



Brief for the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

Introduction

Prior to his death in 1905, Lewis P. Fisher, a local businessman and benefactor, dreamed of establishing a vocational school in Carleton County. His dream became a reality in 1919 when the Carleton County Vocational School (CCVS) officially opened its doors for instruction. CCVS joined the New Brunswick Community College system in 1974.

In 1979, the 60th Anniversary Committee, made up of alumni and former CCVS board members, was formed. This group envisioned a modern college in Woodstock that would offer unique courses and serve the people of the area. NBCC Woodstock introduced itself to the community in 1984 boasting a gymnasium, cafeteria, library, computer labs, and carpentry and welding shops. Prospective students were given the choice of entering the Agriculture, Academic Upgrading, and Nursing Assistant, Communication Arts or Business programs.

The College continues to educate students in new technologies and serve the community by adding new programs geared to the changing job market. Exciting times are ahead. NBCC Woodstock will be there to face the challenges and to prepare its students for the future.

The College in Woodstock represents the only Post-Secondary educational institution in both Victoria and Carleton counties. It will be from the perspective of a Rural Community College in which I will address the position paper of the Commission.

Addressing the Challenges

Change within society has resulted in different challenges and opportunities for the next generation of students wishing to further their education. The evolution of information and communication technologies on society as a whole has challenged learning institutions to be reflective of the new reality of our potential students and our graduates. We must not abandon the sound academically based methods of our past but we must evolve the learning experience to be reflective of the new reality or risk becoming irrelevant as a campus, college and network. Are we prepared to engage this important element? We need to be nimble and responsive if we indeed wish to teach this skill to our students. Distance education does not need to mean online but rather, web enhanced, hybrid or online in both synchronous and asynchronous methods.

The number of students graduating from high school is decreasing every year and therefore the perceived traditional post-secondary market is also in decline. However, for a college in the New Brunswick market, the opportunities for growth are prevalent if potential applicants and their influencers are converted from “go to university at all cost” to “go to the post-secondary learning institution which best suits both your aptitudes, career goals and time lines for success”. Private and public colleges, as well as universities, all prepare individuals for great careers; the problem is the public generally is not aware of the different paths and traditionally have defaulted to a university path mostly based upon a lack of critical

information. If the benefit to potential students is properly conveyed and understood, the Woodstock campus could double in size and better meet the needs of the two counties.

Accessibility

As a fundamental principle, a well educated and trained society is critical for both prosperity and economic development. The existence of an accessible Post-Secondary educational institution in both an urban and a rural setting is critical to increase the number of graduates. Not all people are able to relocate for educational purposes due to family commitments, job requirements or preference. Barriers should be eliminated, including the informational barrier as to the relevance and value of a college education.

Accessibility should be coupled with the ability of a student to ladder their educational experiences; no educational experience should be deemed terminal upon completion. This means that the credits earned at a private college should be recognized by a public college and subsequently recognized by a university. This should be an inherent ability rather than a negotiated end. Post-Secondary institutions must focus on the benefits to a student rather than to the institution, and remember that the institution exists to serve the student, not the reverse. This process retains the value of each institutional experience and the outcomes of their programs but allows the student to determine their educational exit point. It also promotes the idea of lifelong learning whereby the individual may determine that they will pursue the next step on the educational ladder after working for a period of time. This would create a cross institutional ability that now exists at the university level as people progress from bachelor to masters to doctoral degrees.

The attraction of people to the trades is problematic at the level of societal education. Despite the opportunities that are forthcoming, many parents are not encouraging their children to pursue the skilled trades if they are “capable” of pursuing a university education. This misinformation needs to be addressed at a systemic level in order to change the attitudes and perspectives of the students and their influencers.

Relevance and Responsiveness

When students do not succeed at a Post-Secondary educational institution many factors can be responsible for their ill success. Institutions must concentrate on those issues which are within their control. Students indeed are not prepared for Post-Secondary education to a sufficient level to ensure a smooth transition from secondary school to Post-Secondary institutions. Poor math and English skills plague college and university first year students. The institution of a General Studies program which tries to bridge this gap for student will hopefully help with this process but the root of the problem is in the results of our secondary system.

College programs are focused on the outcomes necessary for a successful transition into a career. This is a very successful formula which needs to be respected, however the institution of general education requirements like those instituted in Ontario would benefit the more holistic approach to education rather than just training.

The existence of the community college within a government department rather than in a board governance model like all other Colleges has its limitations on the ability for the

network to be as responsive and nimble as it could be. A nimble environment is recommended in order to better meet the changing and evolving needs of our population.

Quality and Accountability

In order for our province to excel in all of its facets an educational system must be built around quality (quality of teaching, quality of resources, quality of leadership, quality of vision). Without these as fundamental goals we are destined to be average and underachieving. This does not create an environment of hope. Financial investment in people, places and things are required to attract, keep and develop the brightest and the best faculty and staff to the New Brunswick system. This quality will attract and retain the quality students that will make a difference in our province within the different educational opportunities at the Post-Secondary level.

The Community College is now held accountable for key performance indicators which direct and monitor the success of our programming. A quality management system ensures that we account for what and how we are delivering our programming. It is recommended that all Post-Secondary institutions be required to follow suit and have the same level of accountability.

Efficiency

The efficiency of the educational experience for the student should be first and foremost as the mandate of the institutions. A student should be ensured that the institutions have systems in place to prevent the duplication of learning requirements if they switch from a college to an university (or vice versa) or between different colleges or universities. This should not be something in which the student has to negotiate or worry about but rather a fact.

The lack of such transparency between institutions and types of Post-Secondary institutions is inexcusable.

Summary

- Strong rural access to Post-Secondary education is critical to the economic development and prosperity of our province.
- Information Communication Technology has changed the way in which society functions and educational institutions must strive to be reflective of this new reality or risk being deemed irrelevant.
- The onus should be on the learning institutions to develop a transparent system of progression between private and public colleges and universities.
- Society must be educated as to the value of all types of Post-Secondary education to empower them to align their goals with the proper programming.
- Quality is a product of the proper investment in people, places and things.