

BRIEF

TO THE

COMMISSION ON

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

IN NEW BRUNSWICK

FROM

UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS ON THE MIRAMICHI INC

AND

THE MIRAMICHI COMMUNITY

UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS ON THE MIRAMICHI

Background

For more than 50 years the Miramichi had access to post secondary education at St. Thomas College and later St. Thomas University in Chatham.

Following the re-location of St. Thomas University to Fredericton in 1964, the Miramichi region was one of the largest areas in the province without regular access to university programs within a reasonable driving distance, until University Programs on the Miramichi began in 1994. There are approximately 50,000 people in the Miramichi Region.

Over the years since St. Thomas left there had been considerable concern and discussions regarding the need for some post-secondary education at the university level for the people of this area. In 1991 Miramichi Community Futures Inc., a federally funded agency, took up the challenge. They organized a feasibility study to examine the possibility of establishing university courses and programs on the Miramichi. One overriding objective of the study was to identify how a university level program could be achieved in the most financially realistic manner possible. This could only be accomplished with the cooperation of government departments, universities and the community. The Miramichi community rose to the challenge with widespread cooperation and even financial support from local municipalities, industry and Local 689 CEP.

Eventually, with the use of existing space at NBCC Miramichi, the willingness of universities to offer courses which meet the needs of students in the first year programs, and some initial financial support for the local management and marketing of the program, University Programs on the Miramichi became a reality in September 1994.

University Programs on the Miramichi Incorporated (UPM Inc.) was created to provide local coordination and management for the program. Comprised of a community based Board of Directors and Executive Committee (see addendum), UPM Inc. employs a local Program Coordinator and its mandate includes:

- Engaging quality university services that meet the needs of students on the Miramichi and North Shore areas.
- Assisting the participating universities in the local coordination and delivery of their resources to best meet jointly identified needs.
- Scheduling classes, exams and other activities in collaboration with the universities, NBCC Miramichi and instructional staff.
- Routine and daily organization of resources and facilities, classroom space, labs, etc.

- Management support in communicating with the participating universities, governments, community groups, local business/industry and the general public.
- Assisting students, prospective students and parents and directing them as required to appropriate sources re: program/course admissions requirements/ processes; registration policies and procedures; Canada /NB Student Loan Program guidelines/ procedures, course and textbook payment arrangements, other university and local support services such as faculty advising, library support, local computer network access, etc.
- Local program promotion, in consultation with the participating universities, at local high schools and to the general public.

Three universities participate cooperatively in the Program: Saint Thomas University, Mount Allison University, and the University of New Brunswick.

The role of the participating universities include:

- Organization of programs and courses
- Engaging qualified instructors
- Approving students for admission for programs and courses
- Registering students in courses
- Delivering programs and courses
- Evaluating programs and courses
- Setting and collecting tuition, issuing transcripts, etc.
- Other activities which they normally perform in accordance with their own mission and objectives.

Progress to date:

Over these past 12 years we have experienced considerable growth in both numbers of participating students and courses available. We have grown from 65 students and 15 courses in our first year to an average of a 130 students and 35 courses per year over the past 3 years. Our current range of course offerings has permitted many students to acquire the second year of their Arts program at home. A growing number of mature and part time students are using our program to achieve a wide variety of educational goals. While we don't have official follow-up data on the subsequent educational success rates of students who participated in our program, unofficial feedback suggests it has been very good. We do know, however, that our drop out rate has been less than 5% per year and recent student surveys indicate a high degree of satisfaction with their Miramichi program experience.

Support Structure:

The program began with financial support from the provincial government in the form of a grant of \$25,000. For the school year 1996/97, we received a grant of \$5,000 from the

City of Miramichi and the provincial grant was gradually reduced and then eliminated. In 1997/98 we introduced a local Student Administration Fee of \$12.50 per each course which has been gradually increased to offset progressively reduced provincial funding. We do not receive any financial support from the universities. Any discussions we have had with them did not indicate any willingness to assist financially in the program, because of their own financial restrictions. Presently we do not receive any financial support from the province. We subsist on the \$40 per course Administration Fee we charge students and a \$5,000 annual grant we thankfully continue to receive from the City of Miramichi.

The program began with a budget of \$25,000 in 1994 and remains not much greater than that today. Since then, however, the program has more than doubled in size and indications are that it will continue to grow. It now requires greater resources and financial support if it is to survive and thrive. The initial part-time nature of locally administering the program has effectively become a full-time requirement.

Considering that \$25,000 represents less than \$250/year per student to administer the program, our original objective, to be financially realistic, has been achieved. If these same students had attended one of our maritime universities, they would have been subsidized by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission between \$5,000 and \$7,000 each year per student.

Economy

The economy of the Miramichi Region, in recent times, has never been robust. Never seemingly able to sustain the population resulting in the phrase “Miramichi’s biggest export has always been her people”. The region has experienced negative growth for the past two decades, population is in decline and out-migration continues, especially among our more talented young people. The region has sustained the major net loss of good paying civil service, mining and forestry jobs with the closure of CFB Chatham(1000 jobs), the closure of Heath Steele Mines(400 jobs), the closure of the UPM-Kymmene Kraft mill(400 jobs) respectively. These job losses have contributed to a significant reduction of average household income in the region.

The recent indefinite production curtailment at the Weyerhaeuser OSB plant and UPM-Kymmene’s Blackville lumber mill contribute to this phenomenon with a further 300 jobs up in the air. These setbacks will not produce the jobs and income required to stem the flow of out-migration or serve to stabilize the region’s tax base and social service infrastructure. Added to this is the fact that Miramichi has one of the lowest employment participation rates and one of the highest illiteracy rates in New Brunswick. This is the backdrop!

As challenging as things are there are many organizations and people working hard to improve the standard of living and quality of life in Miramichi. We are driven by the conviction that we live in one of the best spots in Canada, if not the world and we want to share our friendly lifestyle and special sense of history and culture. We value and work to protect our special local neighbourhood heritages. We also work collectively to revitalize

our economy with tourism, education, manufacturing, agriculture/aquaculture service and knowledge-based opportunities so that our young people will be able to remain here.

We have made modest progress in the fledgling knowledge-based sector with a significant number of smaller niche companies and particularly Fat Cat Animation. These companies are a direct result of NBCC-Miramichi's Animation/Software Development speciality. Also progress has been made in the tourism sector with the development of the Metepenagiag Heritage Park and the Miramichi Open River Museum. The service/retail sector has shown some growth with the creation of the City of Miramichi's new Power Center. However, all of these improvements combined cannot replace the jobs and income being lost in the resource sectors.

One promising aspect of our economy is in the area of value-added processing and manufacturing. We are fortunate to have companies like Northumberland Cooperative in the Agriculture/food sector and Sunny Corner Enterprises and the Atcon Group in the value-added manufacturing sectors as Miramichi industrial leaders. We must find the means to develop companies in these sectors with the capability and willingness to sell into the export market and to carry along other local companies with them.

We will continue to have great difficulty competing with New Brunswick's larger centers, let alone the world, unless our critical mass develops. Our population will continue to be denied opportunities for personal and professional development as a result of lack of access to quality educational opportunities that other areas of the province take for granted. This lack of access is primarily due to affordability.

Miramichi students will continue to struggle with access to affordable education at the university level by having to leave the region, at great financial sacrifice, to pursue even basic programs like Arts, Business and some Sciences.

The publication "Smarter Together" outlines many important contributions universities make to their respective communities. It is due to those many contributions that we seek expanded university programming in Miramichi. Universities provide more than post-secondary education opportunities. The nature of university activities and scope extends well beyond the campus, as the publication suggests, and those activities are ones which can add significant value to our quality of life. (example; holding a university degree or accumulating credits towards a degree is an asset and in many cases essential if aspiring to management positions with major local employers like UPM-Kymmene)

As noted in the "Background" the availability of quality university educational opportunities in Miramichi enables local access to this programming. The importance of the affordability of a university education in the current economic climate cannot be overstated. Local university students, both full time and part time, can continue to accumulate resources to contribute toward the cost of their education by working at their full or part time jobs. This enables our local students, an intelligent and dynamic mix of people, to continue making their valuable contributions to the local economy and the quality of life in Miramichi.

Research Opportunities:

Having a four year university presence on the Miramichi could also open doors for research grants and projects. UNB presently works with the Miramichi Fish Hatchery in South Esk. There is even an apartment available at the hatchery for post-graduate students. With fishing in general a big part of the economy and tourism of the Miramichi region, the research possibilities are there.

Another industry that could be tied to the four-year program and related research is in the forestry sector. Various woodland companies operate in the area, and are always looking for better methods of harvesting and sustainability. The Community College in Miramichi could offer a base for research projects as well as on-sight work with some of the major companies.

Yet another area of possible research in co-operation with industry could be Northumberland Co-op which has been at the cutting edge of new products for markets both in NB and abroad.

The Miramichi Region 7 Health Authority has also been promised a cancer research connection with Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton with doctors doing their research at these hospitals. An English language Nursing School in conjunction with the Miramichi Region Health Authority as well as a Medical Training Satellite would also be a very logical step in the development of the medical field.

With the tremendous focus on the historical/cultural eco-tourism within the province, what better place for research than the Miramichi. A university program in folklore would be an excellent opportunity for research. The rich native culture and history has barely been tapped, especially with three First Nations communities within the Miramichi region.

Research grants bring money and economic focus to any community, as they are frequently undertaken with to co-operation of local institutions and businesses.

Expansion Proposal

It has been the desire of the community and University Programs on the Miramichi, for some time now, to expand the program. To that end, two years ago, the Board of Directors of UPM Inc. decided to explore the expansion of the current course offerings. The Board passed a resolution (attached) detailing how to achieve the stated goal of enabling Miramichi and other Northern New Brunswick university students to achieve a university degree in selected disciplines without leaving home through either an expanded existing structure or through a Miramichi satellite of an existing university. The Board of Directors struck an expansion committee consisting of several Board members, local MLA's and their designates, the Hon. Charles Hubbard MP, a representative of the City of Miramichi, Enterprise Miramichi, the Greater Miramichi Chamber of Commerce and First Nations representation. (List of expansion Committee members attached)

The expansion Committee articulated the expansion goal as follows:

- (a) A degree in Arts
- (b) Two years towards a business degree
- (c) One year towards a science degree

A detailed Expansion Plan was developed by the Committee and is in the process of being fleshed out.

Some events are influencing the Expansion Plan. During our planning phase a Provincial election was held which saw the then Leader of the Opposition and now Premier the Hon. Shawn Graham announce that \$5 million, over four years, would be made available to assist with expansion of the Miramichi University Program. Since the election the Premier and his Minister of Post Secondary Education, Training and Labour the Hon. Ed Doherty have announced a Commission on Post Secondary Education which will review all aspects of post secondary education and report to the Premier and Minister on August 30, 2007. **It is our deepest desire that this brief influences your recommendations in our favour.**

Conclusion

For the past 13 years, University Programs on the Miramichi has partially filled the void of the relocation of STU to Fredericton in 1964, by offering students the opportunity to complete their first year and, in many cases, their second year of university while staying at home. In fact we have some situations where students were able to complete more than two years of an arts program and an extraordinary case where a student completed his B.A. from UNB without leaving the Miramichi.

Who are these students? It was very obvious from the beginning that there were mainly two groups interested in the program: 1.) Recent graduates from the area high schools and 2.) Mature students who, for various reasons, did not have an opportunity at the appropriate time to go to university.

The students coming directly from high school generally select a program of studies which they plan to follow. The mature students are either interested in completing a program of studies they had already begun, or those who are required to complete a first year of an arts program. Many of the mature students have family responsibilities or a job which makes it impossible to live away from home.

In addition to providing courses and programs from reputable universities, the program is affordable. The greatest cost involved in spending a year at university is related to the expense of living away from home. It is, in most cases, double the cost of tuition. Over the past 13 years since University Programs on the Miramichi began, we have grown to offer between 20-25 courses each semester and have been able to serve the educational needs of more than 1500 students from this area during that time. The success we have had is related to several factors:

- The participating universities in the program—Mount Allison University, St. Thomas University, and the University of New Brunswick , for their role in providing courses and programs and instructors.
- NBCC Miramichi for providing office space, classrooms, computer and library access and other support over the years. Without their help and cooperation, the program would be very difficult to administer.
- The most important component of the program, our students. Their success has been our success.
 - The young man who, in spite of many difficulties, was able to complete the requirements for a B.A. degree from UNB without leaving the Miramichi.
 - The mother, alone with 5 children, who was able to complete 2 years of a degree program while staying at home and following courses at university programs on the Miramichi.
 - The many students who worked at their regular jobs and managed to complete the first or second year of university while living in the area.
 - The students who have completed degrees in Pharmacy after having completed their prerequisites here and the many other students who are now social workers, teachers, nurses, etc.. Many of them have returned to the Miramichi area to work.

A previous “Commission on Excellence in Education” in 1992 in examining the key question regarding “Accessibility to Post Secondary Education” related the following: “Keeping our post secondary education affordable and accessible will obviously be one of the major challenges, as we consider ways of improving the over all system.”

On November 28, 1992 our then premier, Frank McKenna, in a statement at the opening of the legislature session made the following remarks:

“Improving New Brunswickers’ education skills is vital to the province’s economic future...The province is making great strides towards economic self-sufficiency, but the key to maintaining that trend is a well educated work force.”

In addition he added:

“The inescapable conclusion is that more education is needed in less diversified, less prosperous regions. I firmly believe, that as our level of education rises, employment will also increase.”

We would be remiss if we did not look at our past and recall that for more than 50 years we had a post secondary education institution in our area, St. Thomas University, which as the result of the recommendations of the Deutsch Commission Report of 1962, was relocated to Fredericton. In fact all post secondary institutions in the north of the province were also closed. They included a college in Edmundston, Bathurst, and a small college in Caraquet.

However, shortly after the University de Moncton was established, out of the ashes rose extensions of University de Moncton in Bathurst, Shippagan, and Edmundston, with Edmundston becoming a degree granting university.

For more than 30 years, students from the Miramichi and the surrounding area were left with no alternative but to live away from home to acquire a university level education.

The first students in 30 years began their program of studies on the Miramichi in September 1994, ironically in the same building formally occupied by St. Thomas University in Chatham.

During the past two years the board of directors have looked at some of the future concerns, possibilities and needs of the program on the Miramichi. They have been joined by local MLA's, civic officials and other interest groups.

The program has reached a point where it must expand its human resources and look at additional program expansion. We strongly feel the need for more Provincial Government support if the program is going to continue to offer students on the Miramichi and the North Shore access to post secondary education.

As a result, many reports, resolutions, promises, and references have been made relative to the expansion plan of University Programs on the Miramichi:

A.) A report of the Miramichi Prosperity Task Force in February '04 recommended "that support should be provided to continue existing courses and plans should be developed to increase the number of programs and course offerings".

B.) The 2005 Biennial Policy Convention of the N.B. Liberal Association entitled "Pride in our Past and Faith in Our Future" passed a resolution in support of the university program on the Miramichi.

C.) In the fall '06 election campaign \$1.25 million dollars per year was pledged over the next 4 years to improve and expand the Miramichi program by the present provincial government. "Expand distance education opportunities including using existing infrastructure to expand the current offerings of year 1st and 2nd year university programs."

In our efforts to expand the program we were advised to wait until the conclusion of the committee's report.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman and members of the committee this program means a great deal to the people of the Miramichi. In the Deutsch Commission recommendation of 1962 we were left without access to post secondary education for 30 years. This may be the opportunity to correct that situation.

APPENDIX

1. New Brunswick Liberal Association policy resolution
2. Liberal campaign platform position for University programming for Miramichi
3. News article: \$5 million over 4 years for University program for Miramichi
4. UPM Inc. Board resolution re: program expansion
5. UPM Inc. expansion committee plan
6. Miramichi Prosperity Task Force recommendation
7. City of Miramichi letter of support and resolution
8. Letter: the Hon. John Foran, MLA, Miramichi Center
9. Letter: Greater Miramichi Chamber of Commerce
10. Letter: EnterpriseMiramichi
11. Board of directors-UPM Inc.
12. UPM Inc. Expansion Committee
13. Press release: MLA wants UNB satellite campus in Miramichi
14. Press release: Foran wants University Campus for Miramichi