

## **Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth (1973) on How People's Attitudes Toward University Have Changed (1974-Present)**

G. Llewellyn Parsons

In the years 1972-73, there was a large drop in first year enrollment at Memorial University. This was not a very comforting phenomenon, since Confederation with Canada the prospects for university growth in Newfoundland had looked very good.

The then Vice-President of Memorial University, Dr. M.O. Morgan, contacted me to ask if I, who had recently moved from the faculty of the University of Toronto, would do a study to ascertain the reasons for the considerable drop in enrollment at Memorial University.

I consented and I'm pleased to state that the enrollment at Memorial has been steadily rising towards the 20,000 mark from the low 500s of the 1940s. This came about as a result of the wide cooperation and the magnificent efforts of the faculties at Memorial University and their determination to take appropriate action to remedy the situation.

Specifically, the terms of reference of the Committee on Enrollment were as follows:

- To investigate in-depth the causes for the large drop in first year enrollment in September, 1973; to assess the weight of each cause, and to forecast its continuing influence.
- To investigate any changes in the pattern of enrollment in each faculty and the cause or causes of such change.
- To estimate the enrollment of Memorial University in September, 1974.

The members of the Committee were Dr. G. Llewellyn Parsons (Chairman), Department of Educational Administration, Dr. Trevor H. Williams, Department of Educational Foundations, Mr. Chesley Sanger, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Dr. Amarjit Singh, Department of Educational Foundations, Dr. David Kirby, Department of Educational Administration, Mr. Arnold Betz, Registrar's Office, Mr. Cyril McCormick, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, and Mr. William O'Driscoll, Newfoundland Teachers' Association.

To those people we owe a great deal for their sincerity, resolve and dedication to help restore a positive attitude towards student participation and attendance at the University and other post-secondary institutions.

From the study on Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth it was found that many students prematurely discontinued their education and failed to proceed to post-secondary educational institutions because of deprivation. This deprivation arose in the form of inequality of educational opportunity and accessibility resulting from many factors in the social environment: lack of adequate finances, lack of motivation and encouragement, lack of communications about educational possibilities, lack of knowledge about course offerings at, and entrance requirements to, post-secondary institutions and lack of knowledge of the social and academic environments of these schools.

The reasons why the Grade XI, 1972-1973 students did not attend University could be summarized as:

- financial factors, (especially pertaining to those from low income families);
- attractiveness of other post-secondary institutions (especially when financial support was considered); and
- perceived lack of job opportunities after graduation (especially with the perceived oversupply of teachers in the school systems).

These three factors were still relevant for the 1973-1974 students. And unless some positive actions were taken by the faculty and administration at Memorial University, the problem would continue.

Fortunately, the University, after the study, made serious and positive efforts to correct the situation. These efforts have shown very beneficial results.

The recommendation of the Report on Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth and faculty and administration was:

that every student should have universal accessibility to post-secondary education and that the University take every opportunity to encourage students and especially those students who are likely to do well in the teaching profession. The social and manpower needs of a progressive province needs to be realistically assessed and a knowledge of post-secondary education should be improved (through the various guidance counsellors in the system). Greater efforts should be made (without delay) to make students aware of the need for university education in this province, and finally, that more programs be provided in adult education to provide to our people a better view of what this province needs.

It is wonderful to find how cooperative the University has been in improving the attitudes of our people toward the enhancement of post-secondary education. There is now evidence in the twenty-first century that we are on a very positive track. The improvements made since the 1973-74 report have been astounding and this Memorial University of Newfoundland is presenting an image for which we can be justly proud.

1. Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth. A Preliminary Report of the Committee on 1973 Enrollment. December, 1973. MUN.
2. Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth. Report No. 2 of the Committee on 1973 Enrollment. January, 1974, MUN.
3. Career Decisions of Newfoundland Youth. Report No. 3 of the Committee on 1973 Enrollment. May, 1974. MUN.