

**SUBMISSION TO THE COMMISSION ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

**PRESENTED BY:
THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS -
FAUST**

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<http://www.caut.ca/faust/>

Preamble

The Faculty Association of the University of St. Thomas (FAUST) welcomes the opportunity to present its views to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick and to respond to the discussion paper (March 2007). FAUST is a certified trade union under the Industrial Relations Act of New Brunswick. Since 1976, we have represented full- and part-time faculty at St. Thomas University. We are members of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). FAUST is committed to improving the quality of post-secondary education in New Brunswick and to protecting academic freedom. Our brief examines the issues raised in the Commission's report and we use the same headings. Further, we analyze these issues in the context of several concerns, including funding of post-secondary education institutions in New Brunswick, the definition of a quality education, and the liberal arts focus of St. Thomas University.

Any discussion of an ideal post-secondary education system for New Brunswick must be expanded to include an analysis of adequate infrastructure and funding, including sufficient library holdings, lower student-faculty ratios, and adequate institutional research support for faculty. Without properly funded facilities, access is undermined and the quality of research at universities is imperiled. The support for post-secondary education by both the federal and provincial government is sorely lacking. Indeed, in 2006, New Brunswick ranked last in provincial transfers to universities and colleges¹. This is a distressing statistic and FAUST hopes that the Commission will assist the provincial government in finding means to address this funding shortfall. We can do better and take the lead of other provinces to make post-secondary education a priority. For example, in 2005/06 provincial transfers to universities and colleges in New Brunswick were equal to only 41% of those in Saskatchewan.

As the chart below demonstrates, New Brunswick universities and colleges have been underfunded for over a decade. The Commission's discussion paper largely ignores this reality and, in doing so, undermines its discussion of quality and accountability. Any discussion of renewing New Brunswick's universities and colleges must begin with increased core funding. In addition, FAUST has joined together with other CAUT members in demanding that the federal government create a dedicated transfer for post-secondary education and increase funding back to at least 1993 levels. In order to return to 1993 levels, based on inflation and population growth, would require \$40 million annually in new funding. It is troubling that the Commission is largely silent on the issue of increased core transfers to colleges and universities. Recent reviews in both Saskatchewan and Ontario have called for a substantial infusion of new funding. Given that New Brunswick ranks last in the country the need for new funding is even more urgent. It is time for the New Brunswick government to show leadership and a commitment to post-secondary education.

¹ *Source: Calculations based on Statistics Canada, University & Colleges Revenue and Expenditures*

Table 1: Rank of Per capita provincial transfers to universities & colleges (constant 2005\$)

	2006		1993	
	Transfers	Rank	Transfers	Rank
Saskatchewan	\$582	1	\$393	8
Quebec	\$556	2	\$556	1
Newfoundland	\$556	3	\$448	3
Alberta	\$537	4	\$470	2
British Columbia	\$429	5	\$418	6
Manitoba	\$420	6	\$356	9
Prince Edward Island	\$412	7	\$443	4
Ontario	\$365	8	\$426	5
Nova Scotia	\$342	9	\$410	7
New Brunswick	\$237	10	\$248	10

Source: Statistics Canada

Accessibility

The Commission states that access to education is a fundamental value. But, implicitly, the Commission sees access in terms of job training that should benefit the economic status of New Brunswick while seemingly ignoring the very real value of education for education's sake. FAUST maintains that education is far more than simply job training. Education must serve to create ethical, socially conscious, historically and culturally aware, active critical thinkers who are able to function in, and meaningfully contribute to, wider social, cultural, political and artistic domains than simply the work force. St. Thomas University does just this and more. St. Thomas University's liberal arts mission is to: develop independent, inquiring minds by providing opportunities to acquire breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding, to develop an awareness of the perennial questions and new challenges confronting humanity while fostering depth and consistency of moral judgment. We teach our students how to write and speak with clarity and precision while fostering capacity and life-long desire for learning. Hence, access to ideas and critical thinking must be equally foregrounded and not merely access to training for practical skills that will assist employer bottom lines.

FAUST is not naïve about education only for education's sake. Clearly, New Brunswick must get some value for its support of liberal arts education. St. Thomas tells prospective students about the value of a liberal arts education: "Although specialists and technically-trained workers will always be needed, employers are saying emphatically that they need well-educated generalists who are flexible, creative, curious, and capable of seeing the broader picture. Employers in business, industry, government, health care, and other sectors are looking for people who have learned how to learn, people with excellent communication and teamwork skills -- in brief, they are looking for well-rounded, liberally educated people." A liberal arts education does provide people who will participate in the labour force and who will contribute to the long-term growth of the province.

Therefore, it is our position that funding transfers for liberal arts institutions such as St. Thomas must be at least equal to, if not greater than, funding transfers to comprehensive universities and community colleges. This funding will provide access to those who wish to improve themselves in the manner stated above. New Brunswick requires creative, rigorous intellectuals, artistic and ethically aware/active individuals who will contribute to overall well-being and quality of life now and in the future. To provide funds only for access to jobs training now will rob New Brunswick of a brighter future.

FAUST recognizes the vital role community colleges play in New Brunswick's post-secondary landscape. Certainly students who have no desire to attend university and wish to enter the labour force quickly upon high school completion must be given opportunities for job training. However, FAUST is concerned that funds only for shifts to job training through community colleges would be counter-productive. Other options are available for community college and university collaborations. Provinces, for example BC, do provide access to universities through university transfer programs. Funds to community colleges could be used to set up programs such as these in New Brunswick and to improve any similar programs that may exist now. This form of access has its pros and cons. Tuition is lower for students, however, the college faculty may not have Ph.D.s and may not have maintained up-to-date research. This could inadequately

prepare college students for the expectations of the university environment. FAUST therefore recommends that any university transfer programs initiated in New Brunswick must be done with the full input of universities in order to maintain quality control of transferable courses and community college teachers. This is particularly important for liberal arts institutions such as St. Thomas where we teach a very eclectic mix of intellectual and practical ideas.

Accessibility and Aboriginal Issues

FAUST thinks that the under representation of First Nations in post-secondary institutions is unacceptable and should be addressed. Two issues are relevant here. First, universities must provide programming relevant to various Aboriginal cultures. To provide programming pitched to some sort of generic “Aboriginal people” devalues the cultural diversity of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. This programming should not be tokenistic and relegated to Native Studies programs but should ideally be part of every course curriculum in significant ways. Such a commitment to truly integrating Aboriginal issues and perspectives within all academic programs would complement and strengthen more specialized Native Studies programs. The sordid history of non-Aboriginal treatment of Aboriginal peoples in the past and today and the potential for, and importance of, Aboriginal peoples to New Brunswick and Canada must be taught to all. Second, university courses for and by Aboriginal peoples should not teach Indians how to be Indians. It is the role of students’ families to teach them their identities not universities. Rather, we need to provide access to histories and ethnographic materials of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations, both oral and written, that are not stereotypical, sugarcoated or bound up in colonizing forms of philosophy and practice. At the same time we need to provide both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students access to ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations are changing in terms of new urban and land-based economic, social and political innovations. Tokenism and paternalism should not continue to be the philosophies underpinning “new” approaches to Aboriginal education that aim to increase accessibility. Aboriginal students need to understand not only individual Aboriginal identities and cultural revival but also how to think and act as members of a constantly changing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world. We think that a liberal arts education addresses the above needs. In so doing universities such as St. Thomas provide the conditions which make access for Aboriginal peoples easier by being culturally sensitive and intellectually and historically rigorous.

Accessibility and Retention of Graduates

FAUST maintains that retaining graduates in New Brunswick is the responsibility of government and employers. If we wish to keep more of our young graduates in the province, we need to improve the labour climate and the perception of opportunities in the provinces.

Relevance and Responsiveness

Much of the Commission’s discussion of “relevance and responsiveness” seems oriented towards addressing perceived programming and governance problems at the community college level. Yet the challenges presented—how to better fulfill the needs of New Brunswickers by remaining current and flexible amid changing socio-economic demands—are also relevant to the university

sector. FAUST welcomes the opportunity to engage with these questions. The education of a population characterized by its intelligence, ingenuity and competitiveness has been and always will be the key to our society's future success. Universities offer many students an effective pathway to such an education.

Obviously the needs of our Province are manifold and complex, not to be served by any one sort of post-secondary education. Community colleges provide essential career training for many, and initiatives to improve that training should be applauded. It goes without saying, however, that university-level training, including programs in the liberal arts, are equally essential. One could wax eloquent, citing Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to demonstrate the apparently universal human quality of intellectual curiosity—or point to the perils facing any society which turns its back on the broad, open pursuit of knowledge as in Orwell's 1984. But such displays of erudition are unnecessary. No one would suggest that any part of the world in the twenty-first century could be well served by cutting back on the quality or accessibility of its universities, and least of all on liberal arts programs. These have consistently fulfilled many of our most promising students' intellectual and vocational needs. The Commission's sense that *some* New Brunswickers would be better served by entering college rather than university programs has undoubted merit, but this should in no way be taken to mean that the very significant core constituency of those who want and need a university degree is ever likely to disappear. The value of a university-level arts degree remains indisputable in our society, and New Brunswick must make the leading-edge quality of such degrees a top priority in order to achieve success in the coming decades.

If the question is instead whether, and how, universities can improve their “currency”, “responsiveness” and “innovation” qualities as changes take place in the wider world, then the answer is again obvious. Universities can and should strive to support their professors' active, ongoing engagement within their disciplines and within academia generally. This means increased support for research, not only in technology-driven subjects but in the liberal arts as well. Falling behind in the humanities or social sciences would be just as counterproductive for New Brunswick as underdevelopment of the physical and information sciences. Nor does a renewed commitment to support for professors' research agendae in any way threaten quality of teaching. On the contrary, teaching is informed by effective research in ways that can only benefit students. Professors in all fields model intellectual work for their students by engaging in research, and they bring the fruits of new discoveries to the classroom. Furthermore, with the advent of new information technologies, quality research at smaller or relatively isolated regional universities has become more viable than ever before. At a liberal arts university like St. Thomas, for example, New Brunswick has the real possibility of becoming a national leader in a wide variety of subjects.

FAUST strongly recommends the recognition of New Brunswick's need to move forward by investing in the university sector as a major step toward meeting the social, economic and cultural needs of this Province, its students, and its employers. First-rate liberal arts programs must remain a valued component of this sector, and indeed its cornerstone.

Quality and Accountability

There is strong public interest in post-secondary education in New Brunswick and the public should expect a high-quality education from its universities. In meeting this expectation, however, it is important to consider the central issue of the best means to evaluate the quality of a post-secondary education. One way to assess quality and accountability from universities is to measure quantifiable indicators such as employment rates, student satisfaction surveys, and graduation rates. However, such measures have serious limitations (to be discussed below) that could seriously jeopardize the quality of education and research in New Brunswick universities if overemphasized. Despite these limitations, however, St. Thomas University has willingly participated in surveys as one means of assessing its programming and whether it is meeting its stated objectives. St. Thomas has consistently scored very well on such measures, particularly those that evaluate the quality of education provided by the faculty. We are proud to rank 8 out of 23 universities in the primarily undergraduate category of *Maclean's* (2006). It is particularly noteworthy that St. Thomas ranks first in the province of New Brunswick in the number of faculty with Ph.D.'s and first in the same measure among primarily undergraduate universities. This is a very strong indicator of the quality of professor that students have access to at St. Thomas. Our students' satisfaction with the faculty and the education they provide is further underscored by the *Globe and Mail University Report Card* (2006) which revealed that St. Thomas students assigned an A+ for faculty members' knowledge of subjects as well as A's for faculty availability outside classroom hours and their interaction with students and quality of teaching.

As stated above, there are limitations to surveys and other quantifiable measures of the quality of a post-secondary education. Such measures miss a set of unquantifiable and extremely important values and skills that a post-secondary education provides, particularly a liberal arts education. These include the development and enhancement of an educated and democratic citizenship, critical thinking, civic engagement, intellectual curiosity, communication, personal growth, and social equity. Surely these kinds of values and skills should be the hallmarks of any quality system of post-secondary education. Yet how do you measure them? Can you measure them? As Bruneau and Savage (2002) argue in their book *Counting Out the Scholars: The Case Against Performance Indicators in Higher Education*, the quality of higher education is neither a measurable product nor an outcome subject to any simple performance-based definition. How does one measure the development of an open and inquiring mind? The personal growth and development of confidence of a student over four years of university? Critical thinking and communication skills? Quantified indicators miss these and any assessment that makes such indicators primary potentially jeopardizes the real quality and accountability of a post-secondary education.

Bruneau and Savage provide practical considerations and alternatives to performance indicators for measuring the work of universities and their quality, such as the external reviews that departments and programs at St. Thomas participate in on a regular basis by outside expert peers. They also call for strengthening academic freedom and faculty governance, key aspects of a post-secondary institution that FAUST vigorously protects and maintains. Bruneau and Savage also suggest an emphasis on ethics in research and teaching, and a commitment to independent public policy research. They aptly point out that the quality of a higher education institution "has to do with the activity of free inquiry conducted in the public interest" rather than simple quantitative measures. This kind of free inquiry is precisely what St. Thomas faculty seek to

foster in their students through the liberal arts focus and through their research.

The importance of free inquiry in the public interest is also strongly tied to faculty research. One factor that distinguishes a university from a community college is research and the opportunity for students to be exposed to and to engage ideas as they are formed. St. Thomas faculty are proud to contribute research to the New Brunswick community, to introduce undergraduate students to research in the classroom, and to involve students in research through assistantships, research projects, and honours studies. FAUST actively advances the research culture at St. Thomas University through its contract negotiations with the Administration. FAUST seeks to ensure that research is given an appropriate share of the faculty's workload because St. Thomas students deserve the same as any other student in the country: Professors at the top of their game.

FAUST takes exception to the statement in the Commission's discussion paper that St. Thomas is a relatively small player in the research field. We assume this statement is based wholly on quantifiable research funding dollar amounts as presented in Figure 5 of the report since faculty at St. Thomas were not interviewed about their actual research programs. St. Thomas faculty are actively engaged in a wide range of innovative research projects, some of which have successfully secured Canada Research Chairs, SSHRC, CIHR, Health Canada, Justice Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and Canadian Heritage grants, to name a few. These grants may have figured into the data in Figure 5. However, the data are misleading and illustrate the danger of relying entirely on a quantifiable measure of research when assessing quality. Not only does this mischaracterize research at St. Thomas, the reliance on this quantifiable measure seriously endangers important and pioneering research that is very much in the public's interest and at the core of St. Thomas faculty research.

To set the data presented in Figure 5 in context, it is important to note that the federal government has increased research funding in recent years, but much of the monies cannot be accessed by St. Thomas faculty. Much of the increased federal funding for research has unfortunately come with strings attached that require researchers to seek out "co-funders." St. Thomas faculty have avoided such partnerships because they restrict independent research. Further, St. Thomas faculty are in many instances ineligible since the goal of such initiatives is to build stronger ties with industry and to promote the greater commercialization of research. In fact, the co-funding requirements are widening inequities between universities and between regions of the country. The Commission asks why New Brunswick is dead last in research funding. Consider the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). Compared to the distribution of full-time faculty, the share of total funding received through the CFI has been skewed towards the richer provinces. Although the four Atlantic provinces are home to more than 12% of all full-time faculty in Canada, the region received less than 4% of all CFI grants. This imbalance stems in part from the fact that CFI co-funding rules mean that the Foundation only provides 40% of project funding, with the remaining 60% has to be raised from private partners or other levels of government. In Atlantic Canada, and New Brunswick particularly, where industrial partners are scarce, the matching requirement has been a daunting challenge.

This kind of partnered research further disadvantages St. Thomas faculty whose studies tend to be closely tied with the liberal arts mandate of the university. Such research does not typically attract industry partners. That does not mean, however, that the research is any less important

than that which attracts such partners. In fact, it avoids such arrangements that tend to undermine the quality and integrity of research conducted at universities and colleges. Industrial sponsorship can bias research in ways that do not serve the public interest. Financial ties can unduly influence the outcome of the research to suit the industry partner. This is contrary to the goals of a liberal arts university such as St. Thomas that emphasizes an open, *independent* inquiry and one that asks difficult and sometimes unpopular questions.

Indeed, the narrow focus on quantifiable research dollars endangers the most innovative and valuable research that has no anticipated commercial outcome. FAUST encourages the Commission to reevaluate its conception of research and to assist New Brunswick universities in becoming leaders in innovative and independent research. It is important to encourage federal and provincial governments to increase the amount of unrestricted (no strings attached) grants available to faculty at the New Brunswick universities. This will help protect the integrity and independence of academic research and ensure that proposals are assessed first and foremost on their academic merit. If this were the case, the funding of research at St. Thomas University would likely increase dramatically.

Another issue influencing the data presented in Figure 5 is the serious under-funding of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the very funding agent to which most St. Thomas faculty apply. Although more than half of all faculty and graduate students across Canada work and study in the social sciences and humanities, SSHRC funding remains well below that of the other granting councils. In practice, this means that St. Thomas faculty cannot access or bring in the same amount of research funding. The lesser amount of research funding is by no means a reflection of the quality or importance of the research by faculty at St. Thomas University. Indeed, it is simply not the case that St. Thomas is a small player in the research field.

Efficiency

Efficiency is a broad term and somewhat difficult to define in the context of post-secondary education. Efficiency of a post-secondary education may well be enhanced by increasing collaboration among the post-secondary institutions in New Brunswick. As the Commission report points out, a credit earned in one provincial institution should be recognized by the others. Among the universities, this is already largely the case. St. Thomas University has many students who have transferred from other universities (within the province and outside) whose courses at other institutions have counted towards their degrees. This is a fair expectation, as long as the institutions are comparable and their degree programs have met the same high standards, such as those set out by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC).

What efficiency should never mean is a lack of choice, one size fits all, or some sort of compression of a university education to make it somehow faster. In terms of choice, universities like any institution function better when there are options or competition. The existence of several universities and campuses in the province encourages all universities and faculty to strive to be the best and to offer unique courses and foci within their degree programs so they can provide the highest quality education in order to attract students. This competition among universities means that students can choose the post-secondary education that best suits their

needs and interests. Those interested in a liberal arts education and smaller class sizes often choose St. Thomas. The important point is that the citizens of New Brunswick deserve choice and any attempt to remove that choice through amalgamation or redundancy seriously undermines the educational opportunities in the province. We simply need to look south to the greater Boston area which has arguably some of the best universities in the world and yet the highest number of universities of any city in the United States to see the value of choice and competition.

As stated above, efficiency should not be synonymous with quicker. A quality education should never be sacrificed for a notion that equates efficiency with graduating as many students as possible in the shortest period of time possible. It should not mean, for example, the compression of a university education into fewer years. At a time when many universities in other provinces in Canada, such as Ontario, are phasing out three-year degree programs, we must avoid any pressures to move to three-year degree models. A four-year university education is the standard across North America and for good reason. An education and the training of the mind do not happen rapidly. They require an opportunity to mature along with the individual. At St. Thomas, the faculty take great pride in witnessing first hand the growth and transformation of students over their four years with us. Many arrive unsure of themselves or their inherent skills and intellect. By the time they graduate, they have grown into extremely capable and confident individuals who are ready for further studies or for taking up a variety of vocations. This kind of personal growth and change (which cannot be quantified) needs time to mature. It is also the case that a quality education requires breaks from studies to re-energize and to let ideas and skills mature. For many students, the summer months are also used to earn money for tuition and to gain valuable work experience.

St. Thomas University has witnessed a great deal of success in its students' acceptance into graduate schools and post-graduate professional programs across the country and abroad, including a 2007 Rhodes Scholar. We provide a solid foundation for further studies because it is our exclusive focus as an undergraduate university. The post-graduate programs expect a high quality degree training over four years and that is what we provide at St. Thomas. Students at New Brunswick universities would be seriously disadvantaged in their applications to post-graduate studies and jobs if they carried a three-year degree contrary to the expected standard.

Collaboration with Differentiation

The Commission recognizes in its discussion paper that New Brunswick's citizens must be competitive in a global context. This means that post-secondary education qualifications obtained in New Brunswick must be as good as a degree from any other province of Canada, indeed any other country in the world.

Like the authors of the discussion paper, FAUST agrees that greater standardization of programs and institutions is not what is required in the newly global environment. The danger raised by the Commissioners of falling into standardized mediocrity is very real. Among New Brunswick institutions, St. Thomas University is arguably the one which has made the most progress *away* from mediocrity in recent years. Innovative programs, a core focus on the liberal arts and a small-scale, individualized education with close student-faculty interaction are some of the

features that distinguish St. Thomas University from other New Brunswick post-secondary institutions.

St. Thomas University's national and international profile is rising, as evidenced through the university's growing ability to attract students and faculty from around the world. In order to continue this progress, St. Thomas University, like others in the province, must be able to continue to attract and retain professors with international credentials, recognition and connections. Provincial support must be directed not just toward research on New Brunswick or the Atlantic provinces, but also toward global projects, which link New Brunswick and its citizens to the broader world.

The discussion paper proposes that greater attention to strategic planning may be a good way forward. We emphasize that such planning will be effective only if it involves broad-based consultation and is followed by action. Strategic planning must include all members of the institutional community – boards of governors and administrators, certainly, but also faculty and faculty associations, students and alumni. Only through a truly collaborative process can universities and colleges address future challenges creatively, and with sensitivity to all stakeholders. The planning itself will, of course, serve no purpose unless it is supported with funding that will enable planned programs to be implemented, planned activities to take place.

The authors of the discussion paper suggest that while “the college system may need greater differentiation,...the university sector might benefit from closer collaboration” (p. 9). Given the vague nature of the discussion paper, it is not clear what is meant by collaboration or what exactly would be achieved through more formal collaboration. St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick (UNB) already collaborate to an extensive degree, sharing library and other facilities. We are unsure what the benefits of closer collaboration would be. To our minds, it might make more sense for faculty and students at St. Thomas University and Mount Allison University, for instance, to collaborate on projects in the liberal arts, rather than striving for a greater degree of collaboration at an institutional level between St. Thomas University and UNB.

In the “invitation” that precedes the main body of the discussion paper, the Commission on Post-Secondary Education raises the issue of “barriers” between parts of the post-secondary education system, and suggests that New Brunswick citizens' early choices should not be obstacles to further progress in “what should be a seamless system” (p.2). We recognize that in individual cases, early education choices may prove to be obstacles later in life, but we think that this problem should not be overstated. For the most part, determined students are not unduly restricted in their career paths by choices they made earlier in their lives. More importantly, we are not convinced that the “seamless” post-secondary education system the Commissioners imagine is either possible or desirable. If New Brunswick universities are to remain nationally and internationally competitive, differentiation from the college system must be maintained. Individuals should of course be able to upgrade their qualifications to enter university at any stage in their lives if they choose, but to elide college and university education simplistically would be a serious error.

In some fields, a closer integration of universities and colleges might be appropriate, but we think that on the whole, it would be wiser to focus attention on improving the college system *as such*, and the universities *as such*, rather than attempting to mix the two. One of the reasons that New Brunswick has a lower college participation rate than the rest of Canada is that in a tight labour market, it is typically seen as “safer” for students to attend university than college. Even students who would be better served by a college education feel social and familial pressure to attend university. There is a prevailing sense that a college education is somehow less “valuable” than a university education, less likely to lead to a job.

In order to reverse this perception and encourage more students to view college as a valid alternative to university, the provincial government needs to focus on improving the college system. Strengthening the college curriculum would help alter prevailing ideas that a college education is not “worth” as much as a university degree. New Brunswick might have a great deal to learn from European systems, such as that of Germany, where education in the trades combines challenging in-class theoretical learning and practical, paid work experience. The respect granted graduates of German vocational programs, which involve close collaboration between colleges and certified “masters” in the trades, suggests that improving the quality of a college education raises its profile and makes college enrollment a more attractive option. Colleges and universities together make up a competitive post-secondary education system where quality predominates everywhere.

On the whole, we feel that while “collaboration with differentiation” makes a convenient catch-phrase, the Commission has not provided convincing reasons why greater collaboration, either among universities, or between universities and colleges, would necessarily improve post-secondary education in the province. In our view, the main issues lie elsewhere – in the declining funding available to universities and colleges, and the increased financial burden the current system places on students and their families. For ostensibly “public” institutions, universities and colleges rely to an embarrassing degree on funding from private sources. If the current provincial government is serious about maintaining post-secondary education at levels that allow New Brunswick graduates to compete with those of the rest of the world, it has no choice but to increase its financial commitment to universities and colleges, their faculties and students.

Finance

While there is ongoing debate about whether the costs of post-secondary education should be borne primarily by the student or by society (which of course means government), such arguments rather put the cart before the horse. Both the student and society benefit, and in many ways: financial and non-financial, quantifiable and non-quantifiable. Thus *any* barriers to post-secondary education, and any factors impeding or impairing the quality of that post-secondary education will be to the net detriment of society.

Where does New Brunswick stand?

In 1975, student tuition represented about 15% of New Brunswick university operating budgets; in 2006, it represented 38.2%. While there has been some small growth in student aid, it has not remotely kept up with tuition and other costs. The grim reality is that the average student who

graduates does so with a crippling debt load: in 2002 nearly one-quarter of New Brunswick university graduates (24.5%) had a debt load of more than \$25,000. Students in New Brunswick now pay the second highest arts and science undergraduate tuition fees in the country at \$5328. Others, unwilling to incur such daunting levels of debt, forgo the opportunity to benefit both themselves and society by not attending college or university. Moreover, many of those who do attend are forced to drop out for purely financial reasons. The Commission rightly complains that New Brunswick's 20% "drop-out rate places New Brunswick universities in the bottom half of Canadian universities." The Commission need look no further for the culprit: chronic under-funding, necessitating sharp increases in tuition fees.

The proposal for income contingent loans schemes (ICR) will not make education more equitable or affordable. ICR will merely ensure that students are saddled with debt for most of their working lives. Though the current regime of student loan repayment is unfair, ICR would only exacerbate the problem by increasing the length of time students take to pay a loan back and the interest paid over the life of a loan. The core problem is up front affordability and high debt levels. On both counts ICR is a flawed method that has only increased student debt and cost wherever it has been introduced. The most equitable and effective way to increase access to post-secondary education is to lower tuition fees and to introduce a comprehensive system of grants.

Under-funding has another pernicious effect: increasing numbers of students, having no alternative, are forced to work at part-time and even full-time jobs while attending university full time. We have seen these numbers growing over the years, and grieve that these students, through no fault of their own, simply do not have the time to derive the maximum benefit from their education. With little time to think (let alone reflect), they have no choice but to attempt to maximize their grades with what little time they have. Stress-related disorders are increasing for students (not to mention overworked faculty). Students are working harder than ever, but government under-funding means that less and less of that is schoolwork.

At the same time, government funding for New Brunswick universities represents 53.1% of total operating revenue, third worst in Canada. An even more telling statistic, however, is post-secondary education funding per full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrolment: from 1993-94 to 2004-05 it decreased in New Brunswick by 27%.

It is also worth noting that over the last 20 years, while total university expenditures have risen dramatically, the proportion spent on faculty salaries has decreased from 30% to less than 20%. Faculty salaries are of course determined by collective bargaining; administrative salaries tend to be determined by administrators, subject only to approval by Boards of Governors. It stands to reason that when bureaucrats are in charge, they will often tend to see increased bureaucracy as the solution to most problems. A system of incentives and/or penalties could reward those institutions with efficient administrations and penalize those with bloated ones. Most important, though – recognizing that downsizing is invariably more painful than prevention – would be some measure to keep "bureaucratic creep" in check, such as penalties when the growth in administrative costs outstrips growth in total operating revenues and/or FTEs.

The bottom line, however, is that government under-funding of post-secondary education in New Brunswick perpetuates social injustices by barring those who cannot afford it from participating

and punishing many of those who do participate; undermines the quality of post-secondary education by forcing increasing numbers of students into both meaningless and distracting employment and over-crowded classrooms; and causes genuine suffering while failing to reap the benefits, both individual and societal, of a well-educated workforce. We urge you to let New Brunswick be a leader – not a laggard.

(Source for data: Statistics Canada and CAUBO)

Conclusion

The quality of post-secondary education in New Brunswick should be a top priority for the provincial government and we are pleased to see the Commission address this important issue. As St. Thomas approaches its centenary, the faculty are proud of the role we have played since St. Thomas' beginning in shaping our university into one of the best liberal arts universities in Canada. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our teaching and research contributions to the province of New Brunswick. However, we face many challenges as we have discussed in this brief and we encourage the Commission to address these directly. Particularly, the quality of post-secondary education must be set in context: the chronic under-funding of post-secondary education by both the federal and provincial governments. This under-funding leads to poor infrastructure, higher student-faculty ratios, inadequate institutional research support, and an increasing financial burden on students and their families. We reiterate: It is time for the New Brunswick government to show leadership and a commitment to post-secondary education.