

Students to dig deeper in '95-'96

Tuition hike predicted

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Brunsbits

Top ^{eight} ten summer jobs to apply for: greeter at Wal-mart, spruce budworm counter, fry-guy at McD, blackjack dealer in Vegas, flapjack flipper at Boldon's, flakjacket model for Soldier of Fortune magazine, and... there's always music director for a radio station, but be very, very careful.

By Gordon Loane
Brunswick News

UNB and Saint Thomas officials are predicting a tuition fee increase next fall following the release of the 1995-96 provincial budget this week.

Provincial Finance Minister Alan Maher has virtually frozen the government's operating grant to New Brunswick universities next fiscal year.

Since the provincial government grant represents the bulk of university revenues and operating expenses are forecast to rise, it translates into a tuition fee hike.

Just how large the increase will be is still up in the air until further information is provided by the provincial government.

UNB Vice-President Finance and Administration James O'Sullivan says it's a guessing game at the moment until he receives complete information from the provincial government.

"While it's still too early to predict just what will be decided about tuition fees, it is reasonable to expect there will be some sort of increase," said O'Sullivan, who notes that tuition fees are rising this year by nine or ten per cent in most areas of the country.

"It looks like tuition will increase between 3.5 and 7 percent," said Saint Thomas University President Daniel O'Brien.

Tuition at Saint Thomas currently stands at \$2,047 yearly.

"Of course, the provincial operating grant is not where we would like it to be, but I appreciate the provincial government's financial position," O'Brien said.

"It certainly could have been worse," he added.

Universities in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have recently suffered provincial government operating grant cuts, O'Brien noted.

O'Sullivan pointed out that four collective agreements expire June 30, including those representing professors and librarians, maintenance and physical plant works, secretaries and clerks on the Fredericton and Saint John campuses.

UNB Student Union President Paul Estabrooks is happy that universities have been spared from government operating grant cuts this year.

However, Estabrooks is concerned about tuition fee increases, noting that the recently released Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission Report suggests a seven per cent tuition hike is a definite possibility.

"The provincial government's virtual freeze on operating grants shifts the burden of responsibility onto the shoulders of universities to keep tuition fees down," said Estabrooks.

It will be really interesting to see how university officials justify a potential increase," he said.

"Obviously, collective agreements have expired and there are uncertain cost implications as a result," Estabrooks

noted.

On the other side of the coin, Estabrooks notes that UNB has offered an early retirement package to professors that should save money.

"Another positive is the fact that UNB ran an operating surplus last year of just over \$1.1 million dollars," he said.

Estabrooks, along with New Brunswick Student Alliance Chair Kelly Lamrock, is a little puzzled and is seeking more details about a projected 32 per cent increase in the provincial student aid budget over last year.

"Whether the banks are getting an increased risk premium or there's an increase in bursary amounts or government expects more students will need assistance next fall, I don't know at the moment," Estabrooks said.

"Maybe there is something being planned that we are not yet aware of," he speculated.

Professor Jack Van Der Linde, President of the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers, which represents

faculty members and librarians on campus, hopes a projected increase in student loans will not be used as an excuse to charge higher tuition fees.

"I am certainly not happy to hear of any tuition fee increase," he said.

Van Der Linde is also cautioning against blaming faculty members who are negotiating a new collective agreement at UNB.

"I think you will find that the number of faculty members has decreased

over the last couple of years and our wage increases have been modest," he said.

An early retirement package announced last spring has contributed to the decrease and has allowed the university to renew the faculty, he noted.

Van Der Linde expects negotiations on a new collective agreement to begin soon and says the faculty association intends to be realistic in its demands.

"We do not envisage a large increase in wages," he said.

Van Der Linde is also concerned about the amount of money spent on various fixed assets around the university.

He cited the Aitken University Centre, which is believed to be running an annual operating deficit, as prime among his concerns.

Overall, Van Der Linde would have preferred to see an increase in the

provincial operating grant for NB universities.

"But we have to be realistic in the current fiscal climate and the New Brunswick government has provided more support for universities in recent years than its counterparts in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island," he noted.

Meanwhile, William Milne of the UNB Economics Department, says that it was critical the New Brunswick government get its fiscal house in order.

But he questions Finance Minister Alan Maher's budget surplus prediction of \$67.9 million.

"Maher has estimated \$30 million in revenues for highways that he expects will come from the federal government," he emphasized.

"But that \$30 million may not materialize."

"The Finance Minister has included a 14 per cent increase in personal taxes that is really doubtful," Milne said.

Milne sounds an ominous warning for the future of post-secondary education should the federal government slash transfer payments beginning in 1996-97.

The move could devastate universities, resulting in lower enrolments, a potential doubling of tuition and increased class sizes.

"It all amounts to a quality of education issue," Milne said.

"The federal cuts will lead to major changes at universities and so far the provincial government has done nothing to prepare us for what may be ahead," he concluded.

"While it's still too early to predict just what will be decided about tuition fees, it is reasonable to expect there will be some sort of increase." - James O'Sullivan, UNB

"It looks like tuition will increase between 3.5 and 7 per cent." - Daniel O'Brien, STU



Last Saturday, 60 students jumped willingly into the St. John River. "Over half the house jumped, about 55 people, as well as the president from Tibbits, and the presidents from Jones, Dunn, and LBR," said Tony Kotsos, the president of Bridges. This was the seventh annual polar dip, which ended with a few beer and a relaxing time in the whirlpool at the Beaverbrook for all the courageous dippers.

Photo by Mark Robichaud