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Dr. Jacques L'Ecuyer
Dr. Rick Miner
Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick
535 Beaverbrook Court, Suite 105
Fredericton, NB E3B 1X6

Gentlemen:

Thank you for your invitation to express our thoughts regarding improvements to the post-secondary education schema in New Brunswick, and to address the role of Yorkville University and similar institutions in the developing landscape.

Background: The regulation of institutional post-secondary degree granting status is a provincial matter. Yorkville University was designated in March, 2004, as a degree granting institution under the New Brunswick Degree Granting Act (the Act). The University thus far operates one degree program, the Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology (MACP), as well as several post-degree specialty certificate programs and other continuing professional education workshops for counsellors and related professions. The University has made application with the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour for approval to offer additional programs.

With the exception of a practical field training experience, students complete their didactic coursework in small instructor-led online classes. The MACP is a 48 credit hour program that can be completed in five semesters of full time study. Currently, the University enrolls approximately 200 students, representing all the Canadian provinces and territories (in good proportion to their relative English speaking population size), as well as 13 foreign countries. Furthermore, the University has thus far graduated 39 students, all of whom who wish to be are employed in counselling and related occupations.

The University is a private, investor owned institution, providing a 30% bursary to employees of the New Brunswick Department of Education and the New Brunswick Department of Family and Community Services. Other than federal and provincial educational student loans, the University does not receive public funding.

Though the University is based in New Brunswick, its enrollment is nationwide, and international. Even so, the operation and programs of the University have a bearing on the questions posed by the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, specifically with regard to mission, access, financing, and the retention of educated

employees in the province. Additionally, the University directly helps the New Brunswick economy by purchasing its needs locally, creating jobs for New Brunswickers, and bringing occasional student and faculty travelers to Fredericton.

Mission: Yorkville University offers a practitioner oriented program with a distinct emphasis on pedagogy, currency, applicability of curriculum to professional employment, and mentored field experience. Faculty are professionally credentialed at the highest levels available to them, and are encouraged to be active in community service, professional associations, and the direct delivery of professional services to the public. In NB, Yorkville University credits are additionally recognized towards upgrading teacher certificates. New programs for which the University is seeking approval are likewise practitioner oriented professional programs.

Access: Because the University utilizes current technology to deliver the online portion of its program in asynchronous format, students need not be near a campus, and are able to both keep a job and attend class full-time. As a result, the University enrolls many working single mothers and people in rural areas, including people of First Nations origin. When access is not restricted to having to be at a particular 'place' at a certain 'time', education becomes accessible to many groups of people; the home-bound handicapped, those living in rural settings, military personnel stationed overseas, etc. Instead of 'time' and 'place', ability to study at Yorkville University (or any program offered over a technology based format) is limited only by access to computers, a fast internet connection, and facility with the English language.

The University mainly enrolls working adults, average age 37. Providing access to coursework which does not require upheaval of self, family, and job; and augmenting that coursework with community based mentoring experiences which build both professional competence and professional relationships, likely deepens a person's roots in the community and lessens the likelihood of their leaving for 'greener pastures'. Our students report that for many of them their choice is not between Yorkville University and another school, but rather between being in school, or not. All of our graduates thus far work in or near their home communities.

Finance: Private universities are not government supported so tuition is higher than that charged in the public sector. The difference is offset by the convenience (and savings) of not having to move, travel, arrange child care, or recalibrate work commitments in order to attend classes.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Private universities are free of many of the constraints that bind the public sector. At our own expense, we can readily experiment with curriculum, delivery mechanisms, student service methodologies and other areas of institutional life. Private universities can move nimbly to take advantage of opportunities in the global economy. So long as academic integrity is maintained, private sector universities in New Brunswick can fill some of the gaps left open by the unique history, evolution, and mission of the public sector universities.

1. This Province, which has already in place the Degree Granting Act, should support and encourage the development of high quality private universities.

2. The Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training, and Labour should promote partnerships between the public and private sectors to facilitate access to those students for whom access is *the* critical factor. For example, Yorkville University can deliver online and manage curriculum taught by faculty of a public institution.
3. The Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, and other relevant government departments, should treat the private sector as a helpful ally for the benefit of individual New Brunswickers and New Brunswick industry that may need short term or specialized educational programs not able to be offered effectively or efficiently by the public sector. For example, the nursing profession has mandated that all registered nurses need to obtain bachelors degrees by a certain date. This requirement poses a hardship on many nurses who are unable to leave their jobs to attend school, or who live in rural areas where public university attendance is not possible. If called upon to do so, Yorkville University could help.

If there is to be a flourishing sector of private universities in New Brunswick, then mechanisms must be in place for an independent and expert assessment of their quality. Quality in academic programs is never easy to define, and volumes have been written in the attempt. We suggest there is more than one yardstick by which to measure the idea of quality, and that consultation with the private sector is an important factor in defining the right measures for quality. And, of course, as in all manner of enterprise, public and private, the assessment of quality should be ongoing.

Sincerely,

Michael C. Markovitz, Ph.D.
President