



The New Brunswick | L'ALLIANCE ÉTUDIANTE
STUDENT ALLIANCE | **du Nouveau-Brunswick**

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President's Semi-Annual Report
December 13, 2009

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1) Internal

a) Francophone Liaison

After the Executive was elected at the AGM on April 5, we decided that due to all executive positions being filled by Anglophones that a Francophone Liaison position should be proposed to the Board. The proposal for the position was written to provide representation for francophone schools at the Executive and also deal with francophone media outlets when required.

This position was approved unanimously by the Board. Pierre-Henri Marquis from Edmundston was elected to the position during a Board Meeting via conference call on May 17. I truly appreciated P-H's input at the Executive level. He provided insight when translation of documents was or was not needed. During the November Board Call, Pierre-Henri indicated he would resign from the position as he felt it was no longer required. Whether or not the position is still necessary will be discussed at the December Board meeting. If the Board is comfortable with the ED taking interviews from francophone media outlets then the position could be dissolved. I had hoped the position would review bilingualism in the organization but this could become obsolete with the upcoming governance discussion at the next meeting.

Since CCNB has indicated they would like to become more involved it may be useful to transform the position to a college representative so we could fine tune our organization to be truly accommodating and representative of students attending college campuses.

b) ED Hiring Process

Before the AGM in April, the ED at the time, Heather Elliot, indicated she would not be seeking to renew her contract. At the first meeting of the Executive we discussed what kind of a hiring process should be put in place. Based on this discussion, I formalized a report for the Board to review. Minus changes to deadlines the report was adopted unanimously at the May 17 Board call.

It was made clear by the Board at that time that the position should require a fully bilingual candidate. We received 17 CVs in response to our job advertisements and we scheduled interviews for five. We planned to ask three to present to the Board, but only one qualified candidate accepted the invitation. From this, the Board approved to enter into negotiations with Melissa Cormier. I modified the ED contract based on discussion from the Board. The new draft was then reviewed by the Stewart McKelvey office in Fredericton. The salary was determined by a meeting of the Finance Committee. Melissa and I met to discuss the contract and she raised no objections. The contract was approved by the Board via conference call on July 7. The contract was signed and sealed soon after.

c) Board Transition

Considering the turnover of Board members at the NBSA, transition weekends are critically important. Due to scheduling with the hiring process, transition this year was not held until June 20 and 21. This worked well because most of the Executive had experience with the NBSA and little executive transition required. However thought should be put into having it so

both outgoing and incoming board members could attend and discuss best practices and challenges. We had Jeffrey Carleton, Director of Communications for St. Thomas University provide media training. Mike Barnett, Director of the New Brunswick Student Loan Program, gave a presentation on student loans in New Brunswick. We also had Shelly Clayton, President of the Canadian Alliance of Student Financial Aid Administrators, come speak about her organization and challenges in student financial aid

. The Executive prepared and presented on the history of the NBSA, the structure and constitution of the NBSA, and explained past initiatives of the NBSA. There was a session designed for priorities and planning but turned into a general discussion. A CD-ROM with all governing documents and policies of the NBSA was distributed to each Board member. I think the transition weekend was very successful and, if possible, another social/strategic planning event should be scheduled for the Board in the new year.

d) Executive Committee

I've been on the Board for two years as a VP for STU and going on my second year as president and this year has been the most organized and active executive that I have seen with my experience with the NBSA. The Executive has met weekly since elected. Meetings usually average a length of an hour and half and issues and priorities for the week are laid out. The norm for the organization in the past has been that the Executive meets bi-weekly, or as needed. This is the first year that I know of that we have met with all major political parties, attended all party conventions held. We were also able to have several important policy meetings regarding the TCB and pre-budget process.

e) Website

Although the development of the website has taken much longer than expected, UNBSU has been experiencing the same problems with their student housing website which is contracted with the same company. So the issue can be contributed to a back log of projects with Red Cow Technologies. Melissa Wah and I met with Andrew Carr from Red Cow Technologies on July 28. Based on discussion from the Board and the External Committee, we designed a new template for programming with Red Cow. Final approval on the second draft of the design was provided from the External Committee at the committee meeting on October 8. Melissa Cormier has been reviewing French translations of the necessary pages since we approved to go ahead with programming. I contacted Andrew Carr on December 9 about an update and he said programming should be completed by December 14, although content is still needed once it is programmed. The website has had an "under construction" banner since August 1st when Red Cow Technologies took over as our web provider. It was impossible to keep our past website up until the new one was completed because it was hosted by another webmaster with different requirements and that contract had to be terminated.

f) CCNB Dieppe

Relations with CCNB Dieppe have been sensitive since the start of last year. They officially joined the NBSA at the AGM of the 2007-2008 year. That summer there was no

transition with their incoming representatives and their past executive. Following that, their president and council in 2008-2009 indicated that they would like to leave the organization. Our constitution requires that there be a vote from two consecutive councils over a two year period in order to withdraw completely. I am happy to report that Melissa Cormier has been in contact with their representatives for this year and they have indicated that they plan to stay part of the NBSA and hope to more actively participate. We have also received their fees for the current semester meaning they are up to date on their payments.

2) Finances

a) Conference Calls

Early into this financial year, it was clear that conference calls using solely phone service providers were going to be financial unsustainable for the organization. This can also be shown from last year's phone bills under the UNBSU totalled over \$2000; we are now paying back those costs in monthly instalments.

We have switched from Alliant as a conference service provider to Budget Conferencing which is half the cost. We have also tried alternative VOIP providers such as Go-To-Meeting; we are currently using Skype, which is free but varying in quality, for all conference calls. We still have a toll free number with Budget Conference if we need to use our account in the future.

b) Cell Phone Policy

At the board meeting in August, I proposed changes to our cell phone policy. For the last two years the NBSA has paid for two smart phones for the use of the president and the ED. The phones were costing \$135.50 total per month and would cost \$1774.5 for the remainder of the contract. The Board adopted the proposal to cancel the plans and subsidize the ED and president's personal cell phones at \$20 per month, with the amount to be reviewed at a later date; costing \$1180 over 13 months, saving \$594.50 over remainder of the contract.

c) Legal Fees

Our allocated budget for legal expenses was increased from \$750 to \$2000 from last year to this year. We received several lingering legal bills at the start of this fiscal year which came out of this year's budget line. I can only approximate as the financial review has not been completed but entering this fall there was \$1200 spent out of the budget line for legal expenses.

In September, we received bills totalling another \$1200 from September to December of the year prior. Knowing that this would bust our legal line before we begin looking at priorities for this year, Melissa and I met with Brian Gallant from Stewart Mckelvey in Moncton to look at options of reducing our outstanding balance. We agreed that applying to have our hourly fee reduced and made retroactive would be the best approach, as it would total several hundred dollars in savings if approved. Brian updated me on December 8 and said that the application

was still being processed. If the proposal is not accepted, we will likely need to draw from other budgetary lines and look at switching firms.

d) Finance Committee

Finance Committee has met twice this year; once to discuss the salary of the ED, and a second time to talk about a plan future meetings. Meetings have not been scheduled do to my and the Executives focus on external issues, and due to the fact that updated budget numbers have not been available. The ED has not able to complete the financial review and update the budget status due to being assigned to external priorities. Meetings will commence once the financial review has been submitted and the budget numbers are available. All fees for the first semester have been received and there have been no significant expenditures out side of regular operation since the last budget update, therefore I am expecting the NBSA to be in a very safe financial position.

3) External

a) Timely Completion Benefit Appeals Process

This was indentified as one of the more immediate priorities at the start of term, as the appeals process for the TCB was in the development stage. Over the course of the summer I had several phone call and e-mail exchanges with Mike Barnett regarding ways the NBSA could provide input for the design of the appeals process. On September 28, Melissa Wah and I met with Mike Barnett and Gwen Walker, a senior policy advisory. They reviewed the initial draft of the appeals process with us and we went through different student scenarios. Ella Henry's list of student scenarios was quite useful during this meeting. I prepared a four page report from the discussion of the meeting and it was sent to the Board for information on October 9. Overall, Melissa and I were pleased with the flexibility of the appeals process given the restricted legislation for the program. Melissa was able to point out ways that the application process could be clearer to students. The changes were made to the form on the government website.

b) PC Fredericton BBQ – David Alward

On August 25, most of the Executive attended a BBQ for the PC Fredericton ridings. We were able to have an informal meeting with David Alward, the Leader of the Official Opposition. During the conversation he reiterated his interest to require students to stay in the province to receive aid. We countered this with arguments but further lobbying is required to convince him otherwise. Alward committed to keeping the NBSA involved with policy discussion around the issues and he was particularly interested in meeting with us later about matters of youth leadership.

c) NB PC Policy Convention – Moncton

On September 26, Melissa Cormier, Melissa Wah, Jacob Baisley attended the PC Policy Convention. I was unable to attend as I was writing LSATs but they reported that they were able

to get several impromptu lobby discussions with PC MLAs. Jacques Poitras the CBC website took note of NBSA's attendance and posted on Twitter that it was a "savvy" move.

d) NB NDP Biennial Convention – Miramichi

On October 16, Jacob Baisley and I attended the NDP Biennial Convention in Miramichi. There we spoke with former president of the party, Helen Lapoint; she explained the layout for the weekend. We also spoke at length with Roger Duguay, the Leader of the Party, about PSE issues. We told him that we would very much like to meet with him at a later date to talk about policy ideas. I recently followed up with him on this at the legislature after the budget announcement on December 5. They said they will set something up in the new year. Jacob attended the whole conference the next day on October 17 to show that the NBSA was serious about working with the NDP.

e) NB Liberal Biennial Convention – Fredericton

Leading up to the convention, Melissa Cormier and I attended a Liberal Policy Meeting in Fredericton on September 21. This was chaired by Kelly Lamrock, Minister of Social Development, and had Roxanne Reeves (Shawn Graham's wife) as a guest speaker. We were able to get our TCB issues on the agenda for the policy discussion at the convention. We were also able to speak with Mrs. Reeves and she was very sympathetic with our concerns and said she would bring them up with the Premier. Melissa sent a follow-up e-mail to her to reinforce the meeting.

On November 13, the first day of the convention, Melissa Wah, Jacob Baisley, and I attended a Youth Meeting for the Liberal Party. I was able to speak briefly with Shawn Graham and Donald Arseneault together about the Timely Completion Benefit. They both acknowledged that they still have work to do on the file. Michael Ignatief, the Leader of the Federal Liberal Party, was also present - along with other prominent former and current MPs and MLAs.

Melissa Wah and I attended the Education Policy session on November 14. Donald Arseneault was also there and posted on Twitter that he was "glad to see the NBSA here [at this session]. This is for them!" At the Education Session the TCB was up for discussion. It was good that we were present at the session because several students thought the statement was trying to get rid of the program and tried to strike the issue out of the books all together. By the end of the session we were able to get the group to adopt: "The "Debt Reduction for Timely Completion Benefit" while widely acclaimed as a vast improvement in student aid, with continued consultation with students and other organizations could provide government with ways to make the program even better and to guarantee affordability." This was adopted by the NB Liberal Party during the plenary session. During the convention we were able to build our relationship with Minister Arseneault and the Premier and get the party to adopt a statement that they take strides to "guarantee affordability" for post-secondary education. This is something we can use in future lobbying and press releases.

f) Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations

On October 26, Melissa Cormier and I met with Gilles Allain, the ED of the FNBFA, and Linda Lequin, their president. We discussed the possibility of co-hosting a policy symposium on post secondary education. We also discussed the possibility of forming an official partnership or coalition.

We met with both Gilles and Linda again on November 6. Also present was Rick Hudson from Mount Allison University, the past president of the FNBFA. We discussed in more depth the layout of a policy symposium. Both organizations would be given their own panels to shape discussion. We could not agree at that meeting a key speaker. It was agreed, however, that the ideal date for a symposium would be in February. We also agreed to seek government funding to see if the idea is feasible. We discussed that a partnership between the two organizations would be beneficial. We agreed that a motion needed to be brought up at each board and that there could be a possible media and photo opportunity out of a formalized partnership. Of course, we all agreed that a partnership meant that we did not agree nor support each others policy stances on all issues.

g) Partnership

On November 11, I attended a conference call with the rest of the organizations of the Partnership. On the call, the Partnership approved, in principle, the idea of having a rotating principle and vice-principle organization; these two organizations would take turns hosting meetings and organizing discussion for that year. We also approved a set of five core values: 1) Student-focused, 2) Collaboration 3) Commitment 4) Partnership 5) Trust. This is a real step to formalizing the Partnership as this is the first time some kind of structure and core values has been approved by all organizations involved.

h) Budget Submission

This year's provincial budget process was pushed ahead by several months. We were required to submit documents by October 16 with a budget date of December 1. Using current agreed upon policy statements I drafted up a skeleton of the NBSA budget submission with Melissa Wah, which was sent to the Board for review on October 12. We held a conference call for questions or comments on the outline of the document on October 14. I formalized the English version of the NBSA Budget submission and Melissa Cormier formalized and translated the French version. Jacob Baisley designed a professional cover in both French and English. I was very pleased with the quality and presentation of the document. From my experience with the NBSA, it was the most professional our submission to the budget process has been in three years.

On October 20, Melissa Wah, Melissa Cormier, Jacob Baisley and I met with Byron James, the DM for PSE and several senior policy staff to discuss the submission. The meeting was intended to include Minister Arseneault but he was held up in another meeting. Bryon James and his staff were receptive to our recommendations on funding to institutions. In regards to the

Timely Completion Benefit changes, they were cool to the idea of spending more money on the program and argued that an automatic application of the program would almost be impossible. This will be a matter we should look into further. Perhaps the application process could be done through the institutions, similar to an application for graduation. The institutions could send off a list to the government of eligible applicants.

On November 2, the same group from NBSA met with Greg Byrne, the Minister of Finance, and several senior policy staff. Minister Byrne was also receptive to increasing funds to institutions. He indicated, however, he was much more interested on modifying the Repayment Assistance Plan to accommodate students in difficult situations during breaks of study, as opposed to expanding the Timely Completion Benefit to an annual debt cap. The meeting ended with a discussion on how to engage and contact youth using new media.

Leading up to the budget, I had several e-mail and phone exchanges with Minister Arsenault regarding what specifically would be included in the budget. He gave us the information after he originally leaked the info the provincial papers. I don't think he would have given the NBSA information if we did not press him for it. The following day Melissa Wah and I drafted an English press release for Melissa Cormier to translate. Our reaction to the budget was we were generally pleased with the additional funding but it would only be enough to maintain universities for one year without further increases.

i) Media Coverage

The NBSA had a quieter year for media coverage due to the fact there were no major provincial initiatives announced and the fact that we have not developed much in the way of new policy stances. However, we were able to get media converge in several instances to raise awareness of student issues.

On June 9, I did an interview with the Daily Gleaner in Fredericton raising awareness of the limitations of the TCB program. We were quoted saying the timely completion aspect was "unreasonable".

On August 28, I did an interview with CTV's Andy Campbell about declining enrolment in the Maritimes and the disincentive the high cost of education can have.

On September 11, the Daily Gleaner printed an article relating to student credit cards from an interview I did with them weeks before. I said that the fact students have to resort to credits cards means that they're not getting enough financial support from government for the high costs of education.

On October 20, I did an interview with Dan Ahlstrand from 88.9FM, a station which broadcasts in Fredericton, Moncton, Saint John and Halifax. I discussed the latest Statistics Canada tuition report and chronic underfunding of PSE and increasing student debt.

On November 30, I did a television interview with Global Maritimes for the Evening News relating to the tuition freeze in the provincial budget.

On December 1, I did a live interview with 88.9FM regarding the PSE items in the provincial budget, again with Dan Ashstrand.

New media is new avenue the NBSA is getting into and it has been noticed. L'Acadie Nouvelle printed an article about how Jacob Baisley and Melissa Wah were "tweeting" updates from the provincial public budget consultation in Fredericton. On two occasions, Jacques

Portraits of CBC NB listed the NBSA as a political watcher to follow on Twitter. Melissa Wah herself was included one week in Portraits's top five individuals to follow on Twitter.

These are instances I can specifically cite where the NBSA was mentioned. I know there are several other instances where our press releases were picked up by radio stations and weekly papers. I also did several interviews with campus newspapers.

A worrying trend is developing, however, where student issues are being considered "old news". At the Legislature both CTV and CBC NB turned down interview requests because we were not the story that day. The NBSA will need to come up with a strategy to earn back media attention and get the public talking about student issues.

Please contact me if there is any area of further inquiry. I will be happy to answer any questions relating to my report.

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