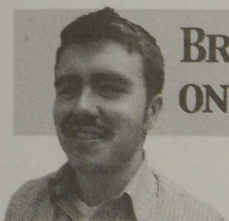


brunswickanopinion

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Addressing a crumbling UNB



BRING IT ON HOME

Josh O'Kane

When I was a proctor in Mackenzie House, a ceiling tile almost exploded in the lounge on a rainy day, narrowly avoiding damaging the house's pool table. Somehow, rain had entered the building's structure and caused the tile to swell up with water.

The tile was in the basement lounge, a floor down from the roof of the building. How water managed to infiltrate the structure and pool in a tile in the middle of the room one floor from the roof is beyond me, but it illustrates a major point – UNB's buildings and infrastructure need updating, and badly.

Without dedicated funding, two recently proposed solutions to the infrastructure problem have been to put off the repairs or to charge students for them.

In the case of maintaining the SUB, those were the two options that students were almost asked to choose between last fall.

Luckily, the past few months have treated Canadian universities – including UNB – well in terms of infrastructure funding. Sixty million dollars of provincial funding was allocated for university infrastructure maintenance last fall, and \$1.4 billion in federal funding was allocated in January as well.

UNB is looking to get a combined \$50 million of that, said Dan Murray, UNB VP Finance and Corporate Services, in a February interview with the Brunswickan.

Fifty million dollars isn't bad, until you consider that UNB has an estimated \$135 million in deferred maintenance. So even though some infrastructure projects could begin this upcoming summer, there will still be maintenance indefinitely deferred until the last



Andrew Meade / The Brunswickan

A \$25 "SUB Fee" proposed last semester is one example of options UNB can take to afford working on its deferred maintenance list, unless government funding can come sooner.

possible moment.

Worse than that, it's unknown when all of the money will reach UNB, meaning planned projects will have to wait until the funding actually reaches the school's bank account.

While Murray has said that provincial funding is moving smoothly, UNB has not received any official criteria regarding federal funding. While it is still in the early days of the funding's allocation, vague details like this could also be a hindrance to UNB's many potential infrastructure maintenance projects.

In a February interview with the Brunswickan, federal NDP leader Jack Layton also noted that details are far too unclear regarding the infrastructure funding.

"Are they going to find a way to make the money move quickly, or are they going to put a lot of conditions in front of it?" he asked.

There is some light shed on the details, though, according to Murray: "We have had discussion with provincial officials on our priorities as they have been working with federal officials on all infrastructure funding that may flow to N.B. more broadly," he said in an email to the Brunswickan last week.

Are those enough details, though? By the time UNB gets its hoped \$50 million in funding, how much will the current figure of \$135 million for necessary repairs have grown?

In a province that's got an action plan for post-secondary education, one can only hope they work more quickly to make action happen – otherwise, UNB and other universities will continue to crumble.

Some projects are already in the planning process, though Murray says that the university can't disclose what they might be until they receive a go-

ahead from the province. With luck, that go-ahead will come soon – so that by the time they're done, another \$50 million of repairs won't be needed.

Tuition has skyrocketed since the early 1990s as government funding schemes have gone largely ignored, leaving the students to make up for the difference. The \$2 billion in infrastructure funding from the federal government is a sign that universities are returning to the budget spotlight. It could be a return to more healthy government funding for the future – or it could be too little, too late.

Unfortunately, the ceiling in parliament probably won't swell up and explode anytime soon, so the government's attention might not last very long.

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the brunswickan

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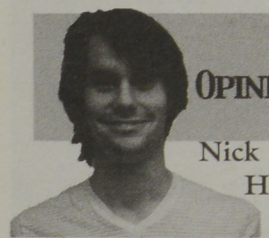
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Just one in a million



THE OPINIONATOR

Nick Howard

Once upon a time a bachelor's degree was the end of education; anything more than that was just excessive. How this has changed!

A vast number of fast food employees can now legitimately request that the letters "BA" be added to their name tags, and you may have to call your cab driver Doctor. Is education inflation a bad thing?

Maybe, but it's certainly different. Yet, the only real changes in the education system have been vast increases in enrolment and massive tuition hikes. This means classes with innumerable

bankrupt students and degrees that are supposed to teach them "how to think".

Two things are very wrong with the commonly-held idea that bachelor degrees are supposed to teach students how to think. First, the idea assumes that after 12 years of formal education, students' brains are as full as their bank accounts. Second, it assumes that there is a specific model of thinking that is appropriate for the millions of students attending university.

I know I am not the only one concerned that these are terrible assumptions on which to base the education of a populous. I am also not the only one writing about it. Heather Mallick wrote an opinion piece for the CBC recently decrying the awful state of financial and educational "student abuse" in universities. Her solution is to thin out the ranks. She tells us to make tuition free, so universities would no longer be driven by profits to cram in as many paying customers (i.e. students) as they can.

Universities would choose only those

students with the greatest chance of success. Mallick thinks this would restore the lustre of the university degree while ensuring that students are not burdened with debt. I agree, sort of.

There needs to be a rethinking of what defines a university degree. Over a period of time, and in what looks strikingly like a clever marketing ploy, a university degree became a necessity for obtaining a job. During the same time a university degree was locked in as something done over four years. It all seems so arbitrary, though I'm sure government accountants and universities saw dollar signs at the time.

University degrees should be something different from crafts and trades. Mallick provides the example of journalism. Journalism is not a university degree, it is a craft – one which requires no less skill than engineering, but which requires very different knowledge and different methods to learn said knowledge. Universities are places of academic learning, where books, lectures and debates rule. Crafts can be efficiently learned through practice

and apprenticeship, much like trades. Where Mallick might say that the two are mutually exclusive is where I take my leave.

Yes, tuition fees should be abolished. No, four year degrees should not be mandatory. But I do believe that a young journalist-in-waiting might benefit from a year of a liberal arts degree before going to study his or her craft. Why should that year not be recognized, simply because it didn't result in a full Bachelor's degree which would be of limited use to a journalist?

The combination of degrees, crafts and trades is essential to the renaissance of holistic education. This would, of course, require an education system that recognizes that one method of learning and one method of thinking is simply not appropriate for millions of students. We come to you at the age of 18 (give or take) with fully formed brains and partially formed egos. After 12 years of school we have a rough idea of how we learn best. Let us choose.

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