



# ATLANTIC BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Presentation to the Commission On  
Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

by

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## **Introduction**

As President of Atlantic Baptist University, I am pleased to respond to the invitation from the New Brunswick Commission on Post-Secondary Education to take part in the province-wide discussion on post-secondary education.

The direct link between educational attainment and economic vitality has been noted in the Discussion Paper as released. The future of our Province, and the quality of life to be enjoyed by continuing generations of New Brunswick citizens will both be impacted by implementation (or failure to implement) recommendations forged with the intent of better preparing students to compete in a global economy. We know we must leverage current educational and monetary resources in a manner that enables our universities and colleges to perform at a level that is “smarter than our competitors.”

Pursuit of such a standard is an ambitious goal. However, our Province brings to the discussion both experience and expertise in higher education. We recognize that the future is not the past, but that the past must inform the future.

I would like to use this opportunity to make some general observations about the study, then give emphasis to the value that I believe institutions such as Atlantic Baptist University bring to the post-secondary scene, and then conclude with some information on the contribution that ABU will be seeking to make in the future.

## The Broader Discussion

The Commission's Discussion Paper touches on major issues facing New Brunswick educational institutions today, including demographic projections, accessibility, relevance, responsiveness, quality, accountability, efficiency, the role of collaboration, and the cost of post-secondary education.

The challenge in re-shaping educational institutions for future competitiveness is that the future is a moving target. We can predict where current trends point if they continue in a consistent direction, but experience suggests a level of caution be added to bold predictions about the future. In equipping students for the future, should post-secondary institutions be focused on the current needs of the market place and the "hot" trends within society, or on developing life-long skills that enable graduates to be adaptive because they are able to assess, examine, and evaluate information, and initiate change as required? While some may question the validity and value of a liberal arts education at a time when there is great demand for trade and technical skills, there are those of us who would argue that such an education produces a crucial skill that wears well over a life-time, namely an ability to think, reason, and question.

The rise and fall of enrolment in a number of private post-secondary institutions in New Brunswick within the last decade should serve to remind us that "market supply and demand" variables are continuously subject to change. Post-secondary institutions, in accommodating and responding to industry dynamics, must walk the fine line between adapting to long-term trends, without becoming overly committed to the market demand of the moment. University programs need to be based on sound theory and enduring trends, while maintaining the ability to respond to more immediate and momentary trends through individual course electives and program adjustments.

Institutional flexibility carries a price tag. There is significant risk and cost associated with launching new programs, and then remedial costs if such programs are downsized or eliminated. Few universities can afford program failures.

Is this the time for a new level of cooperation between universities, industry, and government? Should universities be expected to absorb the full risk of the flexibility suggested in the Discussion Paper? Realizing that government and business currently invest in universities, are there nonetheless new levels of partnership that can be forged whereby industry and government share the cost of initiating/adapting programs that meet more immediate marketplace trends, but which also commit them to a continuing share of the risk so as to shelter universities from the full cost of negative realities if the marketplace need changes quickly?

All parties recognize the benefit of a well-educated and trained workforce. Universities are primary in lifting the overall educational standard. However, can universities be expected to create graduates who in every discipline are “employment ready” given the diverse needs of business and marketplace variables? A graduate may progress through a series of career options throughout a lifetime, so to have an educational foundation that allows him/her to be “career ready” may be of greater long term benefit than the more immediate “employment ready” skills. Graduates today must recognize that to maintain any competitive advantage requires a life-long commitment to learning. Utilizing the skills of how to obtain information, how to evaluate the information obtained, and formulating action based on that information is a lifetime practice. Graduates need to recognize that from time to time they may be required to take additional training in order to maintain competitive advantage in the market.

Having noted the above, however, education is not a “one size fits all” proposition. Any mixture of theory and immediate skills may be needed for success in a particular career. Hence the gap between the current community college sector and the university sector may need to be bridged with a new level of collaboration that results in creation of new certificate or degree options. Agreement on recognition of transferable credits, or cooperative awarding of a degree wherein credits have been achieved equally at the community college and university level, may enlarge options for students while responding effectively to workforce needs.

Such a suggestion automatically raises issues of quality and accountability. Would all credits be equal in value? Do all credits need to

be equal in value? Is there a qualitative difference between courses taken at a college where the experienced instructor may hold a Bachelor's degree, as compared to a first year course taken at a university where the lecturer is a first year Master's graduate? Is it possible to come sufficiently close to a common standard in some cases so as to allow transfer of credits more easily? In exploring possibilities, as noted in the Discussion Paper, the prospect of closer collaboration must recognize "the powerful constraint embodied in the different cultures of the two types of institutions." Nonetheless, is part of the reason New Brunswick experiences a higher drop-out rate among first year university students and a lower participation rate in community colleges because some students are neither "fish nor foul?" If an in-between option existed, would students take advantage of it? Are employment opportunities available that require an integrated skill set not easily attained at a community college or university alone? The suggestion that the time may be right to create a "new kind of institution" should not be dismissed. It may hold promise for all participating institutions, especially if it creates a new option for students who may otherwise be lost entirely to the existing post-secondary options.

It is normal for institutions to be self-protective if there is threat of losing their distinctive character, or if change could infringe on a long-standing reputation based on uncompromising quality which has secured committed funding. No one likes to risk hard won gains. Creating new options, however, may not prove detrimental, as the strength of such institutions is essential to the credibility of new endeavours.

In this regard, I concur with the thought that to create a specifically New Brunswick agency to monitor quality and appropriate accountability in post-secondary education in our province would have benefit. Such an agency could allow for greater connectedness between existing post-secondary education providers in the Province and create the milieu that allows new possibilities to emerge.

While recognizing that realistically the Commission must concern itself with the most effective use of public funds currently committed to post-secondary education, I trust that an assumption common in some circles that rationalizing existing programs offered by the various colleges and universities is the answer to funding issues will not go unchallenged. While there may be need for more concentrated focus in

graduate study programs and research, reducing options collectively and/or geographically may have the effect of limiting accessibility for those students for whom relocation to obtain their education is difficult. As well, the assertion from some that universities must bring graduates to market more quickly must be analyzed carefully. Can degree programs be restructured to accommodate such a goal without loss of quality? If theoretically possible, is the benefit continuous or primarily short term.

### **Faith Based Options in New Brunswick**

The Discussion Paper notes the existence of private post-secondary institutions at 81 locations in the province, the majority being registered under the Private Occupational Training Act with three being incorporated under private Acts of the Legislature.

The three incorporated institutions are named: Atlantic Baptist University, Bethany Bible College, and St. Stephen's University. It is noted that students attending these institutions are eligible to receive federal and provincial student aid, but that the institutions themselves do not receive provincial funding.

I appreciate that the existence of our institutions is noted, but recognize that our presence in post-secondary education raises questions for some as to our nature and value. Where do faith-based institutions fit in the mosaic of post-secondary institutions in New Brunswick? What is the nature of the "religious" component of our mission? How does that component affect our educational mission? Do we recognize and abide by standards that are common to other universities and colleges? How do we prove the quality of our programs? Why do our institutions not seek operational funding? Would we welcome any form of review that would assure the public of the quality of our programs?

While it is not my place to speak on behalf of Bethany Bible College or St. Stephen's University, I would estimate that our three institutions together serve in excess of eleven hundred students a year. ABU serves the greater number with an enrolment of almost seven

hundred. Our institutions have existed for anywhere from three to almost six decades.

The presence of our institutions adds diversity to the greater post-secondary scene, and provides students with added choice as they seek university education. Each of our institutions is unique, identifying with different streams of faith traditions, yet available to students desirous of achieving their education in a setting that accentuates the spiritual within the context of educational and intellectual growth. The comparatively smaller size of our institutions allows for more interaction between professors and students, thus adding strength to the overall mission of our institutions. By our presence in the communities where we are located, we add accessibility to post-secondary education for some who might not have opportunity otherwise. We also add educational and economic benefit to our local communities.

At ABU we strive to add the faith dimension to the total educational experience without substituting or detracting from the educational objectives common to any university setting. We believe our distinctive, wherein we are commonly referred to as a “Christian” university, would be undermined if we adopted a secondary attitude toward our educational objectives. Striving for excellence in education is in part driven by our faith dimension.

ABU has earned respect throughout its various stages of growth for its academic integrity. Prior to ABU becoming degree-granting in 1983, students with up to two years of liberal arts courses were able to transfer to other universities in New Brunswick, the Maritimes, and elsewhere to complete their baccalaureate degrees. Through the success of our student’s academic performance at such institutions, confidence in the quality of courses offered at ABU continued to grow. In October 2001, ABU received a confirmation letter from the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies of Dalhousie University stating that the Academic Planning Committee of the Faculty of Graduate Studies had considered the matter of admitting ABU students into graduate programs at Dalhousie, and recommended that ABU graduates be considered for admission on the same basis as other potential graduate students. A similar letter was received January 31, 2002 which had been written by the Secretary of Senate for Memorial University of Newfoundland. The

integrity of ABU's academic programs has been verified through our experience with other universities in accepting our students.

In 1998, ABU received notification from the Department of Education that it would certify graduates from its concurrent Bachelor of Education program, and verification in December 2000 of a two-year consecutive program. Since launching this program, ABU has awarded 268 Education degrees. Each graduate has received New Brunswick Teacher Certification V. The great majority of these graduates have found employment in the New Brunswick public school system. It is our understanding that an internal Department of Education study done on teacher readiness revealed that our graduates were as comparable as others, even scoring stronger than others in numerous categories. Though our program is still relatively new, we feel the performance of our graduates fully validates the quality and integrity of the program. Our graduates from this and other programs are making a significant contribution for the good of the public.

The fact that ABU does not seek operational funding from the New Brunswick government should not be interpreted as an anti-government statement. It is rather a "pro-mission" position wherein we value the liberty to intentionally add the historic Christian understanding of truth to the classroom debate where all theories and viewpoints are examined and compared. Whatever position a student chooses to adopt on any issue, the student is challenged to think more critically by being challenged with other viewpoints.

Although ABU does not seek direct operation funding out of concern that such dependence could over time infringe on some of the liberties we enjoy as a faith based institution, we recognize that there are direct and indirect relationships with government that affect our well-being. Approximately half of our students obtain government student loans in order to attend ABU. Donor support is also a significant source of income, and the university is able to give income tax receipts as a recognized, not-for-profit charity. In both of these ways ABU is impacted by government policy. As well, the University has received major capital grants, first accessing infrastructure monies of \$3,450,000 in the mid 1990's as a result of agreement by three levels of government, and then \$2,800,000 in 2002 from the Province through the Regional Development Corporation. Capital grants were sought on the basis that



ABU's expansion and growth has economic as well as educational benefit.

My request to the Commission is that in your assessment of the total picture of post-secondary education in New Brunswick, the presence of faith based institutions be recognized for the benefit of choice and diversity that such institutions add. ABU is open to means of assessment and review whereby the public can receive greater assurance of the quality of our programs, so long as the process respects our liberty to continue with our distinctive. We do not fear review of our educational standards.

The creation of a New Brunswick agency for quality assessment that reviews not only those institutions that currently fall under the prevue of the MPHEC, but also private not-for-profit, private for-profit, and the community college sector, might speed the process of collaborative efforts as well as creation of new program options. Such an agency could provide faith based institutions with an intermediary means that recognizes the legitimate benefit we provide to the public while helping government to develop appropriate policy for dealing with such educational agencies.

### **ABU Will Continue to Contribute**

Atlantic Baptist University has roots that go back to 1949. Today ABU is primarily a liberal arts university that offers degrees in Arts, Science, Business, and Education.

The University is aware of demographic trends within our region of the country, yet believes there are sound reasons why sustainability and growth is possible in the future. First, we have achieved our greatest growth as an institution in the last 10 years in a region with relatively static population growth. In fact, ABU exceeded the more modest projections included in its strategic plan. Part of this can be explained by the fact that ABU resides in Moncton, one of the few regions within the Maritimes that is growing. The neighbourhood in which the University exists is growing, with predictions of an additional 1800 homes in the next five years. As well, the City of Moncton in its Economic

Development Strategy released in November 2005 lists “limited post-secondary education opportunities for Anglophones” as one of its key threats, and fostering post-secondary education, primarily for Anglophone students, its number one priority. ABU is located in an area recognized as being underserved.

Another consideration is the strategy that has supported ABU’s growth. Growth has been linked to addition of new programs or strategic expansion of existing programs. This was true throughout the 1980s as the University offered its first degrees, and especially so in 1996 with the move to our present site. Three new programs were introduced at that time, namely Biology, Business, and Communication Studies. In one year the University grew from 220 students to 310 students. Enrolment in the new programs accounted for most of the numerical growth.

Through the introduction of its Education program plus a degree completion option (Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Management), enrolment continued to rise. Our Business Administration program has expanded. The cumulative effect is that at present we are in essence filled to capacity. After seven straight years of enrolment growth, we in part attribute a small drop in 2006-07 to an inability to expand any further given existing facilities and resources.

Currently we are in process of renewing our strategic plan based on the possibility of facility expansion as well as program expansion. We project that ABU could grow to 1000 students by September 2012 if the University can launch a successful capital campaign during while making strategic decisions regarding programs.

Our strategy includes an academic quality equal to what students would experience elsewhere, but also maintaining and accentuating our distinctive. It is in offering something more unique or different in the totality of the university experience that gives ABU a niche market which we speculate may be a growing market.

With an increased number of graduates in recent years, and thus greater awareness generally, we sense that ABU is just beginning to emerge and be discovered by Moncton specifically, and New Brunswick and the region more generally. We sense there is still considerable

potential locally, and that with expanded advertising we could enlarge our geographical base.

ABU also has designs to increase the number of international students on campus. While in any given year the University receives a substantial number of applications given our size, actual attendance has typically been very low within our overall enrolment count. In the last four years the number has never been more than 25 and has been as low as 10. Finances and ABU's inability to offer large scholarships appears to be one of the major obstacles, even though the University does not charge double tuition to international students as most other universities do. Not being a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada appears to be another factor in that international students look for verification of a university's accreditation. Typically, in any given year, one-third to one-half of international students would be from the United States, with the remainder coming primarily from African countries such as Kenya, Zambia, and Nigeria. Other countries include India, Bermuda, and Bolivia.

In terms of program options being considered for inclusion in our strategic plan, I would offer the following as a glimpse into potential areas of growth for ABU.

**Expansion of the BBA program.** – The business program at ABU has more than doubled in the last 5 years. We predict that as we expand the options with appointment of new faculty that there is ample room for this program to continue its current trajectory. In addition to attracting traditional recruits, we have also been experiencing an unprecedented number of students transferring into our Business program. One contributing factor to this increase in transfers is that ABU has articulation agreements with the New Brunswick Community College and Oultons College.

**Adult Learners Professional Studies (ALPS).** – Our degree-completion program currently offers only one track, that of Organizational Management. While we believe this track will continue to hold significant potential, we are exploring other majors. We recognize an opportunity with adults whose circumstances prevent them from giving up work, but who have the ability and desire to complete their university degree within a field related to their work. The Quality

Learning Agenda Policy Statement for Post-Secondary Education and Training released in April 2005 by the Province noted that there are a significant number of adults who have never completed post-secondary training, and that creating opportunity for those adults will meet a need. ABU envisions expansion in this area which may also include establishing satellite locations so as to serve students in their home community.

### **Education and Professional Development of Teachers –**

Conversations with existing teachers in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia regarding certification upgrading has led to proposing 30 credit hours of course work within the area of literacy. The Province of New Brunswick has given approval for the proposed courses and discussions are underway with Nova Scotia. The initial response from teachers has been very strong. They see literacy as a crucial need in professional development. The first three courses ABU offered filled within days of being announced with virtually no advertising apart from word of mouth. The potential exists to develop this initiative into a full Masters of Education option within 2 to 4 years.

**French Language & Literature** - With ABU being located in a bilingual city within the only officially bilingual province, and with a great number of Anglophone students taking immersion within their secondary education, the addition of French as a first modern language major appears to be a natural extension for ABU. Such a program would be not only a credible addition to our current offerings, but also a natural complement to existing programs such as Education and Business where French has significant applicability. This possibility could even lead to some type of partnership with Université de Moncton.

**Science Expansion** – Science programs at a small university always present unique challenges, but the decision to add Biology at ABU in 1996 was deliberate. The time appears right to strengthen our existing major in Biology and to consider natural expansions from this major. One option is to add a stronger environmental studies focus given the interest of existing faculty, or, due to UPEI's veterinarian program being nearby, create a pre-veterinarian track. The Science program may not be a large 'player' within overall enrolment growth, but will still be a credible contributor in the future.

The initiatives under consideration speak in part to our confidence that future growth is possible at ABU, even if broader demographic changes appear challenging as based on the number of future high school graduates. We also speculate that as the need for a trained workforce increases, it will be an optimal time for many adults to re-enter university to complete their post-secondary education. ABU would like to be in a position to capitalize on that possibility.

### **Conclusion**

The myriad of factors that challenge the future of post-secondary education in New Brunswick can appear overwhelming. As a Commission I wish you the proverbial “wisdom of Solomon” as you seek insight into these issues and formulate recommendations that will shape the future of post-secondary education in our Province.