully in research and creative activity. We believe that, by creating a truly excellent higher education system in New Brunswick, we can maintain our enrollments both by retaining New Brunswick students as well as attracting and retaining greater numbers of students from outside the province.

Our view of where we are

The Mount Allison Faculty Association (MAFA) is the exclusive bargaining agent for 190 academic staff at Mount Allison University. Around 150 of this number are full-time professors, instructors and librarians, while 40 are part-time faculty. Of the full-time academic staff, around 110 are in tenured or tenure-track appointments while the other 40 are in various types of full-time contract positions. Therefore, around 60% of the full-time academic staff currently at Mount Allison have earned or can anticipate earning job security here at Mount Allison. Mount Allison University offers a broad range of programmes, almost entirely at the undergraduate level, in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Sciences. Our broad range of programmes extends from Commerce within the Faculty of Social Sciences to Music and Fine Arts in the Faculty of Arts. We also offer high-quality programmes in the natural sciences, including Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Computer Science, and Psychology. In short, Mount Allison provides a wide range of programmes for study of the liberal arts and sciences to prepare students to meet the challenges of work and citizenship in a rapidly and unpredictably changing world. While some regard Mount Allison as *only* a liberal arts institution, many of our programmes in fact prepare students for professional work or advanced professional training for careers in business, law, government, health care, the arts, and other fields.

Although Mount Allison, like other institutions in the region, has experienced some recent adversity in enrollment, we see the institution bouncing back. We attribute this to the high-quality programmes that we offer, for which we have a country-wide reputation. The commission has expressed concern about high enrollment in arts

programmes. Our view is that enrollment in arts reflects student perceptions of a changing labour market and that the government's current focus on vocational education is not a sound long-term policy. In liberal higher-education, students are not just presented with a set of accepted facts as the sum total of their education. Rather, they are taught how to think critically and how to identify, master and evaluate new methods of inquiry in their major subject, or subjects, of study. We recognize and agree that New Brunswick needs graduates with vocational skills in the trades and elsewhere, though we do not think that this is the only thing New Brunswick needs. New Brunswick also needs graduates with the learning, resourcefulness, and disciplined habits of thought and investigation that can produce "practical" applied knowledge. We believe that students who have only been taught applied knowledge will find it more difficult to adjust to a changing world.

On the subject of teaching, we would also like to address the commission's initial thoughts on quality assurance on p. 7 of its discussion paper. With our support, Mount Allison University makes significant efforts to ensure that high-quality teaching is the norm at this institution. Our members regularly implement and consider the results of course evaluations and they have access to peer assistance to improve their teaching. The recently-established Purdy Crawford Teaching Centre has raised the profile of best practices in teaching. The assessment of teaching effectiveness is part of every tenure and promotion decision, and the work of each of our members is evaluated annually by the administration throughout his or her career. As professionals, our members constantly improve their pedagogical techniques, and we are concerned with the implication that New Brunswick's universities require external pressure to improve

teaching effectiveness. Our members are guaranteed academic freedom and their professional practice is the greatest assurance that the quality of what we do will improve on an ongoing basis. We oppose the expenditure of more resources on compulsory, externally-driven teaching evaluation and believe that to improve teaching effectiveness we need to maximize the resources directed to the actual delivery of teaching on the province's campuses.

A major concern that we share with the commission pertains to the question of research and creative activity. The commission asks a relevant question, on p. 7: "But should every professor be expected to be actively engaged in research?" Our answer to this is an emphatic 'yes'. We believe that students and the society as a whole are best served when all academic staff engage in teaching, research and creative activity, and service, to the benefit of their institutions, their disciplines, and their communities. We refer to both research *and* creative activity because the university has a broad mandate, to enrich all aspects of our life, and this enrichment arises from our literary, musical and artistic efforts as well as our more applied efforts understood as "research." We do not believe that the highest-quality university instruction can be delivered by individuals with no interest or time to consider and contribute to the development of knowledge or creative activity in their field. We are already in a situation where the university employer suggests that a certain percentage of academic staff are in "teaching-only positions," particularly part-time faculty and those teaching full-time on contracts of nine (or fewer) month's in duration. These individuals receive compensation that is considerably less than their better established full-time colleagues. The 40% of academic staff teaching part-time or on a contract basis are generally less productive in

research and creative activity. They often spend far more of their time on teaching activities than their tenured and tenure-track colleagues, and they often lack the income and resources to be engaged in research and creative activity.

Make no mistake, this situation has developed largely over the last twenty years principally because of budgetary considerations. Just as tuition at Mount Allison has quadrupled over the last twenty years (at a rate considerably more than the rate of inflation), another response of New Brunswick institutions to limited revenues has been to create a marginal, secondary academic work force that does a significant share of undergraduate teaching but is unable to contribute to research, creative activity and service to the same degree as their tenured and tenure-track colleagues. Like our students we are concerned about the high cost of education, and believe that we have priced higher education out of the range of the poorest segment of Canadian society. Only through public investment can we achieve a higher education system that is both accessible and excellent. New Brunswick can become a destination for students from elsewhere in Canada and the world if we create an outstanding system.

One final comment focuses on the question of governance. On p. 6 of your Discussion Paper you raise the issue of the traditional structure of the university, with a Senate as the highest academic decision-making body while the Board of Regents is responsible for the financial and management issues. We think that this aspect of the structure is basically sound. As a union we have no interest in playing the role of the Senate and believe that academic decision making should remain in its hands. We do agree, however, that consideration should be given to questions of transparency of New Brunswick's universities. To take Mount Allison as an example, while we all value the

institution's autonomy, we must also be aware that the university is a *de facto* public institution, rather than a private one, and that it must behave in an accountable fashion. This is hard to achieve, particularly in Mount Allison's case, when the university's Board of Regents is not broadly representative of New Brunswick or Canadian society. The commission should consider some modest steps to increase accountability, such as giving the provincial Auditor-General authority to look at the finances and management practices of the public university sector. Perhaps New Brunswick should also follow Nova Scotia's and Ontario's lead in forcing the public disclosure of institutional salaries over \$100,000 per year. Finally, there should be genuine public representation on university Boards, in the form of appointees made by the provincial and related municipal governments.

Making the University Sector Part of a Sustainable Province

The upshot of our earlier discussion is that we are optimistic that the university sector can be part of a sustainable province, economically, politically, socially, culturally, and environmentally. We believe that improving accessibility through greater public core funding will help us retain our student numbers. We believe that increased public investment in our teaching, research and creative activity will continue to pay dividends for society as a whole, as it has done over the last several decades. We would also like to note that we live in the era of the rise of the service sector. Our resource industries are declining, our future prosperity will come from the service economy, and accessible, high-quality university education is fundamental to prosperity in this new economy. The university sector can and does "export," in the sense that by attracting students from

outside New Brunswick and outside Canada, we generate income for New Brunswickers in a *de facto* export industry.

We therefore request that your commission recommend that the province reaffirm its commitment to a high-quality, accessible post-secondary system of autonomous institutions that values teaching, research, creative activity and service, in both pure and applied study in a broad range of disciplines. We see Mount Allison University, and our members, as playing a fundamental part in the post-secondary system of the future.