

THE BI-CAMPUS REPORT: *First Thoughts from AUNBT*

The Condon/O'Sullivan **REPORT OF THE UNB COMMISSION ON INTER-CAMPUS RELATIONS, FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE**, released to the administration in October and to the rest of us in December, is a well-researched assessment of inter-campus relations in their institutional aspect. Prepared by respected figures of long association with UNB and written up in polished prose, it is the first such study in a generation. On the central question of UNB's future as a two-campus institution the Report is ultimately equivocal. Mandated to assume that the present "one university with two campuses" will continue, it gives countenance nonetheless to those who see the Saint John campus as on a long-settled course towards independence.

As one of UNB's few bi-campus institutions, AUNBT's offers the following brief observations to encourage academic staff to give the serious issues raised in Condon/O'Sullivan the attention they deserve. Please read the Report, consider its implications and participate in the general meetings scheduled for next **Monday** (Fredericton - Tilley 102 @ 1pm) and **Tuesday** (Saint John - Ganong lecture theatre @ 1pm). The full document is at <http://www.unb.ca/president/commission.html>

THE FUNDING QUESTION For decades, perceived inequity in institutional funding has been a lively grievance for the Saint John campus. AUNBT was among those groups who hoped that in this bi-campus report the funding issue would receive authoritative definition and practical resolution. In person and in writing we told Condon/O'Sullivan that "AUNBT considers it your first duty to recommend a funding formula that will leave the Saint John campus less vulnerable to fluctuations in domestic enrollment".

The Report does examine the funding question in impressive detail and from many angles. It shows specific ways in which the provincial funding formula has disadvantaged UNB, and disadvantaged UNBSJ especially. What the Report does not do is come up with an internal UNB response to this problem, except in the immediate term. Its verdict is that the problem is the creation of the provincial government's funding formula and is of such magnitude that internal resolution is simply beyond UNB's ability. Its principal message is that more generous provincial

funding allocated separately is the only solution to UNBSJ's (and UNB's) funding woes.

The Report views the current UNB funding approach – apportioning the provincial grant between the two campuses in just the way that it would be apportioned if the two were separate institutions – as a plausible one. It says that, given UNB's poor level of funding from the province and the undesirability of pitting priorities of one campus against those of the other campus before the board of governors, this approach also makes best sense institutionally. The overarching problem, it argues, is not really UNB's budgetary allocation between campuses but a combination of:

- the low level of provincial support for NB universities generally (the lowest in Canada),
- the now-antiquated funding formula itself, and
- the formula's failure to take account of the added expenses incurred by multi-campus institutions.

Each of these is a factor that only the provincial government can address.

According to the Report, UNB has sought repeatedly to persuade the province to fund the two campuses separately. Its central recommendation is that UNB should now “insist” on campus-specific provincial funding (p41). What the Report does not go on to explain is how separate provincial grants to the two UNB campuses would result in better funding for UNBSJ than the current situation, in which UNB mimics the provincial formula in its campus budget apportionments. The closest the Report comes to this vital question is the remark that, under separate funding, “the needs of each campus c[ould] be clearly presented to government” (p2).

THE GOVERNANCE QUESTION When a bi-campus study group was still in embryo, the administration assured AUNBT that it would not be addressing governance, an issue rendered toxic by the **Miner-L'Écuyer Report's** recent attack on role of university senates. That the Condon/O'Sullivan mandate did ultimately include governance may be a nod to the small but evidently powerful section of the Saint John business community that, in the discredited polytechnic idea, had glimpsed the prospect of a local institution over which they could exert great influence.

Within such a context the Report's recommendation that, for the Saint John campus (alone), a community liaison council be created is both modest and yet potentially troubling. It is modest in the sense that the current administration has been adamant

that UNB is too mature an institution for members of the board of governors to be appointed to “represent” particular geographic communities. The idea of a Saint John-specific advisory committee looks like a way to consult important constituencies without enlarging an already over-large board of governors and rendering it more parochial. Such a committee is troubling for its obvious potential to become a vehicle for authorized lobbying by those who see UNBSJ’s mission as that of a sort of superior vocational school.

THE INDEPENDENCE QUESTION

The most curious feature of Condon/O’Sullivan is its final recommendation, for a study of how to break UNB into two free-standing, single-campus institutions. It is curious both because entering into such a question contradicts the inquiry’s express mandate to assume a single University of New Brunswick and because none of the 100+ submissions to the commissioners favoured separation. Although AUNBT itself has not been immune from bi-campus strains and stumbles, we can see no institutional merit in such a domestic version of the *Clarity Act*.

But even had Condon/O’Sullivan made no such recommendation, one cannot survey UNBSJ’s rapid evolution (full degrees, separate budget, full vice-president, separate senate, funding within UNB as a separate institution) without seeing that obtaining a segregated provincial grant would be a sort of penultimate pre-condition to independence. All that would be missing would be articulation of a distinct UNBSJ “mission”. And this Report urges such an exercise: “Above all, the time has come to decide what the nature of UNBSJ is to be once and for all” (p65). To some, this plea will seem to devalue what the Report itself acknowledges – that the UNBSJ Senate has already articulated a mission, albeit one identical to that adopted in Fredericton. To others, it may reflect a natural concern that UNBSJ’s distinctive character gets submerged in unsubtle institutional marketing.

The Report goes so far as to suggest what a distinctive UNBSJ mission would look like, and here we enter troubled waters indeed. Anyone reading Condon/O’Sullivan will perceive that much of it was written in the shadow of the late-June release of the province’s ominous **Action Plan** for higher education. This timing helps explain why the Report supposes what **Miner-L’Écuyer** said and the **Action Plan** implied: that UNBSJ’s mission should include focus on applied programs designed especially to meet local needs. Indeed, its recommended UNBSJ mission statement (p65) bears quite a resemblance to Shawn Graham’s vision for the Saint John campus as expressed in last year’s State of the Province speech (p12).

In the well-remembered events of 2007, not just the Saint John campus but the whole Saint John community supported UNBSJ's continuation as part of the University of New Brunswick. People feared that a separate institution would be hijacked by a particular local agenda. The Condon/O'Sullivan Report serves as a caution to the whole UNB academic community to bring clarity to institutional values or once again risk falling prey to partial agendas and narrow interests.