

Summer is here again, and our universities have settled once more into their annual period of perceived tranquility.

There is a popular misconception that not only the students, but also everyone else in the university community except the maintenance staff, take a summer-long vacation until classes resume in September.

Far from it.

For most faculty members the summer is the best - if not the only - time to perform research in their respective fields of expertise.

A widely recognized definition of research is "careful study and investigation, especially to discover new facts or information".

Research, in other words, is the pursuit of knowledge, and in its purest form it is performed solely for its own sake.

As the unprecedented technological advances of our age prove, new knowledge is unlimited and is waiting only to be discovered.

Consequently, university faculty in every corner of our great nation should be jumping for joy at the announcement earlier this year by the Hon. Brian Tobin, Canada's Industry Minister, of the investment of another \$83.8 Million in federal funds to support 83 additional Canada Research Chairs at 25 universities.

That will bring to 360 the number of such Chairs which have been established since their inception in December, 2000.

By the year 2005, in fact, the federal government intends to establish a total of two thousand such Chairs.

Nevertheless, university faculty in New Brunswick – and

indeed throughout Atlantic Canada – are noticeably unimpressed by this development.

Why?

The introduction of research chairs funded by the federal government represents a laudable attempt at discouraging top-performing Canadian faculty members, who might otherwise have done so, from succumbing to the lure of the United States, and this initiative is to be warmly applauded.

In front of every silver lining, however, there is a dark cloud.

The Canada Research Chairs program has the high minded precept of fostering excellence in research in this country, in addition to acting as a deterrent to faculty migration to other countries.

Regrettably, though, this also has caused and will continue to cause significant, and obviously unforeseen, internal problems.

The total number of full-time and part-time university students in Canada as a whole fell by 1% between 1992 and 1999 – the most recent time frame for which accurate figures are available.

During the same period, the number of full-time of university faculty declined by nearly 10%.

The percentage drop in faculty numbers in Ontario, however, at almost 12% was more than twice that in New Brunswick.

Worse still, Ontario has a significantly greater complement of faculty than we do; of the order of twelve times as many.

In a nutshell, disregarding the attractions of the other provinces and of the United States,

there is a huge number of faculty vacancies to be filled in Ontario alone, and it is aggressively seeking qualified candidates to fill them.

Consequently, the introduction of the Canada Research Chairs program has resulted in what has been characterized by university faculty in New Brunswick as the federally-subsidized raiding from their ranks of their most highly productive colleagues by larger institutions elsewhere in Canada; particularly in central Canada, where salaries are higher and research facilities are more readily available owing to the economies of scale those institutions enjoy.

In addition, of course, they also enjoy the relatively abundant corporate sponsorship of research of which there is a dearth in this region.

Added to all this, the average median salary of a New Brunswick faculty member is now approximately 10% lower than the comparable national average salary.

Therefore, it is beyond doubt that replacing, with similarly-qualified individuals, faculty members who accept Canada Research Chair appointments in other provinces is going to be difficult, to say the least.

As a result, this well-intentioned program has been something of a mixed blessing for the universities of Atlantic Canada.

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