

# **Women and Post-Secondary Education**

**Brief presented by the**

**New Brunswick Advisory Council  
on the Status of Women**

**to the**

**Commission on Post-Secondary Education  
in New Brunswick**

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The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a body created by provincial legislation to study and advise on issues of concern to women and to bring these before the public and the government. The Council is composed of 13 women appointed by government who meet at least four times per year to determine priorities for action on women's issues.

**June 2007**

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## **Executive Summary**

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes this opportunity to present its views to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. Our brief focuses on women's needs and concerns with regards to accessibility of post-secondary education.

As we noted in our submission to the provincial government's Self-Sufficiency Task Force, the level of equality between groups in society should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative. Gender equality is internationally recognized as an indicator of sustainable, people-centre development and a matter of human rights.

Unfortunately, the Commission discussion paper barely mentions gender and diversity concerns and virtually no sex-disaggregated data is provided in its online research section. Sex-disaggregated data are essential for policy and program development that takes into account the significant differences in the status, situation and life experiences of women and men. Systematic inclusion of gender in analysis is a tool for revealing possible outcomes for women and for men in all their diversity and for ensuring that these groups benefit equally from initiatives.

Despite some significant gains made over the past decades, women still earn less than men, shoulder a heavier burden of family responsibilities, are more likely to live in poverty and to experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Women also remain seriously under-represented in decision-making positions and face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives. The inequalities are especially severe and multi-layered for groups such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

Women have pursued higher education and training in ever growing numbers over the past thirty years and now outnumber men in the total university student population. Women also account for over half of the community college clientele in Canada, but only about 40% of community college students in New Brunswick.

However, women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape gender-specific education and training patterns. Women are more likely than men to study part-time and are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects.

The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for the entire society. It contributes to lower average earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity.

The Advisory Council recommends improved gender and diversity-specific data collection on student aid, enrolments and completion rates, along with a comprehensive needs study. We also call upon provincial education, labour and social program authorities to develop and implement a multi-faceted and coordinated strategy to achieve the full and equitable participation of women in post-secondary education.

## Introduction

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes this opportunity to present its views to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick.

The Commission's mandate is vast and important: examination of structural, financial, accessibility and quality issues for the entire post-secondary education and training sector in our province.<sup>1</sup> The inquiry covers public universities, private universities (denominational and for-profit), the NBCC/CCNB network, apprenticeships, private trainers and other aspects of literacy and lifelong learning. Special attention is to be paid to the effects of the increasing financial burden carried by students and to the pertinence of the traditional structural groupings of education, training and apprenticeship. The terms of reference emphasize the need for improved access to the widest range possible of relevant, high quality and competitive education and training options while promoting collaborative and cost-sharing institutional initiatives.

The inquiry is proceeding on a tight timeline. Commissioners Dr. Rick Miner and Dr. Jacques L'Écuyer released their discussion paper in March 2007, consulted with educational stakeholders and the public in April and early May and are expected to report to the provincial government in the summer of 2007. Three women sit on the eight member advisory panel that will provide input into the report on the future direction of the higher education and training sector.<sup>2</sup>

The level of equality between groups in society should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative, including the New Brunswick government's self-sufficiency project.<sup>3</sup> There is increasing acceptance internationally that gender equality should concern and fully engage men as well as women, since it is "a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development" as well as a human rights matter.<sup>4</sup>

We note our dismay that the Commission discussion paper barely mentions gender and diversity concerns.<sup>5</sup> An allusion to the under-representation of Aboriginal peoples in the province's post-secondary institutions and the suggestion that the virtual absence of women among apprentices is a "missed opportunity" are the only hints of the challenges faced by these groups.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, only one of the more than thirty graphs available in the Research Data section of the Commission's site presents data that differentiates between women and men.<sup>7</sup> Sex-disaggregated data are essential for policy and program development that takes into account the significant differences in the status, situation and life experiences of women and men. Systematic inclusion of gender in analysis is a tool for revealing possible outcomes for women

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission was launched in late January 2007. "Premier announces N.B. Commission on Post-Secondary Education", January 19, 2007 press release available [www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0075pe.htm](http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0075pe.htm); Government of New Brunswick, « Terms of Reference – Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick », p. 2-3 Available at [www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html](http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4. Available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html>

<sup>3</sup> See *Self-Sufficiency and Equality*, Notes for a presentation to the Self-Sufficiency Task Force by the NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women, March 2007, Available at [www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw1.asp](http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw1.asp)

<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006* (2006), Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 4. Available at [www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm](http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, *Discussion Paper*, March 2007. Available at [www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html](http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> The graph entitled "First Nations enrolments in 2005-2006", presents data on female and male students receiving federal government funding support. Available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/research.php>, consulted April 30, 2007.

and for men in all their diversity and for ensuring that these groups benefit equally from initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

Despite some significant gains made over the past decades, women still earn less than men, shoulder a heavier burden of family responsibilities, are more likely to live in poverty and to experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Women also remain seriously under-represented in decision-making positions and face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives. The inequalities are especially severe and multi-layered for groups such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

In their search for economic security and personal development and pushed by rising labour market requirements, women have pursued higher education and training in ever growing numbers over the past thirty years. In New Brunswick as in Canadian universities, women now outnumber men in the total student population.<sup>10</sup> Women also account for over half of the community college clientele in Canada, but only about 40% of community college students in New Brunswick.<sup>11</sup>

Yet women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape gender-specific education and training patterns. Women are more likely than men to study part-time and are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects.<sup>12</sup>

The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for the entire society. It contributes to lower average earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity. Elimination of the gender wage gap would result in significant increases in tax revenues and decreases in health and social program expenditures, according to a study by St. Mary's University economist Dr. Ather Akbari.<sup>13</sup> As the World Economic Forum has shown in a recent report, societies with the most equality between the sexes are also the world's most competitive.<sup>14</sup>

This submission focuses on women's needs and concerns with regards to accessibility of post-secondary education. It is divided into three parts. The first examines gender differences in post-secondary participation. The second explores the barriers to women's higher education and training. Finally, we present a series of recommendations to address the problems identified.

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<sup>8</sup> There is an extensive practice-based literature on Gender-based Analysis, also called Equity Analysis, Gender Equity Analysis, Gender Equality Analysis, Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Analysis. See for example, House of Commons Canada, *Gender-Based Analysis: Building Blocks for Success*, Report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women, April 2005; United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, "Gender Mainstreaming", Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>

<sup>9</sup> See for example, NB ACSW, *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women*; NB ACSW, Reminder List: For Those Who Think Women Have Reached Equality, Available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>10</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, March 2006, available at [www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-503-X](http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-503-X), p. 91-92.

<sup>11</sup> NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *The Gender Wage Gap in New Brunswick* (2004), prepared for GPI Atlantic, Halifax, N.S., available at [www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/documents/GENDER\\_WAGE\\_GAP\\_NB\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_EN.pdf](http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/documents/GENDER_WAGE_GAP_NB_FINAL_REPORT_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadia Zahidi (2006), *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 17-18, available at [www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm](http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm)

## 1. Gender differences in post-secondary educational participation and attainment

Women's educational attainment has risen dramatically over the past thirty years as growing numbers of women have set their sights on post-secondary education. From the young high school graduate to the middle-aged woman with adult children, women of all ages have been making the connection between education and better employment prospects while seeking opportunities for personal development and citizen engagement.

But the growing female presence in the post-secondary sector is only part of the story. Closer examination of women's and men's participation patterns over the past three decades reveal disturbing trends that mirror and perpetuate gender inequality.

It should also be noted that many adult New Brunswickers did not finish high school and have literacy levels below the level considered necessary to live and work in today's society. International literacy survey statistics from 2003 revealed that 54% of New Brunswick women and 59% of men aged 16 and over had serious difficulties in reading basic texts, while 67% of women and 63% of men had low levels of numeracy skills, worse than the Canadian averages.<sup>15</sup> Literacy programs are severely underfunded and less educated adult learners who are unemployed or underemployed experience great difficulties accessing and successfully completing fragmented employment and academic upgrading initiatives.

### 1.1. Increasing educational attainment and expansion of post-secondary clientele

Education levels have improved significantly for both women and men in New Brunswick in the past thirty years. As of 2001, nearly half (48%) of New Brunswick women and men (47%) aged 15 and over had some form of education or training past high school, up from just 20% and 18% respectively in 1971.<sup>16</sup>

The once substantial gender gap in university degrees has been all but eliminated in New Brunswick as in the rest of Canada. The 2001 census revealed that 12% of New Brunswick women and 11% of men aged 15 and over had a university degree, up from 8% and 9% respectively in 1991 and 2% and 5% in 1971.<sup>17</sup> At the national level, slightly more men than women now have university degrees: 15% of Canadian women and 16% of men.<sup>18</sup>

While New Brunswick Francophone women have almost caught up to Anglophones in university degree-holding - as of 2001, 11% of francophone women compared to 12% of Anglophone women and 9% of francophone men had university degrees - other groups continue to lag behind.<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal women in New Brunswick have attained a higher level of schooling than Aboriginal men, but are less likely than non-Aboriginal women and men to hold a university degree. As of 2001, 7% of N.B.'s Aboriginal identity<sup>20</sup> women aged 15 and over and 3% of their male counterparts had a university degree, compared to 12% and 11% of non-Aboriginal females and males in the province.<sup>21</sup> Women with disabilities have lower educational levels than women

<sup>15</sup> NB ACSW (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, p. 10-11, Fredericton, NB ACSW, available at <http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>16</sup> Ginette Lafleur (1990), *Les femmes à l'heure des comptes. Dossier statistique, 1971-1986*, Publication d'Action Éducation Femmes N.-B., p. 57; Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, catalogue 97F0017XCB01002.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1991 & 2001, catalogue 97F00017XCB1001 & 97F0017XCB01002.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Irène Savoie for the Fédération des dames d'Acadie inc., *Socioeconomic Profile of Francophone Women in New Brunswick*, April 2004. Available at <http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>20</sup> Persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group and those who report themselves as a Registered or Treaty Indian, and/or Band or First Nation membership.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, catalogue 97F0011XCB01043.

and men without disabilities. As of 2001, 9% of New Brunswick women with disabilities<sup>22</sup> aged 15 to 64 and 6% of their male counterparts had a university certificate or degree, compared to 16% of women and 13% of men without disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

New Brunswick universities have seen a dramatic growth in female clientele over the past thirty years. Women's full-time enrolments in New Brunswick universities more than doubled between 1975/76 and 2005/06, rising from 4,803 to 11,722, while male enrolments increased by only one-third.<sup>24</sup> By the late 1980s, females outnumbered males in our province's universities. Women have held on to their lead, accounting for 58% of full-time enrolments in 2005/06, up from 43% thirty years earlier, closely paralleling Canadian trends.<sup>25</sup>

Female enrolments in the New Brunswick community colleges have not followed the same upward trend. Women continue to be under-represented in institutions hit by declining enrolments overall as well as a proportional decline in female enrolments since the 1990s. New Brunswick total college enrolment has decreased by almost a third since 1990/91, compared to the national increase of 3.5%.<sup>26</sup> Only 38% of full-time students in regular college programs were female in 2005/06, down from a high of 46% in 1988/89.<sup>27</sup> Some 3,000 women were enrolled in these programs in 2005/06, less than half the peak clientele of ten years earlier.<sup>28</sup> New Brunswick falls short of the Canadian average, where women have accounted for slightly more than half of the full-time community college clientele since the mid 1970s.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.2. Part-time and graduate level enrolments

A closer look at enrolment patterns reminds us that gender inequalities persist in our province's universities and colleges.

Many more women than men are attending colleges and universities on a part-time basis. Women were 65% of all part-time students in New Brunswick universities in 2005/06, up from 60% in the mid 1970s, while they represented 58% of all full-time students.<sup>30</sup> In the New Brunswick Community Colleges, women were 55% of all part-time students and 40% of all full-time students in 2005/06.<sup>31</sup> While about the same proportion of female and male university students were studying part-time – 20% of women and 19% of men – a much higher proportion of

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<sup>22</sup> Persons with disabilities are those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical or mental condition or a health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do; types of disabilities include: hearing, seeing, speech, mobility, agility, dexterity, pain, learning, memory, developmental, delay and psychological.

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada (September 2003), *2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey*, catalogue 89-587-XIE, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE>

<sup>24</sup> Lafleur, p. 76, 79; Maritime Provinces Higher Education database.

<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> Sean Junor & Alex Usher (2004), "The Price of Knowledge 2004: New Brunswick", Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/poknb.asp>

<sup>27</sup> This figure for "regular" enrolments includes the following: Apprenticeship, Distance Education, Continuing Education, Correspondance Education, General Studies and Connections. Data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/cover.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Canadian average based on community college enrolments for 1999/2000. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; Lafleur, p. 79. The Canadian average, based on enrolment statistics for 2001/02, was 60%. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Figures cited for total community college enrolments include regular, contract and distance programs.

women than men were enrolled part-time at the N.B. Community College, 27% versus 17% in 2005/06.<sup>32</sup>

The impact of part-time status on completion time and attrition rates merits systematic study. Women presumably take longer on average to complete their programs since more women than men are part-time students.<sup>33</sup> Educational authorities do not systematically collect time-series data on time to completion for degrees, diplomas and certificates nor dropout rates of women and other under-represented groups, so we are unable to track some of these important trends.<sup>34</sup>

Gender differences are also evident when we consider women's participation in graduate programs. Women have made significant inroads in graduate studies over the past thirty years, but they remain less likely than men to pursue the more advanced degrees, particularly the doctorate. The female share of enrolments in bachelor's and first professional degree programs in New Brunswick rose from 50% in 1980/81 to 60% in 2005/06. During the same period, women also increased their presence in master's programs, from 36% to 55%. As for doctoral studies, women's share of enrolments has more than tripled, climbing from 13% in 1980/81 to 46% in 2005/06.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.3. Gender segregation by field of study and training

Gender segregation is still entrenched in higher education and training, replicating occupational segregation in the labour force. Today as two decades ago, New Brunswick and Canadian women are concentrated in a limited range of occupations compared to men. Women still account for less than 10% of workers in the trades, transport and equipment sector, while barely one in five jobs in the natural and applied sciences sector is held by a woman.<sup>36</sup>

In New Brunswick as in Canadian universities, women continue to predominate in traditional faculties like nursing and are over-represented in the humanities and social sciences. Almost nine out of ten full-time students in health-related programs (86%) were female in our province in 2005/06, while women accounted for about 70% of the clientele in education, the humanities and the social sciences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Some studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s suggest that women take longer than men to complete their Master's or Ph.D degrees, at least in certain disciplines. See the literature review in Sandra W. Pyke (1997). Education and the "Woman question". [Education and the "Woman Question"] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>

<sup>34</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (2006), *Canadian Post-Secondary Education. A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*, Ottawa, CCL. Available at <http://www.ccl-cca.ca>, p. 70-78.

<sup>35</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Includes part-time and full-time enrolments; undergraduate includes Bachelor's degrees, 1<sup>st</sup> professional degrees, undergraduate diplomas, certificates and other undergraduate.

<sup>36</sup> N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, Fredericton, NB ACSW, p. 57. Available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>; Statistics Canada (2007). *Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates 2006*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry. Catalogue no. 89F0133XIE, p. 9-10, 20. Available at [www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89F0133X](http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89F0133X)

<sup>37</sup> Based on enrolments at undergraduate and graduate levels. Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Canadian patterns are similar, though lower in health-related programs at 75% in 2001/02. Note that N.B. university enrolments do not include out-of-province medical school enrolments. See Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*: p. 92.

Women have made significant inroads in some university programs long dominated by men, such as law. Female enrolments in New Brunswick's two law faculties climbed steadily from a 37% share in 1980/81 to 56% in 2005/06.<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, female enrolment in the traditionally male fields of engineering, applied and physical sciences and mathematics continues to lag well behind that of men. Women's share of full-time enrolments in engineering and the applied sciences rose slowly but steadily from 9% in 1980/81 to a high of 21% in the mid-1990s.<sup>39</sup> But the trend has reversed in recent years. In 2005/06, less than one in five students (17%) studying in this field in New Brunswick universities is female, slightly below the Canadian average.<sup>40</sup> Women in mathematics and the physical sciences boasted a 30% share of full-time enrolments in 1980/81 but lost ground from the end of the decade through the 1990s. Now women represent barely one in four students in those disciplines in New Brunswick universities, slightly below the latest Canadian average.<sup>41</sup>

There has been little change in the gender distribution of community college program enrolments over the past thirty years. In the 1970s and 1980s, women in New Brunswick's community colleges were far more likely to be training to become nurses' aids, legal secretaries, or hairdressers than carpenters or mechanics.<sup>42</sup> Female training ghettos and low female enrolments in non-traditional courses persisted into the 1990s. In 1992/93, three-quarters of full-time female enrolments were clustered in academic, secretarial-clerical, business, and health-community services training programs, while male enrolments were concentrated in technical and trades programs including construction, mechanical-motorized equipment, electronics, mechanical-industrial, and metal training. Indeed, a study released by the Advisory Council in 1994 concluded that training patterns of the 1990s would only help perpetuate long-standing gender inequities in the workplace.<sup>43</sup>

Even today, most women attending the New Brunswick Community Colleges are training for traditionally female employment or taking some kind of academic upgrading course. Nearly one in five full-time female regular students was enrolled in Office administration programs in 2005/06, while about one in ten was training as a Practical nurse, where they made up 90% and 96% of the clientele respectively.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, that year women made up just 3% of full-time enrolments in carpentry and 5% in automotive and heavy equipment mechanic programs. Women remain a tiny minority in most of the traditionally male-dominated trades and technology programs.

Women are severely under-represented throughout Canada in the apprenticeship programs that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training and experience. Women accounted for only 2% of all the apprentices taking community college courses in our province in 2005/06 – less than fifty women of a total of nearly 2,000 apprentices – a proportion that has hardly budged in twenty years.<sup>45</sup> As of March 2007, only 64 or 2% of New Brunswick's more than 3,000 registered

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<sup>38</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Includes part-time and full-time enrolments at all levels.

<sup>39</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database.

<sup>40</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. The Canadian figure for 2001/02 was 24%. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. The Canadian figure was 30% in 2001/02. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> Lafleur, p. 73; NB ACSW (1984), *Plan of Action on the Status of Women in Community Colleges*, submitted to the Department of Community Colleges.

<sup>43</sup> NB ACSW (1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*.

<sup>44</sup> Calculated from campus-level data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

<sup>45</sup> The 2005/06 total includes full-time and part-time enrolments in regular and contract apprenticeship programs. Data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. For the evolution since 1986, see McFarland, p. 198-199.

apprentices are female and fully one-half of these women are apprenticing as cooks.<sup>46</sup> Women make up 2% or less of those apprenticing as carpenters, mechanics or electricians.<sup>47</sup>

These gender imbalances in our university and college programs have important consequences for women's earning potential and career status, as some of the better-paying jobs are in the trades, scientific and technology sectors. We also pay a high economic and social price for this under-development of human resources, particularly in light of Canada-wide worker shortages in some of the skilled trades and professions.<sup>48</sup>

As for training programs offered in private institutions, we know little about gender participation patterns because the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour does not collect this data by gender or program.

## **2. Barriers to women's higher education and training**

We have seen that full and equal participation of women in the post-secondary system remains elusive. In this section, we will review some of the barriers faced by women in accessing and completing higher education and training.

Gender-specific obstacles are rooted in the labour market and the larger society. Women may also experience discrimination and adaptation problems within the learning environments.

### **2.1. Financial obstacles**

Financial constraints are widely acknowledged as formidable barriers to post-secondary education participation for women and men.<sup>49</sup> The heavy share of costs borne by students and their families and the spectre of indebtedness loom large in decisions to undertake or complete higher education and training. Socio-economic status, ethnicity, and place of residence still shape inequitable access. Students from low-income families and from Aboriginal communities in particular continue to be underrepresented in post-secondary classrooms.

Women have fewer financial resources to invest in higher education since on average they live on lower incomes than men. The last census revealed that women's average total income was 62%

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<sup>46</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Apprenticeship and Certification Branch, Provincial Summary Totals of Apprentices as of 2007/03/23.

<sup>47</sup> Canadian patterns are similar. See Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> See for example, Canadian Council on Learning, *Canadian Post-Secondary Education. A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*, p. 17-18; also Ross Finnie, Marie Lavoie and Maud-Catherine Rivard (2001), "Women in engineering: The missing link in the Canadian knowledge economy," *Education Quarterly Review*, vol. 7, no 3. Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/studies/81-003/feature/eqab2001007003s1a01.htm>

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Joseph Berger, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin (2007), *The Price of Knowledge 2006-07*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp> Marc Frenette (2007), *Why are Youth from Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences and Financial Constraints*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2007295.htm>; K. Myers & P. de Broucker (2006), *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System*, Canadian Policy Research Network, Executive summary available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1479&l=en>; M. Corak, G. Lipps & J. Zhao (2003), *Family Income and Participation in Post-Secondary Education*, Statistics Canada, available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=11F0019M2003210>

of men's in New Brunswick and 61% of women versus 40% of men in our province had an annual income of less than \$20,000.<sup>50</sup>

Women are more likely to live in poverty than men because of lower wages, savings and pension benefits, their involvement in unpaid work and the impact of family responsibilities. Lone parent women and their children are the group hardest hit in New Brunswick as in the rest of Canada. Although the rate has generally been falling in recent years, more than one out of three (37%) female lone-parent families was still living below the poverty line in 2005.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, one in twenty-five children in two-parent families were living in poverty. Overall, about 15,000 New Brunswick children, or one in ten children under the age of 18 lived in poverty in 2005.

Women are far more likely than men to work part-time - one in four New Brunswick women compared to barely one in ten men<sup>52</sup> – and they still earn less on average than men. According to the latest hourly pay gap data from Statistics Canada, women earn 12% less on average than men in New Brunswick in 2006, while the average gap for Canadian women was 16% that year.<sup>53</sup>

Even women with a university or college education experience pay disparity. Women who graduated from a New Brunswick university in 1999 and who were working full time five years later earned 18% less on average than men with whom they graduated.<sup>54</sup> Women who graduated from New Brunswick Community College in 2005 and who were working full time one year later earned on average 14% less than men with whom they had graduated.<sup>55</sup>

Women with disabilities and Aboriginal women have lower incomes and earn less than other women and men in New Brunswick.

The average total annual income for women with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years in New Brunswick was just \$14,856 in 2000, nearly \$8,000 less than men with disabilities, about \$5,000 less than women without disabilities and \$15,000 less than men without disabilities. More than one in three disabled women aged 15 and over in the province (35%) had total incomes of less than \$10,000 in 2000, compared to one in four of their male counterparts (25%).<sup>56</sup>

The average total income of Aboriginal women aged 15 years and over in New Brunswick in 2000 was \$13,898, or 78% of Aboriginal men's average income (\$17,901), compared to \$18,676 and \$30,020 respectively for non-Aboriginal females and males.<sup>57</sup> Almost half (47%) of New

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<sup>50</sup> Based on 2001 Census of Canada, before-tax annual incomes from all sources for females aged 15 years and over. See N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, Fredericton, NB ACSW, p. 30, available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>.

<sup>51</sup> Poverty rates based on after-tax income, using Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs which take into account the relative proportion of income spent on basic necessities such as rent, food and clothing. Statistics Canada, *Income in Canada, 2005*, cat. No 75-202-XWE; Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 202-0804, available at <http://www.statcan.ca>

<sup>52</sup> See NBACSW, *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women*, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 282-0072. Includes part-time and full-time workers.

<sup>54</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

<sup>55</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2006), *Survey of 2005 New Brunswick Community College Graduates*.

<sup>56</sup> Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001*, Table 5 available at [www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE/tables.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE/tables.htm)

<sup>57</sup> Statistics cited include on reserve and off reserve population. Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Total Income Groups, Sex and Aboriginal Groups for Population 15 Years and Over, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995 and 2000 – 20% Sample Data, <[http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=60107&APATH=3&GID=355313&METH=1&PTYPE=55496&THEME=54&FOCUS=0&AID=0&P\\_LACENAME=0&PROVINCE=0&SEARCH=0&GC=0&GK=0&VID=0&FL=0&RL=0&FREE=0](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=60107&APATH=3&GID=355313&METH=1&PTYPE=55496&THEME=54&FOCUS=0&AID=0&P_LACENAME=0&PROVINCE=0&SEARCH=0&GC=0&GK=0&VID=0&FL=0&RL=0&FREE=0)>, accessed May 31, 2007.

Brunswick Aboriginal women with income reported total incomes of less than \$10,000 in 2000, compared to 42% of Aboriginal men, 33% of non-Aboriginal women and 20% of non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women who were employed in 2000 also earned less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, on average \$14,313 versus \$19,110 in 2000.<sup>58</sup>

The persistence of these income and earnings inequities means that the skyrocketing cost of pursuing post-secondary studies has a differential impact on women and particular groups of women. Over the past two decades, university students and aspiring students have witnessed a dramatic rise in tuition fees as post-secondary institutions have passed along federal funding cuts. Since 1990, the average annual undergraduate tuition fees at New Brunswick universities have risen by 177%, from \$1,925 in 1990/91 to \$3,863 in 2001/02 and reaching \$5,328 in 2006/07.<sup>59</sup> New Brunswick currently has the second highest average university fees after Nova Scotia. Canadian undergraduates paid an average of \$4,347 in tuition fees for the 2006/07 academic year.<sup>60</sup>

Community college fees have remained lower and programs take less time to complete than university studies. Annual fees for private training programs tend however to be far more expensive than either university or community college. In 2005/06, students attending the New Brunswick Community College paid an average annual fee of \$3,050, compared to \$7,520 for private career colleges or training institutions and \$5,038 in the universities.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond tuition fees, students must also find the resources to cover compulsory student services fees, textbooks, accommodation, food, transportation and lost earnings potential. For students with children, child care is another major expense. And since substantially more women than men study part-time, living and even tuition costs would on average be higher for female students overall.

Existing non-repayable financial aid, in the form of government-provided scholarships or grants, is mainly focused on occupational training offered in the community colleges.<sup>62</sup>

Over the past decade, limited financial support for training has been provided through New Brunswick's Training and Skills Development program.<sup>63</sup> Aimed at getting the unemployed and maternity and parental leave-takers back into the labour force, the program offers up to two years of aid to cover tuition fees and help with living costs. But Employment Insurance based eligibility criteria are restrictive and program choice must be approved by a provincial employment counsellor who assesses the likelihood of obtaining stable employment.<sup>64</sup> Most grant recipients are in community college or other training programs, but a small number have used the funding to complete their university studies. In 2005/06, women made up 53% of the almost 6,500 clients

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<sup>58</sup> Statistics cited include on reserve and off reserve population. Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Employment Income Groups in Constant Collars, Sex and Aboriginal Groups for Population 15 Years and Over, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995 and 2000 – 20% Sample Data, <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=57103&GID=355317&METH=1&APATH=3&PTYPE=55496&THEME=53&AID=0&FREE=0&FOCUS=0&VID=0&GC=0&GK=0&SC=1&SR=1&RL=0&CPP=99&RPP=9999&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0&d1=2&d2=4>, accessed May 31, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Amounts cited are in current dollars. Statistics Canada, "University tuition fees 2006/2007", *The Daily*, September 1, 2006, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060901/d060901a.htm>

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Student Financial Services Branch (2007), *New Brunswick Student Financial Assistance Program, Statistical Profile 2005-2006*, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> In 2006/07, the N.B. government introduced a one-time benefit of \$2,000 for first year, full-time university students who are N.B. residents. See [http://www.gnb.ca/0162/grants/grant\\_for\\_students-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0162/grants/grant_for_students-e.asp)

<sup>63</sup> Formerly known as the Skills, Loans and Grants program. See Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/covers.htm>, p. 10-11.

<sup>64</sup> See N.B. government web site at <http://www.gnb.ca/0311/2be.htm>

receiving funding for training under the program. The average grant for female students in 2005/06 was higher than for males (\$6,484.07 for women versus \$5,284.59 for men).<sup>65</sup>

Before the transfer of responsibility for labour market training from the federal government to the provinces in 1996 and changes to the Unemployment Insurance program, more public funding was available for sponsored training programs and women were targeted as an equity group facing labour market disadvantage.<sup>66</sup> According to economist Joan McFarland, federal spending cuts on training programs and seat purchases largely account for the declining female clientele in the New Brunswick Community College over the past decade. From the 1970s through to the mid-1990s, most female trainees in New Brunswick's community colleges benefited from some form of aid to cover tuition and living costs for occupational training and academic upgrading. Almost 80% of female community college students in 1985/86 and 57% in 1996/97 were receiving financial support from government or industry, a proportion that fell to less than 30% by the end of the 1990s.<sup>67</sup>

Too few employers in Canada provide workplace-based training or sponsor trainees in public or private institutions. Training support is concentrated on the higher skilled workforce, younger employees and those working for large firms.<sup>68</sup> A Statistics Canada survey showed that only 26% of all adult workers aged 25 and over in New Brunswick participated in employer-supported training in 2002.<sup>69</sup> Some research also suggests that men are more likely than women to receive employer-supported training.<sup>70</sup> A growing body of national and international research links Canada's lagging economic growth to employer underinvestment in training and skills development.<sup>71</sup>

Several small-scale government initiatives in our province have been recently introduced to encourage women's participation in non-traditional training programs. New scholarships covering the first year's tuition for students in non-traditional programs at the Community College were awarded for 2006/07 under New Brunswick's Wage Gap Action Plan.<sup>72</sup> Launched in November 2006, Partners Building Futures is a federal-provincial pilot project that will provide two years

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<sup>65</sup> Data provided by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. In 2005/06, 3,403 women and 3,065 men were receiving funding; of this number 170 women and 102 men were in university programs.

<sup>66</sup> Ursule Critoph (2003), "Who Wins, Who Loses: The Real Story of the Transfer of Training to the Provinces and its Impact on Women," in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, p. 14-33; see also Karen Lior and Susan Wismer, "Still Shopping for Training: Women, Training and Livelihoods," in *Ibid.*, p. 214-229.

<sup>67</sup> Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/cover.htm>, p. 14-15, Table A6, Annex.

<sup>68</sup> Karen Myers and Patrice de Broucker (June 2006), *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System*, Canadian Policy Research Network, Executive summary available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1479&l=en>; Mark Goldenberg (September 2006), *Employer Investment in Workplace Learning in Canada*, Canadian Policy Research Network for the Canadian Congress on Learning, available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1529&l=en>

<sup>69</sup> Valerie Peters (April 2004), *Working and Training: First Results of the 2003 Adult Education and Training Survey*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81-595-M2004015>

<sup>70</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (April 2007), *Connecting the Dots...Linking Training Investment to Business Outcomes and the Economy*, p. 20, Available at <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Home/index.htm?Language=EN>

<sup>71</sup> See CCL, *Connecting the Dots*; See also Joseph Berger, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin (2007), *The Price of Knowledge 2006-07*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp>

<sup>72</sup> See Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour web site at [http://www.ceibathurst.com/icdm/BasicPage\\_E.aspx?CPagId=266](http://www.ceibathurst.com/icdm/BasicPage_E.aspx?CPagId=266)

support to some sixty women on social assistance who prepare for non-traditional skilled trades, part of the effort to move people from welfare to work.<sup>73</sup>

But for many potential students, including lone parent women on social assistance, undertaking post-secondary studies would require taking on a repayable loan provided under the financial aid program administered by the provincial Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

Student indebtedness has reached crisis proportions in our province and across Canada. In 2006, 66% of Atlantic Canadian university undergraduates owed an average of \$29,747, the highest average debt in the country.<sup>74</sup> New Brunswick students are more likely than other Canadian students to borrow to finance their post-secondary studies, they borrow higher amounts and take longer to repay their debt. Some 52% of New Brunswick university graduates had student loan debt in 2000, the second-highest rate in the country and well above the national average of 42%. Fully 25% of New Brunswick university graduates had student loan debt in excess of \$25,000, compared to 13% at the national level.<sup>75</sup> As for New Brunswick college graduates, 51% had student loan debt in 2000, above the national average of 38%, and about 5% had student loan debt in excess of \$25,000, about the same as at the national level.<sup>76</sup> Two years after graduation in 2000, both college and university graduates at the national level had paid off 27% of their student loan debt, compared to 20% and 16% respectively for New Brunswick graduates.<sup>77</sup>

Women made up 63% of all student aid applicants in New Brunswick in 2005/06, but we know little about their specific borrowing and debt situation because most student loan data is not available by gender.<sup>78</sup> Some 7% of all post-secondary students in New Brunswick who received student loans in 2005/06 were single parents – mostly women with dependent children.<sup>79</sup>

Statistics from the New Brunswick Student Financial Assistance Program highlight troubling trends for the student population as a whole. The average student loan debt at graduation for our province's university, community college and private institution students in full-time studies has more than doubled since the early 1990s, rising from \$9,947 in 1993/94 to \$21,240 in 2005/06.<sup>80</sup> University students finishing Bachelor's degrees owed on average \$32,132 in 2005/06, compared to \$12,675 for students completing the shorter duration Community College programs.<sup>81</sup>

Gender-specific evidence on student borrowing and debt provided by some regional and national surveys points to disadvantages experienced by women. Women generally had more difficulty

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<sup>73</sup> For more on the Partners Building Futures Projects, see <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0449pe.htm>. A new pilot program in Nova Scotia called Career Seek allows income assistance recipients to attend a university or other postsecondary program of more than two years and still receive benefits. See Income Assistance for Post-Secondary Education at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/whatsnew.html>

<sup>74</sup> Sean Junor and Alex Usher (2004), *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*, Montreal, p. 3, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp>.

<sup>75</sup> Sean Junor and Alex Usher (2004), "The Price of Knowledge 2004: New Brunswick", Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/poknb.asp>

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2007), Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 9, 14.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

repaying student loans than their male counterparts, because they borrowed more than men and earned less.<sup>82</sup>

Many of the briefs submitted to this Commission and to other inquiries across Canada address the problem of student debt and the ever-increasing costs of pursuing post-secondary studies. Not surprisingly, student associations offer some of the most detailed reform proposals. These include introduction of an annual debt ceiling, reduction of student loan interest rates and introduction of loan remission for high need students post-graduation, more accurate assessment of student living costs for financial assistance purposes, expansion of needs-based bursaries for low-income students, and lowering of tuition fees to below the current national average.<sup>83</sup>

We agree with that the focus should be on reducing the upfront and out-of-pocket cost for students, rather than on increasing the student's borrowing capacity and extending the debt repayment period. The Canadian Association of University Teachers calls for a "new architecture of student financial assistance that focuses on reducing costs and debt and encouraging under-represented groups, like aboriginals, to pursue post-secondary education."<sup>84</sup> A tuition fee freeze and reduction, along with higher upfront, needs-based grants for low-income students feature prominently in the CAUT submission which like many others insists on the importance of increased public investment in post-secondary education and alleviating the burden on the individual student.

## 2.2. Family responsibilities

Just as family responsibilities continue to shape the labour force participation of women, so too do they affect women's pursuit of higher education and training.

Women still shoulder the lion's share of caring responsibilities and unpaid household tasks - bearing and caring for children, elder care, care for the chronically ill or disabled and housework - without adequate access to essential support services.<sup>85</sup>

Without a family policy, New Brunswick is not doing enough to help families reconcile the demands of education, paid work, and family life. Back in 1970, the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for postsecondary educational institutions to develop

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<sup>82</sup> Warren Clark analyzes the results of a survey of 1995 Canadian graduates of bachelor's programs conducted by Statistics Canada in 1997 in the article "Paying Off Student Loans", *Canadian Social Trends*, (Winter 1998), Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=11-008-X19980034002>. Analysis of data from the National Graduates Survey of the class of 1990 supported similar conclusions. See Saul Schwartz and Ross Finnie (October 2002), "Student Loans in Canada: an analysis of borrowing and repayment," *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 21, issue 5, p. 497-512. See also the recent survey by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (June 2007), *Two Years On: A Survey of Class of 2003 Maritime University Graduates*. Fredericton, MPHEC. Available at [http://www.mphec.ca/english/pol\\_b.html](http://www.mphec.ca/english/pol_b.html)

<sup>83</sup> See for example, Fédération des étudiants et étudiantes du Centre universitaire de Moncton (April 2007), *Pour une accessibilité réelle: Recommandations auprès de la Commission sur l'éducation postsecondaire au Nouveau-Brunswick*; The New Brunswick Student Alliance (April 2007), *Moving Education Forward: Making Post-Secondary Education a New Brunswick Priority*, both available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>.

<sup>84</sup> CAUT also affirms that New Brunswick government's Tuition Tax Back Credit Program, aimed at encouraging the educated to remain in the province, will do little to encourage access to post-secondary education. Canadian Association of University Teachers (April 2007), *Submission to the New Brunswick Commission on Post-Secondary Education*, p. 4, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>. See also Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations, *What would the ideal post-secondary system for New Brunswick look like?* available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>85</sup> See for example the results of a 2005 Statistics Canada time-use survey, summarized in *The Daily*, July 19, 2006 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060719/d060719b.htm>

programs to meet the special needs for continuing education of women with family responsibilities.<sup>86</sup> But educational authorities and institutions have been slow to recognize the distinct needs of students with dependents.<sup>87</sup>

The mature female student has become increasingly common on university campuses and in community colleges in the province over the past three decades. Because she must often juggle the multiple roles and responsibilities of breadwinner, mother, and partner, she is more likely to be a part-time student. Some 7% of all post-secondary students in New Brunswick who received student loans in 2005/06 were single parents – mostly women with dependent children.<sup>88</sup>

Students with dependents, particularly women, face particular challenges in pursuing post-secondary education, related to finding time for family and study, and accessing support services.<sup>89</sup>

For lone mothers, the balancing act is particularly challenging. Interviewed for a New Brunswick study in 2000, eighteen lone parent mothers aged 18 to 35 from the Acadian peninsula pointed to many obstacles they faced in undertaking and completing their community college or university programs: in addition to adequate financial aid, these women noted the lack of access to quality, reliable, flexible childcare, lack of affordable, appropriate housing, transportation problems, need for on-campus support groups, and lack of information about available programs and resources.<sup>90</sup>

The scarcity of affordable, quality child care services is indeed a critical problem for most women who are in the paid labour force or pursuing studies, since there are presently licensed regulated spaces for less than 15% of children aged 12 and under in New Brunswick. For women whose course and study requirements spill over into the evenings and weekends, finding flexible child care may be next to impossible.<sup>91</sup>

A child's illness or the care needs of an aging parent often present particular challenges to female students and may lead to program interruptions or even dropping out, especially in the longer duration programs.<sup>92</sup>

As for maternity and parental leave benefits, only employees who pay into Employment Insurance and can live on 55% of their earnings can take advantage of the federal program. Self-employed

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<sup>86</sup> Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970), *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*, Ottawa, Information Canada, p. 406.

<sup>87</sup> Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (April 2005), *Students with Dependents: Common Practices in Post-Secondary Education Institutions in Canada and the United States*, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>88</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2007), Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> See Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (February 2005), *Embracing Differences: Post-Secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities* <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>90</sup> Irène Savoie for the Réseau des femmes francophones du N.-B. (October 2000), *Les obstacles rencontrés chez les étudiantes monoparentales de la péninsule Acadienne, âgées entre 18 et 35 ans, lors d'un retour aux études postsecondaires*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid; see also on this problem that is particularly severe for lone parents, Conseil des directeurs et directrices du Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (May 2007), *Mémoire présenté à la Commission sur l'éducation postsecondaire au Nouveau-Brunswick*, p. 6, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>92</sup> Some research on female students in Ph.D. programs shows that women are more likely than men to see their graduate training plans or amount of time devoted to graduate work curtailed by family-related issues such as the death of a parent or the birth of a child or child rearing responsibilities in general, thereby resulting in expansion of overall time needed for degree completion or in some cases, withdrawal from the program. See Sandra W. Pyke (1997), Education and the "Woman question". [Education and the "Woman Question"] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163, retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>.

women are not eligible for the program and the accumulated hours requirements exclude many low-income women and vulnerable workers.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.3. Chilly learning environments

Female students in post-secondary educational institutions also face problems arising from systemic discrimination within the learning environments and inadequate support mechanisms.

Navigating community college classrooms and on-site training may be difficult for the female trainee. New Brunswick women who participated in focus groups for an Advisory Council study on women and training in the early 1990s reported a host of problems before, during, and after their training. These included difficulties accessing information about course offerings, lack of support, inadequate employment counselling, and gender and sexual harassment during training and work placements.<sup>94</sup> More recent studies on women and training suggest that these problems persist.<sup>95</sup>

University campuses also present challenges to the female learner. Surveys conducted among male and female university students in Canada and the U.S. reveal significant gender differences in reported experiences of academic life, with women reporting disadvantage on a range of aspects linked to the structures and operation of educational institutions.<sup>96</sup>

The so-called “chilly climate” for women in academia is displayed in expressions of sexist humour and stereotypical views of women, the use of sexist language, more attention given to male students by professors and graduate supervisors, from calling on them more frequently in class to inviting their participation on papers or articles, the paucity of women faculty as role models and mentors and the problem of sexual harassment by fellow students and faculty.<sup>97</sup>

Sexual harassment remains a persistent and painful reality of campus life. A survey conducted at the Moncton campus of the Université de Moncton in 1999 found that 70% of female students and 55% of female employees reported experiencing at least one incident of sexist behaviour, sexual harassment, or sexual aggression.<sup>98</sup> The first official policies to address the problem only date back to the mid-1980s, and in most New Brunswick universities are little more than a decade old. Indeed, the term sexual harassment, so common today, did not even exist until the mid-1970s, when it was coined to describe the unwanted imposition of sexual demands in the context of a relationship of unequal power.

For women who are members of disadvantaged communities, getting a post-secondary education means grappling with additional obstacles and exacerbated challenges.

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<sup>93</sup> Women's Network PEI (Fall 2003), *Looking Beyond the Surface: An In-Depth Review of Parental Benefits*, Final Report; also Provincial Focus Groups, New Brunswick Report, Fall 2003, available at <http://www.wnpei.org/parentalbenefits/research.html>

<sup>94</sup> NB ACSW (December 1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*, p. 23-26, Moncton, NB ACSW.

<sup>95</sup> Joan McFarland (2003), «Public Policy and Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick» in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work : Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 195-196.

<sup>96</sup> Sandra W. Pyke (1997), Education and the “Woman question”. [Education and the “Woman Question”] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163, retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Monique Gauvin, Katherine Marcoccio and Alice Guérette-Breau, *Le harcèlement sexiste, le harcèlement sexuel et l'agression sexuelle à l'Université de Moncton : rapport de sondage mené auprès des étudiantes et des employées au Centre universitaire de Moncton*, Moncton : Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sur le harcèlement sexuel et sexiste en milieu d'enseignement francophone, February 1999.

Students or potential students with disabilities encounter physical access problems but also face problems as a result of discrimination and negative stereotypes, as the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons reminds us in its brief to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education. As a result "current enrolments do not adequately reflect the potential numbers from individuals with disabilities" who could benefit from post-secondary education.<sup>99</sup>

The challenges faced by Aboriginal students or potential students are "complex and multi-faceted" – from lack of role models to racism in campus environments - rooted in the specific historical, cultural, demographic, geographic and social situation of these individuals.<sup>100</sup> For Aboriginal women, such problems are interlinked with other issues from violence to health and employment concerns.<sup>101</sup>

Policy and programs to address the barriers faced by these groups must be developed in partnership with community-based and advocacy organizations.

Women in non-traditional university programs such as engineering and those training for non-traditional trades in community colleges may experience particular difficulties since they are still largely outnumbered by male students and have few female role models among faculty. Female professors, like female students, tend to be concentrated mostly in education, the humanities, and social sciences. In 2004/05, only 8% of full-time professors in Engineering and Applied Sciences and 10% of full-time professors in Mathematics and Physical Sciences in New Brunswick universities were female.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, women make up less than 10% of instructors in the trades, technology and natural resource development courses at the New Brunswick Community College.<sup>103</sup>

If the gender imbalance in the non-traditional fields of higher education and training is to be corrected, it is essential to provide support to female students. Efforts have been made to recruit female students in the non-traditional programs through special scholarships, guidance programs in secondary schools, and the creation of women's chairs in fields such as engineering. However, these initiatives may be undermined by an atmosphere that is often hostile to women in male dominated programs and faculties.

Ensuring that women have mentors and access to other forms of ongoing support while learning and training is a key part of improving the post-secondary picture for women. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The later 1970s and 1980s saw some women-centered initiatives including supportive pre-training "bridging" programs established in some provinces.<sup>104</sup> These women-centered programs recognized the particular training needs of women at a time when government-funding initiatives attempted to mitigate women's labour market disadvantage.<sup>105</sup>

Women need support to deal with the discrimination and life issues they face during post-secondary studies, but they also need extra supports in preparing for, gaining access to and

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<sup>99</sup> Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons (March 2007), *Improving Access to Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities*, p. 8, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>100</sup> Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>101</sup> See NB ACSW (April 2006), *Equality for First Nations Women*, Fredericton: NB ACSW.

<sup>102</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database.

<sup>103</sup> Women as a percentage of all term and regular instructors, as of fall 2005. Based on data provided by N.B. Department of Training and Employment Development, Human Resources Services.

<sup>104</sup> NB ACSW (December 1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*, p.28-33, Moncton, NB ACSW; See also McFarland (2003), p. 195-196.

<sup>105</sup> Ursule Cristoph (2003), "Who Wins, Who Loses: The Real Story of the Transfer of Training to the Provinces and its Impact on Women," in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed, *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 16.

staying in non-traditional workplaces. As the author of a recent study on women's training evolution in Canada affirmed, "programs that ignore the interrelationship of these needs may bring about short-term results but do little to address the systemic disadvantages of women in the labour market."<sup>106</sup>

Women seeking to enter or stay in non-traditional occupations still face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, experiencing sexual and general harassment, and lack of support from co-workers, management and employers.

As a recent report by Canada's Construction Sector Council noted, one of the problems that has impeded the success of training programs aimed at women are "workplaces that are not as welcoming, receptive and accommodating as they need to be."<sup>107</sup> Significant change will only come when industries and employers are sensitized to the importance of a workplace culture that supports women.<sup>108</sup> There exist some valuable how-to guides for employers on recruitment, integration and retention of women in non-traditional workplaces, some produced by the now defunct national association Women in Trades and Technology (WITT).<sup>109</sup>

#### **2.4. Unique challenges faced by Aboriginal women**

The post-secondary experience of Aboriginal women is shaped by realities that are often vastly different than for other women. While they are better represented in higher education than their male counterparts, Aboriginal women like Aboriginal men remain less likely than non-Aboriginal individuals to enter university or college and have a much higher drop-out rate. Aboriginal students who do finish high school are almost twice as likely as other Canadian students to either drop out of college or university studies or skip post-secondary education altogether, according to a recent survey of high school graduates in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, two years after graduation.<sup>110</sup>

While 44% of Aboriginal identity women aged 15 years and over had some post-secondary education according to the 2001 census – university, trades or other training, only 27% had completed a degree or certificate, and another 17% were without a diploma.

By contrast, the 54% of non-Aboriginal women who had some post-secondary studies included 38% who had a degree or certificate and 16% without.

The dropout problem is particularly severe at the university level. Of the Aboriginal women in Canada who had studied at university, the percentage without a degree (9%) is greater than the

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Future Labour Supplies for Canada's Construction Industry*, p. 25-26. Available on the CSCC website at [http://www.csc-ca.org/english/whatwedo\\_1.html#profile](http://www.csc-ca.org/english/whatwedo_1.html#profile).

<sup>108</sup> See Denise McLean (2003), *Workplaces that Work: Creating a Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women*, prepared for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, available at <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/about/fpt.htm>

<sup>109</sup> See for example WITT National Network (1995), *Welcoming Women into Trades, Technology, Operations and Blue-Collar Work: A Checklist of Strategies*, London, Ontario. A driving force in advocacy and promotion of women's training in the 1980s and 1990s, WITT had by 2003 lost its federal funding and closed its doors. Provincial WITT chapters are still active in a few provinces including Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

<sup>110</sup> See R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), *The Class of 2003 : High School Follow-Up Survey*. Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 34-35, available at [www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614\\_class\\_of\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614_class_of_03_en.pdf) ; Census data on highest level of schooling attained also points to very high non-completion rates. See Jeremy Hull (June 2005), *Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes, 2001*, Ottawa, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada., available at [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/pse/01/index\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/pse/01/index_e.html)

percentage with a degree (5%). Of non-Aboriginal women who had studied at university, 10% were without a degree versus 15% who had a degree.<sup>111</sup>

For Aboriginal women, the struggle for equality “cannot be separated from the twin legacies of colonialism and racism, which continue to marginalize Aboriginal peoples and devalue their cultures and traditions.”<sup>112</sup> Aboriginal women are also confronted with discrimination on the basis of sex in their own communities.

This profound systemic discrimination compounds a multitude of severe and inextricably linked socio-economic disadvantages. These include grinding poverty and related health problems, lack of access to adequate housing, high incidence of violence and abuse, low education and employment levels, and limited access to political power and resources in their households, communities and beyond.<sup>113</sup>

Studies have shown that Aboriginal women increasingly see education as a way for them and their daughters to escape poverty on the one hand, and the risk or reality of partner abuse on the other.<sup>114</sup> The Native Women’s Association of Canada recently observed that “Aboriginal women sometimes engage in educational activities because women are not tolerating violence in our communities and are leaving for the city. One of the few ways they can access band support to leave violent circumstances is through accessing educational funding.”<sup>115</sup>

While more Aboriginal women want to pursue a post-secondary education to improve their lives, they must overcome a formidable array of hurdles to entry and completion of studies.

Financial hardship remains a significant obstacle for many students and aspiring students, despite the federal government funding allocated to aid Status Indian students attending post-secondary institutions throughout Canada. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program has long been capped. The limited resources mean that not all would-be students can access the grants administered on a discretionary basis by First Nations band or tribal councils, and that the grants do not adequately cover rapidly rising tuition, living and travel costs.<sup>116</sup> The off-reserve population is particularly disadvantaged.<sup>117</sup> Aboriginal students are less likely than other students to have financial support from their families, so some must rely on student loans and employment income.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See Jeremy Hull (February 2006), *Aboriginal Women A Profile from the 2001 Census*, Prepared for Women’s Issues and Gender Equality Directorate Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Table 4-1, based on INAC’s custom 2001 Census tabulations, available at [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/abw/t4-1\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/abw/t4-1_e.html)

<sup>112</sup> Aboriginal Women’s Roundtable on Gender Equality, “Equality for Aboriginal Women,” held March 30 – April 1, 2000 (report last updated July 29, 2003), Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, available at [www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/abwomenroundtable/section3\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/abwomenroundtable/section3_e.html)

<sup>113</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada (2005), *Companion Document First Ministers’ Meeting, Kelowna, B.C., November 24-25, 2005*, p. 8 at <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/reports.html>; New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women (April 2006), *Equality for First Nations Women*, Fredericton, NB ACSW.

<sup>114</sup> Madeleine Dion Stout and Gregory D. Kipling (March 1998), *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development*, Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, p. 23 at [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662634314/index\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662634314/index_e.html)

<sup>115</sup> NWAC (2005), p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> First Nation band or tribal councils set the funding priorities, maintain student files and screen applications for eligibility. Guidelines may vary in each organization. Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>; see also R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 19-22, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>117</sup> The N.B. Aboriginal People’s Council, serving the off-reserve population, does not receive PSSSP funding, but offers limited financial assistance for post-secondary education through provincially funded scholarships and through training initiatives funded under the federal Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy. See Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007),

The Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations have called for increased public investment in post-secondary education and removal of funding caps to match rapid population growth and escalating costs.<sup>119</sup>

The research also insists on the importance of addressing the particular historical, social, educational and geographic barriers that limit Aboriginal peoples' post-secondary participation.

High secondary school dropout rates and inadequate preparation during the kindergarten to Grade 12 years drastically reduce the potential pool of post-secondary students in Aboriginal communities.<sup>120</sup> The situation is all the more dramatic in light of the rapidly increasing Aboriginal youth population. Nearly one-third (29%) of New Brunswick's Aboriginal identity population is under the age of 14, compared to 18% for the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>121</sup> The Aboriginal youth population is growing much faster than the youth share of the general population, thanks to a birth rate that is about 1.5 times the overall Canadian rate.<sup>122</sup>

A 2001 survey of the off-reserve Aboriginal population in Canada showed that Aboriginal women have different reasons than Aboriginal men for dropping out of high school. The number one factor prompting female off-reserve youth to leave school was pregnancy or to look after children (25%), while 15% said they were bored. By contrast, nearly one in four (24%) off-reserve Aboriginal male youth aged 15 to 19 said they left high school because they were bored, while 19% wanted to work.<sup>123</sup>

Aboriginal individuals who go on to university or community college are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to have to leave their home community, incurring expenses and distancing themselves from family and social supports.<sup>124</sup>

The legacy of the residential school system and assimilationist policies also means that many Aboriginal students have a deep mistrust of education systems. Moreover, they often shoulder a heavy burden of community and family expectations, are unable to turn to role models with post-secondary education experience and lack self-confidence and motivation.<sup>125</sup>

Aboriginal students on university and college campuses struggle to make their way in an environment where they are socially isolated and dealing with systems, programs and services that are not culturally sensitive. Many do not feel welcome in institutions where they find few

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*Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>, and the web site of the NBAPC at <http://education.nbapc.org/pages.asp?pid=149&deptid=4&lid=0>

<sup>118</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), *The Class of 2003 : High School Follow-Up Survey*.

Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 35-36, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/newsevents/newsfull.asp?newsid=125>

<sup>119</sup> NWAC (2005), p. 7; Assembly of First Nations (May 2005), *First Nations Education Action Plan*, p. 6, available at <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=109><http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=109>

<sup>120</sup> Michael Mendelson (July 2006), *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*, Ottawa, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p. 30- 35, available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications>

<sup>121</sup> Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Catalogue number 97F0011XCB01001

<sup>122</sup> Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, June 28, 2005 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050628/d050628d.htm>

<sup>123</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey – Initial Findings. Well-Being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population*, at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-589-XIE/school.htm>

<sup>124</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 14, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>125</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 11-17, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

Aboriginal people among faculty and support staff.<sup>126</sup> Aboriginal women commonly experience racism and sexism in educational settings.<sup>127</sup>

Family responsibilities also loom large for many Aboriginal women pursuing higher education. Aboriginal university and college students tend to be older than the typical student and are more likely to have children. Many of them are lone parent mothers.<sup>128</sup> Supporting and caring for dependants is a significant barrier to access and completion of post-secondary studies.<sup>129</sup>

According to a 2001 survey of off-reserve Aboriginal peoples in Canada, 34% of Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 who had started but not completed a post-secondary program reported family responsibilities as their reason for dropping out, while 21% cited financial reasons, 12% lost interest/motivation and 8% got a job or had to work. About one in four (24%) of their male counterparts cited financial reasons as the number one factor, while only 11% reported family responsibilities as their reason for not finishing post-secondary studies.<sup>130</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that more than increased funding is required to promote Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education. A recent study that drew on interviews with educators and on-site visits to educational institutions, affirms, "institutions must develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal people, and the historic and social barriers they face, before a real difference will be seen in the number of Aboriginal people who succeed in pursuing higher education."<sup>131</sup>

Much research emphasizes the importance of increasing Aboriginal control and participation in the development of curriculum, programs and services and the crucial role of community-based delivery. We may learn from some initiatives in the Western provinces. Favoured initiatives include targeted access programs to ease the transition and provide guidance to Aboriginal learners and Aboriginal-specific personal and academic support services.<sup>132</sup> Mentors and role models, individual counselling and academic advising, housing, childcare and transportation assistance and culturally appropriate post-secondary information are identified as essential supports. Many studies also emphasize the importance of improving data collection and tracking of enrolment and completion rates, currently woefully inadequate for policy-making.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (September 2005), *Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, Millennium Research Note #2, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/OthePublications.asp>

<sup>127</sup> Stout and Kipling, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> David Holmes (February 2005), *Embracing Differences: Post-Secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>129</sup> See for example, Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), p. 50-51.

<sup>130</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey – Initial Findings. Well-Being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population*, at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-589-XIE/school.htm>

<sup>131</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 41, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>132</sup> For more than 20 years now, the Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Institute has offered various programs and services to First Nations students at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, in an effort to ease the transition to university study as well as to encourage research and publication in Aboriginal languages, culture, education and history. Institute web site at <http://www.unbf.ca/education/mmi/>

<sup>133</sup> See for example *Ibid.*, p. 41-42; Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (May 2002), *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report Prepared for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available at <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/publications.en.stm>; see also Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Persistent gender inequality in income and employment, family responsibilities, experience of violence and harassment and under-representation in positions of power influences women's post-secondary educational participation in New Brunswick. Students or potential students who are otherwise disadvantaged, including low-income lone mothers, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, are particularly affected. Downplaying or ignoring these realities is not an option in reform of post-secondary education. Improving the level of equality among groups is a social and economic necessity and should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative.

It is therefore disappointing to note the failure to address gender equality concerns in the current inquiry's terms of reference and discussion paper. The lack of sex-disaggregated data in the Commission's online research section obscures the gender-specific participation patterns and sidesteps the issue of gender-specific measures. Women appear to have largely fallen off the government radar in higher education and training policy in recent years. We hope that recent initiatives such as the Wage Gap Action Plan Scholarships may be the first steps in the rediscovery of a more proactive and women-centered approach.<sup>134</sup>

Women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape education and training patterns. The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for society. It contributes to lower earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity.

Women are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects, are more likely than men to study part-time and are the ones to feel the impact of the absence of family-friendly policies. The mature student has become more common on university campuses and in community colleges in the province over the past decades. For parents, especially lone parents, the balancing act is challenging. The scarcity of affordable, flexible child care services is a critical problem for student parents. Canada's maternity and parental leave benefits program is only for employees who pay into Employment Insurance and can live on 55% of their earnings. Without a family policy, New Brunswick is not doing enough to help families reconcile the demands of education, paid work, and family life.

It is time to implement a comprehensive post-secondary education strategy that would include women-centered initiatives for training, integration and retention in male-dominated occupations. Women-specific initiatives are essential, because women must overcome specific barriers, such as harassment and discrimination in the classroom and on the job site – let alone the standard barriers most women face, such as a heavier share of family responsibilities and limited access to affordable, quality care services.

For years, women's organizations in Canada have called for "a seamless system of training and adjustment services (with numerous access points and with services not tied to any income support program) as the kind of system that will best meet women's diverse training and adjustment requirements."<sup>135</sup> An integrated approach is also needed for university education and the entire post-secondary sector.

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<sup>134</sup> Note that the 2005 Newfoundland and Labrador White Paper on Public Post-Secondary Education was one of the rare recent government inquiries that called on institutions to improve women's situation in colleges and universities.

<sup>135</sup> Karen Lior and Susan Wismer (2003), "Still Shopping for Training: Women, Training and Livelihoods." In Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work : Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 219. See also Susan Wismer (1988), *Women's Education and Training: A Policy Analysis*, Toronto, CLOW.

The Advisory Council therefore recommends:

□ That the provincial education, labour and social program authorities, in collaboration with their federal counterparts and in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal women's organizations and community groups, undertake a needs assessment and develop an action plan that includes the appropriate policies and programs to promote the full and equitable participation of Aboriginal women in post-secondary education. A system of sex-disaggregated data collection must also be developed and implemented for the purposes of tracking enrolment and completion rates and monitoring program results for Aboriginal learners.

□ That the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour ensure that comparable statistical information on student aid, enrolments, attrition and completion rates of women and men, and diverse groups of women and men (Aboriginal, other-abled, lone parents) in New Brunswick's community colleges and universities is collected, made available to the public and used in policy-making.

□ That the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in collaboration with educational institutions and community groups, identify the needs and concerns of women and diverse groups of women with regards to post-secondary education access and participation.

□ That the provincial education, labour and social program authorities develop and implement a coordinated strategy to achieve the full and equitable participation of women in post-secondary education. The framework would include, but not be limited to, the following:

□ Effective recruitment initiatives to encourage and support the participation of women in engineering and applied sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, technology and skilled trades. Special outreach efforts must focus on chronically under-represented groups, such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

□ Increased public investment in higher education and training, including literacy programs for adult learners, with funding tied to equity goals.

□ A revamped student financial aid system, with higher proportion of upfront, need-based non-repayable grants and scholarships based on actual education and living costs, along with tuition fee control measures.

□ Changes to the Employment Insurance program to extend eligibility for maternity and parental benefits to student mothers and parents, with leave provisions guaranteed by post-secondary institutions.

□ Creation of affordable licensed child care spaces in on-campus and off-campus centres that offer flexible scheduling to student parents.

□ Enhanced support services, including mentoring programs and peer support groups, for female students in colleges, universities and apprenticeship settings, particularly those in non-traditional fields of study and training. Services provided to Aboriginal students and students with disabilities developed and based on a collaborative service and support model which partners post-secondary institutions with other agencies and groups.

□ Preparation and dissemination of user-friendly information resources about learning options, existing programs and services.

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# **Women and Post-Secondary Education**

**Brief presented by the**

**New Brunswick Advisory Council  
on the Status of Women**

**to the**

**Commission on Post-Secondary Education  
in New Brunswick**

**July 2007**

This is a publication of the:

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The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a body created by provincial legislation to study and advise on issues of concern to women and to bring these before the public and the government. The Council is composed of 13 women appointed by government who meet at least four times per year to determine priorities for action on women's issues.

**June 2007**

Ce document est disponible en français. Demandez *Les femmes et l'éducation postsecondaire*.

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## **Executive Summary**

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes this opportunity to present its views to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. Our brief focuses on women's needs and concerns with regards to accessibility of post-secondary education.

As we noted in our submission to the provincial government's Self-Sufficiency Task Force, the level of equality between groups in society should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative. Gender equality is internationally recognized as an indicator of sustainable, people-centre development and a matter of human rights.

Unfortunately, the Commission discussion paper barely mentions gender and diversity concerns and virtually no sex-disaggregated data is provided in its online research section. Sex-disaggregated data are essential for policy and program development that takes into account the significant differences in the status, situation and life experiences of women and men. Systematic inclusion of gender in analysis is a tool for revealing possible outcomes for women and for men in all their diversity and for ensuring that these groups benefit equally from initiatives.

Despite some significant gains made over the past decades, women still earn less than men, shoulder a heavier burden of family responsibilities, are more likely to live in poverty and to experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Women also remain seriously under-represented in decision-making positions and face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives. The inequalities are especially severe and multi-layered for groups such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

Women have pursued higher education and training in ever growing numbers over the past thirty years and now outnumber men in the total university student population. Women also account for over half of the community college clientele in Canada, but only about 40% of community college students in New Brunswick.

However, women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape gender-specific education and training patterns. Women are more likely than men to study part-time and are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects.

The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for the entire society. It contributes to lower average earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity.

The Advisory Council recommends improved gender and diversity-specific data collection on student aid, enrolments and completion rates, along with a comprehensive needs study. We also call upon provincial education, labour and social program authorities to develop and implement a multi-faceted and coordinated strategy to achieve the full and equitable participation of women in post-secondary education.

## Introduction

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes this opportunity to present its views to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick.

The Commission's mandate is vast and important: examination of structural, financial, accessibility and quality issues for the entire post-secondary education and training sector in our province.<sup>1</sup> The inquiry covers public universities, private universities (denominational and for-profit), the NBCC/CCNB network, apprenticeships, private trainers and other aspects of literacy and lifelong learning. Special attention is to be paid to the effects of the increasing financial burden carried by students and to the pertinence of the traditional structural groupings of education, training and apprenticeship. The terms of reference emphasize the need for improved access to the widest range possible of relevant, high quality and competitive education and training options while promoting collaborative and cost-sharing institutional initiatives.

The inquiry is proceeding on a tight timeline. Commissioners Dr. Rick Miner and Dr. Jacques L'Écuyer released their discussion paper in March 2007, consulted with educational stakeholders and the public in April and early May and are expected to report to the provincial government in the summer of 2007. Three women sit on the eight member advisory panel that will provide input into the report on the future direction of the higher education and training sector.<sup>2</sup>

The level of equality between groups in society should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative, including the New Brunswick government's self-sufficiency project.<sup>3</sup> There is increasing acceptance internationally that gender equality should concern and fully engage men as well as women, since it is "a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development" as well as a human rights matter.<sup>4</sup>

We note our dismay that the Commission discussion paper barely mentions gender and diversity concerns.<sup>5</sup> An allusion to the under-representation of Aboriginal peoples in the province's post-secondary institutions and the suggestion that the virtual absence of women among apprentices is a "missed opportunity" are the only hints of the challenges faced by these groups.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, only one of the more than thirty graphs available in the Research Data section of the Commission's site presents data that differentiates between women and men.<sup>7</sup> Sex-disaggregated data are essential for policy and program development that takes into account the significant differences in the status, situation and life experiences of women and men. Systematic inclusion of gender in analysis is a tool for revealing possible outcomes for women

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission was launched in late January 2007. "Premier announces N.B. Commission on Post-Secondary Education", January 19, 2007 press release available [www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0075pe.htm](http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0075pe.htm); Government of New Brunswick, « Terms of Reference – Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick », p. 2-3 Available at [www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html](http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 4. Available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html>

<sup>3</sup> See *Self-Sufficiency and Equality*, Notes for a presentation to the Self-Sufficiency Task Force by the NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women, March 2007, Available at [www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw1.asp](http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw1.asp)

<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006* (2006), Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 4. Available at [www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm](http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, *Discussion Paper*, March 2007. Available at [www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html](http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/context.html)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> The graph entitled "First Nations enrolments in 2005-2006", presents data on female and male students receiving federal government funding support. Available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/research.php>, consulted April 30, 2007.

and for men in all their diversity and for ensuring that these groups benefit equally from initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

Despite some significant gains made over the past decades, women still earn less than men, shoulder a heavier burden of family responsibilities, are more likely to live in poverty and to experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Women also remain seriously under-represented in decision-making positions and face discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives. The inequalities are especially severe and multi-layered for groups such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

In their search for economic security and personal development and pushed by rising labour market requirements, women have pursued higher education and training in ever growing numbers over the past thirty years. In New Brunswick as in Canadian universities, women now outnumber men in the total student population.<sup>10</sup> Women also account for over half of the community college clientele in Canada, but only about 40% of community college students in New Brunswick.<sup>11</sup>

Yet women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape gender-specific education and training patterns. Women are more likely than men to study part-time and are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects.<sup>12</sup>

The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for the entire society. It contributes to lower average earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity. Elimination of the gender wage gap would result in significant increases in tax revenues and decreases in health and social program expenditures, according to a study by St. Mary's University economist Dr. Ather Akbari.<sup>13</sup> As the World Economic Forum has shown in a recent report, societies with the most equality between the sexes are also the world's most competitive.<sup>14</sup>

This submission focuses on women's needs and concerns with regards to accessibility of post-secondary education. It is divided into three parts. The first examines gender differences in post-secondary participation. The second explores the barriers to women's higher education and training. Finally, we present a series of recommendations to address the problems identified.

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<sup>8</sup> There is an extensive practice-based literature on Gender-based Analysis, also called Equity Analysis, Gender Equity Analysis, Gender Equality Analysis, Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Analysis. See for example, House of Commons Canada, *Gender-Based Analysis: Building Blocks for Success*, Report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women, April 2005; United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, "Gender Mainstreaming", Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>

<sup>9</sup> See for example, NB ACSW, *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women*; NB ACSW, Reminder List: For Those Who Think Women Have Reached Equality, Available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>10</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, March 2006, available at [www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-503-X](http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-503-X), p. 91-92.

<sup>11</sup> NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *The Gender Wage Gap in New Brunswick* (2004), prepared for GPI Atlantic, Halifax, N.S., available at [www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/documents/GENDER\\_WAGE\\_GAP\\_NB\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_EN.pdf](http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/documents/GENDER_WAGE_GAP_NB_FINAL_REPORT_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadia Zahidi (2006), *The Global Gender Gap Report 2006*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 17-18, available at [www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm](http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm)

## 1. Gender differences in post-secondary educational participation and attainment

Women's educational attainment has risen dramatically over the past thirty years as growing numbers of women have set their sights on post-secondary education. From the young high school graduate to the middle-aged woman with adult children, women of all ages have been making the connection between education and better employment prospects while seeking opportunities for personal development and citizen engagement.

But the growing female presence in the post-secondary sector is only part of the story. Closer examination of women's and men's participation patterns over the past three decades reveal disturbing trends that mirror and perpetuate gender inequality.

It should also be noted that many adult New Brunswickers did not finish high school and have literacy levels below the level considered necessary to live and work in today's society. International literacy survey statistics from 2003 revealed that 54% of New Brunswick women and 59% of men aged 16 and over had serious difficulties in reading basic texts, while 67% of women and 63% of men had low levels of numeracy skills, worse than the Canadian averages.<sup>15</sup> Literacy programs are severely underfunded and less educated adult learners who are unemployed or underemployed experience great difficulties accessing and successfully completing fragmented employment and academic upgrading initiatives.

### 1.1. Increasing educational attainment and expansion of post-secondary clientele

Education levels have improved significantly for both women and men in New Brunswick in the past thirty years. As of 2001, nearly half (48%) of New Brunswick women and men (47%) aged 15 and over had some form of education or training past high school, up from just 20% and 18% respectively in 1971.<sup>16</sup>

The once substantial gender gap in university degrees has been all but eliminated in New Brunswick as in the rest of Canada. The 2001 census revealed that 12% of New Brunswick women and 11% of men aged 15 and over had a university degree, up from 8% and 9% respectively in 1991 and 2% and 5% in 1971.<sup>17</sup> At the national level, slightly more men than women now have university degrees: 15% of Canadian women and 16% of men.<sup>18</sup>

While New Brunswick Francophone women have almost caught up to Anglophones in university degree-holding - as of 2001, 11% of francophone women compared to 12% of Anglophone women and 9% of francophone men had university degrees - other groups continue to lag behind.<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal women in New Brunswick have attained a higher level of schooling than Aboriginal men, but are less likely than non-Aboriginal women and men to hold a university degree. As of 2001, 7% of N.B.'s Aboriginal identity<sup>20</sup> women aged 15 and over and 3% of their male counterparts had a university degree, compared to 12% and 11% of non-Aboriginal females and males in the province.<sup>21</sup> Women with disabilities have lower educational levels than women

<sup>15</sup> NB ACSW (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, p. 10-11, Fredericton, NB ACSW, available at <http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>16</sup> Ginette Lafleur (1990), *Les femmes à l'heure des comptes. Dossier statistique, 1971-1986*, Publication d'Action Éducation Femmes N.-B., p. 57; Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, catalogue 97F0017XCB01002.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1991 & 2001, catalogue 97F00017XCB1001 & 97F0017XCB01002.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Irène Savoie for the Fédération des dames d'Acadie inc., *Socioeconomic Profile of Francophone Women in New Brunswick*, April 2004. Available at <http://www.acswcccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>

<sup>20</sup> Persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group and those who report themselves as a Registered or Treaty Indian, and/or Band or First Nation membership.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, catalogue 97F0011XCB01043.

and men without disabilities. As of 2001, 9% of New Brunswick women with disabilities<sup>22</sup> aged 15 to 64 and 6% of their male counterparts had a university certificate or degree, compared to 16% of women and 13% of men without disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

New Brunswick universities have seen a dramatic growth in female clientele over the past thirty years. Women's full-time enrolments in New Brunswick universities more than doubled between 1975/76 and 2005/06, rising from 4,803 to 11,722, while male enrolments increased by only one-third.<sup>24</sup> By the late 1980s, females outnumbered males in our province's universities. Women have held on to their lead, accounting for 58% of full-time enrolments in 2005/06, up from 43% thirty years earlier, closely paralleling Canadian trends.<sup>25</sup>

Female enrolments in the New Brunswick community colleges have not followed the same upward trend. Women continue to be under-represented in institutions hit by declining enrolments overall as well as a proportional decline in female enrolments since the 1990s. New Brunswick total college enrolment has decreased by almost a third since 1990/91, compared to the national increase of 3.5%.<sup>26</sup> Only 38% of full-time students in regular college programs were female in 2005/06, down from a high of 46% in 1988/89.<sup>27</sup> Some 3,000 women were enrolled in these programs in 2005/06, less than half the peak clientele of ten years earlier.<sup>28</sup> New Brunswick falls short of the Canadian average, where women have accounted for slightly more than half of the full-time community college clientele since the mid 1970s.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.2. Part-time and graduate level enrolments

A closer look at enrolment patterns reminds us that gender inequalities persist in our province's universities and colleges.

Many more women than men are attending colleges and universities on a part-time basis. Women were 65% of all part-time students in New Brunswick universities in 2005/06, up from 60% in the mid 1970s, while they represented 58% of all full-time students.<sup>30</sup> In the New Brunswick Community Colleges, women were 55% of all part-time students and 40% of all full-time students in 2005/06.<sup>31</sup> While about the same proportion of female and male university students were studying part-time – 20% of women and 19% of men – a much higher proportion of

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<sup>22</sup> Persons with disabilities are those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical or mental condition or a health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do; types of disabilities include: hearing, seeing, speech, mobility, agility, dexterity, pain, learning, memory, developmental, delay and psychological.

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada (September 2003), *2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey*, catalogue 89-587-XIE, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE>

<sup>24</sup> Lafleur, p. 76, 79; Maritime Provinces Higher Education database.

<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> Sean Junor & Alex Usher (2004), "The Price of Knowledge 2004: New Brunswick", Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/poknb.asp>

<sup>27</sup> This figure for "regular" enrolments includes the following: Apprenticeship, Distance Education, Continuing Education, Correspondance Education, General Studies and Connections. Data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/cover.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Canadian average based on community college enrolments for 1999/2000. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; Lafleur, p. 79. The Canadian average, based on enrolment statistics for 2001/02, was 60%. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database; NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Figures cited for total community college enrolments include regular, contract and distance programs.

women than men were enrolled part-time at the N.B. Community College, 27% versus 17% in 2005/06.<sup>32</sup>

The impact of part-time status on completion time and attrition rates merits systematic study. Women presumably take longer on average to complete their programs since more women than men are part-time students.<sup>33</sup> Educational authorities do not systematically collect time-series data on time to completion for degrees, diplomas and certificates nor dropout rates of women and other under-represented groups, so we are unable to track some of these important trends.<sup>34</sup>

Gender differences are also evident when we consider women's participation in graduate programs. Women have made significant inroads in graduate studies over the past thirty years, but they remain less likely than men to pursue the more advanced degrees, particularly the doctorate. The female share of enrolments in bachelor's and first professional degree programs in New Brunswick rose from 50% in 1980/81 to 60% in 2005/06. During the same period, women also increased their presence in master's programs, from 36% to 55%. As for doctoral studies, women's share of enrolments has more than tripled, climbing from 13% in 1980/81 to 46% in 2005/06.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.3. Gender segregation by field of study and training

Gender segregation is still entrenched in higher education and training, replicating occupational segregation in the labour force. Today as two decades ago, New Brunswick and Canadian women are concentrated in a limited range of occupations compared to men. Women still account for less than 10% of workers in the trades, transport and equipment sector, while barely one in five jobs in the natural and applied sciences sector is held by a woman.<sup>36</sup>

In New Brunswick as in Canadian universities, women continue to predominate in traditional faculties like nursing and are over-represented in the humanities and social sciences. Almost nine out of ten full-time students in health-related programs (86%) were female in our province in 2005/06, while women accounted for about 70% of the clientele in education, the humanities and the social sciences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Some studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s suggest that women take longer than men to complete their Master's or Ph.D degrees, at least in certain disciplines. See the literature review in Sandra W. Pyke (1997). Education and the "Woman question". [Education and the "Woman Question"] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>

<sup>34</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (2006), *Canadian Post-Secondary Education. A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*, Ottawa, CCL. Available at <http://www.ccl-cca.ca>, p. 70-78.

<sup>35</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Includes part-time and full-time enrolments; undergraduate includes Bachelor's degrees, 1<sup>st</sup> professional degrees, undergraduate diplomas, certificates and other undergraduate.

<sup>36</sup> N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, Fredericton, NB ACSW, p. 57. Available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>; Statistics Canada (2007). *Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates 2006*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry. Catalogue no. 89F0133XIE, p. 9-10, 20. Available at [www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89F0133X](http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89F0133X)

<sup>37</sup> Based on enrolments at undergraduate and graduate levels. Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Canadian patterns are similar, though lower in health-related programs at 75% in 2001/02. Note that N.B. university enrolments do not include out-of-province medical school enrolments. See Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*: p. 92.

Women have made significant inroads in some university programs long dominated by men, such as law. Female enrolments in New Brunswick's two law faculties climbed steadily from a 37% share in 1980/81 to 56% in 2005/06.<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, female enrolment in the traditionally male fields of engineering, applied and physical sciences and mathematics continues to lag well behind that of men. Women's share of full-time enrolments in engineering and the applied sciences rose slowly but steadily from 9% in 1980/81 to a high of 21% in the mid-1990s.<sup>39</sup> But the trend has reversed in recent years. In 2005/06, less than one in five students (17%) studying in this field in New Brunswick universities is female, slightly below the Canadian average.<sup>40</sup> Women in mathematics and the physical sciences boasted a 30% share of full-time enrolments in 1980/81 but lost ground from the end of the decade through the 1990s. Now women represent barely one in four students in those disciplines in New Brunswick universities, slightly below the latest Canadian average.<sup>41</sup>

There has been little change in the gender distribution of community college program enrolments over the past thirty years. In the 1970s and 1980s, women in New Brunswick's community colleges were far more likely to be training to become nurses' aids, legal secretaries, or hairdressers than carpenters or mechanics.<sup>42</sup> Female training ghettos and low female enrolments in non-traditional courses persisted into the 1990s. In 1992/93, three-quarters of full-time female enrolments were clustered in academic, secretarial-clerical, business, and health-community services training programs, while male enrolments were concentrated in technical and trades programs including construction, mechanical-motorized equipment, electronics, mechanical-industrial, and metal training. Indeed, a study released by the Advisory Council in 1994 concluded that training patterns of the 1990s would only help perpetuate long-standing gender inequities in the workplace.<sup>43</sup>

Even today, most women attending the New Brunswick Community Colleges are training for traditionally female employment or taking some kind of academic upgrading course. Nearly one in five full-time female regular students was enrolled in Office administration programs in 2005/06, while about one in ten was training as a Practical nurse, where they made up 90% and 96% of the clientele respectively.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, that year women made up just 3% of full-time enrolments in carpentry and 5% in automotive and heavy equipment mechanic programs. Women remain a tiny minority in most of the traditionally male-dominated trades and technology programs.

Women are severely under-represented throughout Canada in the apprenticeship programs that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training and experience. Women accounted for only 2% of all the apprentices taking community college courses in our province in 2005/06 – less than fifty women of a total of nearly 2,000 apprentices – a proportion that has hardly budged in twenty years.<sup>45</sup> As of March 2007, only 64 or 2% of New Brunswick's more than 3,000 registered

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<sup>38</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. Includes part-time and full-time enrolments at all levels.

<sup>39</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education database.

<sup>40</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. The Canadian figure for 2001/02 was 24%. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database. The Canadian figure was 30% in 2001/02. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> Lafleur, p. 73; NB ACSW (1984), *Plan of Action on the Status of Women in Community Colleges*, submitted to the Department of Community Colleges.

<sup>43</sup> NB ACSW (1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*.

<sup>44</sup> Calculated from campus-level data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

<sup>45</sup> The 2005/06 total includes full-time and part-time enrolments in regular and contract apprenticeship programs. Data provided by NBCC-CCNB Quality and Shared Services Branch, N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. For the evolution since 1986, see McFarland, p. 198-199.

apprentices are female and fully one-half of these women are apprenticing as cooks.<sup>46</sup> Women make up 2% or less of those apprenticing as carpenters, mechanics or electricians.<sup>47</sup>

These gender imbalances in our university and college programs have important consequences for women's earning potential and career status, as some of the better-paying jobs are in the trades, scientific and technology sectors. We also pay a high economic and social price for this under-development of human resources, particularly in light of Canada-wide worker shortages in some of the skilled trades and professions.<sup>48</sup>

As for training programs offered in private institutions, we know little about gender participation patterns because the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour does not collect this data by gender or program.

## **2. Barriers to women's higher education and training**

We have seen that full and equal participation of women in the post-secondary system remains elusive. In this section, we will review some of the barriers faced by women in accessing and completing higher education and training.

Gender-specific obstacles are rooted in the labour market and the larger society. Women may also experience discrimination and adaptation problems within the learning environments.

### **2.1. Financial obstacles**

Financial constraints are widely acknowledged as formidable barriers to post-secondary education participation for women and men.<sup>49</sup> The heavy share of costs borne by students and their families and the spectre of indebtedness loom large in decisions to undertake or complete higher education and training. Socio-economic status, ethnicity, and place of residence still shape inequitable access. Students from low-income families and from Aboriginal communities in particular continue to be underrepresented in post-secondary classrooms.

Women have fewer financial resources to invest in higher education since on average they live on lower incomes than men. The last census revealed that women's average total income was 62%

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<sup>46</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Apprenticeship and Certification Branch, Provincial Summary Totals of Apprentices as of 2007/03/23.

<sup>47</sup> Canadian patterns are similar. See Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada*, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> See for example, Canadian Council on Learning, *Canadian Post-Secondary Education. A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*, p. 17-18; also Ross Finnie, Marie Lavoie and Maud-Catherine Rivard (2001), "Women in engineering: The missing link in the Canadian knowledge economy," *Education Quarterly Review*, vol. 7, no 3. Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/studies/81-003/feature/eqab2001007003s1a01.htm>

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Joseph Berger, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin (2007), *The Price of Knowledge 2006-07*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp> Marc Frenette (2007), *Why are Youth from Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences and Financial Constraints*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2007295.htm>; K. Myers & P. de Broucker (2006), *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System*, Canadian Policy Research Network, Executive summary available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1479&l=en>; M. Corak, G. Lipps & J. Zhao (2003), *Family Income and Participation in Post-Secondary Education*, Statistics Canada, available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=11F0019M2003210>

of men's in New Brunswick and 61% of women versus 40% of men in our province had an annual income of less than \$20,000.<sup>50</sup>

Women are more likely to live in poverty than men because of lower wages, savings and pension benefits, their involvement in unpaid work and the impact of family responsibilities. Lone parent women and their children are the group hardest hit in New Brunswick as in the rest of Canada. Although the rate has generally been falling in recent years, more than one out of three (37%) female lone-parent families was still living below the poverty line in 2005.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, one in twenty-five children in two-parent families were living in poverty. Overall, about 15,000 New Brunswick children, or one in ten children under the age of 18 lived in poverty in 2005.

Women are far more likely than men to work part-time - one in four New Brunswick women compared to barely one in ten men<sup>52</sup> – and they still earn less on average than men. According to the latest hourly pay gap data from Statistics Canada, women earn 12% less on average than men in New Brunswick in 2006, while the average gap for Canadian women was 16% that year.<sup>53</sup>

Even women with a university or college education experience pay disparity. Women who graduated from a New Brunswick university in 1999 and who were working full time five years later earned 18% less on average than men with whom they graduated.<sup>54</sup> Women who graduated from New Brunswick Community College in 2005 and who were working full time one year later earned on average 14% less than men with whom they had graduated.<sup>55</sup>

Women with disabilities and Aboriginal women have lower incomes and earn less than other women and men in New Brunswick.

The average total annual income for women with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years in New Brunswick was just \$14,856 in 2000, nearly \$8,000 less than men with disabilities, about \$5,000 less than women without disabilities and \$15,000 less than men without disabilities. More than one in three disabled women aged 15 and over in the province (35%) had total incomes of less than \$10,000 in 2000, compared to one in four of their male counterparts (25%).<sup>56</sup>

The average total income of Aboriginal women aged 15 years and over in New Brunswick in 2000 was \$13,898, or 78% of Aboriginal men's average income (\$17,901), compared to \$18,676 and \$30,020 respectively for non-Aboriginal females and males.<sup>57</sup> Almost half (47%) of New

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<sup>50</sup> Based on 2001 Census of Canada, before-tax annual incomes from all sources for females aged 15 years and over. See N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2006), *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women in New Brunswick*, Fredericton, NB ACSW, p. 30, available at <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/acsw3.asp>.

<sup>51</sup> Poverty rates based on after-tax income, using Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs which take into account the relative proportion of income spent on basic necessities such as rent, food and clothing. Statistics Canada, *Income in Canada, 2005*, cat. No 75-202-XWE; Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 202-0804, available at <http://www.statcan.ca>

<sup>52</sup> See NBACSW, *2006 Report Card on the Status of Women*, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 282-0072. Includes part-time and full-time workers.

<sup>54</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

<sup>55</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2006), *Survey of 2005 New Brunswick Community College Graduates*.

<sup>56</sup> Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001*, Table 5 available at [www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE/tables.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-587-XIE/tables.htm)

<sup>57</sup> Statistics cited include on reserve and off reserve population. Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Total Income Groups, Sex and Aboriginal Groups for Population 15 Years and Over, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995 and 2000 – 20% Sample Data, <[http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=60107&APATH=3&GID=355313&METH=1&PTYPE=55496&THEME=54&FOCUS=0&AID=0&P\\_LACENAME=0&PROVINCE=0&SEARCH=0&GC=0&GK=0&VID=0&FL=0&RL=0&FREE=0](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=60107&APATH=3&GID=355313&METH=1&PTYPE=55496&THEME=54&FOCUS=0&AID=0&P_LACENAME=0&PROVINCE=0&SEARCH=0&GC=0&GK=0&VID=0&FL=0&RL=0&FREE=0)>, accessed May 31, 2007.

Brunswick Aboriginal women with income reported total incomes of less than \$10,000 in 2000, compared to 42% of Aboriginal men, 33% of non-Aboriginal women and 20% of non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women who were employed in 2000 also earned less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, on average \$14,313 versus \$19,110 in 2000.<sup>58</sup>

The persistence of these income and earnings inequities means that the skyrocketing cost of pursuing post-secondary studies has a differential impact on women and particular groups of women. Over the past two decades, university students and aspiring students have witnessed a dramatic rise in tuition fees as post-secondary institutions have passed along federal funding cuts. Since 1990, the average annual undergraduate tuition fees at New Brunswick universities have risen by 177%, from \$1,925 in 1990/91 to \$3,863 in 2001/02 and reaching \$5,328 in 2006/07.<sup>59</sup> New Brunswick currently has the second highest average university fees after Nova Scotia. Canadian undergraduates paid an average of \$4,347 in tuition fees for the 2006/07 academic year.<sup>60</sup>

Community college fees have remained lower and programs take less time to complete than university studies. Annual fees for private training programs tend however to be far more expensive than either university or community college. In 2005/06, students attending the New Brunswick Community College paid an average annual fee of \$3,050, compared to \$7,520 for private career colleges or training institutions and \$5,038 in the universities.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond tuition fees, students must also find the resources to cover compulsory student services fees, textbooks, accommodation, food, transportation and lost earnings potential. For students with children, child care is another major expense. And since substantially more women than men study part-time, living and even tuition costs would on average be higher for female students overall.

Existing non-repayable financial aid, in the form of government-provided scholarships or grants, is mainly focused on occupational training offered in the community colleges.<sup>62</sup>

Over the past decade, limited financial support for training has been provided through New Brunswick's Training and Skills Development program.<sup>63</sup> Aimed at getting the unemployed and maternity and parental leave-takers back into the labour force, the program offers up to two years of aid to cover tuition fees and help with living costs. But Employment Insurance based eligibility criteria are restrictive and program choice must be approved by a provincial employment counsellor who assesses the likelihood of obtaining stable employment.<sup>64</sup> Most grant recipients are in community college or other training programs, but a small number have used the funding to complete their university studies. In 2005/06, women made up 53% of the almost 6,500 clients

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<sup>58</sup> Statistics cited include on reserve and off reserve population. Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Employment Income Groups in Constant Collars, Sex and Aboriginal Groups for Population 15 Years and Over, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1995 and 2000 – 20% Sample Data, <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=57103&GID=355317&METH=1&APATH=3&PTYPE=55496&THEME=53&AID=0&FREE=0&FOCUS=0&VID=0&GC=0&GK=0&SC=1&SR=1&RL=0&CPP=99&RPP=9999&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0&d1=2&d2=4>, accessed May 31, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Amounts cited are in current dollars. Statistics Canada, "University tuition fees 2006/2007", *The Daily*, September 1, 2006, Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060901/d060901a.htm>

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Student Financial Services Branch (2007), *New Brunswick Student Financial Assistance Program, Statistical Profile 2005-2006*, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> In 2006/07, the N.B. government introduced a one-time benefit of \$2,000 for first year, full-time university students who are N.B. residents. See [http://www.gnb.ca/0162/grants/grant\\_for\\_students-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0162/grants/grant_for_students-e.asp)

<sup>63</sup> Formerly known as the Skills, Loans and Grants program. See Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/cover.htm>, p. 10-11.

<sup>64</sup> See N.B. government web site at <http://www.gnb.ca/0311/2be.htm>

receiving funding for training under the program. The average grant for female students in 2005/06 was higher than for males (\$6,484.07 for women versus \$5,284.59 for men).<sup>65</sup>

Before the transfer of responsibility for labour market training from the federal government to the provinces in 1996 and changes to the Unemployment Insurance program, more public funding was available for sponsored training programs and women were targeted as an equity group facing labour market disadvantage.<sup>66</sup> According to economist Joan McFarland, federal spending cuts on training programs and seat purchases largely account for the declining female clientele in the New Brunswick Community College over the past decade. From the 1970s through to the mid-1990s, most female trainees in New Brunswick's community colleges benefited from some form of aid to cover tuition and living costs for occupational training and academic upgrading. Almost 80% of female community college students in 1985/86 and 57% in 1996/97 were receiving financial support from government or industry, a proportion that fell to less than 30% by the end of the 1990s.<sup>67</sup>

Too few employers in Canada provide workplace-based training or sponsor trainees in public or private institutions. Training support is concentrated on the higher skilled workforce, younger employees and those working for large firms.<sup>68</sup> A Statistics Canada survey showed that only 26% of all adult workers aged 25 and over in New Brunswick participated in employer-supported training in 2002.<sup>69</sup> Some research also suggests that men are more likely than women to receive employer-supported training.<sup>70</sup> A growing body of national and international research links Canada's lagging economic growth to employer underinvestment in training and skills development.<sup>71</sup>

Several small-scale government initiatives in our province have been recently introduced to encourage women's participation in non-traditional training programs. New scholarships covering the first year's tuition for students in non-traditional programs at the Community College were awarded for 2006/07 under New Brunswick's Wage Gap Action Plan.<sup>72</sup> Launched in November 2006, Partners Building Futures is a federal-provincial pilot project that will provide two years

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<sup>65</sup> Data provided by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. In 2005/06, 3,403 women and 3,065 men were receiving funding; of this number 170 women and 102 men were in university programs.

<sup>66</sup> Ursule Critoph (2003), "Who Wins, Who Loses: The Real Story of the Transfer of Training to the Provinces and its Impact on Women," in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, p. 14-33; see also Karen Lior and Susan Wismer, "Still Shopping for Training: Women, Training and Livelihoods," in *Ibid.*, p. 214-229.

<sup>67</sup> Joan McFarland (1999), *Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick*. Available at <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/Womens/cover.htm>, p. 14-15, Table A6, Annex.

<sup>68</sup> Karen Myers and Patrice de Broucker (June 2006), *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System*, Canadian Policy Research Network, Executive summary available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1479&l=en>; Mark Goldenberg (September 2006), *Employer Investment in Workplace Learning in Canada*, Canadian Policy Research Network for the Canadian Congress on Learning, available at <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1529&l=en>

<sup>69</sup> Valerie Peters (April 2004), *Working and Training: First Results of the 2003 Adult Education and Training Survey*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81-595-M2004015>

<sup>70</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (April 2007), *Connecting the Dots...Linking Training Investment to Business Outcomes and the Economy*, p. 20, Available at <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Home/index.htm?Language=EN>

<sup>71</sup> See CCL, *Connecting the Dots*; See also Joseph Berger, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin (2007), *The Price of Knowledge 2006-07*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp>

<sup>72</sup> See Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour web site at [http://www.ceibathurst.com/icdm/BasicPage\\_E.aspx?CPagId=266](http://www.ceibathurst.com/icdm/BasicPage_E.aspx?CPagId=266)

support to some sixty women on social assistance who prepare for non-traditional skilled trades, part of the effort to move people from welfare to work.<sup>73</sup>

But for many potential students, including lone parent women on social assistance, undertaking post-secondary studies would require taking on a repayable loan provided under the financial aid program administered by the provincial Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

Student indebtedness has reached crisis proportions in our province and across Canada. In 2006, 66% of Atlantic Canadian university undergraduates owed an average of \$29,747, the highest average debt in the country.<sup>74</sup> New Brunswick students are more likely than other Canadian students to borrow to finance their post-secondary studies, they borrow higher amounts and take longer to repay their debt. Some 52% of New Brunswick university graduates had student loan debt in 2000, the second-highest rate in the country and well above the national average of 42%. Fully 25% of New Brunswick university graduates had student loan debt in excess of \$25,000, compared to 13% at the national level.<sup>75</sup> As for New Brunswick college graduates, 51% had student loan debt in 2000, above the national average of 38%, and about 5% had student loan debt in excess of \$25,000, about the same as at the national level.<sup>76</sup> Two years after graduation in 2000, both college and university graduates at the national level had paid off 27% of their student loan debt, compared to 20% and 16% respectively for New Brunswick graduates.<sup>77</sup>

Women made up 63% of all student aid applicants in New Brunswick in 2005/06, but we know little about their specific borrowing and debt situation because most student loan data is not available by gender.<sup>78</sup> Some 7% of all post-secondary students in New Brunswick who received student loans in 2005/06 were single parents – mostly women with dependent children.<sup>79</sup>

Statistics from the New Brunswick Student Financial Assistance Program highlight troubling trends for the student population as a whole. The average student loan debt at graduation for our province's university, community college and private institution students in full-time studies has more than doubled since the early 1990s, rising from \$9,947 in 1993/94 to \$21,240 in 2005/06.<sup>80</sup> University students finishing Bachelor's degrees owed on average \$32,132 in 2005/06, compared to \$12,675 for students completing the shorter duration Community College programs.<sup>81</sup>

Gender-specific evidence on student borrowing and debt provided by some regional and national surveys points to disadvantages experienced by women. Women generally had more difficulty

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<sup>73</sup> For more on the Partners Building Futures Projects, see <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pet/2007e0449pe.htm>. A new pilot program in Nova Scotia called Career Seek allows income assistance recipients to attend a university or other postsecondary program of more than two years and still receive benefits. See Income Assistance for Post-Secondary Education at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/whatsnew.html>

<sup>74</sup> Sean Junor and Alex Usher (2004), *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*, Montreal, p. 3, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/Price.asp>.

<sup>75</sup> Sean Junor and Alex Usher (2004), "The Price of Knowledge 2004: New Brunswick", Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/poknb.asp>

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2007), Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 9, 14.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

repaying student loans than their male counterparts, because they borrowed more than men and earned less.<sup>82</sup>

Many of the briefs submitted to this Commission and to other inquiries across Canada address the problem of student debt and the ever-increasing costs of pursuing post-secondary studies. Not surprisingly, student associations offer some of the most detailed reform proposals. These include introduction of an annual debt ceiling, reduction of student loan interest rates and introduction of loan remission for high need students post-graduation, more accurate assessment of student living costs for financial assistance purposes, expansion of needs-based bursaries for low-income students, and lowering of tuition fees to below the current national average.<sup>83</sup>

We agree with that the focus should be on reducing the upfront and out-of-pocket cost for students, rather than on increasing the student's borrowing capacity and extending the debt repayment period. The Canadian Association of University Teachers calls for a "new architecture of student financial assistance that focuses on reducing costs and debt and encouraging under-represented groups, like aboriginals, to pursue post-secondary education."<sup>84</sup> A tuition fee freeze and reduction, along with higher upfront, needs-based grants for low-income students feature prominently in the CAUT submission which like many others insists on the importance of increased public investment in post-secondary education and alleviating the burden on the individual student.

## 2.2. Family responsibilities

Just as family responsibilities continue to shape the labour force participation of women, so too do they affect women's pursuit of higher education and training.

Women still shoulder the lion's share of caring responsibilities and unpaid household tasks - bearing and caring for children, elder care, care for the chronically ill or disabled and housework - without adequate access to essential support services.<sup>85</sup>

Without a family policy, New Brunswick is not doing enough to help families reconcile the demands of education, paid work, and family life. Back in 1970, the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for postsecondary educational institutions to develop

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<sup>82</sup> Warren Clark analyzes the results of a survey of 1995 Canadian graduates of bachelor's programs conducted by Statistics Canada in 1997 in the article "Paying Off Student Loans", *Canadian Social Trends*, (Winter 1998), Available at <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=11-008-X19980034002>. Analysis of data from the National Graduates Survey of the class of 1990 supported similar conclusions. See Saul Schwartz and Ross Finnie (October 2002), "Student Loans in Canada: an analysis of borrowing and repayment," *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 21, issue 5, p. 497-512. See also the recent survey by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (June 2007), *Two Years On: A Survey of Class of 2003 Maritime University Graduates*. Fredericton, MPHEC. Available at [http://www.mphec.ca/english/pol\\_b.html](http://www.mphec.ca/english/pol_b.html)

<sup>83</sup> See for example, Fédération des étudiants et étudiantes du Centre universitaire de Moncton (April 2007), *Pour une accessibilité réelle: Recommandations auprès de la Commission sur l'éducation postsecondaire au Nouveau-Brunswick*; The New Brunswick Student Alliance (April 2007), *Moving Education Forward: Making Post-Secondary Education a New Brunswick Priority*, both available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>.

<sup>84</sup> CAUT also affirms that New Brunswick government's Tuition Tax Back Credit Program, aimed at encouraging the educated to remain in the province, will do little to encourage access to post-secondary education. Canadian Association of University Teachers (April 2007), *Submission to the New Brunswick Commission on Post-Secondary Education*, p. 4, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>. See also Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations, *What would the ideal post-secondary system for New Brunswick look like?* available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>85</sup> See for example the results of a 2005 Statistics Canada time-use survey, summarized in *The Daily*, July 19, 2006 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060719/d060719b.htm>

programs to meet the special needs for continuing education of women with family responsibilities.<sup>86</sup> But educational authorities and institutions have been slow to recognize the distinct needs of students with dependents.<sup>87</sup>

The mature female student has become increasingly common on university campuses and in community colleges in the province over the past three decades. Because she must often juggle the multiple roles and responsibilities of breadwinner, mother, and partner, she is more likely to be a part-time student. Some 7% of all post-secondary students in New Brunswick who received student loans in 2005/06 were single parents – mostly women with dependent children.<sup>88</sup>

Students with dependents, particularly women, face particular challenges in pursuing post-secondary education, related to finding time for family and study, and accessing support services.<sup>89</sup>

For lone mothers, the balancing act is particularly challenging. Interviewed for a New Brunswick study in 2000, eighteen lone parent mothers aged 18 to 35 from the Acadian peninsula pointed to many obstacles they faced in undertaking and completing their community college or university programs: in addition to adequate financial aid, these women noted the lack of access to quality, reliable, flexible childcare, lack of affordable, appropriate housing, transportation problems, need for on-campus support groups, and lack of information about available programs and resources.<sup>90</sup>

The scarcity of affordable, quality child care services is indeed a critical problem for most women who are in the paid labour force or pursuing studies, since there are presently licensed regulated spaces for less than 15% of children aged 12 and under in New Brunswick. For women whose course and study requirements spill over into the evenings and weekends, finding flexible child care may be next to impossible.<sup>91</sup>

A child's illness or the care needs of an aging parent often present particular challenges to female students and may lead to program interruptions or even dropping out, especially in the longer duration programs.<sup>92</sup>

As for maternity and parental leave benefits, only employees who pay into Employment Insurance and can live on 55% of their earnings can take advantage of the federal program. Self-employed

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<sup>86</sup> Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1970), *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*, Ottawa, Information Canada, p. 406.

<sup>87</sup> Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (April 2005), *Students with Dependents: Common Practices in Post-Secondary Education Institutions in Canada and the United States*, available at <http://www.millenniumships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>88</sup> N.B. Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (2007), Student Financial Services Branch, N.B. Student Financial Assistance program, *Statistical Profile, 2005/06*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> See Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (February 2005), *Embracing Differences: Post-Secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities* <http://www.millenniumships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>90</sup> Irène Savoie for the Réseau des femmes francophones du N.-B. (October 2000), *Les obstacles rencontrés chez les étudiantes monoparentales de la péninsule Acadienne, âgées entre 18 et 35 ans, lors d'un retour aux études postsecondaires*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid; see also on this problem that is particularly severe for lone parents, Conseil des directeurs et directrices du Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (May 2007), *Mémoire présenté à la Commission sur l'éducation postsecondaire au Nouveau-Brunswick*, p. 6, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>92</sup> Some research on female students in Ph.D. programs shows that women are more likely than men to see their graduate training plans or amount of time devoted to graduate work curtailed by family-related issues such as the death of a parent or the birth of a child or child rearing responsibilities in general, thereby resulting in expansion of overall time needed for degree completion or in some cases, withdrawal from the program. See Sandra W. Pyke (1997), Education and the "Woman question". [Education and the "Woman Question"] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163, retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>.

women are not eligible for the program and the accumulated hours requirements exclude many low-income women and vulnerable workers.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.3. Chilly learning environments

Female students in post-secondary educational institutions also face problems arising from systemic discrimination within the learning environments and inadequate support mechanisms.

Navigating community college classrooms and on-site training may be difficult for the female trainee. New Brunswick women who participated in focus groups for an Advisory Council study on women and training in the early 1990s reported a host of problems before, during, and after their training. These included difficulties accessing information about course offerings, lack of support, inadequate employment counselling, and gender and sexual harassment during training and work placements.<sup>94</sup> More recent studies on women and training suggest that these problems persist.<sup>95</sup>

University campuses also present challenges to the female learner. Surveys conducted among male and female university students in Canada and the U.S. reveal significant gender differences in reported experiences of academic life, with women reporting disadvantage on a range of aspects linked to the structures and operation of educational institutions.<sup>96</sup>

The so-called “chilly climate” for women in academia is displayed in expressions of sexist humour and stereotypical views of women, the use of sexist language, more attention given to male students by professors and graduate supervisors, from calling on them more frequently in class to inviting their participation on papers or articles, the paucity of women faculty as role models and mentors and the problem of sexual harassment by fellow students and faculty.<sup>97</sup>

Sexual harassment remains a persistent and painful reality of campus life. A survey conducted at the Moncton campus of the Université de Moncton in 1999 found that 70% of female students and 55% of female employees reported experiencing at least one incident of sexist behaviour, sexual harassment, or sexual aggression.<sup>98</sup> The first official policies to address the problem only date back to the mid-1980s, and in most New Brunswick universities are little more than a decade old. Indeed, the term sexual harassment, so common today, did not even exist until the mid-1970s, when it was coined to describe the unwanted imposition of sexual demands in the context of a relationship of unequal power.

For women who are members of disadvantaged communities, getting a post-secondary education means grappling with additional obstacles and exacerbated challenges.

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<sup>93</sup> Women's Network PEI (Fall 2003), *Looking Beyond the Surface: An In-Depth Review of Parental Benefits*, Final Report; also Provincial Focus Groups, New Brunswick Report, Fall 2003, available at <http://www.wnpei.org/parentalbenefits/research.html>

<sup>94</sup> NB ACSW (December 1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*, p. 23-26, Moncton, NB ACSW.

<sup>95</sup> Joan McFarland (2003), «Public Policy and Women's Access to Training in New Brunswick» in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work : Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 195-196.

<sup>96</sup> Sandra W. Pyke (1997), Education and the “Woman question”. [Education and the “Woman Question”] [Electronic version]. *Canadian Psychology*, 38(3), 154-163, retrieved April 12, 2007, from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/ehost/pdf?vid=5&hid=103&sid=29aabd16-96b7-43f8-8e17-31cf8f88cb3a%40sessionmgr104>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Monique Gauvin, Katherine Marcoccio and Alice Guérette-Breau, *Le harcèlement sexiste, le harcèlement sexuel et l'agression sexuelle à l'Université de Moncton : rapport de sondage mené auprès des étudiantes et des employées au Centre universitaire de Moncton*, Moncton : Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sur le harcèlement sexuel et sexiste en milieu d'enseignement francophone, February 1999.

Students or potential students with disabilities encounter physical access problems but also face problems as a result of discrimination and negative stereotypes, as the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons reminds us in its brief to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education. As a result "current enrolments do not adequately reflect the potential numbers from individuals with disabilities" who could benefit from post-secondary education.<sup>99</sup>

The challenges faced by Aboriginal students or potential students are "complex and multi-faceted" – from lack of role models to racism in campus environments - rooted in the specific historical, cultural, demographic, geographic and social situation of these individuals.<sup>100</sup> For Aboriginal women, such problems are interlinked with other issues from violence to health and employment concerns.<sup>101</sup>

Policy and programs to address the barriers faced by these groups must be developed in partnership with community-based and advocacy organizations.

Women in non-traditional university programs such as engineering and those training for non-traditional trades in community colleges may experience particular difficulties since they are still largely outnumbered by male students and have few female role models among faculty. Female professors, like female students, tend to be concentrated mostly in education, the humanities, and social sciences. In 2004/05, only 8% of full-time professors in Engineering and Applied Sciences and 10% of full-time professors in Mathematics and Physical Sciences in New Brunswick universities were female.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, women make up less than 10% of instructors in the trades, technology and natural resource development courses at the New Brunswick Community College.<sup>103</sup>

If the gender imbalance in the non-traditional fields of higher education and training is to be corrected, it is essential to provide support to female students. Efforts have been made to recruit female students in the non-traditional programs through special scholarships, guidance programs in secondary schools, and the creation of women's chairs in fields such as engineering. However, these initiatives may be undermined by an atmosphere that is often hostile to women in male dominated programs and faculties.

Ensuring that women have mentors and access to other forms of ongoing support while learning and training is a key part of improving the post-secondary picture for women. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The later 1970s and 1980s saw some women-centered initiatives including supportive pre-training "bridging" programs established in some provinces.<sup>104</sup> These women-centered programs recognized the particular training needs of women at a time when government-funding initiatives attempted to mitigate women's labour market disadvantage.<sup>105</sup>

Women need support to deal with the discrimination and life issues they face during post-secondary studies, but they also need extra supports in preparing for, gaining access to and

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<sup>99</sup> Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons (March 2007), *Improving Access to Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities*, p. 8, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>100</sup> Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

<sup>101</sup> See NB ACSW (April 2006), *Equality for First Nations Women*, Fredericton: NB ACSW.

<sup>102</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission database.

<sup>103</sup> Women as a percentage of all term and regular instructors, as of fall 2005. Based on data provided by N.B. Department of Training and Employment Development, Human Resources Services.

<sup>104</sup> NB ACSW (December 1994), *Training for Results: A Study of Women and Employment Training in New Brunswick*, p.28-33, Moncton, NB ACSW; See also McFarland (2003), p. 195-196.

<sup>105</sup> Ursule Cristoph (2003), "Who Wins, Who Loses: The Real Story of the Transfer of Training to the Provinces and its Impact on Women," in Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed, *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 16.

staying in non-traditional workplaces. As the author of a recent study on women's training evolution in Canada affirmed, "programs that ignore the interrelationship of these needs may bring about short-term results but do little to address the systemic disadvantages of women in the labour market."<sup>106</sup>

Women seeking to enter or stay in non-traditional occupations still face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, experiencing sexual and general harassment, and lack of support from co-workers, management and employers.

As a recent report by Canada's Construction Sector Council noted, one of the problems that has impeded the success of training programs aimed at women are "workplaces that are not as welcoming, receptive and accommodating as they need to be."<sup>107</sup> Significant change will only come when industries and employers are sensitized to the importance of a workplace culture that supports women.<sup>108</sup> There exist some valuable how-to guides for employers on recruitment, integration and retention of women in non-traditional workplaces, some produced by the now defunct national association Women in Trades and Technology (WITT).<sup>109</sup>

#### **2.4. Unique challenges faced by Aboriginal women**

The post-secondary experience of Aboriginal women is shaped by realities that are often vastly different than for other women. While they are better represented in higher education than their male counterparts, Aboriginal women like Aboriginal men remain less likely than non-Aboriginal individuals to enter university or college and have a much higher drop-out rate. Aboriginal students who do finish high school are almost twice as likely as other Canadian students to either drop out of college or university studies or skip post-secondary education altogether, according to a recent survey of high school graduates in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, two years after graduation.<sup>110</sup>

While 44% of Aboriginal identity women aged 15 years and over had some post-secondary education according to the 2001 census – university, trades or other training, only 27% had completed a degree or certificate, and another 17% were without a diploma.

By contrast, the 54% of non-Aboriginal women who had some post-secondary studies included 38% who had a degree or certificate and 16% without.

The dropout problem is particularly severe at the university level. Of the Aboriginal women in Canada who had studied at university, the percentage without a degree (9%) is greater than the

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Future Labour Supplies for Canada's Construction Industry*, p. 25-26. Available on the CSCC website at [http://www.csc-ca.org/english/whatwedo\\_1.html#profile](http://www.csc-ca.org/english/whatwedo_1.html#profile).

<sup>108</sup> See Denise McLean (2003), *Workplaces that Work: Creating a Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women*, prepared for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, available at <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/about/fpt.htm>

<sup>109</sup> See for example WITT National Network (1995), *Welcoming Women into Trades, Technology, Operations and Blue-Collar Work: A Checklist of Strategies*, London, Ontario. A driving force in advocacy and promotion of women's training in the 1980s and 1990s, WITT had by 2003 lost its federal funding and closed its doors. Provincial WITT chapters are still active in a few provinces including Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

<sup>110</sup> See R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), *The Class of 2003 : High School Follow-Up Survey*. Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 34-35, available at [www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614\\_class\\_of\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614_class_of_03_en.pdf) ; Census data on highest level of schooling attained also points to very high non-completion rates. See Jeremy Hull (June 2005), *Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes, 2001*, Ottawa, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada., available at [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/pse/01/index\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/pse/01/index_e.html)

percentage with a degree (5%). Of non-Aboriginal women who had studied at university, 10% were without a degree versus 15% who had a degree.<sup>111</sup>

For Aboriginal women, the struggle for equality “cannot be separated from the twin legacies of colonialism and racism, which continue to marginalize Aboriginal peoples and devalue their cultures and traditions.”<sup>112</sup> Aboriginal women are also confronted with discrimination on the basis of sex in their own communities.

This profound systemic discrimination compounds a multitude of severe and inextricably linked socio-economic disadvantages. These include grinding poverty and related health problems, lack of access to adequate housing, high incidence of violence and abuse, low education and employment levels, and limited access to political power and resources in their households, communities and beyond.<sup>113</sup>

Studies have shown that Aboriginal women increasingly see education as a way for them and their daughters to escape poverty on the one hand, and the risk or reality of partner abuse on the other.<sup>114</sup> The Native Women’s Association of Canada recently observed that “Aboriginal women sometimes engage in educational activities because women are not tolerating violence in our communities and are leaving for the city. One of the few ways they can access band support to leave violent circumstances is through accessing educational funding.”<sup>115</sup>

While more Aboriginal women want to pursue a post-secondary education to improve their lives, they must overcome a formidable array of hurdles to entry and completion of studies.

Financial hardship remains a significant obstacle for many students and aspiring students, despite the federal government funding allocated to aid Status Indian students attending post-secondary institutions throughout Canada. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program has long been capped. The limited resources mean that not all would-be students can access the grants administered on a discretionary basis by First Nations band or tribal councils, and that the grants do not adequately cover rapidly rising tuition, living and travel costs.<sup>116</sup> The off-reserve population is particularly disadvantaged.<sup>117</sup> Aboriginal students are less likely than other students to have financial support from their families, so some must rely on student loans and employment income.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See Jeremy Hull (February 2006), *Aboriginal Women A Profile from the 2001 Census*, Prepared for Women’s Issues and Gender Equality Directorate Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Table 4-1, based on INAC’s custom 2001 Census tabulations, available at [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/abw/t4-1\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/abw/t4-1_e.html)

<sup>112</sup> Aboriginal Women’s Roundtable on Gender Equality, “Equality for Aboriginal Women,” held March 30 – April 1, 2000 (report last updated July 29, 2003), Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, available at [www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/abwomenroundtable/section3\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/abwomenroundtable/section3_e.html)

<sup>113</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada (2005), *Companion Document First Ministers’ Meeting, Kelowna, B.C., November 24-25, 2005*, p. 8 at <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/reports.html>; New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women (April 2006), *Equality for First Nations Women*, Fredericton, NB ACSW.

<sup>114</sup> Madeleine Dion Stout and Gregory D. Kipling (March 1998), *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Strategic Research Directions for Policy Development*, Ottawa, Status of Women Canada, p. 23 at [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662634314/index\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662634314/index_e.html)

<sup>115</sup> NWAC (2005), p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> First Nation band or tribal councils set the funding priorities, maintain student files and screen applications for eligibility. Guidelines may vary in each organization. Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>; see also R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 19-22, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>117</sup> The N.B. Aboriginal People’s Council, serving the off-reserve population, does not receive PSSSP funding, but offers limited financial assistance for post-secondary education through provincially funded scholarships and through training initiatives funded under the federal Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy. See Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007),

The Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations have called for increased public investment in post-secondary education and removal of funding caps to match rapid population growth and escalating costs.<sup>119</sup>

The research also insists on the importance of addressing the particular historical, social, educational and geographic barriers that limit Aboriginal peoples' post-secondary participation.

High secondary school dropout rates and inadequate preparation during the kindergarten to Grade 12 years drastically reduce the potential pool of post-secondary students in Aboriginal communities.<sup>120</sup> The situation is all the more dramatic in light of the rapidly increasing Aboriginal youth population. Nearly one-third (29%) of New Brunswick's Aboriginal identity population is under the age of 14, compared to 18% for the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>121</sup> The Aboriginal youth population is growing much faster than the youth share of the general population, thanks to a birth rate that is about 1.5 times the overall Canadian rate.<sup>122</sup>

A 2001 survey of the off-reserve Aboriginal population in Canada showed that Aboriginal women have different reasons than Aboriginal men for dropping out of high school. The number one factor prompting female off-reserve youth to leave school was pregnancy or to look after children (25%), while 15% said they were bored. By contrast, nearly one in four (24%) off-reserve Aboriginal male youth aged 15 to 19 said they left high school because they were bored, while 19% wanted to work.<sup>123</sup>

Aboriginal individuals who go on to university or community college are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to have to leave their home community, incurring expenses and distancing themselves from family and social supports.<sup>124</sup>

The legacy of the residential school system and assimilationist policies also means that many Aboriginal students have a deep mistrust of education systems. Moreover, they often shoulder a heavy burden of community and family expectations, are unable to turn to role models with post-secondary education experience and lack self-confidence and motivation.<sup>125</sup>

Aboriginal students on university and college campuses struggle to make their way in an environment where they are socially isolated and dealing with systems, programs and services that are not culturally sensitive. Many do not feel welcome in institutions where they find few

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*Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>, and the web site of the NBAPC at <http://education.nbapc.org/pages.asp?pid=149&deptid=4&lid=0>

<sup>118</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), *The Class of 2003 : High School Follow-Up Survey*.

Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 35-36, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/newsevents/newsfull.asp?newsid=125>

<sup>119</sup> NWAC (2005), p. 7; Assembly of First Nations (May 2005), *First Nations Education Action Plan*, p. 6, available at <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=109><http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=109>

<sup>120</sup> Michael Mendelson (July 2006), *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*, Ottawa, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p. 30- 35, available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications>

<sup>121</sup> Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, Catalogue number 97F0011XCB01001

<sup>122</sup> Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, June 28, 2005 at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050628/d050628d.htm>

<sup>123</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey – Initial Findings. Well-Being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population*, at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-589-XIE/school.htm>

<sup>124</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 14, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>125</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 11-17, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

Aboriginal people among faculty and support staff.<sup>126</sup> Aboriginal women commonly experience racism and sexism in educational settings.<sup>127</sup>

Family responsibilities also loom large for many Aboriginal women pursuing higher education. Aboriginal university and college students tend to be older than the typical student and are more likely to have children. Many of them are lone parent mothers.<sup>128</sup> Supporting and caring for dependants is a significant barrier to access and completion of post-secondary studies.<sup>129</sup>

According to a 2001 survey of off-reserve Aboriginal peoples in Canada, 34% of Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 who had started but not completed a post-secondary program reported family responsibilities as their reason for dropping out, while 21% cited financial reasons, 12% lost interest/motivation and 8% got a job or had to work. About one in four (24%) of their male counterparts cited financial reasons as the number one factor, while only 11% reported family responsibilities as their reason for not finishing post-secondary studies.<sup>130</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that more than increased funding is required to promote Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education. A recent study that drew on interviews with educators and on-site visits to educational institutions, affirms, "institutions must develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal people, and the historic and social barriers they face, before a real difference will be seen in the number of Aboriginal people who succeed in pursuing higher education."<sup>131</sup>

Much research emphasizes the importance of increasing Aboriginal control and participation in the development of curriculum, programs and services and the crucial role of community-based delivery. We may learn from some initiatives in the Western provinces. Favoured initiatives include targeted access programs to ease the transition and provide guidance to Aboriginal learners and Aboriginal-specific personal and academic support services.<sup>132</sup> Mentors and role models, individual counselling and academic advising, housing, childcare and transportation assistance and culturally appropriate post-secondary information are identified as essential supports. Many studies also emphasize the importance of improving data collection and tracking of enrolment and completion rates, currently woefully inadequate for policy-making.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (September 2005), *Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, Millennium Research Note #2, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/OthePublications.asp>

<sup>127</sup> Stout and Kipling, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> David Holmes (February 2005), *Embracing Differences: Post-Secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>129</sup> See for example, Malatest & Associates Ltd. (June 2007), p. 50-51.

<sup>130</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey – Initial Findings. Well-Being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population*, at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-589-XIE/school.htm>

<sup>131</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (January 2004), *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education, What Educators Have Learned*, Montreal, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, p. 41, available at <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/ResearchSeries.asp>

<sup>132</sup> For more than 20 years now, the Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Institute has offered various programs and services to First Nations students at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, in an effort to ease the transition to university study as well as to encourage research and publication in Aboriginal languages, culture, education and history. Institute web site at <http://www.unbf.ca/education/mmi/>

<sup>133</sup> See for example *Ibid.*, p. 41-42; Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (May 2002), *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report Prepared for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available at <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/publications.en.stm>; see also Government of New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (April 2007), *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, available at <http://www.idconcept.net/cpse-ceps/EN/listbriefs.php>

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Persistent gender inequality in income and employment, family responsibilities, experience of violence and harassment and under-representation in positions of power influences women's post-secondary educational participation in New Brunswick. Students or potential students who are otherwise disadvantaged, including low-income lone mothers, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, are particularly affected. Downplaying or ignoring these realities is not an option in reform of post-secondary education. Improving the level of equality among groups is a social and economic necessity and should be one measure of the success of any public policy initiative.

It is therefore disappointing to note the failure to address gender equality concerns in the current inquiry's terms of reference and discussion paper. The lack of sex-disaggregated data in the Commission's online research section obscures the gender-specific participation patterns and sidesteps the issue of gender-specific measures. Women appear to have largely fallen off the government radar in higher education and training policy in recent years. We hope that recent initiatives such as the Wage Gap Action Plan Scholarships may be the first steps in the rediscovery of a more proactive and women-centered approach.<sup>134</sup>

Women are not on an equal footing with men in the post-secondary system. Systemic barriers within educational institutions and in the larger society continue to shape education and training patterns. The gender gap in post-secondary education carries heavy costs for individuals and for society. It contributes to lower earnings and pension incomes for women, an inefficient use of human resources, an escalating skills shortage and reduced overall productivity.

Women are chronically under-represented in certain trades, science and technology programs that offer better employment prospects, are more likely than men to study part-time and are the ones to feel the impact of the absence of family-friendly policies. The mature student has become more common on university campuses and in community colleges in the province over the past decades. For parents, especially lone parents, the balancing act is challenging. The scarcity of affordable, flexible child care services is a critical problem for student parents. Canada's maternity and parental leave benefits program is only for employees who pay into Employment Insurance and can live on 55% of their earnings. Without a family policy, New Brunswick is not doing enough to help families reconcile the demands of education, paid work, and family life.

It is time to implement a comprehensive post-secondary education strategy that would include women-centered initiatives for training, integration and retention in male-dominated occupations. Women-specific initiatives are essential, because women must overcome specific barriers, such as harassment and discrimination in the classroom and on the job site – let alone the standard barriers most women face, such as a heavier share of family responsibilities and limited access to affordable, quality care services.

For years, women's organizations in Canada have called for "a seamless system of training and adjustment services (with numerous access points and with services not tied to any income support program) as the kind of system that will best meet women's diverse training and adjustment requirements."<sup>135</sup> An integrated approach is also needed for university education and the entire post-secondary sector.

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<sup>134</sup> Note that the 2005 Newfoundland and Labrador White Paper on Public Post-Secondary Education was one of the rare recent government inquiries that called on institutions to improve women's situation in colleges and universities.

<sup>135</sup> Karen Lior and Susan Wismer (2003), "Still Shopping for Training: Women, Training and Livelihoods." In Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Ed. *Training the Excluded for Work : Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth and People with Low Income*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, p. 219. See also Susan Wismer (1988), *Women's Education and Training: A Policy Analysis*, Toronto, CLOW.

The Advisory Council therefore recommends:

□ That the provincial education, labour and social program authorities, in collaboration with their federal counterparts and in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal women's organizations and community groups, undertake a needs assessment and develop an action plan that includes the appropriate policies and programs to promote the full and equitable participation of Aboriginal women in post-secondary education. A system of sex-disaggregated data collection must also be developed and implemented for the purposes of tracking enrolment and completion rates and monitoring program results for Aboriginal learners.

□ That the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour ensure that comparable statistical information on student aid, enrolments, attrition and completion rates of women and men, and diverse groups of women and men (Aboriginal, other-abled, lone parents) in New Brunswick's community colleges and universities is collected, made available to the public and used in policy-making.

□ That the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in collaboration with educational institutions and community groups, identify the needs and concerns of women and diverse groups of women with regards to post-secondary education access and participation.

□ That the provincial education, labour and social program authorities develop and implement a coordinated strategy to achieve the full and equitable participation of women in post-secondary education. The framework would include, but not be limited to, the following:

□ Effective recruitment initiatives to encourage and support the participation of women in engineering and applied sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, technology and skilled trades. Special outreach efforts must focus on chronically under-represented groups, such as Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

□ Increased public investment in higher education and training, including literacy programs for adult learners, with funding tied to equity goals.

□ A revamped student financial aid system, with higher proportion of upfront, need-based non-repayable grants and scholarships based on actual education and living costs, along with tuition fee control measures.

□ Changes to the Employment Insurance program to extend eligibility for maternity and parental benefits to student mothers and parents, with leave provisions guaranteed by post-secondary institutions.

□ Creation of affordable licensed child care spaces in on-campus and off-campus centres that offer flexible scheduling to student parents.

□ Enhanced support services, including mentoring programs and peer support groups, for female students in colleges, universities and apprenticeship settings, particularly those in non-traditional fields of study and training. Services provided to Aboriginal students and students with disabilities developed and based on a collaborative service and support model which partners post-secondary institutions with other agencies and groups.

□ Preparation and dissemination of user-friendly information resources about learning options, existing programs and services.

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