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UNIVERSITY EDUCATION STILL BEST CHOICE

By

Jack Vanderlinde

A professor at a local university last week received a disturbing telephone call from one of his students. The student had successfully completed her first year of undergraduate studies last Spring, but was distressed because her father had advised her against resuming her university studies next September. He had encouraged her, instead, to enroll in a Community College programme to “learn some marketable skills” rather than “wind up flipping hamburgers”.

Unfortunately, this well-intended advice obviously had been based on the mistaken – but alarmingly prevalent – belief that university graduates experience difficulty in finding well-paid full-time jobs relating to their particular interests.

A recent study has shown, for example, that even when jobs were at their most scarce during the early 1990’s, the majority of university graduates who at first had only been successful in finding jobs in the service sector went on to find jobs in their own fields of study, or in related fields, within two years; and that virtually all of them had found relevant work within five years. In view of the abysmally poor state of the employment market at the beginning of the last decade, this is very revealing.

Successive New Brunswick governments of different political stripes have, year after year, invested - ostensibly - as much as they could afford in this province’s university system. No doubt this benevolence is due to a political environment where the integrity of the health care system and “jobs, jobs, jobs” head every provincial government’s agenda. They recognize that university graduation almost invariably leads to well-paid full-time employment and is vital to the future of the Province.

Recently published Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) data confirm the employability of University graduates. Although, according to HRDC, in 1998 there were nearly 3,000 more university graduates in New Brunswick than there were in 1997, it appears that an even greater number found jobs as the unemployment rate for this group fell slightly (to 5.1% from 5.2% in the previous year). Last year their job-finding experience in this province was even more encouraging. In 1999 there were almost 5,000 more people with a university degree than there were in 1998, but the unemployment rate for university graduates again fell – from 5.1% to 4.4% – with everyone who was looking for a full-time job having found one. As well, 700 fewer university graduates held part-time jobs than in the previous year. In comparison, the 1999 unemployment rate for Community College graduates was 8.2%; that of High School graduates was 10.5%

The universities are not in competition with the Community Colleges. Each has a different role. Frequently, in fact, university graduates go on to pursue Community College studies, and vice-versa. The Community Colleges, generally speaking, strive to give their students the job-skills which are currently in demand, changing from time to time with the vagaries of the economy. The universities, on the other hand – again, generally speaking – attempt at the undergraduate level to place as much emphasis on the development of individual adaptability and analytical thinking as they do on proficiency in a particular discipline.

During the current economic boom there are, overall, more full-time jobs available than at any time during the last decade. However, in times of an economic downturn, the historical statistics demonstrate that university graduates have been the least affected.

Not everyone is cut out to attend university but, in view of the employment statistics, every young person who has the necessary aptitude and motivation should do so. Those that do need not doubt that a University degree will equip them for meaningful, well-paid employment.

(Jack Vanderlinde is president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations and a professor in the Physics Department at UNB Fredericton.)

Published September 2000

EDUCATION MERITS FUNDING

By

Jack Vanderlinde

[The following “op-ed” piece was published in the New Brunswick daily media, and was broadcast on CBC Radio, around the time of the last Federal Election.]

In the midst of the uncharacteristic mud-slinging which dominated the recent federal election, health care was the only issue of genuine concern which received any noticeable discussion. Education enjoys virtually the same level of importance as health care in the minds of Canadians but it was, nevertheless, completely overlooked.

According to a recent poll conducted by Ekos Research, 90% of us believe that education should be a high priority with the federal government. Health care, at 92%, takes first place by only a negligible margin. Rightly so, especially in the case of post-secondary education. In the so-called “new economy”, being educated at the post-secondary level is virtually a pre-requisite to finding meaningful employment.

In New Brunswick last year, for example, the unemployment rate for high school graduates was almost 2-1/2 times that of university graduates (10.5% compared with 4.4%) and the gap is widening every year. Moreover, because there were nearly twice as many of the former as there were of the latter, for every unemployed university graduate in this province in 1999 there were four unemployed high school graduates.

How, then, have successive federal governments responded to this situation? Abysmally poorly. The federal cash contribution to post-secondary education in Canada has fallen by 34% since 1992, from \$2.9 Billion to \$1.9 Billion. (Yes, that is a drop of One Thousand Million Dollars - count the zeros - in only eight years.) Worse still: although we continue to enjoy the longest and richest economic boom in decades, this amount represents the lowest percentage of Canada’s Gross Domestic Product allocated to post-secondary education by the federal government in more than 30 years.

One of the results of this shortsighted philosophy on the part of successive federal governments has been that student tuition fees and post-graduation debt loads have risen to unconscionably high levels. Average undergraduate tuition fees across Canada rose from \$1,496.00 in 1990-1991 to \$3,379.00 in 1999-2000, an increase of 126%. According to Statistics Canada, the average debt load of a student graduating with a bachelor’s degree went from \$9,700.00 in 1990 to \$13,300.00 in 1995. The Canadian

Federation of Students has estimated that the current figure is of the order of \$25,000.00; if so, Canadian students now have the highest levels of debt in the world when they graduate.

Our federal leaders exhort us to compete on the world stage, and especially with our neighbour to the south. They urge us to educate ourselves to the highest levels attainable, and to embrace an ethos of “lifelong learning”. Lo and behold: the Council of Ontario Universities has calculated that colleges and universities in the United States now receive almost 32% more total public funding than they did 5 years ago. Over the same period, though, total public funding for post-secondary education in Canada has actually declined by 7.4%. So much for our competitive edge.

Continued federal underfunding of post-secondary education is also exacting a heavy toll on the budgets of individuals and families who recognize the realities of the 21st Century and are determined to equip themselves to accommodate its educational imperatives. In 1992, the one-fifth of Canadian households with the lowest income levels spent approximately 11% of their disposable incomes on tuition fees. By 1998, this had risen to more than 19%. The Canadian Association of University Teachers recently reported that “... university participation rates for 18 to 24 year-olds from lower socio-economic backgrounds over the past eight years have not kept pace with [those of] students from higher socio-economic backgrounds”. One can hardly be surprised. Furthermore, if present federal funding trends continue, our universities will once more become the preserves of the privileged group who can afford to attend them - while the marketplace, on the other hand, will be crying out for more and more individuals who possess university degrees.

The ultimate irony of all this is that employed Canadians pay taxes; and the more they earn, the more taxes they pay. It has been estimated by economist Robert Allen that Canada’s university graduates will each pay approximately \$85,000.00 (at today’s value) more in taxes than the average wage earner. This more than compensates the taxpayer for the approximately \$36,000.00 which it costs to educate each student.

Not everyone is cut out to go to university. A place there should, nevertheless, be available to everyone who is qualified to occupy one and wishes to do so. The “new economy” demands nothing less - and we, as taxpayers, should demand it too.

(Jack Vanderlinde is president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations and a professor in the Physics Department at UNB Fredericton.)

Published November 2000

MODERN THREE “Rs” THREATENING N.B.’s UNIVERSITIES

By

Jack Vanderlinde

The “three R’s” of education traditionally have meant “reading, writing, and arithmetic”. However, the “three R’s” of modern university life – Retirements, Recruitment, and Retention – threaten the viability of the universities in New Brunswick.

More than a decade ago, the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA) brought to the Provincial government’s attention that, by the end of the 1990’s, there would be a shortage of university faculty resulting from the bulge in their numbers hired in the 1960’s and 1970’s reaching retirement. It also predicted that their potential replacements would be in a “seller’s market”, because there would be fewer replacement candidates than the number of vacancies to be filled. For this reason, it was obvious that hiring incentives in New Brunswick in the 1990’s and beyond would have to be attractive because universities would be competing with each other and with industry to meet their recruitment needs. At the time, the demand for formal post-secondary credentials had not reached its recent explosive proportions; this subsequent development has made a bad situation even worse.

Yet little, if anything, has been done to address these issues.

In January of this year, the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) announced that 4,000 faculty members have been lost from the system since 1992, as institutions struggling with cutbacks in federal transfer funding for post-secondary education — calculated by the Canadian Association of University Teachers to be of the order of \$1 Billion per year — did not replace retiring academics. According to CAUBO, the Canadian university system “is estimated to need 2000-3000 new faculty members in each of the next six years” and will have to replace approximately 20,000 of them by the year 2010. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) puts this figure at closer to 30,000.

The official figures currently available for New Brunswick, published by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, indeed show that between 1990-91 and 1998-99 the number of full-time university faculty in New Brunswick declined by 10%. Is this decline entirely attributable to retirements? What about the recruitment – and, equally important, the retention – of faculty members in this province?

At the University of New Brunswick alone there have been more than 100 faculty resignations in the last ten years. Of these, 45 have occurred within the last three years and 16 of them have taken place since the beginning of this year. It must be borne in

mind that these were resignations, not retirements. The majority of these faculty members simply took their skills to greener pastures in the United States, or elsewhere in Canada, where salaries are higher and research facilities and opportunities are more abundant.

This hemorrhage of talent is hardly surprising when one considers that OCUFA, the country's largest provincial organization of university faculty, has recently declared that "one new all-inclusive university the size of McMaster" (which presently supports 16,000 students and 1,000 faculty) will be required "every year for the next four years" in order to meet the demand for university spaces in Ontario alone. This newspaper observed, on January 17 of this year, that Carleton University in Ottawa anticipates hiring one professor per week until 2010, and the University of Toronto one person a day for the next few years.

The Province of Quebec has raised the stakes in this growing competition by offering five-year income tax holidays to foreign academics in the engineering, technology, health, and finance fields who take jobs in that province's universities.

Money and equipment are not, of course, the only motivating factors in university faculty accepting positions in New Brunswick. Some are attracted by "lifestyle" considerations, and New Brunswick has significant assets when these criteria come into play. Nevertheless, the numbers speak for themselves, and time is running out for this province to put in place a strategy to ensure that New Brunswick's universities will continue to be able to attract the best and the brightest to teach and research here.

(Jack Vanderlinde is President of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations and Chair of the Physics Department at UNB Fredericton).

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UNIVERSITY FUNDING INCREASE MUST BE PUT IN PERSPECTIVE

By

Desmond Morley

"This report puts the much appreciated increase in university operating funding in the last provincial budget in its proper perspective", said Prof. Jack Vanderlinde, president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations. Prof. Vanderlinde was commenting on a recently-released survey, commissioned by the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO), which documents the accumulated cost of deferred maintenance in Canada's universities.

"Deferred maintenance" is the backlog of work resulting from the postponement to future budgets of routine maintenance and repairs, and by failure to carry out major repairs or restoration on obsolescent equipment and on physical plant which is at the end of its life cycle.

Quoting from the CAUBO survey, Prof. Vanderlinde stated that, nationally, there is approximately \$3.6 Billion in long-overdue deferred maintenance of which over \$1 Billion can now be classified as urgent. This has resulted solely from more than two decades of belt tightening, he said, and stressed that the comparable figures for New Brunswick's universities are "proportionate with those for Canada as a whole".

CAUBO also is predicting overall enrolment increases of the order of 20% between now and the year 2010, as a result of the "echo baby boom" - the children of the baby boomers - moving through the system. According to Prof. Vanderlinde, this phenomenon, and the fact that some deferred maintenance projects "simply cannot be postponed any longer" will stretch this province's universities' financial resources to the limit and are likely to result in the quality of the education they offer being threatened.

"The increase of 2% per year for the next three years given to universities was one of very few increases granted in the last budget and, in view of the cuts in other sectors, it shows a heartening degree of recognition by government of the critical importance of the universities in the social and economic fabric of the province".

"Nevertheless, with inflation also running at about 2% per year", Vanderlinde observed, "it will be difficult for New Brunswick's institutions of higher learning to face the financial challenges of the new Millennium which are now beginning to emerge.

“For example, the average age of a university faculty member is around 55. This means that approximately half of them will be retiring over the next ten years, during the same period in which a 20% increase in enrolments is expected. As a result, not only will retiring faculty have to be replaced, but more of them must be recruited if unmanageable class sizes are to be avoided”.

The recruitment of faculty in New Brunswick, noted Vanderlinde, is particularly difficult at any time because average faculty salaries in this province are of the order of 15% lower than the national average.

“That was the primary reason for the recent faculty strike at the University of Moncton. Higher salaries and better research facilities elsewhere in Canada and in the United States already are luring away the best and the brightest”, he said.

“The costs of performing overdue deferred maintenance, accommodating increasing enrolments, and inflation, will no doubt greatly exceed the increase in operating funding which the universities will receive during the next three years. If a viable financial formula for faculty renewal is not established soon, the quality of teaching and research in the universities of this province will be seriously compromised”.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).

Published April 2001

DON'T CONFUSE DIPLOMAS WITH DEGREES

**By
Desmond Morley**

At its bi-annual meeting in Ottawa last weekend, the Canadian Association of University Teachers voted overwhelmingly to condemn the government of Alberta for having bestowed upon the Calgary location of a U.S.-based learning facility, the DeVry Institute of Technology, the power to confer 4-year baccalaureate degrees in Computer Information Systems, Electronics Engineering, and Business Operations.

Although the institution in question is now empowered to grant undergraduate degrees, it is neither a university nor a degree-granting college. It is a private, for-profit corporation whose tuition fees - of the order of \$7,500.00 per year - are paid entirely by the student. It also has two branches in Ontario, one in Mississauga and the other in Toronto.

The revered Massachusetts Institute of Technology, commonly known as "M.I.T.", also is a U.S.-based private degree-granting institution. There, however, the resemblance begins and ends. DeVry has no mandate to address general public policy issues. It is not, as are the universities, committed to performing research and community service as well as teaching. Twenty percent of its faculty reportedly do not hold advanced academic degrees, and they enjoy neither academic freedom nor the tenure which guarantees it.

It is, in fact, simply a subsidiary of a multi-national company with a market capitalization of \$2.4 Billion and a president whose compensation package last year amounted to more than \$2.5 Million.

In a democracy such as ours, of course, no valid objection can be raised against a legitimate corporate enterprise making a profit from anyone who freely chooses to pay the price it sets for its goods or services. A strong argument can be made, nevertheless, that those profits should not be subsidized with taxpayers' dollars.

Approximately seventy percent of DeVry's students receive some government-sponsored financial aid. Unfortunately, according to data gathered by the Ontario government, the highest rates of default on student loans (31% and 34.5% in 1998 and 1999, respectively) are found among those who have attended private vocational schools such as DeVry. The corresponding default figures for community colleges are 20.1% and 25.4%, and 8.4% and 12.3% for universities.

At around \$7,500.00, DeVry's tuition fees are some \$3,000.00 per year, or 40%, higher than the average cost of university undergraduate tuition across Canada. Critics suggest

that high tuition fees are a factor in the high loan default rates among private vocational school students. DeVry itself has stated: “For a variety of reasons, high student loan default rates on federal student loans are most often found in [among others] proprietary institutions ... which tend to have a higher percentage of low income students enrolled than do four-year publicly supported and independent colleges and universities.”

If college or university students fail to repay any part of their student loans, the taxpayers who foot the bill have the benefit of knowing that some or all of their contribution was invested in taxpayer-owned education facilities. This is not the case with private vocational schools, where unrepaid public funds merely contribute to the good health of corporate balance sheets.

It used to be that having “a degree” connoted that its holder had attended a university and, regardless of specific field of study, as a result had also benefited from the balance of applied skills and the broader insights drawn from the physical sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Private educators are not interested in providing a broad-based education, instead focusing narrowly on course content in current demand in the marketplace. What they provide are, in truth, diplomas or certificates of competence in a narrow range of skills.

For the governments of Alberta and Ontario to permit these credentials to be called “degrees” is an irresponsible devaluation of the word and an affront to those individuals who have earned one or more of them at a traditional university. It is to be hoped that, should the need arise, the prudent application of corresponding provincial legislation in New Brunswick will ensure that the portent of the word “degree” is not distorted in this province as it has been elsewhere in Canada.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).

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LORD SHOWS STATESMANSHIP IN EDUCATION

By

Desmond Morley

There is an old saying that a politician thinks of the next election, while a statesman thinks of the next generation.

If so, the recent simultaneous release of both the report of the Working Group on Accessibility to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick and the official response to it of the provincial government were marked by indications of what may, in fact, be statesmanship.

The report itself contains eighteen recommendations, to each of which the Lord government has responded, to a lesser or greater degree, positively.

One recommendation, that the government invest significant new money in student assistance focusing primarily on bursaries for students most in need, has been answered with the allocation over the next three years of an additional \$5.1 Million in non-repayable student financial assistance.

The response to another recommendation, that a fund be established to match monies raised from the private sector by educational institutions, has resulted in the allocation of \$1 Million in public money for this purpose over the next 2 years.

These two are the most tangible responses to the reports' recommendations.

It has not gone unnoticed, however, that foremost among the recommendations of the report is that government take the initiative to work with institutions to publicize "the lifelong advantages that a post-secondary education brings in terms of career options, income, health and personal satisfaction" and "the importance of post-secondary education to New Brunswick's socio-economic wellbeing".

The establishment of a permanent web site to ensure that this information is passed on, particularly to middle- and high-school students, and an aggressive "promotional strategy", also figure prominently in the recommendations.

In 1997, with the help of the university administrations and student groups and in collaboration with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) - N.B. Branch and Fundy Community Television (as they then were known), university faculty in New Brunswick produced a video

program in both official languages entitled “At the Doorstep of the 21st Century” which demonstrated the socio-economic advantages of a post-secondary education. The program was aired several times on the Cable TV network, and copies of the video presentation were sent, through the Department of Education, to each high school in the province.

Consequently, it is in this renewed commitment by the Department of Education to the ongoing promotion of post-secondary education, which obviously is intended to produce an increased demand for post-secondary education which will long survive the next provincial election, that the seeds of statesmanship appear to have germinated.

Premier Bernard Lord showed his personal interest in this topic by participating with Education Minister Elvy Robichaud - whose own enthusiasm also was obvious - in the news conference at which these initiatives were announced.

Mr. Lord, acknowledging that he was passionately committed to the issue, not only reminded his audience that he had been a co-founder of the New Brunswick Student Alliance, but also confirmed that he had never lost sight of his principles as a student activist.

The Premier underscored this by saying that the two percent increase in government operating funding scheduled to go to universities in the 2001-2002 fiscal year was the absolute minimum which the province would give, and that if possible it would be increased.

These announcements could not have been more timely.

Within the last few weeks HRDC has confirmed that, although employment for university graduates has increased by 44% since 1990, and “the better educated people are, the better their situation on the labour market”, nevertheless there has been a decrease in the number of university graduates.

It is, therefore, reassuring - and, yes, statesmanlike - that amid short-term approaches the Lord government has introduced long-term measures to reverse the trend of falling university enrolments which, without doubt, have occurred as a result of a chronic shortage of government funding and prohibitive increases in tuition fees to compensate for it.

It is also encouraging that, in the Premier’s case, his student ideals appear to have avoided their most frequent burial place, the grave of graduation.

Time will tell.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations)

Published June 2001

ACT DEBASES ACADEMIC STANDARDS

By

Desmond Morley

Some folks just can't take a gentle hint, can they?

On May 7 last, this column was devoted to the DeVry Institute of Technology, a private, for-profit learning facility which is a corporate subsidiary of a U.S.-based multi-national company.

For reasons best known to the respective governments of Alberta and Ontario, DeVry has been granted the power in those provinces to confer the exalted title of "degree" on what are, in reality, merely diplomas or certificates of competence in narrow fields of expertise.

Observing that having "a degree" used to mean that, in obtaining it, one also had benefited from concomitant exposure to four or more years of a broad university experience, the column closed with the hope that recent New Brunswick legislation - the Degree Granting Act - would be used judiciously to prevent a similar distortion of the word "degree" occurring in this province.

On May 24 a private, for-profit corporation named Lansbridge University, located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, was designated in this province under the Degree Granting Act to grant "master's degrees". These will be delivered electronically in three programs with strong commercial and information technology content.

So much for the gentle hint...

A subsidiary of Learnsoft Corporation, which is based in Ottawa, Lansbridge University was originally established in Fredericton in October, 1999 as Unexus University. (A U.S. lawsuit for trademark infringement by Illinois-based education firm Unext.com precipitated a somewhat hurried name change.)

Why would an Ottawa-based company offering educational services over the Internet, which is universally accessible, locate in Fredericton?

Well, at the time New Brunswick was the only province in which any person or corporation who had a mind to could claim to be a "university" without breaking the law.

Perhaps the infusion into the enterprise of \$375,000.00 in taxpayers' money from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, and of another \$225,000.00 from Human

Resources Development Canada, on the pretext of the creation of 30 new jobs in Fredericton - which, by the way, do not seem to have materialized - was also an incentive.

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 8th Edition, a "university" is

“[A]n educational institution designed for instruction, examination, or both, of students in many branches of advanced learning, conferring degrees in various faculties, and often embodying colleges and similar institutions”...

DeVry is offering what it calls “degrees” elsewhere in Canada but it has not - as yet, at any rate - been permitted to presume to call itself a “university”.

Unfortunately, the absence of appropriate legislation in New Brunswick meant that, unlike DeVry, Unexus/Lansbridge could ignore the traditionally accepted definition of a “university” and call itself one.

However, it was hoped that it would not also be given the degree-granting status which could then mislead some members of the general public to identify it with the province's publicly-funded conventional institutions.

Obviously, it is time to take off the rose-coloured spectacles.

The New Brunswick Department of Education gave its final blessing to Lansbridge's enfranchisement as a degree-granting entity on June 11, 2001 after an “independent body” reportedly had judged that its program was of “degree quality”.

The “independent body” would, of course, be expected to have been the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, which evaluates all new university course offerings in the Maritime Provinces. It was not.

The “independent body” in this case appears to have been the international consulting firm KPMG, based in Zurich, Switzerland which convened a “validation committee” consisting of a university president, three Business School deans, and one professor of education.

No doubt this committee presented its recommendation to the government for accreditation under the Act through Lansbridge's own Advisory Board - which, coincidentally, includes among

its members none other than a Vice-President of KPMG and the Executive Director of the Tele-education Section of the New Brunswick Department of Education.

Not exactly arm's length dealings, one might muse.

For the New Brunswick government to have permitted Unexus/Lansbridge to call itself a "university", without making any attempt to introduce measures to prevent it, is surpassed in its naiveté only by its then having accredited it to grant "degrees" by e-mail.

The result has been the debasement, in this province, of the academic and social currency of the traditional degrees which many individuals have had to sacrifice much to obtain.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).

Published July 2001

PROVINCE MUST LOOSEN FUNDING GRIP

By

Desmond Morley

In the last few days the news media has again been filled with reports on the effects of even more increases in university tuition fees being imposed this year in New Brunswick and throughout Canada.

Student leaders, of course, are up in arms.

One of them, predictably, has expressed the concern that a university education will, in the near future, become unaffordable for all but students from the most affluent backgrounds.

The old “universities-are-once-more-going-to-be-the-preserves-of-the-elite” lament, it seems, is still alive and well.

What else is new?

Same tired old story, one might say; we’ve heard it all before.

Wait a minute.

This issue affects all of us, and it isn’t getting nearly enough of our attention.

A follow-up survey was commissioned earlier this year by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission to find out how individuals who graduated from Maritime universities in 1996 were faring in the labour market.

Published in April 2001, the survey showed that 11% of them were unemployed in 1997, and that this had decreased to only 6% in 2000.

This compares with an overall unemployment rate in New Brunswick of 12.8% in 1997 which, in 2000, at 10% was still in double digits.

The average first-year employment income of these graduates in 1997 was \$27,092.00 - marginally higher, in fact, than the national average income of \$27,066.00 for all wage earners in Canada that year, regardless of occupation or length of time in the workforce.

By 2000 their average income had increased by 35% to \$36,564.00.

The comparable figure for the national average income from employment for the year 2000 is not yet available; however, we doubt few, if any, other discrete groups in Canada - including even the most successful labour unions - were able to garner a 35% increase in their members' average employment income between 1997 and 2000.

This issue affects all of us because individuals who are members of a group which enjoys a low rate of unemployment and high levels of both current income and future earning potential have an ongoing high level of disposable income.

This is spent in all areas of the economy, which in turn encourages the growth of jobs and income for everyone.

Unfortunately, as a society we are guilty of ignoring the tangible economic benefits which flow to each of us from the education of any of us.

We also have failed to grasp that some form of post-secondary education is now, and for many years has been, an integral part of an education continuum in which participation by a growing majority of the population is necessary to meet the socio-economic needs of the modern world.

This is particularly true with regard to the universities.

Increasingly, it seems, we view those who aspire to obtaining a university education as if they are looking for something extra; for which, therefore, they themselves should foot the bill.

As a result, subsidies to the universities from government - in other words, from society as a whole - have fallen.

For example, at Mount Allison University they have fallen from between 80 and 90 percent 25 years ago to only 36 percent at the present time, according to its new president, Wayne McKay.

It is unrealistic to imagine that university or any other form of post-secondary education will ultimately be available entirely at taxpayers' expense, as is presently the case - nominally, at least - in the K-12 public system.

Nevertheless, it is ludicrous that society, through the unenlightened decisions of government, should continue to be so doggedly parsimonious with regard to university funding that, by default, it erects financial barriers in the form of burgeoning tuition fees to the future of what is potentially its most productive group of citizens.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations)

Published September 10, 2001

U.S. MUST PUNISH ONLY THE GUILTY

By

Desmond Morley

Timothy McVeigh was a terrorist.

He hated the government of the United States with such fanatical passion that he conspired with others in reducing the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City to rubble with a homemade bomb, killing or injuring almost 700 innocent people.

Mr. McVeigh also was an Anglo Saxon who claimed to be a Christian.

There was, though, no subsequent vengeful rain of cruise missiles and - to coin a phrase - B-52 droppings on Anglo Saxon Christians throughout the world. No U.S. administration would dream of holding all Anglo Saxon Christians accountable for the aberrant actions of only a few of them.

So it must be with the members of any and all ethnic groups and with the adherents of every religious faith.

Consequently, the overwhelming hope which unites university faculty in New Brunswick with their colleagues - not only in this province but throughout the world - is that reason will prevail in the collective mind of the wounded colossus south of us; and that, in the weeks to come, the restraint of its response to the depravity of the Oklahoma bombing will also characterize its agenda for action in the aftermath of the recent events in New York and Washington.

However, the U.S. administration seems convinced Osama bin Laden, an Arab radical and suspected terrorist who now reportedly enjoys the support of the Taliban, the rulers of Afghanistan who share his Muslim faith, masterminded the recent destruction and carnage at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

As a result, disturbing rhetoric which bodes ill for the Afghanis in particular, and for Muslims in general, is flowing from all quarters of U.S. society, including the highest levels of its government.

Given the appropriate stimuli, grief and anger are common among human beings; in the present circumstances, the monumental despair and unmitigated rage of our American neighbours are readily understandable.

Nevertheless, these heightened emotions must not be so indulged as to become the rationale for the scything of another swath of indiscriminate destruction through yet more innocent bystanders - though, this time, on the other side of the world.

In a letter to President George W. Bush and the Members of Congress signed by numerous esteemed academics from all parts of the Western Hemisphere is the simple statement “revenge breeds revenge”.

Nothing could be more true; the events in the Holy Land, Northern Ireland and elsewhere have confirmed this over the years as the body count has continued to mount.

The letter goes on: “The craven acts of terrorism in New York and Washington are dignified intolerably by their classification as acts of war”.

We could not agree more.

To so describe them elevates, by definition, the deranged fanatics who perpetrated these outrages to the level of “warriors” in the eyes of those whom they seek to convince that they are fighting a “holy war” against the United States.

Wars have a way of spreading - Laos and Cambodia saw a considerable measure of involvement in the Vietnam conflict.

Consequently, in any military response, the U.S. must be careful that it does not ignite a conflagration which quickly runs out of its control.

Furthermore, the declaration that they have been successful in starting a war is exactly what the terrorists want; and the situation was not helped by the ill-chosen vocabulary of President Bush in his recent announcement of a “crusade” against terrorism.

The Muslim world in general, according to numerous reliable reports, has perceived this unfortunate choice of words to be a veiled threat directed more against Islam itself than against the terrorism of a handful of misguided extremists.

We are keeping our fingers crossed that his subsequent clarifications have been well received.

It is one thing to threaten to bomb Afghanistan further back into the Stone Age than the Russians already did only a decade ago; it is quite another to carelessly offend the shared sensitivities of the world’s Muslims - who reportedly number almost two billion - and, in so doing, risk precipitating the new Holy War between Christendom and Islam.

That, after all, seems to be the ultimate raison d'être of the recent campaign of terror against the United States.

Therefore, only the guilty must be punished.

If American retribution against bin Laden and others of his ilk is warranted, let it be meted out only to them, and not to the vast majority of innocent Muslims, within Afghanistan and elsewhere, who both believe in, and observe, the Koran's prohibition of the taking of innocent lives.

At this terrible time for all of humanity, Muslims are unjustly being forced to endure an additional burden; that of a collective blame which they have neither brought upon themselves nor even remotely deserve.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)

Published September, 2001

Paucity of Facilities Frustrate Academics

**By
Claude Dionne**

The Premier's Platinum Medal for Research Excellence promised in the 2001 provincial Budget will recognize some of the province's outstanding senior researchers.

Every year for the next six years, two of them will each receive \$1 Million, spread over a two-year period, to further their work.

The Premier's Platinum Medal, targeted at senior researchers, will complement the existing Premier's Research Excellence Awards; these already support the province's most promising young researchers.

Unfortunately, the province in question is Ontario, not New Brunswick.

The positive aspect of this news is that, somewhere at least, meaningful sums are being spent on research from which we all will ultimately benefit.

The negative aspect is that the millions of dollars being spent on research at this time in Ontario – and elsewhere in North America – provide a compelling incentive to young, and perhaps not-so-young, New Brunswick university faculty to evaluate their own research facilities; and, realizing how woefully inadequate they are in many cases, to jump ship to take advantage of the relatively generous subsidies being allocated to research outside this province.

Ontario Premier Mike Harris is reported to have said that this research initiative will help "Ontario's best and brightest young researchers build top-notch research teams."

Consequently, it does not stretch the imagination too much to acknowledge that this anticipated team-building effort is also likely to involve the recruitment of some of New Brunswick's finest minds to the ranks of Ontario's "best and brightest".

It can be argued, of course, that many of them will not relocate because there are so many social compensations – clean air, no traffic jams, and so forth – which attach to living in this province.

This is true – but not for everyone.

As the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations pointed out to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance during the latter's recent public hearings in Halifax, many talented academics are, at best, frustrated with the paucity of research

facilities and funding which are available to them in the Atlantic region; and, at worst, some of them feel they are squandering the talents with which they have been endowed by staying here.

Either of these sentiments already has been a sufficient reason for the departure for greener pastures of many of our faculty members – and if we fail to recognize this reality, we are deluding ourselves.

Worse still, the flight of faculty from New Brunswick – the retention problem – probably is the lesser of two similar problems with which university administrators, seeking to maintain at desirable levels the numbers and quality of faculty in this province, are currently wrestling.

The other is that of recruitment.

Even in the best-case scenario, where no migration of our existing faculty would take place, New Brunswick's universities still will be forced to accommodate a wave of retirements, expected to be of the order of 50%, over the next 10 years.

Who is going to replace them?

Certainly not academics from Ontario, who are relatively awash in research funding from their provincial government and have little reason to leave there.

Not from Quebec either, in several disciplines; there a five-year provincial income-tax holiday has been given to Science faculty members recruited from outside the province.

There may, though, be some help on the way.

The federal government, urged by Fredericton MP Andy Scott and other parliamentarians, appears to be willing to re-examine its role in funding research, through the Canada Foundation for Innovation and other funding vehicles, with a view to making sponsorship under these programs more readily accessible to university researchers in the Atlantic provinces.

If so, such changes would result in a substantial levelling, for Atlantic universities, of the playing field in the game of faculty retention and recruitment in Canada.

Therefore, let us hope they are made as soon as possible.

(Dr. Claude Dionne, a professor in the Department of Administration and Director of MBA programs at l'Université de Moncton, is currently the President of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).

Published November 7, 2001

Don't Surrender Our Sovereignty

Desmond Morley, Woodstock

Soon after the horrific acts of terrorism on September 11, a debate began to rage over whether or not the Canada-U.S. border should be eliminated in favour of a so-called "common security perimeter".

Let's put things in perspective.

Canada-U.S. trade is conducted at approximately a million dollars a minute, and 75% of the goods and services this represents pass through only four or five border crossings.

There are about two hundred million attempted legal crossings by individuals every year, through the approximately 130 staffed crossing points along the 6,000 kilometer border; of these, less than 1% result in entry being refused.

In other words: up to now, the existing system has worked very well.

Furthermore, logic suggests that the malcontents we are trying to keep out probably are already here.

Why, then, are we even considering running the risk of abandoning our national sovereignty and unique culture, and sacrificing our own - unquestionably more humanitarian - refugee and immigration policies, without any reasonable expectation of preventing a mere handful of murderous zealots from entering North America?

Surely not to eliminate lineups at the border caused by a reflexive tightening of security which is as silly as it is ineffective.

Terrorists do not pass through borders with explosives strapped to their bodies, and any potential evildoer with a wet-suit could come ashore just about anywhere north of Mexico if sufficiently motivated to do so.

Even if we were able to recognize all the readily identifiable cutthroats who are the "who's who" of international terrorism through having a common security perimeter with the United States, nevertheless many of the suicide bombers who have made the news during the last few years have no previous record of wrongdoing.

They have been variously described as quiet, shy, well-educated, studious, deeply religious, family oriented, hard working, and the like

Does this mean we also would have to prohibit entry to anyone to whom some or all of the foregoing descriptions apply?

This is nonsense.

In considering a common security perimeter with the United States, Canada is considering using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Let us hope common sense will prevail.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)

Published October 16, 2001.

Feeling Uncertain

Desmond Morley, Woodstock

Are clarity and decisiveness ever going to return to this nation's political scene?

Federal Industry Minister Brian Tobin recently was reported to have declared that his agenda for innovation is not going to be derailed by "some guy in a cave" - a dismissive reference to the world's most notorious fugitive, Osama bin Laden.

He reluctantly admitted, however, that the current preoccupation of the government of Canada with security may cause a lengthening of the timeline on which his innovation portfolio will come to fruition.

Other minds - among them those of some eminent Ottawa-watchers - seem to have reached the more blunt consensus that security will win out over innovation, at least for the foreseeable future; and that Mr. Tobin will probably be, so to speak, last among equals when it comes to divvying up whatever is left after the Cabinet's newly-acquired security concerns have been addressed.

Nevertheless, last week Mr. Tobin was still asserting publicly that he is going to forge ahead with committing significant resources to the widespread introduction of broadband technology.

For doing so, he was immediately criticized by several of his parliamentary colleagues, who accused him of merely grandstanding to advance his own leadership aspirations without any real expectation of being able to deliver the goods.

All of which indicates that the intentions of our federal politicians concerning competing fiscal priorities in these uncertain times are obscure, to say the least.

Now let's have a look at New Brunswick.

On October 27, Premier Bernard Lord was reported to be preparing to deliver a 10-year plan to New Brunswickers, with the goal of calming the "concern and uncertainty" created by the September 11 terrorist attacks.

At that time, he acknowledged that a budget deficit was possible, owing to shrinking revenues and rising provincial expenditures.

Three days later, Mr. Lord announced that his government will carry out to completion its partially-implemented business and income tax cuts - while admitting at the same time that the

anticipated deficit could occur as soon as next year, and that the economic slowdown may force the province to draw upon its \$100 Million “rainy-day” fund.

Forgive us, but this sounds a bit like robbing Peter to pay Peter.

No, not you, Mr. Mesheau - but while we’re on the subject: even though Finance Minister Peter Mesheau was then on record as having no plans to cut government staffing levels, on October 30 the Premier announced to a group of business leaders that his government is going to continue “to eliminate overlaps and duplication” - the time-honoured euphemism for cost-cutting layoffs.

If our elected politicians at the federal and provincial levels continue to contradict both themselves and each other while trying to reassure us that they have complete control of the post-September 11 situation, we might not be blamed for continuing to feel, regardless of what the Premier’s 10-year plan may contain, concerned and uncertain - and not necessarily about further terrorist attacks...

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)

Published November 3, 2001.

Federal Budget May Benefit Research Community

Desmond Morley, Woodstock

Don't worry, the cavalry is coming – we think.

A recent speech delivered by Business New Brunswick deputy minister Jacques Dubé to the Institute of Public Administration of Canada paints a dismal picture of government support of research in this province.

Between 1989 and 1998 the entire amount spent on research and development in New Brunswick by the business, government, and education sectors combined fell by more than 20% from a high of \$163 Million to only \$126 Million. During the same period, Canada's overall spending on R & D increased by 60% from \$9.5 Billion to over \$15 Billion.

On a per capita basis, in fact, this province is now spending on R & D only one-third of the average amount that the rest of Canada is spending. As a result, it is perhaps understandable that Mr. Dubé also said, reportedly, that we are not good at innovation in New Brunswick. Nevertheless, we beg to differ.

The foregoing figures encompass all R & D performed in N.B., but there are so few commercial enterprises with research facilities here that the bulk of it has always taken place in our universities. If those institutions were not good at innovation, we would be in big trouble.

The innovative capacity of New Brunswick's universities has been limited only by a lack of equipment and infrastructure caused by the absence of meaningful levels of research funding over the years. However, it seems that there now may be help on the way.

It was announced in the last few days that, after years of heavy lobbying of the federal Finance Department notably by Fredericton MP Andy Scott and by university faculty groups – substantial research support will be going to small universities under the federal budget soon to be brought down.

No details are yet available, but this is music to the ears of the research community in New Brunswick because, by national standards, all of this province's universities are "small".

In the past they have suffered greatly from the flight of research funds, regardless of their source, to larger, wealthier institutions elsewhere in Canada with state-of-the-art research infrastructure already in place. As well, they have been denied access to much of the federal

government research funding which, of late, has been available only if the research performed has commercial potential.

In other words the basic, or “pure” research at which our universities excel has taken a back seat to government-funded R & D being conducted solely for immediate economic exploitation.

Therefore, the critical need locally for research funding cannot be overstated, and if it does come through in the next federal budget, it will be the metaphorical arrival of the cavalry on the scene in the nick of time.

Let’s keep our fingers crossed, though, that access to any such funds will not become entangled in bureaucratic red tape. The situation is now such that the researchers in this province need the cavalry to arrive at a gallop, not at a canter.

(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)

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