

St. Thomas University Presentation Brief
Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

Monday, April 16, 2007 @ 1:45 pm
Delta Fredericton

Dr. Michael W. Higgins, President and Vice Chancellor
Mr. Lawrence Durling, Vice-President (Finance)
Dr. Patrick Malcolmson, Vice President (Academic)

"Thousands of Canadian university undergraduate students have started to pore over their calendars to register for fall courses. What will they find? In a distressing number of cases, they'll discover large, overflowing classes, even in the upper years of four-year degrees. Such is the nature of too many undergraduate programs at Canadian universities, where teaching has yielded to research as the professoriate's Holy Grail and budgets have not kept pace with enrolment."

**Jeffrey Simpson, "The 'flight from the classroom' leaves undergrads behind",
The Globe and Mail, June 28, 2006**

"In an economy fuelled by innovation, the capabilities developed through a liberal education have become America's most valuable economic asset."

**Association of American Colleges and Universities
November 2006**

"We need more than just technical skills. The thing we often see missing in new hires is the ability to use the right side of the brain, the creative part"

**Wayne Johnson, Vice President, Hewlett Packard
November 2006**

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- Liberal Education Outcomes
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"Universities Helping to Build Intellectual Capital" by Dr. Michael W. Higgins, *Globe & Mail* (online), *Telegraph Journal*, *Daily Gleaner*, *Times Transcript*

Introduction

A Model of Transformational Change

Within the post-secondary sector of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University is a model of transformational change with achievements in the areas of teaching, student focus, tuition, and community outreach. We have built a national reputation as students and graduates have consistently ranked us in the *Macleans* 'top ten' for primary undergraduate universities and we scored very high marks on the 2007 national student survey by the *Globe & Mail*.

More recent results from the National Survey of Student Engagement – a program of institutional measures that are valuable for determining if undergraduates are getting a high quality education – demonstrate leading national performance based on our student's evaluation of their entire education experience, their education choice, level of academic challenge, and student-faculty interaction. In the latter two areas, St. Thomas ranked second in Canada. (Please see the attached charts.)

St. Thomas University's reputation is built on attributes valuable to the future of post-secondary education in New Brunswick:

- Affordable
- High quality
- Unique traditions with student-centred learning, social justice, and humanistic goals critical to Roman Catholic identity and a strong community spirit
- A rich campus life that develops and graduates better students
- Student-focused environment, engaged faculty, and innovative programmes
- Civic and social awareness as liberal arts graduates learn to think for themselves
- Student-centred business model with prudent fiscal management and infrastructure investment

Contributing to Post Secondary Education in New Brunswick

Accessibility

- most affordable tuition in the province
- best provincial scholarship programme (percentage of operating budget) at \$1.5 million
- enrollment has tripled since the 1970s

Relevance and Responsiveness

- largest single campus of liberal arts enrollment in New Brunswick
- large selection of unique liberal arts programmes in New Brunswick
- institutional priority is excellence in undergraduate teaching and learning

Quality / Accountability

- ranked 8 out of 23 universities in the primarily undergraduate category of *Macleans* (2006)
- ranked in the *Macleans* 'top ten' of primarily undergraduate universities for the past 6 years
- most qualified faculty in the province with the highest percentage of faculty with PhD's (ranks #1 in primarily undergraduate university rankings by *Macleans*)
- out-performed the top three-ranked universities in: year 1/2 class size, faculty with PhDs, scholarships/bursaries, and student services as percentage of budget in *Macleans* (2006)
- in the *Globe & Mail University Report Card* survey, St. Thomas earned A's from students for faculty interaction, overall quality of education, and overall university atmosphere as well as A+'s for campus attractiveness, personal safety, and faculty knowledge of subjects

Collaboration with Differentiation

- led the way in co-operation among provincial universities
 - affiliation agreement with the University of New Brunswick to share infrastructure/services
 - creative information technology staffing partnership with Mount Allison University
- partners with the community to enhance student experience (ie., CBC broadcast facility)
- partner with the New Brunswick Community College in Criminal Justice and Gerontology

Finance

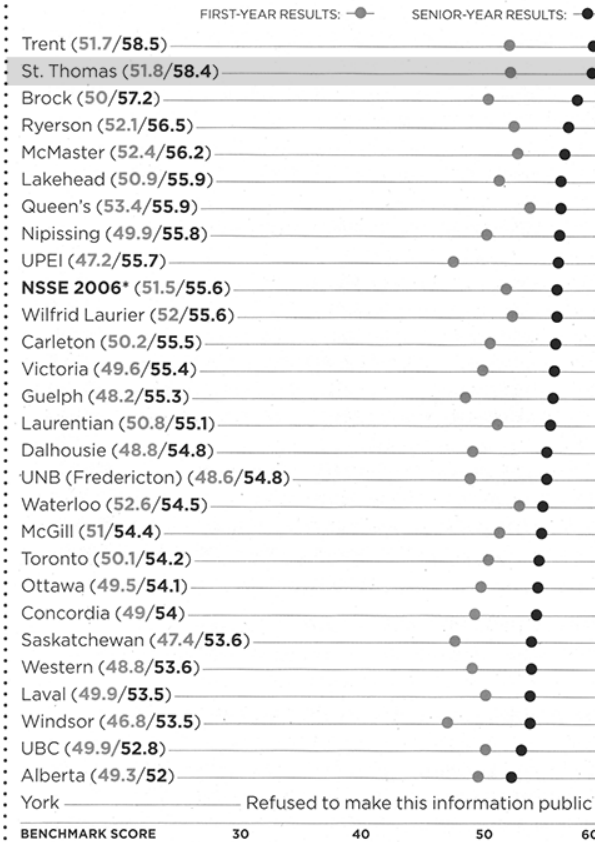
- created large endowment to fund scholarships while maintaining lowest tuition
- no operating deficit in decades
- minimal deferred maintenance

NSSE 2006 BENCHMARK COMPARISONS

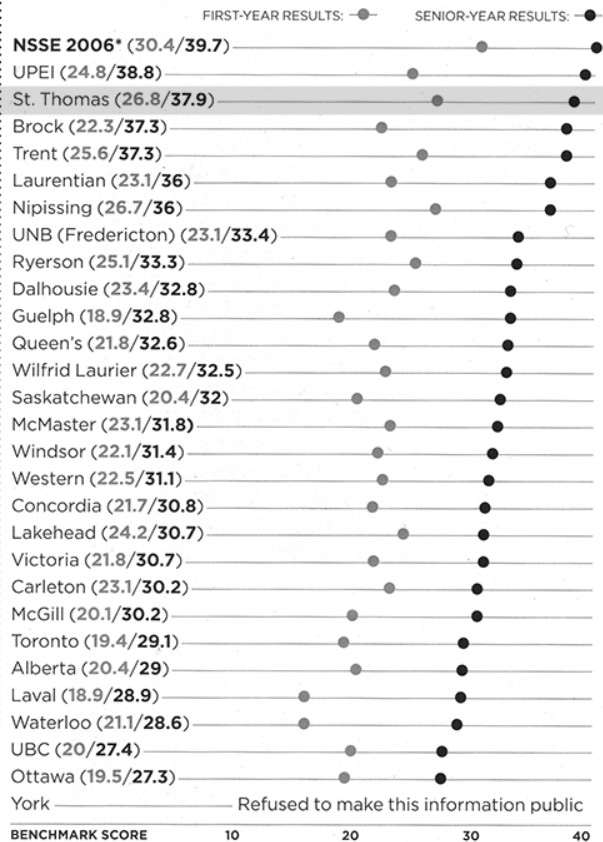
NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE)

NSSE created benchmarks to compare performance in five key areas across all universities—American and Canadian—taking part in the 2006 NSSE survey. Level of Academic Challenge addresses the intellectual and creative demands on students, and includes such areas as number of assigned readings, written papers and reports, as well as coursework that emphasizes judgment and transforming information into more complex interpretations. Student-Faculty Interaction gauges professors as mentors, measuring how often students meet with faculty to discuss career plans or ideas outside the classroom or work with them on research projects or other activities outside of course requirements.

LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE



STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION



*NSSE 2006 represents results from 557 Canadian and American universities.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE)

NSSE surveys are distributed to undergraduate students in their first and final years. In general, senior students are more critical when evaluating their university experience. While the majority of students would choose to return to their alma mater, the number drops—in some cases sharply—for students in their final year as compared to freshmen.

IF YOU COULD START OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU GO TO THE SAME INSTITUTION YOU ARE NOW ATTENDING?

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS		DEFINITELY YES (%)	PROBABLY YES (%)	SENIOR-YEAR STUDENTS		DEFINITELY YES (%)	PROBABLY YES (%)
Queen's	60		31	Guelph	51		34
Western	60		30	Trent	51		37
Guelph	54		35	St. Thomas	50		37
Nipissing	54		35	UPEI	46		41
Waterloo	53		36	Wilfrid Laurier	46		36
Wilfrid Laurier	53		36	Brock	45		38
McGill	52		37	Queen's	45		38
Laval	50		42	Western	45		38
St. Thomas	49		37	McGill	44		38
Trent	47		36	Waterloo	44		37
McMaster	45		43	Nipissing	43		41
Victoria	45		43	McMaster	41		39
UBC	43		43	NSSE 2006*	41		40
Alberta	42		46	Victoria	39		47
NSSE 2006*	42		41	Laval	38		47
Laurentian	41		39	Alberta	34		50
Ryerson	41		44	Saskatchewan	34		49
Saskatchewan	40		49	Concordia	33		48
Carleton	39		46	Ryerson	33		44
Lakehead	39		41	UBC	32		45
UNB (Fredericton)	39		47	UNB (Fredericton)	31		49
Brock	38		45	Carleton	30		46
UPEI	38		46	Laurentian	30		41
Concordia	37		48	Toronto	29		39
Ottawa	35		46	Lakehead	28		44
Dalhousie	34		45	Windsor	28		45
Toronto	34		43	Dalhousie	21		49
Windsor	26		49	Ottawa	17		50
York	Refused to make this information public			York	Refused to make this information public		

*NSSE 2006 benchmark reflects the overall result for 557 Canadian and American universities.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT (NSSE)

The NSSE survey asks undergraduates dozens of detailed questions—as well as some broader ones—to assess how engaged they are with their schools, their profs and their peers. Hundreds of American universities, and a growing number of Canadian institutions, participate in the annual survey. Listed here are 28 ranked Canadian universities that took part in 2006.

HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE YOUR ENTIRE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AT THIS INSTITUTION?

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS		EXCELLENT (%)	GOOD (%)	SENIOR-YEAR STUDENTS		EXCELLENT (%)	GOOD (%)
Queen's	53		38	Trent	45		46
Western	47		41	Guelph	43		46
Nipissing	45		45	UPEI	41		50
Guelph	43		47	Queen's	41		45
Waterloo	41		44	St. Thomas	41		49
Trent	40		45	Western	38		47
Wilfrid Laurier	40		49	Brock	37		40
St. Thomas	38		51	Nipissing	36		53
McMaster	37		48	Waterloo	36		47
McGill	33		48	Wilfrid Laurier	36		52
NSSE 2006*	32		52	NSSE 2006*	35		50
Victoria	31		55	McMaster	34		47
Lakehead	29		52	Victoria	29		57
Alberta	28		53	McGill	26		52
Brock	28		53	New Brunswick	26		57
Carleton	28		53	Ryerson	24		51
Laval	27		57	Alberta	23		56
Ryerson	27		52	Windsor	23		53
UNB (Fredericton)	26		60	Carleton	22		57
UPEI	26		57	Concordia	21		55
UBC	24		50	Saskatchewan	21		60
Laurentian	24		51	Toronto	21		48
Ottawa	24		53	Dalhousie	20		55
Dalhousie	23		54	Lakehead	20		52
Saskatchewan	23		60	Laurentian	20		52
Toronto	22		48	Laval	20		59
Concordia	19		58	UBC	18		52
Windsor	16		55	Ottawa	12		55
York	Refused to make this information public			York	Refused to make this information public		

* NSSE 2006 benchmark reflects the overall result for 557 Canadian and American universities.

Recommendations

Just as St. Thomas has emerged as a leading liberal arts university, New Brunswick can be the leader in post-secondary education in Canada.

Within the post-secondary sector of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University has been a model of transformational change. Despite programme restrictions and the lowest per-student provincial operating grant, St. Thomas has consistently achieved the lowest tuition in New Brunswick and the Maritime region, highest budgetary financial support for student bursaries and scholarships, and high national rankings for quality of education. These and many other attributes speak to the themes of accessibility, relevance and responsiveness, quality and accountability, collaboration with differentiation, and efficiency.

Effecting transformational change in New Brunswick's post education sector will be a challenge because not all aspects of the sector nor all universities require radical change. New Brunswick's universities have unique features; two nationally leading undergraduate liberal arts universities, a francophone university, and a comprehensive provincial university with strengths in graduate studies, science and engineering. These are strengths which are not present in most provinces. So-called "system" changes may work against these strengths, thereby eroding progress.

New Brunswick *can* become a national leader in education by preserving the distinctiveness of each university and taking simple, straightforward steps that create the conditions for each university to prosper. It means rewarding success, preserving student choice, and staying clearly focused on the needs of students. From this starting point, a national and international marketing strategy for post-secondary education would attract greater numbers of out-of-province students. It would also help to change the image New Brunswick throughout the country.

Accessibility

- Post-secondary education **costs for students should not increase in real terms.**
- **Comprehensive information** about post-secondary education options, costs, and value should be available to students and their families. Related to this, the **student aid program should be simplified** and **better communicated** in the secondary schools. All initiatives are part of the requirement for **strengthened ties** between the secondary and post-secondary institutions.
- There are many ways to **remove barriers for students** wishing to attend university: align university entrance requirements, create a centralized application process, or increase incentives for international students.

Quality and Accountability

- New Brunswick should seek to foster higher levels of quality and student accountability by making the **National Survey of Student Engagement mandatory.**
- The integration of teaching and research differs according to each institution's mission and **financial and accountability structures** recognize the difference.

Collaboration and Differentiation

- Students have benefitted from collaboration between universities but they have benefitted even more significantly from the differentiation. New Brunswick should **preserve the differentiation** that has promoted high standards of quality and achievement.

- **Programme restrictions should be removed** from St. Thomas University as it has demonstrated the ability to quickly develop, high-quality post-secondary education programmes and some existing niche programmes are ready for graduate studies.
- A **working group of New Brunswick university presidents** would provide the appropriate forum for university co-ordination and bringing a united voice to government.
- **Strategic planning** by the universities should be mandatory and reportable.
- The value of the **affiliation agreement** between St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick has not been maximized and should be examined.

Finance

- An **assessment of the current funding** level for each university in the context of its role, planned enrolment, and programming base should be undertaken. **Additional funding** is required, though it must be provided under specific terms: predictable, incentive-based, allocated under an equitable formula and with increased levels of accountability.
- **Targeted funding** is required to drive **participation rates** in specific regions of the province or among groups that have been under-represented and to enhance New Brunswick's national leadership role in undergraduate education.
- Tied to the increased level of funding should be **increased accountability** – quality standards are important but should be developed and implemented by universities within the context of a cost/benefit analysis.

Relevance and Responsiveness

- Given that a university education increases individual earning potential significantly and provides greater socio-economic *and* a liberal arts education provides a superior foundation for employment mobility and life-long learning, New Brunswick should explore a post-secondary model where students interested in receiving skill-based training would also be required to complete several years of **education at university** as this would significantly improve their ability to adjust to future labour market changes.
- Better quality data is required for many policy and improvement issues so New Brunswick should assign each student (from K-12 to post-secondary) a **uniform student number** so that education choices and performance can be tracked.
- New Brunswick should work aggressively with the Federal Government to expedite immigration processes and alter rules so **international students** have more time to find employment after graduation.
- The Department of Education should revisit the idea of a **trade stream within K-12**.
- The Department of Post-Secondary Education and Labour should develop a system to **evaluate and validate credentials** at community colleges while universities should agree among themselves as to which credits would be accepted as **transfers**. As well, the New Brunswick Community Colleges should look to **the universities to provide any education components** to their curricula and not attempt to duplicate programs offered by the universities.
- Universities and community colleges should be increasing their emphasis on **partnering with industry and the private sector** so that students can apply learned skills with employment experience.

Commission on Post Secondary Education - Issues and Questions

Accessibility

St. Thomas University's mission statement speaks directly to accessibility. Social justice informs our mission and providing students from divergent backgrounds with the opportunity for a university education is an objective that unites our community. In living this mission, St. Thomas offers the most affordable tuition in the province and a leading scholarship programme that recognizes student need, academic excellence, and community leadership. Attracting students of proven ability and potential has contributed to the largest enrolment growth of any university in the province.

Value of a University Education

In *The New Brunswick Reality Report—At the Crossroads*, the Task Force on Self-Sufficiency notes that higher wages are essential to encourage more people to live and work in New Brunswick. Study after study has documented the advantage of a university education, yet the perception of the economic value of higher education may be a barrier for many New Brunswickers.

According to the 2001 census, the average university graduate in Canada earned \$61,823 compared to the \$34,632 earned by a high school graduate. This \$27,191 annual difference, projected over 35 years, would be \$952,000. If this \$1 million difference is calculated as an annual benefit with annual interest of 5%, the future value of a university education would be almost \$2.5 million in 35 years.¹ A university education is a superior long-term investment that pays dividends for individuals and society.

A recent study by the Educational Policy Institute, however, finds that conventional wisdom about the costs and benefits of education is mistaken.² It found that the average annual university tuition cost, income differential, and future value are not understood, especially by those from low-income backgrounds. This has implications for accessibility as it makes higher education seem less attractive when it is an important driver for economic renewal.

Importance of a Liberal Education

Among post-secondary education options, a liberal education fosters development of the best overall career foundation – the ability to reason and discern. Leadership in liberal arts education is key to a self-sufficient future for New Brunswick because the knowledge economy is as much about critical thinking and life-long learning as it is about technical knowledge.

The skills provided by a liberal arts education – the ability to think critically, communication skills, and a passion for life-long learning – give liberal arts graduates an advantage over their more vocational counterparts. These skills will always be needed despite changes in trades or technology. Those educated in the humanities, social sciences, and liberal arts are more mobile between industries and occupations and have an understanding of globalization and cultural diversity.

- A liberal arts education has a positive impact on earning power. According to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, humanities graduates between the ages of 20 and 50 see their annual income increase more on average than university graduates across all disciplines.
- A new study by the Association of American Colleges and Universities surveyed 305 employers

and 510 college graduates and found the majority of employers are seeking more emphasis in college curricula on global issues, teamwork, communication skills, critical thinking and innovation/creativity. 90% of employers and graduates endorse liberal education as very or fairly important.

According to a Maritime Provinces Higher Education Committee 2001 study, graduates of St. Thomas University are employed, employed in their area of study, and have a life-long learning commitment at levels the same or higher as the New Brunswick university average.

These benefits also are consistent for groups within our university community. With the highest percentage of female students of any campus in the province, St. Thomas University is also a leader in educating New Brunswick's women. Female graduates in the humanities and social sciences face substantially lower periods of unemployment than women in applied programmes. Humanities and social sciences female graduates also have shorter intervals of unemployment than the men in their education group.³ St. Thomas has also created signature programmes, such as Native Studies that provides the opportunity for Native and non-Native students to study the cultural, historical and contemporary situation of Native people in North America.

Both male and female graduates of the humanities and social sciences were better off in terms of employment prospects than their counterparts in college or applied arts programmes. A study conducted by University of British Columbia economist Richard Allen "found that male degree holders had an average income that was 9% higher than their counterparts from trade, vocational and technical programs. For women, the advantage for university degree holders was an impressive 24%."⁴

As the pace of change continues to accelerate, the strategy of providing students one skill by training them in a specific technical knowledge has become problematic. We must provide 21st century knowledge workers with the kinds of skills liberal arts education provides. Workers have to be able to re-tool and adapt much more quickly than workers in the previous century.

Tuition, Scholarships and Bursaries

Understanding the value of a university education and the advantage that a liberal education can provide are not sufficient if economic barriers to education exist. Universities, governments, and individuals all have a role to play to ensure that this barrier is easily surmounted by students in terms of loans, grants, low tuition, and bursaries and scholarships.

An explicit part of St. Thomas University's mission is to ensure students of divergent backgrounds have the opportunity to learn and realize their potential. That is why St. Thomas has the lowest tuition in the region, ranging from almost \$400 to more than a \$2000 difference compared to the other provincial universities. It is also why it has one of the best scholarship and bursary programmes in the region, valued at \$1.5 million annually. St. Thomas devotes a greater percentage of its operating budget to student scholarships and bursaries than any other primarily undergraduate university in eastern Canada:

- **Entrance scholarships guarantees**, ranging in value from \$500 to \$2,000, reward students of achievement. The three-tiered programme guarantees a scholarship to all Canadian applicants with a required admission average, and as an applicant's average increases, so does the scholarship value.
- **Major renewable scholarships**, ranging in value up to \$50,000, honour the best academic minds among new students.
- **Student Leader Scholarships**, valued at \$8,000, are our newest scholarship programme to

attract high-impact student leaders.

Admissions

The post-secondary education sector should work together to eliminate any barriers for students wishing to receive some level of post-secondary education. Many of these are administrative: the alignment of entrance requirements among universities in the province could be explored, a centralized application process could reduce paperwork and eliminate costs for students by way of a centralized application fee,⁵ and the education international students could be subsidized. The latter is important if the Provincial Government wants to encourage more students from abroad to come to the province.

Retention

Like all universities in the province, St. Thomas has attrition particularly between the first and second years. There are many reasons why a student chooses not to continue university education. A student may have entered a program in which they were not interested or were not well suited. Government and universities may not have done enough to promote the value of a broad-based education. There may be transitional problems from grade 12, some of which are social, but some of which are academic.

The latter factor may be vital and New Brunswick should explore the means to determine how effective the K-12 system is in preparing students for post-secondary education. Perhaps a study examining student retention rates by region, school district or even at the school level. If there are problems within the school system in terms of the quality of instruction, what are the measures for determining performance?

Universities need to work more closely with the Provincial Department of Education to ensure that the K-12 curriculum is indeed preparing students adequately for the challenges of post secondary education. Examining accountability measures in the K-12 system could also serve as a way for universities to evaluate the success of their own Bachelor of Education Programmes. (Most of the teachers in the province would be graduates from New Brunswick BEd programmes. It would be one way in which we could determine whether we are indeed doing an adequate job of preparing the people who are preparing New Brunswick students for post-secondary education.)

Retention is obviously a complex issue. One can distinguish a number of aspects of retention that should be analyzed and measured by post-secondary institutions:

- Retention within a program, e.g. Arts or Science
- Retention within a specific institution, taking into account transfers between faculties
- Retention within a specific institution, taking into account students taking one or more years off and then returning
- Retention within the post secondary education sector in New Brunswick, with students transferring from one institution to another
- Retention within the post secondary education sector in the region or nationally
- Students who simply leave and do not complete a degree or seek any further post-secondary education
- Students who fail academically and are required to leave

A system for tracking students and making it possible to analyze and measure retention in a complex and hence meaningful way is required.

Relevance and Responsiveness

New Brunswick is home to two of the top-ranked undergraduate liberal arts universities in the country, Mount Alison University and St. Thomas University. The education provided by these two leading universities provides qualities that employers require and directly serves the needs and interests of students and employers in New Brunswick. This province should strive to have the most educated workforce in the country - a higher degree of education leads to fewer periods of unemployment and higher wages.

Choosing a Liberal Arts Education

Addressing the question posed by the Commission about why so many students enroll in arts programs while the need grows for science, mathematics, computer science, and engineering graduates can only be seen as a positive development.

Statistics Canada has found that "graduates in the humanities and social sciences possess the problem-solving, interpersonal, communications, and learning skills that employers claim are needed in the emerging economy." ⁶ Given that these are the skills employers require, St. Thomas University is serving the needs and interests of students and employers in the Province of New Brunswick.

Perhaps the Province of New Brunswick should be cautious about attempting to manage the decisions of high school graduates to suit its needs for increasing the number of people with skilled trades or the number of people studying pure and applied sciences. The labour market extends beyond the provincial borders and perhaps it is time the Provincial Government recruited the labourers it needs to fill shortages as well as the immigrants it needs to grow the tax base. Related measures could include expediting the immigration processes and changing the rules so that international students who come to New Brunswick have more time after graduation to find employment before their student visa expires.

Targeting Trade Skills in High Schools

Encouraging more students to attend university does not adequately address the shortage of workers in the skilled trades, however taking students, who are otherwise interested in pursuing university studies, away from the university system could have long-term detrimental effects on the New Brunswick economy and have negative implications on our ability to become a self-sufficient province. University graduates, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, have higher incomes and earning potential and experience lower rates of unemployment. Maintaining the earning potential and low unemployment rates of our citizens is the key to self sufficiency.

That is not to say that the need to encourage more students coming out of the K-12 system to pursue studies and careers in specific skilled areas is insignificant. But the long-term implications for the economy of not supplementing this type of education with broad-based university education will prove detrimental and serve to comprise New Brunswick's ability to become self-sufficient in 20 years. When the planned mega-projects requiring skilled trade workers are completed, these workers will need to be mobile within labour market sectors. A skilled trade, supplemented with broad-based education will go a long way in helping them adjust to labour market changes.

Strengthening Trade Skills With University Education

We applaud the government for recognizing that more must be done to encourage students coming out of grade 12 to pursue advanced education in a skilled trade, but it must also recognize the value of supplementing that skilled training with broad-based education.

Universities cannot be in competition with the government in recruiting students away from universities. The result might be that we have more students in the college system, but at what cost? It most certainly would have some negative impact on our higher than national average university participation rate. If we are already a national leader in this regard, we should not jeopardize that and instead focus on finding a solution that works – one that maintains our large base of graduates with high earnings potential, but also meets the provinces needs in the trades.

- Perhaps the Provincial Department of Education should revisit the idea of a **trade stream within the K-12 system**. This would assist in identifying students with the aptitude and desire to develop a skilled trade and would prepare them for immediate entry into an apprenticeship programme within the college system.
- The Provincial Government, in fulfilling its self-sufficiency agenda, would be well served to adopt a model where students interested in receiving more skill based training would be required to complete education at the **university level**. Universities are in the best position to provide this broad-based education which will assist students with their long-term employment ambitions and put the province on the road to self sufficiency.

Credential Validation

Universities have rigorous standards and measures of accountability and credential validation. The lack of a counterpart in the college system has made it difficult for co-operation between the colleges and universities in establishing applied arts programmes. In one instance, we abandoned our applied arts programme in journalism in favour of another type of collaboration with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The result is one of the best journalism programmes in the country: with classrooms inside a broadcast facility, students have the opportunity learn in a professional news environment and receive hands-on technical training from highly experienced CBC technical staff while receiving their broad-based liberal arts degree from professors at the university.

Partnering with the college system in its current form does not allow for the ideal co-operation. In order for it to work effectively, the New Brunswick college system would need to develop a system to evaluate and validate credentials. The Ontario College Credentials Validation Service, for example, provides assurance that all post-secondary programs of instruction leading to one of the Ontario College Credentials (certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, or graduate certificate) conform to the credentials framework.⁷ If such a system of validation existed within the college system, there should indeed be more open collaboration between the colleges and universities which would include a full recognition of college credits within the university system. A model in British Columbia provides another possible template.

Co-operation and collaboration among the institutions in the post-secondary education sector are not the only models of co-operation. Where appropriate, universities and colleges should be partnering with industry and the public and private sectors to apply skills and employment experience. St. Thomas University does this, not only through our journalism programme, but through a social work with Dalhousie University unique arts co-op programme that combine a broad-based liberal arts education with employment experience where students get academic credit for work placements. There is certainly more that can be done in this area.

Quality and Accountability

By measures from external groups, St. Thomas University is performing best in areas vital to mission by providing excellence in undergraduate education. It has earned top national rankings for quality from *Maclean's* and the *Globe & Mail*. Recent results from the National Survey of Student Engagement demonstrate very high national comparators of student's evaluation of their entire education experience, making the same education choice, the level of academic challenge, and student-faculty interaction (the latter two areas ranked second in Canada). By being one of the first universities to embrace strategic planning, St. Thomas University's first strategic plan was in 1993, institutional planning and performance has been public and measurable.

National Standing

St. Thomas University has been the great success story in post-secondary education in the region. Despite the lowest per-student provincial operating grant, it has managed to achieve the lowest tuition in the Maritime region, the highest budgetary support for bursaries and scholarships, and top national rankings for quality. The number of student's on the dean's list has grown, the number of honours students has increased, both the quality and number of students receiving graduate school scholarships has increased. In the past three years, two students have received Rhodes Scholarships.

Though by no means comprehensive, two of the most prominent means of measure in Canada are now *Maclean's* and the *Globe and Mail*. Along with other sources, the rankings give an external view of universities and inspire discussions about higher education.⁸

- In 2007, St. Thomas ranked 8th in the primarily undergraduate category of *Macleans* continuing a string of top-ten performances that stretches back six years. St. Thomas also outperformed the top three ranked universities in the categories of: 1st and 2nd year class size, faculty with PhDs, scholarships/bursaries as a percentage of operating budget, and student services as a percentage of operating budget.
- In the 2007 *Globe & Mail University Report*, St. Thomas earned an A+ from students for faculty members' knowledge of subjects as well as A's for faculty availability outside classroom hours and their interaction with students and high marks for quality of teaching. St. Thomas received A's for the overall quality of education and overall university atmosphere.

Student Engagement

The most effective way to ensure that undergraduates are getting high quality education to focus on student engagement. For the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), more than one million first-year and senior students from 557 institutions in the United States and Canada were asked to rate their undergraduate experience in 2006. (Please see the Appendices for NSSE results.)

- **Level of Academic Challenge** - addresses intellectual and creative demands on students, and includes such areas as number of assigned readings, written papers and reports as well as coursework that emphasizes judgment and transforming information into more complex interpretations. In the *Maclean's* summary, *St. Thomas finished second in the country*.
- **Student-Faculty Interaction** - Student-faculty interaction gauges professors as mentors, measuring how often students meet with faculty to discuss career plans or ideas outside the classroom or work with them on research projects or other activities outside of course

requirements. In the *Maclean's* summary, *St. Thomas finished second in the country.*

- **Evaluating Entire Education Experience** - The survey asks undergraduates dozens of detailed questions-as well as some broader ones-to assess how engaged they are with their schools, their professors and their peers. In the *Maclean's* summary, *St. Thomas finished fifth for senior students and eighth for first-year students.*
- **Making the Same Choice** - NSSE surveys are distributed to undergraduate students in their first and final years. In general, senior students are more critical when evaluating their university experience. While the majority of students would choose to return to their *alma mater*, the number drops-in some cases sharply-for students in their final year as compared to freshman. In the *Maclean's* summary, *St. Thomas finished third for senior students and ninth for first-year students.*

Teaching and Research

St. Thomas University's professors are distinguished scholars, authors with national reputations, public commentators and public figures well-known beyond the university walls. In addition to adding to society's knowledge, their research agendas also act as a catalyst to strengthen this excellent teaching environment. With its priority on undergraduate teaching, many students are given the chance to participate in research projects – an opportunity normally available only to graduate students at larger institutions.

St. Thomas University shares expertise and facilities with others and forms partnerships to provide programming that enhances New Brunswick. Faculty research agendas are very productive and the University has established research centres and endowed chairs, and recently named two Canada Research Chairs. In recent years St. Thomas has significantly expand its research and scholarship, a key aspect of the advancement of knowledge and sustaining the quality of teaching and the intellectual life of the university.

St. Thomas University's *Strategic Research Plan* identifies six focal areas:

1. Qualitative Analysis
2. New Brunswick and Atlantic Studies
3. Human Rights and Social Justice
4. Narrative Studies
5. Populations on Margins of Society
6. Multiculturalism

Faculty in both the humanities and the social sciences have active research programmes. For example, for the academic year 2005-06, faculty published journal articles, conference papers, and eight books. Since 2000, faculty have been funded by SSHRC, CIHR, Health Canada, Justice Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Canadian Heritage, Province of New Brunswick, and New Brunswick Innovation Foundation, business sources and charitable foundations. Much of the research in the humanities and social sciences is time-intensive rather than resource-intensive so it has been developed without funding or by small internal grants financed in part by a SSHRC institutional grant.

St. Thomas University's areas of expertise are resources for community building and policy development:

- Centre for Research on Youth At Risk

- Third Age Centre
- Fredericton 80+ Study
- Atlantic Human Rights Centre
- New Brunswick and Atlantic Studies Research and Development Centre
- Canada Research Chair in Qualitative Research and Analysis
- Canada Research Chair in Rural Social Justice
- Chair in Criminology and Criminal Justice
- Chair in Native Studies
- Chair in Canadian Citizenship and Human Rights
- Dalton Camp Endowment in Journalism
- Irving Chair in Journalism

Collaboration with Differentiation

While the benefits from collaboration have been tangible, the foundation for St. Thomas University's growth and success – the success of its students – has been its distinctiveness in mission.

Existing Collaboration Among New Brunswick Universities

The concept of collaboration with differentiation formed part of *Ontario - A Leader in Learning* (2005), more commonly known as the Rae Report. Bob Rae believed that differentiation should be encouraged and he established two broad principles to guide greater collaboration; ease of student movement between institutions and meeting labour market needs, accomplishing research, and developing excellence.⁹ The New Brunswick Commission states that closer collaboration between the universities is beneficial and therefore the most important question is how to proceed?

St. Thomas has led the way in co-operation between provincial universities and it has done so in a way that preserves its distinctiveness. We share infrastructure and services with the University of New Brunswick and we have a creative information technology staffing partnership with Mount Allison University. (This also extends to the community. For example, research work for the Fredericton 80+ Study, the Third Age Centre and the Centre for Youth at Risk all have contributed to community building. And a unique partnership with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has resulted in the development of a premier journalism programme with a emerging national reputation.)

The most significant collaboration in New Brunswick post-secondary education is between St. Thomas and UNB. Based on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Higher Education in New Brunswick, St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick entered into an *Agreement of Affiliation* in 1963 that established the basis for a working relationship that has benefitted both parties. St. Thomas was relocated from Chatham to Fredericton on the campus of UNB in 1964. It retained its authority to govern student admissions and programmes, administration and financing, and agreed to hold in abeyance other degree-granting powers while it shared services and facilities with UNB based on mutually agreed costs. For example, based on its fiscal transfer, St. Thomas has the use of the library, book store, student centre and athletic facilities.

The ultimate beneficiary of the affiliation agreement has been students. As services and facilities are equitably shared with the UNB, St. Thomas is able to offer students library, athletic, health, social and cultural opportunities usually found at institutions many times our size. From this institutional co-operation, students at both universities have far greater elective course options in liberal arts, sciences and computer studies. At the same time, the potential value of the affiliation agreement between the two universities has not been maximized.

Differentiation Between Universities

With the clearest and most focused mission, St. Thomas has established itself as a university that puts students first - its stated priority is excellence in undergraduate teaching.

No other Canadian university specializes as exclusively in the liberal arts education. Over the past decade, St. Thomas has experienced the largest enrolment growth of any university in the province. It now offers the largest selection of liberal arts courses to the largest liberal arts

campus enrollment in the province. Accomplishing this, St. Thomas has no large classes - there are no classes with more than 60 students (in fact, we are only university in Atlantic Canada that has that provision in its faculty contract). Working from our mission statement, faculty have built programmes and departments that are unique and demonstrate leadership in liberal arts education.

Strategic Planning at St. Thomas University

St. Thomas University has long embraced the strategic planning process and much of the success in the last decade may be attributed to the clarity displayed in the first two five-year plans and the implementation of objectives. Now on our third plan, we have added a series of specific new objectives and accompanying strategies, most significantly those that centre on quantifying the quality learning environment.

With relevance to the work of the Commission, some goals of the St. Thomas University strategic plan are to:

1. Foster Excellence in Liberal Arts
2. Promote and Facilitate Scholarly Research by University Faculty
3. Nurture our Roman Catholic Identity
4. Develop Strategic Partnerships
5. Enhance Stewardship and Public Accountability

To realize these goals, 24 objectives and 81 strategies will be investigated and implemented over the coming five years.¹⁰ Selected specific objectives, many of which align with the issues raised by the Commission, include:

- promoting effective learning and teaching strategies
- developing further distinctive approaches to humanities and social sciences
- exploring opportunities for new programme development
- expanding course delivery options for students
- developing more linkages and partnerships with other Catholic institutions and organizations and establish a Catholic Studies Outreach Programme
- developing a plan for making community service an integral part of life at St. Thomas University
- seeking further opportunities to develop linkages, partnerships, and ventures with high schools
- enhancing internationalization efforts
- develop professional and continuing education offerings in partnership with other educational institutions and professional organizations
- exploring the expansion of offerings in Miramichi
- developing and maintaining responsive enrolment and retention management policies
- developing a comprehensive set of indicators to track students' educational progress
- exploring mechanisms for greater public transparency

Finance

A long-standing funding issue requires resolution.

The existing provincial funding formula was introduced when university enrolments were predicted to decrease and was intended to promote funding stability. St. Thomas University has had an aberrant enrolment history since the introduction of the formula with an enrolment increase of 300%. The formula had a feature to deal with exceptional enrolment change which provided some limited adjustments to the University's funding base during the late 1980's and early 1990's. However, it was placed in abeyance during the mid-to-late 1990's when university operating grants were frozen and reduced.

St. Thomas began pursuing this issue once grant levels again began to be increased. The initial government response was to remove the special enrolment adjustment feature of the formula. Subsequently, an adjustment of \$350,000 was made to the University's operating grant in 2003-04 representing 35% of the amount that the University would have received if the formula had been respected. St. Thomas has continued to request that this \$600,000 be added to its operating grant base. Currently, the University receives a grant per weight unit that is approximately 70% of that received by other universities in the Province. Although the funding level would still be well below that of other New Brunswick universities, the provision of this adjustment of \$600,000 would be of tremendous value to St. Thomas in reducing its excessive dependence on part-time faculty.

Review of Funding Levels

The financing of post-secondary education is an extremely important dimension to the work of the Commission. The discussion paper identifies some of the questions with regard to funding that give an indication of the complexity. The review of existing funding levels of all universities relative to size and roles advocated above would provide a more comprehensive approach to adequately funding the University. The time is right to give extensive consideration to the matter for a number of reasons:

- **Financial Issues Have Received Inadequate Attention** - In 1997 the mandate of the MPHEC was changed so that it no longer had a responsibility to recommend to governments on the financial needs of post-secondary institutions in the region. As a result, the government has been making decisions on funding without adequate information about the needs of universities and the implications of their decisions. There has been a tendency to follow financing trends emerging from other jurisdictions regardless of whether they are appropriate for New Brunswick. This lack of awareness about the needs of PSE has resulted in government support levels for PSE decreasing in real terms as a result of enrolment and cost increases and in relative terms when compared to other provinces.
- **Impact of Federal Research Agenda** - The Federal Government has significantly increased funding for research and development and universities in this region have responded eagerly. The challenge is that initiatives being funded generally do not provide adequate contributions to overhead and often require additional direct funding. In many cases, the only source of funding for universities in this region is the existing funding base. Funding provided by governments and students for undergraduate teaching, the dominant activity for all universities in this region, is in effect being used to subsidize additional research and development activity.

- **Barriers to Student Mobility** - One of the stated objectives of Federal Government support for post-secondary education has been the promotion of student mobility. Over the years, the role of the Federal Government involvement in post-secondary education transfers has in fact weakened and barriers to mobility have emerged. Even in this region, which has had regional planning for program development, barriers to student mobility have crept in through grants to students that are conditional upon the student remaining in their home province to pursue post-secondary education studies.
- **Federal Government Poised to Invest** - In its recent budget, the Federal Government announced that the Canada Social Transfer to the provinces would be increased by \$800 million for post-secondary education commencing in 2008-09. The increased transfers will be made in accordance with terms negotiated between the two levels of government. It will be extremely important for the Government of New Brunswick to enter these discussions with a clear indication of its needs and priorities.

Financing Complexity

There is no clear delineation of the responsibilities of the Federal and Provincial Governments when it comes to funding post-secondary education. Although provincial governments have responsibility for education in Canada, the Federal Government plays a significant role because of aspects of universities that important to the Federal Government - research and development, student mobility, accessibility of all Canadians to comparable levels of services (student aid, fiscal transfers), international considerations, etc. These shared interests often have been to the disadvantage of post-secondary education institutions as a result of disputes about responsibility and the difficulty in reaching agreement about directions and priorities. A myriad of government post-secondary education funding mechanisms have evolved: direct provincial operating grants to institutions; federal and provincial student aid programs; direct provincial grants to students; federal and provincial research and development programs to universities; income tax rebates to students.

Principles and Actions

- **Additional Funding is Required** - Participation must increase in order for residents to participate effectively in society from an economic and social perspective given the increased complexity from factors such as globalization and technology. Increased participation will produce economic benefits and reduce the cost of social programs. Some funding should be directed to specific regions which traditionally have had low participation rates to provide incentives for participation and to induce expectation change.

Increased investment in training and the development of New Brunswick Community Colleges will not reduce post-secondary education requirements, everyone should have a broad education with training on top of the education not *in lieu* of education. Undergraduate education is one area where New Brunswick can play a leadership role in Canada. New Brunswick's reputation for providing quality undergraduate university education must be re-enforced and enhanced given the increased need for attracting students from other provinces and countries to pursue their studies and perhaps remain here after completing their studies.

- **Cost for Students Should Not Increase in Real Terms** - Students have borne an increased proportion of the cost of university programs as the rate of increase in tuition fees has been well above general inflationary increases and increases in government operating grants over the past 15 years. Although the cost of obtaining a university degree in New Brunswick

remains a significant value, the proportion of costs borne by students should not increase further. New Brunswick's tuition fees are lower than those in Nova Scotia but they are higher than other provinces in Canada. There seems to be increasing interest by governments to provide incentives for students to pursue post-secondary education and to limit the debt loads of students upon graduation.

- **Student Aid Programs Should be Simplified and Promoted** - More students can be expected to rely on student aid as a result of recent changes which allow students to access student loans without referencing parental income. Therefore, efforts should be made to simplify the programs in order to ensure that there is widespread knowledge about the programs. Students entering the first year of high school should be provided by their schools information about student aid programs. Teachers in high school should have a full understanding of the programs that can be communicated on an on-going basis to their students. Training should also be provided to high school teachers, particularly in geographic areas that traditionally have had low participation rates, about changing the post-high school expectations of their students. Breaking down traditional expectations that have served as barriers to post-secondary education is necessary in order for student aid programs to work effectively.
- **Financing Should be Provided Under Specific Terms** - There should be a degree of predictability and stability in grants to universities as programming is extremely dependent on highly-qualified faculty many of which are tenured. Regardless of variations in enrolment demand, it is important that universities be staffed with an adequate number of faculty in a broad range of disciplines. University programs cannot be quickly ramped up or down in response to changing economic or student demands. Universities should be responsive to changing needs but there should be a high degree of stability for purposes of meeting needs on a long-term basis. **Predictability of funding** is important to allow adequate planning at universities particularly given these considerations about meeting demands over the long-term.

There should be limited amounts of **incentive based funding** to enhance responsiveness to changing demands. Incentive funding should be linked to real needs and should not be at the expense of an appropriate level of base funding. Students through their program decisions provide extremely good evidence of need while labour market plans have not had a good track record for influencing post-secondary education program development. Incentive-based funding can also be appropriately used to reward success and to promote cooperation among universities with a view to maximizing resources.

Operating assistance should be **allocated among universities on an equitable basis** - all universities should receive similar support levels when measured relative to enrolment levels after reflecting program cost differentials.

The existing funding formula has been in place for nearly 30 years and appropriately should have a **major review**. The formula obviously has some redeeming features given its durability. It is an allocation formula that has a high degree of stability with some limited adjustment for enrolment change. St. Thomas advocates an assessment of the current funding level for each university in the Province in the context of its role, planned enrolment and programming base. This assessment is necessary to address any imbalances that have occurred as a result of a formula that emphasizes funding stability being in operation for an extended period of time. Following this assessments the existing formula could be reinstated with the addition of some incentive based funding.

Lastly, there should be an **increased level of accountability for funding received by universities** - accountability standards are important but should be developed and implemented within the context of cost/benefit analysis and not simply imposed for the sake of accountability. Benchmarks adopted should be of real benefit to all stakeholders including the universities themselves. Costly, labour intensive accountability measures should be avoided - resources should not be used for accountability at the expense of programming. The National Survey of Student Engagement is an accountability measure that appropriately meets cost/benefit considerations.

Endnotes

¹ For society, taxes paid on incomes paid by university graduates provide a disproportionate share of funds governments use to support social programs. University graduates comprise about 15% of the age 24-65 population but pay 33% of all personal income taxes. They also tend to make more efficient use of the healthcare system, are more active in civic affairs, and are more likely to donate to charities and participate in volunteer activities. Millennium Scholarship Foundation. *The Price of Knowledge 2004*.

² Usher, A. (2005) *A Little Knowledge Is a Dangerous Thing: How Perceptions of Costs and Benefits Affect Access to Education*. Toronto, Ontario; Educational Policy Institute.

³ Giles, P., Drewes, T. "Liberal Arts Degrees and the Labour Market", *Perspectives*, Autumn 2001, pg. 5.

⁴ Blackman, R., Tiez, J. "A Liberal Arts Degree Can Make you Rich and Happy", www.sfu.ca/arts/articles/libarts.htm, pg. 1.

⁵ (Currently, students wishing to stay in the province of New Brunswick to study liberal arts, for example, might pay a total of \$140.00 in application fees for the three English speaking universities. Perhaps the government could pay universities a flat, equalized fee per student to offset the administrative costs of processing applications so that students and their parents do not have to incur the cost of applying for university. The same could be done for international students as a means of encouraging immigration.)

⁶ Giles, P., Drewes, T. "Liberal Arts Degrees and the Labour Market", *Perspectives*, Autumn 2001, pg. 1.

⁷ "To provide reasonable assurance that all post-secondary programs of instruction leading to one of the Ontario College Credentials (certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, or graduate certificate), regardless of funding source, conform to the credentials framework and maintain the integrity of the credentials offered by the college system and protect the interests of students and employers who require a reasonable guarantee of consistency and quality in post-secondary programs of instruction offered by colleges of applied arts and technology. An arms-length, policy driven management board appointed by the committee of presidents, provides oversight to the CVS to ensure consistency and quality of programming." Ontario College Credentials Validation Service – <http://acaato.on.ca/home/ontario/credential>

⁸ Needless to say, St. Thomas University has reservations about the media coverage these ranking exercises.

⁹ He recommended that the Ontario government encourage the distinct evolution of each institution and promote differentiation through mean such as the tuition framework, accountability arrangements, and provincial funding. He implicitly endorsed student choice and urged colleges and universities to better recognize each other's related programming in order to create "clear and efficient pathways" for students.

¹⁰ Implementing any strategic plan is a living process and the long-planned establishment of a committee to study the post-secondary sector New Brunswick and the change in leadership at St. Thomas University has delayed the implementation of some aspects of the current plan. The plan may be found at <http://w3.stu.ca/stu/about/strategic/strategic.aspx>.