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Armstrong disappointed with 1.7% funding increase proposal

MPHEC funding report released

by Gordon Loane

UNB President Robin Armstrong is "disappointed" and says the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission "lost its nerve" when it recommended a 1.7 percent increase in next year's government operating grant for New Brunswick universities.

In a report released this week, the Commission also recommended that universities increase tuition by a maximum five percent next year.

Armstrong says the Commission's own analysis indicates a need for a 3.5 percent increase in operating revenue for universities next year.

"Yet if you add everything up and follow the Commission's recommendations UNB will only get a 2.5 percent overall increase. The Commission is obviously not leaving the hard decisions to government," he says.

Instead, Armstrong believes it appears to be looking over its shoulders at what the government may do, instead of staying at arms length: "Overall, it's a change in strategy and a change in their traditional report."

"Furthermore, the Commission used to recommend similar increases in government operating grants and tuition fees." This is no longer the case Armstrong says, "it seems to indicate a change in policy."

Armstrong says he's "not holding his breath" when asked whether the government is likely to grant even a 1.7 percent increase in funds. At the same time, Armstrong says students should expect a tuition fee increase next year greater than five percent.

The Université de Moncton has just announced a seven per cent increase in tuition fees next year and it appears the trend is for a greater increase than seven per cent in Nova Scotia. "I'd say at this point a tuition fee increase in excess of five per cent is likely," says the President.

Armstrong admits the university will face a major funding problem if government grants increase by only 1.7 per cent, and feels that anything less than this would be even more damaging.

"God help us if we have to cut departmental budgets by 15 per cent. Realistically, I don't expect the funding problem to be quite that serious." On a slightly more positive note, Armstrong hopes to replace more professors who retire this year. He says about 20 departures from faculty are predicted and that the university should be able to replace a few more than in previous years.

Armstrong says he is pleased

to see that the MPHEC report contains a realistic assessment of the state of universities in the Maritimes. He says the need for substantial improvements to the student loan program is noted and that's a positive sign. "For some students accessibility to higher education is a problem."

The accessibility issue is a sore point with UNB Student Union President Eric Burchill. Burchill says the MPHEC report acknowledges the student loan program has not changed since 1984, yet tuition in the Maritimes has increased by nearly 1000 dollars since then.

"In addition the official student unemployment rate in New Brunswick last summer was 19.5 per cent, up nearly three per cent over 1991. We need changes in the student loan program as a start," he says.

Burchill is not impressed with the funding increase of 1.7 per cent recommended in the MPHEC report. "Tuition went up 12 per cent at UNB this year and we could use a break." While acknowledging, that times

are tough, he says the McKenna government should not freeze university grants if "education is a priority."

Burchill says he does not expect the student faculty ratio to substantially change in the coming year. The number of students per faculty member has continued to increase each year and at UNB now stands at 15.28 versus 13.4 just six years ago. He continues: "Government operating grants have restricted UNB's ability to hire faculty members as everyone knows."

Meantime, Gail Storr, President of the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers, is echoing Robin Armstrong's disappointment with the MPHEC Report.

Storr says the legitimacy of the MPHEC as an independent body is undermined when the Commission states "there is no point in making general recommendations to government when the response is already known." It's the job of the Commission to provide arms length advice to the government

regarding existing needs for higher education," she says.

"The level of recommended funding puts an unfair burden on students, support staff and faculty," she says. "Last year UNB lost 18 faculty positions. That translated into higher work loads and larger classes."

In addition, Storr says, professors already suffer a financial penalty for choosing to teach and do research in the Maritimes.

The MPHEC report says average faculty salaries in the Maritimes fell from 87 per cent to 83 per cent of that in the rest of the country last year. Storr says professors face other problems like inadequate library holdings, limited access to outdated equipment and increased student-faculty ratios. "The suggested 1.7 per increase does nothing to maintain existing levels of service," she says.

"I would hope that the government of this province in reviewing this report will stand behind their stated commitment

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Weekend Weather

Friday will be beautifully warm, but with cloudy periods. Highs near 3. On Saturday, there is a chance of rain, with mild temperatures. On Sunday, it will start getting cold again.

Brunsbites

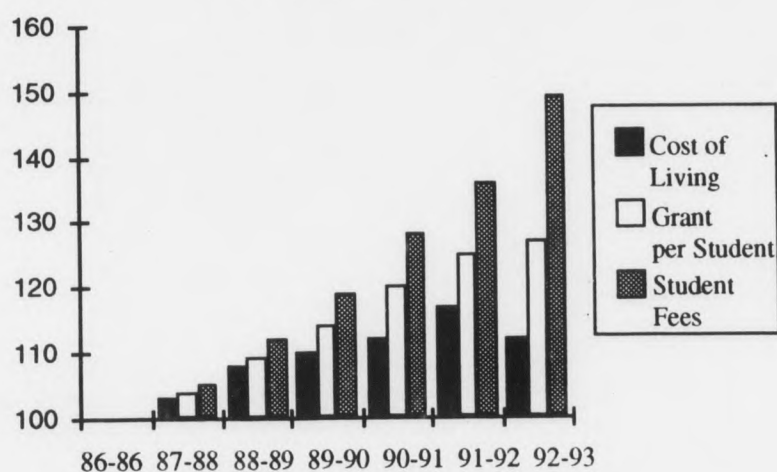
Great Headlines from this week's Sun:

- Baby born pregnant with triplets
- Alcoholics kick habit by drinking tiger poo
- Drug ring exposed when herd of cows gets high eating grass
- Baby glows in the dark for 3 months after being hit by lightning
- Tragic dog baby born
- Space aliens invade shuttle for 3 hours
- Dream about car accident leaves sleeping man with broken leg

-taken from the Sun, vol.11#3
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Maritime Provinces

Grant and Fee Changes
1986-87 to 1992-93



1986-87 = 100

This table shows some of the grant and fee changes outlined in the MPHEC report.

New chancellor sought

by Murray Carew

The field has been narrowed to two candidates in the search for a new Chancellor at U.N.B.

President Robin Armstrong says a committee of the Board of Governors has prepared a list of candidates. "The Chair of U.N.B.'s Board of Governors and I have discussed the matter and we have met with Premier Frank McKenna but no decision has been made," Armstrong confirms.

Armstrong is not releasing the names of the two candidates being considered but an announcement is expected some time before May graduation ceremonies.

Asked if the new Chancellor should be a UNB Alumnus, Armstrong says that would be desirable, but not essential. A New Brunswick resident who is not a UNB Alumnus, or a non New Brunswick resident who is an alumnus could still be considered.

UNB has been searching for a new Chancellor since Lady Violet Aitken announced she would not re-offer for another term. The Chancellor's office is largely ceremonial at UNB.

The Chancellor, normally appointed for five years, presides over graduation ceremonies and other university functions. The appointment is made by the New Brunswick cabinet following consultations with the university Board of Governors.