

**FNBFA President's Blog # 3 – September 10, 2018**  
**Provincial Election Campaign 2018**

**New Brunswick Universities for a Better Future**

From the time that I was old enough to form permanent memories, my parents told me that I would be going to university. They never asked my opinion about the matter, nor did they offer me an alternative. They just made regular reference to the day that I would be in university which, they explained, would be exactly 10 weeks after the day I graduated from high school. They talked about it in the same matter-of-fact tone that they used to tell me that I should put on a hat before going outside in January.

Neither of my parents had a university degree and yet, as many of their generation, they were able to make a living wage despite this. However, they had a sense that the world was changing and that opportunities for their children would be more limited without a university degree. Although they had no statistics to back up their perception, they were, in fact, correct.

It turns out that the statistics do support their perception. Studies of employment trends and income data for university graduates continue to show that post-secondary education is linked to better lifelong employment rates and opportunities, higher salaries, greater income increases over time, and a greater likelihood of receiving benefits such as health insurance and pension plans. These advantages exist regardless of the field of study; data from Statistics Canada, for example, show that full-time workers with degrees in geography earn, on average, above \$72,000 annually, which is similar to earnings of graduates with degrees in biological and biomedical sciences. Data specifically for graduates from New Brunswick universities compiled by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission in 2017 shows that 88% of university graduates are employed two years after graduation; 75% reported that their job is at least somewhat related to their degree; and their median income is \$40,000. In addition to these career and economic benefits, post-secondary education is also linked to greater job satisfaction, greater levels of civic engagement and healthier lifestyles.

There is a great deal of evidence confirming that post-secondary education continues to be the most effective tool that we have for the social and economic mobility of our youth. And yet, unfortunately, the university graduation rate of New Brunswickers is the lowest in Canada, lagging behind that of all other provinces by a full 50%, a discrepancy that has remained largely unchanged for decades. This is of great concern to New Brunswick's professors and librarians who have long lobbied for the increased accessibility of post-secondary education. We know that the two main determinants of a student completing a university degree are: 1) having a parent with a university degree, and 2) having the financial means to pay for a university education. Clearly, making our universities more affordable is the most effective realm of intervention, and the tuition-relief programs recently implemented by the Government of New Brunswick represent a big step in this direction.

We encourage the Government to expand and improve these programs, and we call upon the Government and our public universities to address other barriers that exist to post-secondary education, particularly those affecting Aboriginal peoples, in order to eliminate the significant employment and educational gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Calls to Action contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report focus heavily on our education system, and especially on our universities, as institutions that must take a leading role in addressing the deeply rooted social and economic inequities that are the result of Canada's treatment of Aboriginal peoples.

Given the overall effectiveness of post-secondary education in social and economic mobility, it is imperative that our public universities become truly accessible. Universities must be open to and inclusive of everyone, and they must be provided with the necessary resources to transform and eliminate systemic barriers at all levels. This is the highest calling for post-secondary institutions in a truly democratic and egalitarian society.