

# PENSIONS RULES CHANGED

At the instigation of FAUST and MAFA, in concert with them the Federation recently has pursued a number of changes to pensions legislation. We are, therefore, pleased to report that the amendments to the Regula-

tions necessary to effect some of the promised changes were approved by the Cabinet on January 26 last, and took effect on February 1, 2001. These changes – which at the present time only affect the holders of “money-purchase” or “defined contribution” plans at FAUST and MAFA – are as follows:

3. It will no longer be obligatory to purchase an annuity at the age of 80.

We hope that the foregoing is a strong indication that the Lord government will also honour its promise to amend the Act to reflect the other changes requested by New Brunswick university faculty. These include the enshrinement in legislation of provisions to guarantee pension benefits to same-sex partners, and a requisite 2-year vesting period. (The latter is presently permitted, but is not a legal requirement).

Changes to legislation take longer than regulatory changes. However, we have been informed by the New Brunswick Department of Training and Employment Development - Pensions Branch that the proposed amendments to the Act are now moving through the system.

## Notice

### Board Meeting

10:30 am March 17, 2001  
(Storm Date: March 24)

Main Board Room  
Ground Floor  
Victoria Health Centre  
Brunswick Street,  
Fredericton

All FNBFA Board meetings are open to individual faculty members, and an invitation to attend is extended to anyone wishing to do so

### YOUR OPINIONS ARE WELCOMED

A special invitation is extended to those members of local associations who are interested in commenting upon university life in general. Readers are invited to send their opinions and/or comments, in writing, to:

FNBFA Bulletin  
65 Brunswick, Suite 297,  
Fredericton, NB E3B 1G5

1. Life Income Fund (LIF) holders will now be permitted to withdraw between 17% and 25% of their assets from the fund, depending upon their age at the time of the withdrawal.

2. Individuals who begin their LIF in the middle of a calendar year and who wish to withdraw a lump sum will no longer be obliged to withdraw a prorated amount. They will now be permitted to withdraw the maximum amount allowed for an entire year.

### Inside . . .

FNBFA Brief to HOC Finance Committee.....	2
Education Merits Funding .....	6
Colleague Honoured.....	7
Strike Settled at Memorial.....	8
PNRA: Call for Nominations.....	9
Obituary – Fenton Burke.....	10

# Brief of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations

Presented to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance,  
September 18, 2000

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA) is again pleased to accept the invitation of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance ("the Committee") to participate in its annual pre-budget consultation process for the 2000-2001 fiscal year.

The stated goal of the Committee in this round of consultations is to form a plan for presentation to the Minister of Finance which will:

1. Ensure that Canada remains a major player in the new economy;
2. Provide Canadians with equal opportunity to succeed; and
3. Create an economic and social environment where Canadians can enjoy the best quality of life and standard of living.

The purpose of this brief is to identify some of the obstacles to these objectives being accomplished, and to offer some general recommendations on how they might be overcome.

## 2. OBSTACLES

### The Brain Drain

In its first report to the House under Standing Order 83.1, entitled "Budget 2000: New Era... New Plan" published in December, 1999 the Committee stated:

"In our Report entitled *Productivity With A Purpose* we examined the issue of the brain drain.

At that time there was no clear consensus as to whether it is indeed a serious problem. That is still the case today...

"... Our conclusion last spring was that the brain drain might not be a major problem in aggregate.... [but it] ... does, however, pose a serious problem for certain sectors of the economy."

The Committee then goes on to give the example of Nortel, Canada's largest company, only 7% of whose executives work in Canada and whose engineers' entry-level earnings are CAN \$49,000.00 in Canada compared with CAN \$80,000.00 (US \$ 53,000.00 at a 51% exchange rate) in the United States.

There also are wide disparities between the average (mean) salaries of university faculty in Canada and the U.S. In Canada, the average full professor makes 14% less than someone of the same rank in a U.S. university; an associate professor makes 7.4% less; and an assistant professor makes 12.7% less. In certain disciplines, these disparities are considerably more pronounced than the averages would indicate. This problem is magnified by the comparative abundance of funding for research infrastructure in the United States. In such an environment, the potential for migration south of the border of our best and brightest academics is a constant threat to the quality of teaching and research in this country's universities.

### Research Chairs

The introduction of Research Chairs funded by the federal government represents a laudable attempt towards discouraging top-performing Canadian faculty members who might otherwise have done so from succumbing to the lure of the United States. The government of Canada, as a result, is to be warmly applauded for having taken this initiative.

To embrace the corollary of a popular expression, however, in front of every silver lining there is a dark cloud. The Research Chairs program has the high minded precept of fostering excellence in research in this country. Probably it also has acted as a disincentive to faculty migration to other countries. Regrettably, however, it has caused and will cause significant – no doubt unforeseen – internal problems as well.

The introduction of the Research Chairs program has resulted in what has been characterized by university faculty in New Brunswick as the "subsidized raiding" from their ranks of their most highly productive colleagues by larger institutions elsewhere in Canada; specifically, in central Canada, where salaries are higher and research facilities are more readily available owing to the economies of scale those institutions enjoy. Even in New Brunswick's largest university, this phenomenon can have devastat-

(Continued on page 3)

## Brief of the FNBFA (continued from page 2)

ing effects. The average median salary of a New Brunswick faculty member now being 10% lower than the comparable national average salary (\$69,596 compared with \$77,700), replacing faculty members who accept Research Chair appointments in other provinces with similarly-qualified individuals is difficult, if not impossible.

## Development of Human Capital

In its Budget 2000: New Era – New Plan report the Committee states

“Post-secondary institutions are about more than research – they are primarily teaching establishments. They are the institutions that help to create the human capital that makes Canada productive.

“In last year’s report on productivity, we noted that higher education reduces Canadians [sic] probability of being unemployed and increases their lifetime incomes. That is why human capital formation and access to education are high priorities of the government and why past budget measures have attempted to advance that cause.” [Emphasis added.]

In New Brunswick in 1999 there were 5,000 more individuals with university degrees than there were in 1998; yet, even so, the unemployment rate for this group fell from 5.1% in 1998 to 4.4% in 1999. (The corresponding 1999 figures for Community College and High School graduates were, respectively, 8.2% and 10.5%). In other words, in 1999 university graduates in New Brunswick enjoyed virtually full employment – a 3% transitional unemployment rate at any given time generally

being accepted by economists as “full employment”.

Since the Committee obviously has unequivocally recognized that higher education brings greater employability, the foregoing reinforcement of this proposition may seem to be superfluous. It is not. Earlier herein, emphasis was placed on the Committee’s words “... past budget measures have attempted to advance that cause”; i.e. the cause of the formation of human capital through access to education – especially higher education. With the utmost respect, the FNBFA must observe that past budget measures have fallen far short of the Committee’s perception of them.

In the words of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)

“... if we assume that federal cash transfers are allocated in their pre-CHST proportions... the federal cash contribution to post-secondary education in the current year has fallen by 34% since 1992 – from \$2.9 Billion to \$1.9 Billion. As a share of the economy, this is the lowest level of cash investment in post-secondary education by Ottawa in more than 30 years. [Italics in original.]

This may explain, in part, why the average undergraduate arts tuition fees increased by more than 75% in New Brunswick between 1990-1991 and 1999-2000. Surely this outcome cannot be viewed as advancing the cause of the formation of human capital.

## Reduced Faculty Complement

Another barrier to the attainment of the Committee’s objectives is the dilution of the quality of education resulting from the re-

duction in the overall number of faculty members, while overall enrolments continue to rise. According to StatsCan figures published by the CAUT, between 1990-1991 and 1998-1999 the student-faculty full-time equivalent ratio has increased from approximately 17:1 to approximately 19.5:1. Measured by industrial standards, this could be viewed as a 14.7% increase in faculty productivity. In reality, though, in the post-secondary educational context it amounts to a loss of more than 5 hours of faculty-student contact and/or research opportunity in every 40 hour work week. This is hardly likely to ensure that Canada’s university students and researchers are kept at the cutting edge of competitiveness in the new (for “new” read “global”) economy.

## Social Imperatives

According to the Committee

“If we think of GDP [Gross Domestic Product] per capita as the pie, our standard of living is measured by the size of that pie but not necessarily by its ingredients. Our standard of living, i.e. the size of the pie, is determined by the quantity and quality of the inputs we use in the production process and the efficiency with which we use those inputs.” [Emphasis added.]

The FNBFA begs to differ and is, in fact, greatly disquieted by the Committee’s apparent perception that the “standard of living” of Canadians is dictated solely by economic factors. The foregoing passage is, furthermore, contradictory in any case: if only the size of the pie (to adopt the Committee’s own metaphor), and not its ingredients, deter-

(Continued on page 4)

## Brief of the FNBFA (continued from page 3)

mines our standard of living, what role does "... the quality of the inputs we use in the production process" (i.e. the ingredients) have to play? The size of any pie, real or metaphorical, is determined solely by the quantity of its ingredients, not by their quality. The FNBFA prefers to believe that the standard of living of Canadians is determined both by its economic success and by its cultural accomplishments. If not, we are judging ourselves by the most shallow of bacchanal values.

In New Brunswick, there is no opera. There is no ballet. As well as providing education and performing the most advanced research which is within their means, New Brunswick's universities are, generally speaking, the cultural hub of their local communities and of the province as a whole. Therefore, it is essential that "soft" disciplines such as Music, Fine Arts and Classics - to name only a few - be nurtured and encouraged to flourish.

#### Libraries

It is also essential that the universities' library acquisitions remain current. In 1849, John Ruskin asked

"What do we as a nation care about books? How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public and private, as compared with what we spend on our horses?"

Ruskin was reportedly being quoted by James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, at an annual meeting of the Information Indus-

try Association. According to Mr. Billington, in 1988 - the most recent year in which figures were then available to him - American consumers had spent \$15.1 Billion on horse racing, horse purchases, and veterinary care. In contrast, they had spent only \$6.4 Billion on libraries.

Owing to the discouraging situation of the libraries in New Brunswick's universities (reported to the Committee in last year's brief ) which has, at best, remained unchanged, the FNBFA has every reason to believe that this cavalier attitude towards libraries remains prevalent.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Levelling the Research Playing Field

Countervailing measures must be taken to offset the impact on Canada's outlying regions of the Research Chairs initiative; which, as described above, has resulted to an unacceptable extent in an internal brain drain to central Canada.

The FNBFA recommends that researchers in universities located in provinces such as New Brunswick, which have a negligible pool of potential commercial/industrial sponsors, be exempted from the "matching funds" condition for eligibility for grants from the Canada Foundation for Innovation and from the National Science and Engineering Research Council. It also recommends the establishment of a major new fund to provide start-up money for new faculty to establish themselves, particularly in the industrially de-

prived regions.

This would give researchers in this province and elsewhere the opportunity to substantially increase the quality of their research without having to move to another part of the country. The excellent quality and availability of the communications technology already in place means that the consolidation in one geographical location of research expertise in any particular field is neither desirable nor necessary.

#### Improving Access

The FNBFA respectfully refers the Committee to "Ensuring Access: Assistance for Post-Secondary Students", one of the recommendations of which resulted in the introduction of the Millennium Scholarship program. The opening passage therein is noteworthy:

"As Canada moves into the next century, Canadians need the tools to take advantage of the opportunities presented by a technological society. Perhaps the most important of these tools is embodied in human capital and in knowledge". [Emphasis added.]

The enlightened premises of this report stand in stark contradiction to undergraduate arts tuition fees having increased over the last decade by more than 75% here in New Brunswick, and the national average debt load at graduation of an individual with a bachelor's degree having increased by 129% between 1982

(Continued on page 5)

## Brief of the FNBFA (continued from page 4)

and 1995. These trends unquestionably must be reversed.

Among the many striking recommendations of the report is this one:

"14. The Government of Canada should put in place a system of grants which would support post-secondary students in their first and second year of education at recognized institutions. These grants should be awarded according to a formula that takes into account both the need and the academic merit of eligible candidates."

The spectre of an unmanageable debt load upon graduation probably is the greatest deterrent to participation in post-secondary education of the majority of those qualified individuals who choose, nevertheless, not to attend university. This is thought to be particularly true in the case of those with the lowest income levels. In 1992, this group - one fifth of the population - spent 11.2% of their after-tax income on tuition fees; by 1998 this had risen to 19.1%.

The report "Ensuring Access: Assistance for Post-Secondary Students" which examines alternatives for the amelioration of student debt, contains many sensible recommendations, most of which have not yet been implemented. The FNBFA recommends that this report be re-examined by the Department of Finance, and that those of its recommendations which have not yet been implemented be acted upon without further delay

Preserving Social Assets

It has already been mentioned that the universities are the lynch-pins of the cultural infrastructure of such provinces as New Brunswick. This is especially true in this province, where the dynamism of the discrete cultures of its two dominant linguistic groups finds its greatest protection and support in the university community.

In 1996, the introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) to replace Established Programs Financing (EPF) carried with it a one-third reduction in federal funding to the provinces - from \$18.5 Billion to \$12.5 Billion.

Such reductions invariably mean cutbacks at the local level in funding for university programs that do not have an immediately apparent relationship with the vitality of the economy. The FNBFA recommends, therefore, that the federal government show leadership in promoting the value of cultural programs and the arts in our universities by providing financial incentives for their retention and improvement.

#### Ensuring Equality of Opportunity

The FNBFA has welcomed the recent announcement that a significant restoration of funds will soon be allocated to the CHST. However, it seems clear that the bulk, if not all, of the money to be restored will be used to help to solve the apparent national crisis in health care. Unlike health care, for the delivery of which the Canada Health Act sets out national principles, the financial treatment of Canada's institutions of higher

learning is entirely in the discretion of the provinces. In fact, there is no way of knowing how federal funds are being spent or even if they are being spent.

The FNBFA joins CAUT, therefore, in calling on the federal government and the provinces to

"... develop a similar set of principles as in the Canada Health Act to apply to post-secondary education as a way of ensuring that federal transfers help meet national goals".

Among the most important "national goals" at this time are, without doubt, those declared in the Committee's June 27, 2000 call for submissions. Legislative guidelines for the equitable distribution of CHST funds would undoubtedly help to ensure that they will indeed be met.

#### CONCLUSION

As in the past, the FNBFA feels privileged to have been invited to make a presentation to the Committee. As the years go by, we hope that each round of consultations will become more and more meaningful; and that the Committee will, in its recommendations to the Finance Minister, give the ongoing viability of the universities and the allocation of the funding necessary to nourish them its strongest support.

Respectfully submitted September 18, 2000 by

Dr. Jack Vanderlinde,  
President

Desmond A. Morley,  
Executive Director

# 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, at various dates 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 On-

tario 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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

## Education Merits Funding (Continued from page 6)

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 tax-

payer 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.)

## COLLEAGUE HONOURED



The Federation offers the congratulations of New Brunswick faculty to Dr. Roger Moore (Romance Languages - St. Thomas University) on having been chosen to receive a 3M Teaching Fellowship this year.

Selected from among 52 nominees from 26 Canadian

universities, Dr. Moore is the only recipient of the Fellowship in Atlantic Canada. There have been 150 other winners over the period in which the 3M Teaching Fellowship has been in existence, but only 10 of them have taught in Atlantic Canada.

Prof. Moore is particularly

pleased to have been selected because, he says, "Less than 10 percent of all those winners are in Arts. I'm the first person in Canada to receive this award for Spanish. That's incredible".

Bestowed by the 3M Company and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, the award is granted each year to only 10 professors throughout Canada. Among the criteria which the successful candidate must satisfy is an "exceptionally high degree of leadership and commitment" to teaching.

This is not the first prestigious award which Prof. Moore has earned in his 28 years as a faculty member at St. Thomas. In 1996 he was presented both with the St. Thomas University Special Merit Award and with its first Excellence in Teaching Award.

In 1999 he was selected, by the Association of Atlantic Universities, from among more than 3,000 faculty members to receive the Distinguished Teacher Award.

"This fellowship is really a university award," says Prof. Moore modestly. "We've all improved so much".

## STRIKE SETTLED AT MEMORIAL

[The following article from correspondence to the Federation by Prof. Bill Schrank (Economics - Memorial University), Chief Negotiator for MUNFA, is reprinted with permission from the author. - Ed.]

On Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, via the conciliation officer, the MUNFA Negotiating Committee offered compromise proposals on outstanding matters.

This was done to hasten an end to the strike and facilitate a return to our classrooms, laboratories and libraries. The administration responded on Friday, again through the conciliator, with positive responses on three of the items proffered.

The administration agreed to compensate tenure-track non-PhD lecturers with a special, two-year, \$750 per year, Professional Development Expense Reimbursement (PDER); even in its last proposal, the administration had denied any "occupational adjustment" to this small group. The administration also agreed to PDER reimbursements for professional memberships for all members, and entitlement long denied. On the matter of paid vacation carryover, the administration conceded that, upon retirement, payment for unused vacation shall be made if notice of retirement is given two terms in advance, and teaching or other responsibilities prevent the taking of vacation before retirement.

It should be remembered that these improvements in our Collective Agreement are additional to the others that have come about over the course of negotiations, many of them in the last few

weeks. In some instances, we have resisted clawbacks to our current Collective Agreement. In many others we have made substantial gains, especially in the important areas of collegial procedures. The new Collective Agreement will provide:

a far more equitable distribution of salary than that initially proposed by the administration;

substantial salary increases and an earlier implementation of the co-called "occupational adjustments" to salary;

implementation of salary increases for colleagues who have retired or resigned since September 1, 1999;

language that makes clear that total salary (basis annual salary plus market differential) cannot be reduced;

procedures to initiate pension reform;

an increase in PDER from \$200 to \$400 per year;

language on Research Ethics Boards;

a limit on parking fee increases (the administration had demanded no limit);

for colleagues refused LTD benefits by the insurer, the option of taking reduced duties and responsibilities;

a duration clause which prevents the administration from abrogating the Collective Agreement

as it attempted to do in 1995.

The administration also agreed, contrary to their initial proposals, that there shall be:

course remissions for scholarly activity;

procedures for determination of course equivalencies for non-standard courses;

accumulation of banked time;

no contractual cap on the university's employee benefits premiums;

no roll-back of distance education course stipends;

no limitation on the use of the medical defence in discipline cases.

On the other outstanding issues, the administration refused to negotiate. They would not consider our modified proposal on reducing teaching norms from 6 courses to 5 in particular units, even though the proposal had involved collegial committees with purely advisory roles. They rejected severance and refused further movement on front-end loading of salaries.

Earlier we succeeded in negotiating an increase in the per-course stipend from \$3,519 to \$3,800. We had hoped to increase it still further, but the administration refused to move on this point.

We decided, though, that the

(Continued on page 9)

## STRIKE SETTLED AT MEMORIAL

(Continued from page 8)

time had come to balance the gains made against the possibility of a protracted strike which might or might not have yielded further improvements. The Negotiating Committee therefore decided, in the interests of getting back to work and making sure that student concerns are met, to finalize the Collective Agreement. The final set of meetings between the two negotiating committees began at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday November 11<sup>th</sup> and concluded at 10:00 on Sunday morning.

Throughout the final two weeks, the Negotiating Commit-

tee's hand was enormously strengthened by the many people who organized the strike, walked the picket lines day after rainy day, and performed all the other jobs around MUNFA Strike Headquarters that made the strike a success. We also appreciate the overwhelming support we received from the community, various student organizations and their individual members, retired colleagues who came out in support, other faculty associations across the country, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and the CAUT Defence Fund.

Our objective throughout was to move towards a fair and equitable settlement, and to resist the administration's attempt to weaken practically every article of the Collective Agreement, often in significant ways. Rather than submit to the administration's "take it or leave it" approach, we pressed for and negotiated better contract language, better working conditions, and better salaries for all.

Bill Schrank

[On behalf of the Negotiating Committee.]

## PRIX NICOLE RAYMOND AWARD: CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Nominations are sought for potential recipient(s) of the 2001 Prix Nicole Raymond Award, sponsored by the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations. The Award is customarily presented at the Annual Plenary Session and General Meeting of the Federation.

### Nature of the Award

The Award is given to a person, group of persons or an organization in recognition of a distinguished contribution to the advancement of post-secondary education. It is awarded by the Federation in memory of the contributions to academic life through her teaching, research activities and involvement of the late Professor Nicole Raymond of l'Université de Moncton.

### Selection Procedures

Nominations for the Prix Nicole Raymond Award

should be forwarded to the FNBFA office prior to March 1, 2001. A Committee of three members of the Board of Directors will study the nominations and will present its recommendation to the Board. The Award will be presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Federation in the Spring.

Only one Prix Nicole Raymond Award is given any academic year, but is not necessarily presented annually.

For further information, contact the Federation of fice.

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## PROFESSOR MADE ST. THOMAS HIS PRIORITY

By: Peter J. Cullen

[The Federation offers sincere condolences to the family and friends of Prof. Fenton Burke (STU) who passed away earlier this year. The complete article from which the following has been abstracted originally appeared in the January edition of "Transitions", the newsletter of St. Thomas University. It is reprinted here in edited form with the permission of the author.]

Although St. Thomas University professor Fenton Burke passed away on January 10, his peers say his tie to St. Thomas will never be broken. As a lover of literature and a meticulous critic, Fenton earned the reputation of a tastemaker to whom one could turn for practically anything...

During his almost-forty years of service to St. Thomas, Fenton acted as president of the faculty association, served on the board of governors and the senate, chaired the Administration and Academic Standing Committee, worked as a faculty advisor for athletics, and was associate professor and chair of the English department at the time of his passing...

According to Stewart Donovan, a fellow English professor at St. Thomas, Fenton was "... the last great reader at this university... We all have books, we all read, but he had a particular ferocity. He read in areas most people don't know about..."

Fenton was a versatile individual who possessed an affinity for understanding his students and peers... Despite his predilection for prose and poetry, Fenton realized that not everyone possessed an innate love of literature. Therefore, he often used contemporary methods to reach his audiences of students...

"He never neglected books or poetry but he used film to communicate with the students. Although he wouldn't teach [a film course], he knew its relevance. ...[said Prof. Donovan] He shifted into film without any contempt for that medium. He became an expert on world cinema: Japanese, Italian, Russian, German... he knew it all."

Another colleague, Russell Hunt, observed that when Fenton discovered something new and incredible, he shared his enthusiasm with his friends and fellow professors. "He wasn't a scholar in the traditional sense but he knew more than anyone I ever knew..."

Having spent almost 40 years with St. Thomas University, Fenton knew practically everyone, be they faculty, student or staff. "He was most genuinely loved. He knew everybody and considered them all equal," [said Prof. Donovan]. "He was a bluff and gruff character but he was really an extremely sophisticated individual who understood the great literatures of the world... It's that refined mind that I will miss most of all."

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