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# Student Life Transformed: A Post-World War Two Institutional Case Study of St. Francis Xavier University

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is an institutional case study of how post-World War II social trends reconfigured Canadian universities and colleges and thus substantially altered the undergraduate experience. The study focuses on the church-related college of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. By marshalling a combination of salient documentary, oral, survey, and statistical evidence, the author concludes that critical processes, such as rising enrolments, physical plant expansion, faculty laicization, the campaign for student power, and gradual integration of the sexes transformed key dimensions of student life. Pronounced changes occurred in the sociology of residence life, in student attitudes to institutional authority, in student-faculty relations, in institutional decision-making processes, in gender relations, in program offerings and curricular regulations, in rules governing student social life, and in the role of religion. Consequently, the student who enrolled after the 1960s entered a markedly different institution than the student's predecessor who had been admitted as an undergraduate before 1945. The research demonstrates the value of the close analysis of student life at the local institutional level in the post-war era for understanding the contours of the contemporary undergraduate experience.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude traite de l'impact de la société canadienne de l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale sur les étudiantes et étudiants de l'Université St. Francis Xavier, une fondation religieuse située à Antigonish, en Nouvelle-Écosse. Cet article montre, à l'aide de statistiques, d'interviews, et de documents d'archives, de quelles façons l'ajout de nouveaux édifices, le processus de sécularisation du personnel enseignant, la croissance démographique du corps étudiant et sa quête d'un certain pouvoir ont transformé en profondeur l'essence même de l'expérience universitaire. Les étudiantes et étudiants ont alors envisagé sous un oeil tout autre leurs relations avec les autorités de l'institution, leurs professeurs, leurs camarades de sexe opposé, de même que leur vie en résidence, leurs choix de programmes scolaires et la place de la religion dans leur vie. En conséquence, l'étudiante ou l'étudiant qui débute ses études au début des années soixante-dix entre à une université qui ne ressemble guère à celle de l'année 1945. Une étude détaillée de la vie étudiante révèle ainsi les contours de l'expérience universitaire au premier cycle.


## INTRODUCTION

A new generation of university histories has been gradually elucidating the complex origins and evolution of Canadian higher education (Axelrod, 1990a; Cameron, 1996; Frost, 1984; Gibson, 1983; Johnston, 1976, 1981; MacDonald, 1989; McKillop, 1994; Nicholl, 1994; Reid, 1984; Waite, 1994). One strength of these studies is their careful attention to the student experience. In spite of important continuities in student life across the generations (Axelrod, 1990b), it is clear that the post-World War II era, and especially the 1960s, was a watershed for the Canadian undergraduate experience. Through that turbulent decade, the baby boom generation flooded onto the university and college campuses (Owram, 1996). Their presence reconfigured university life. Perhaps the changes they helped to inspire were most pronounced at the church-related residential colleges. In 1970, in the Roman Catholic tradition alone, there were more than 30 English-speaking colleges (Shook, 1971).

## PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The following is a case study of post-World War II institutional change at St. Francis Xavier University (St.F.X.) in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The analysis is conducted from the standpoint of the undergraduate experience and gives special attention to the 1960s. A conjunction of social trends during that decade transformed student life much more substantially than earlier or subsequent eras. Consequently, students in the post-1960s era entered a markedly different institution than those students who had been admitted as undergraduates before the 1960s. The purpose of this analysis is to identify dimensions of college life that changed, to reveal the nature of those changes, to explain why they happened, and to explore their impact on student life. Such a project opens a window on crucial shifts in Canadian undergraduate education and helps to explain the contours of the contemporary student experience.

Marshalling a combination of documentary, oral, survey and statistical evidence, along with information gleaned from relevant literature on higher education and student movements, this article: (1) profiles St.F.X. in 1945; (2) identifies and analyzes key dimensions of institutional change; (3) examines the implications of this change for student life; and (4) discusses the relevance of this study for understanding changes affecting student life in Canada overall.

## SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY TO 1945

In 1945, St.F.X. was a small Catholic, undergraduate, residential, liberal arts college almost one hundred years old.[1] Bishop Colin F. MacKinnon had founded it in 1853 to supply the urgent clerical needs of the expanding Diocese of Antigonish, a diocese that encompassed the seven counties of eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. The college also became an avenue into the secular professions — law, medicine, and education — for a minority of ambitious males from its largely Scottish Catholic constituency. St.F.X. was chartered to grant degrees in 1866, and from 1880 it was primarily a residential college. From 1900, the dominant and prescribed liberal arts curriculum was expanded to include engineering and the sciences. In 1928, St.F.X. college authorities established

its now famous Extension Department. Under the dynamic directorship of Dr. Moses Coady, it promoted adult education and stimulated community renewal among the farmers, fishermen and industrial workers of eastern Nova Scotia (Welton, 2001). By 1945, the college had 27 faculty and about 460 regular undergraduate students. They resided on a small campus of nine modest buildings located on the south side of the town of Antigonish and flanked to the east by another Roman Catholic institution, Mount Saint Bernard College (the Mount). This was an affiliated school for women that had been founded in 1883 and was run by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame (MacDonell, 1998). St.F.X.'s primarily Catholic constituency totalled 120,387, about 53% of the population of eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton (Government of Canada, 1951).

The freshman undergraduate admitted to St.F.X. in 1945 entered a small, intimate college community known internally as the "Xaverian family." Its main institutional pillar was the priest-professor. From registration, through residence life, worship, course work, athletics and the extra-curriculum, to graduation several years afterwards, the St.F.X. scholar lived under the wing of the priest-professor.[2] He was the student's residence prefect, disciplinarian, mentor, friend, model, and sometimes even his priest, coach, and administrator. The arrangement was *in loco parentis* with a vengeance. The priest-professors were a diverse lot — some were lax, others were harsh, some were scholarly and others were not, some thrived in the academic realm while others longed to escape from its rigors to a quiet country parish. Whatever their character, it was an open book to the students they lived among from morning call to lights out in the evening. Generally, the priest-professor was dedicated and benevolent, inspiring emulation and respect from his youthful charges. Student-priest relations were usually harmonious. While students recognized that priestly control over their lives was great, nonetheless, they rated highly the priest's concern for them, his involvement in their lives, his overall leadership effectiveness, and his success in modeling the Christian faith (St.Francis Xavier University Archives [STFXUA], 1991).

In 1945, 20 out of 27 faculty members were clerics, and all 11 university officials were also priests (St.F.X., 1945–46). The omnipresent priest-professor was almost always a native of the Diocese of Antigonish

and a graduate of St.F.X., recruited from the student body because of his academic talents and religious propensities. Many were of Highland Catholic descent. The entire faculty was Roman Catholic. The priest-professor was a product of the region, the church, and the college. As a child, he probably learned the rudiments of the faith in a devout, modest Catholic home and under the careful instruction of the parish priest. After receiving a general liberal arts undergraduate preparation at St.F.X., he usually proceeded to the seminary,[3] and then finally to graduate studies in a chosen discipline. Often he had earned a doctorate, but sometimes only a masters or bachelors degree. This background formed a professor whose loyalties to his region, to his Church, and to his *alma mater* ran deep. His professional aspirations rarely aimed beyond the horizons of the diocese, and his professional rewards were realized within diocesan institutions. His interests were in the advance of religion as much, or more, than they were in the progress of his academic discipline.[4] In 1945, the undergraduate at St.F.X. lived and moved and had his being in an institution whose tone was firmly set by such a priest-professor.

About one-half of the students at St.F.X. in 1945 came from within the Diocese of Antigonish; most of these hailed from Cape Breton. Of those from outside the diocese, about half were from mainland Nova Scotia and the other Maritime provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. Nearly 10% of the students came from Quebec while another 10% from south of the border. Only 13 out of every 100 students was female and these lived at the adjacent Mount Saint Bernard College. The largest proportion of the students was of Scottish Catholic background; the remainder were Irish, English, French, Acadian, and American (St.F.X., 1950–51, pp. 78–99). The average St.F.X. undergraduate was from a working class home and went to college to train for a profession and improve his social and economic standing. He or she usually followed the liberal arts program, but war-stimulated industrialization had markedly bolstered enrolments in engineering and the sciences.

Student life at St.F.X. immediately after World War II was carefully regulated. University authorities organized the institutional regimen, stated the calendar, in order to further:

> the religious, intellectual, physical and social development of the student. Thus it strives to form and strengthen character so that its graduates will seek first the kingdom of God and His justice in their whole conduct. (St.F.X., 1945–46, p. 16)

By later standards, discipline was strict —alcohol was forbidden and unannounced absences from class or campus were subject to penalties. Priest prefects supervised dorm life. Lights had to be out by 11 p.m. Students were expected to attend university chapel daily where the priests offered mass and heard confessions. Evening prayers were recited in common. Mass was chanted by the community of students and faculty on Sundays and Holydays. The academic year opened with "a novena of prayer to the Holy Spirit," and an annual retreat of three days was held during Holy Week. Moreover, several student organizations — the Knights of the Blessed Sacrament, the Canadian Catholic Student Missions Crusade, and the Holy Name Society — reinforced the religious tenor of the institution. So did the presence of a female community, the Congregation of the Sisters of St Martha, who had cared for the domestic needs of the institution since 1897 (Cameron, 2000). Twenty-six Marthas lived and laboured on campus in 1945 (STFXUA, 1994) The calendar claimed that "Religion is the central and unifying force on the campus" (St.F.X., 1945–46, p. 16).

Gender relations were carefully monitored at St.F.X. While the sexes shared classroom time and space, female students were largely confined to Mount Saint Bernard, the affiliated women's institution owned and operated by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Segregation of the sexes was the accepted tradition, an arrangement enforced by the celibate priests and sisters. Male and female students were forbidden to enter the residences of the opposite sex under threat of expulsion. In addition to separate residences, there were separate dining facilities, separate chapels, separate athletic facilities, and separate student unions. As well, certain programs were gender-specific, for example, secretarial arts, nursing, and home economics for women, and engineering and the sciences for men.

In 1945, this was the institutional ethos at St.F.X. into which a freshman student was forthwith immersed. His college was a respected and

central diocesan institution with the bishop as its chancellor and a prominent priest-professor occupying the presidency. Its official philosophy was education of the whole person, its ideal was a mature and devout Catholic leader, and its sociology was close-knit, gender-segregated, and hierarchical. The atmosphere was pervaded by orthodox Catholicism and the daily regimen supervised by the priest-professor. This paternal pillar of the establishment functioned *in loco parentis* and his charges generally acquiesced to his authority. The limited number of programs available to the students each had a large prescribed component (about 75%).

This general college configuration had been in place since the 1880s. However, from 1945 to the 1970s, and particularly during the 1960s, St.F.X. would change rapidly. It would experience, really, a marked institutional metamorphosis. As a direct consequence, therefore, the freshman student who enrolled at St.F.X. after the 1960s would enter a strikingly different institution.

## POST-WAR INSTITUTIONAL STRESS AND REFORM

A steady and surprising rise in enrolments across the next several decades precipitated fundamental changes at St.F.X. Regular full-time undergraduates in 1945 numbered 460; by 1970–71 St.F.X. registered 2349 of them (STFXUA, 1971a). The trend was apparent at universities across the country and precipitated a conference on the "crisis in higher education" organized by the National Conference of Canadian Universities (McKillop, 1994; Waite, 1994). Enrolments in Canada leapt from 64,200 in 1953–54 to 178,200 in 1964–65. The immediate causes of the increase included higher birth rates that produced the baby boom generation (Owram, 1996), a post-war trend of rising prosperity, widened opportunities in industry, business, and government, and larger numbers of students who aspired to a university education.

The burgeoning enrolments forced St.F.X., as it did all other Canadian colleges and universities, into a period of frenetic expansion. Between 1945 and 1971 ten substantial new buildings were constructed to accommodate the growing undergraduate program of the university — four new residences, a larger university chapel and auditorium, a

recreation-athletic centre, a student union building, a high rise academic centre, and a modern library. A new science building, which opened in 1957, revealed the university's commitment to develop its science program. Government loans and grants through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Canada Council had largely funded the impressive physical expansion. In 1951, the Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences had convinced the federal government to support Canadian universities (Stager, 1973). Expansion also required successive tuition hikes. Class sizes increased, faculty-student relations became more impersonal, and the tight-knit "Xaverian family" atmosphere gradually weakened.

Growth at St.F.X. made urgent the need for more faculty to man the classrooms, laboratories and residences. However, the supply of Catholic scholars was lean and successive bishops, who were also responsible for the pastoral needs of the diocese, had no inexhaustible supply of priest-professors to assign to the college.[5] Indeed, after 1965, the supply of priests became increasingly problematic because of the decline in vocations combined with departures from the priesthood (Weber & Wheaton, 1988). Thus began an irreversible trend of faculty laicization (the increasing assumption by lay people of roles earlier filled by priests) as the administration hired more and more lay scholars. In 1945, 81% of the faculty of 27 were clerics or sisters; by 1970 the percentage had plummeted to 36% of 147 faculty members, and by 1980, 22% of 175 faculty (St.F.X, 1945–46, 1969–70, 1979–80). The administration itself gradually laicized from all priests in 1945 to only six priests and sisters out of nineteen administrators in 1980. Finally, the number of Marthas, the sisters responsible for the university's household management, had declined from twenty-six to twenty in spite of the vast increase in the number of students. The presence of religious professionals began to wither away. These trends also appeared at other Catholic colleges (MacDonald, 1989).

The changes laicization implied for the undergraduate experience will escape those who fail to consider the important differences between clerical and lay faculty. First, lay faculty were obviously not committed to a career within the church nor to celibacy. Priestly concerns about the

religious and ethical development of their students and the advance of Catholicism were largely displaced by professional preoccupations with their discipline and advance of their own careers. Lay faculty conducted much more research and published far more than the priest-professors (Cameron, 1996). The formation at St.F.X. of a chapter of the Canadian Association of University Teachers in 1957 symbolized the growing lay faculty concern with professionalization.

In addition, the lay staff lived off campus and, of course, they had no prefecting or religious responsibilities. Therefore, their social relations with students were much more limited and mostly centred around academic concerns. For better or for worse, their opportunities for shaping and guiding the personal, social, vocational, and spiritual lives of students were fewer. A student advisor in 1967 believed that "the lay faculty could be enticed into showing more interest and concern in student activities," and a veteran priest-professor observed in 1980 that "a good many of the faculty are cut off from the life on the campus" (*Alumni News,* 1980; STFXUA, 1967b). Finally, the fact that lay faculty were much more specialized in their academic backgrounds and interests, undoubtedly affected the way they presented material in the classroom and the role in that presentation played by religion.[6]

By the 1970s, other changes in the St.F.X. faculty also altered the undergraduate experience. The faculty was much larger, of course. Immediately after the war, nearly the entire faculty were natives of the region; in 1970, only about 44% of the faculty had roots in eastern Nova Scotia. The number of St.F.X. graduates who were professors had also decreased from about 90% to around 61% by 1970. This latter trend was partly caused by the decline of the tradition in the 1960s of recruiting promising students from among the graduates for further training and eventual placement on the St.F.X. faculty. Moreover, the faculty as a male preserve (there were only two women on faculty in 1945) was eroding: by 1970 females, many of them sisters (both Notre Dames and Marthas), accounted for over one-quarter of the St.F.X. professorate. Lastly, because religious commitment was more often considered a matter of indifference in hiring decisions, and academic qualifications and

experience became paramount, the proportion of Catholic faculty had decreased to about 79% by the end of the 1960s.

By the 1970s, the St.F.X. faculty had much less knowledge of the region, of the traditions of St.F.X., and of the backgrounds of the students, than any preceding generation of faculty. What did this mean for students? They were surrounded by a less robust religious presence and were less likely to know intimately the sisters and priests. This distancing probably contributed to a decline in vocations to the priesthood. Students had more models now of professional academics instead of professional religious. Since those lay academics were increasingly "from away" and recently hired, there was a shrinking pool of "tradition bearers" at St.F.X. Thus students were less likely to observe and absorb from the faculty a strong sense of the traditional St.F.X. identity and lore.

In addition to the changes produced by rapid university growth, other social trends helped to reconfigure student life at St.F.X. As the baby boom generation reached the universities in the 1960s, many students were influenced by an international youth movement (Fraser, 1988; Levitt, 1984). While shaped by diverse national and regional factors, youth generally became disillusioned about many features of Cold War western societies. These included the Vietnam War, racism and the repression of minorities, the nuclear arms race, degradation of the environment, authoritarian bureaucracies, and the restricted roles for women. Doug Owram (1996) states:

> In the early 1960s...doubts about the Cold War, the civil-rights issue in the United States, and the Quiet Revolution in Canada were the points of dissonance that eroded the quietist foundation created in the 1950s. (p. 171)

These issues, claims Owram (1996), "created powerful centres of dissent within society" (p. 171). The baby boom generation was committed to democracy, equality, and personal freedom. According to Kenneth Westhues (1975), the idealistic and optimistic movement:

> promised...a new alienation-free society, to be accomplished through the democratization of the universities, an end to racism and the Vietnam War, a return to nature, and through 'turning on' to the world of psychedelic drugs. (pp. 388–389)

Several youth organizations in Canada both expressed and harnessed the widespread discontent. These included the Student Union for Peace, the New Left Committee, the Company of Young Canadians, the Student Christian Movement, and the Canadian Union of Students. University youth were especially receptive to the mounting voices of dissent. The opportunities for mobilization on the campuses were many — student newspapers, campus radio stations, freedom from parental control, free time and lack of pressing responsibilities, and traditions of academic freedom and thus general freedom from police surveillance and action (Westhues, 1975). Student leaders were able to mobilize protest around issues such as tuition fee increases, restrictive admissions policies, alleged racism, lack of say in institutional governance, irrelevant courses, and the supposed wrongful dismissal of faculty members. The methods of dissent included sit-ins, boycotts/strikes, critiques in the student paper, protest marches/demonstrations, and disruption of the meetings of the administration or faculty.

Scarcely a campus in Canada escaped student unrest and protest. St.F.X. was no exception. Although situated in an isolated area, its students had access to radio, television, newspapers, and the campus media — the *Xaverian* and the student radio station. The *Xaverian* regularly fronted headlines such as these: "University of Toronto in Disarray," "U Vic Students Yell Down Administration," "Saskatoon Law Students Still on Strike," "Sherbrooke Students Defy Department," and "MUN on Strike" (*Xaverian,* 1971a, 1972). Some St.F.X. students, faculty and administrators responded to the calls for campus reform and the international currents of change. Generally, the impetus for reform came from the students; many faculty and administrators firmly resisted change. Probably the first intimation of future turbulence happened in the fall of 1961. Students boycotted classes for two days, angered by the administration's unilateral decision to shorten the Christmas vacation. Apparently, most students supported the two-day walkout (*Xaverian,* 1961b). Predictably, the faculty and administration were opposed; they condemned the strike as "an infringement on the legitimate authority of the institution" (STFXUA, 1961).

Gradually the "legitimate authority" of St.F.X. over its students was redefined. Xaverians in residence took aim at the reigning practice of *in loco parentis*. They worked to reduce the authority of the priests and to expand their own responsibilities. Student residences gained the right to "all night lights" in 1961 (*Xaverian*, 1961a). Students assumed control of their own supervision at athletic and social events when they established a campus police force in 1963 (*Xaverian*, 1963). Two years later the priest-prefects, responsible for discipline in the residences (there were 24 of them), became priest-counselors when students acquired the right to form house committees chaired by student-prefects with powers to formulate and enforce residence rules. Another student-initiated shift in policy was achieved in 1968 when the administration established student and university disciplinary committees. The priest-counselor participated in neither of these two bodies (*Xaverian*, 1965, 1969a).

These developments drastically reduced the authority of the priests over the students, demoralized some, and precipitated their exit, over the following years, from the student residences. The priest-professor was no longer a disciplinarian at St.F.X. and he was less and less often a counselor. The establishment of a professional counselling centre at this time symbolized the shift from informal faculty-student relations to more formalized, professional relations (St.F.X., 1966–67, pp. 4 & 38). The president of St.F.X., Rev. Dr Malcolm MacLellan (STFXUA, 1965a), favoured the priest as pastor and counselor above that of prefect and "policeman." However, he recognized that the relation between priest-professor and student had been "an outstanding characteristic" of the traditional structure of St.F.X.; and he neither contemplated nor desired what eventually happened: its slow but steady erosion into nothingness. The new order, vocal students argued, would be superior for developing mature, responsible, independent, open, and honest students. Student reformers made effective use of the *Xaverian* to argue, plead, badger, lecture, tongue lash and cajole the students and faculty. One rhetorician summed up their agenda: "Do you want to change this archaic institution into something that bears at least a half decent resemblance to a modern university?" (*Xaverian*, 1968, p. 1).

By the late 1960s, the students' agenda to change the so-called "archaic institution" included their participation in its administration and the abolition of the prescribed curriculum. In 1967, the president permitted student representation on the University Council,[7] the Committee on Students' Activities, and the Athletic Committee. That same year X-men and X-women gained the right to present their ideas and concerns to the board of governors; then in 1969 they gained the legal right to elect annually three students to the board (STFXUA, 1967c; Nova Scotia, 1969). When a senate was established at St.F.X. in December 1970, the president of the student union and four other students became members (STFXUA, 1970c). Therefore, by the 1970s, students had substantially democratized St.F.X., then having the privilege of representation on eleven councils and committees. Thereafter, they could no longer claim, as they had earlier, to be merely "passive instrument[s] of the administration" (St.F.X., 1969–70, p. 44; *Xaverian,* 1967a).

Student pressure for more election in the choice of courses culminated with the elimination of the largely prescribed arts curriculum (it required 15 courses out of 20 for a degree). The Dean of Arts, Father Malcolm MacDonell, replaced it in 1968–69 with a required distribution of five courses in each of two related subjects, three pairs of courses, and four free electives (St.F.X., 1969–70, pp. 58–64). Until then, one student alleged, St.F.X. had "the least flexible course of all" universities in the Atlantic provinces. The trend at most universities during the 1960s was toward less compulsion in the selection of courses. Patricia Jasen (1989) has demonstrated that the critique of the arts curriculum was widespread; many students concluded it had "little to do with human values and ignored the most fundamental questions about the quality of life in the western world" (p. 247). Of course, gradual diversification of program offerings since World War Two had also contributed to expanded choice: in 1945 St.F.X. offered 12 separate programs; the offerings numbered 24 by 1970 (St.F.X., 1945–46, p. 40; St.F.X., 1969–70, pp. 58–89).

Along with assuming responsibility for their own discipline, gaining a voice in institutional administration, and achieving greater flexibility and diversity in program offerings, St.F.X. students worked to deregulate further their moral and spiritual lives. The array of student

demands convinced President MacLellan to establish a President's Commission in 1968 to investigate the personal and social conditions of the student body and to recommend improvements to the University Council at the beginning of each semester (STFXUA, 1968). The use of alcohol on campus and open housing — the right to entertain members of the opposite sex in one's residence room — became two volatile issues.[8] By March 1970, the long reign of prohibition at St.F.X. had ended: the student union had acquired a liquor license from the Nova Scotia Licensing Board to serve liquor, beer, and wine to those age 21 and over in a Campus Club located, ironically, in the old chapel (*Xaverian,* 1970). Two problems intensified: underage drinking in the residences, and the abuse of alcohol. Successive presidential reports to the St.F.X. board of governors underscored these issues (see, for example, STFXUA, 1971a).

Open housing became a more explosive issue, eventually provoking a student referendum, demonstrations, sit-ins, endless *Xaverian Weekly* critiques, bomb threats, a fire-bombing, a hunger strike, and a general strike. Xaverians, especially males, had always been unhappy with the segregation of the sexes at St.F.X. They became even more discontented by the end of the 1960s when women accounted for nearly 40% of the student body (STFXUA, 1979). In 1969–70 there were 945 male students out of 1,441 (66%) in residence at St.F.X. and 906 female students at the Mount. Of course, the student activists tracked residence life developments on campuses elsewhere. In the fall of 1969, the Xaverian reported that the universities of New Brunswick, St. Mary's, Dalhousie, Memorial, and Acadia each had some form of open housing (*Xaverian,* 1969b). This news helped to inflame passions. So did the position of the Student Union executive and the *Xaverian* in 1968. The executive affirmed that:

> [we] will not now nor at any future time carry on negotiations with the administration and faculty of this university without a complete revision of their concept of a student's place in voicing his views in this community. (STFXUA, 1968)

An *Xaverian* editor declared:

> I don't think I need reiterate the numerous advantages of open residences. Rather, I would like to emphasize that we of the

> Weekly Editorial Board feel the time has come for concrete action. Sitting on one's complacent ass is no way to revolutionize the university. (*Xaverian,* 1969a)

Then the Students Union, in the fall of 1969, boldly asserted that it would establish its own rules re social living in a "Declaration of Rights in Residence." A referendum on open housing had shown massive support among the students for the Student Union's position.[9] With this ammunition, the Students Union urged the administration to negotiate.

However the administration remained intransigent. Administrators and faculty feared that open housing would lead to premarital sex and hence a moral and public relations disaster for the Catholic university. Although the President's Commission on Social Life in March 1970 recommended the institution of a trial programme of open housing, the University Council turned this down (STFXUA, 1971c). Thereafter, the student-administration confrontation escalated. In March 1971, three student leaders — Bob MacKinnon, Jean Deleskie, and Daniel O'Connor — were tried and found guilty by the University Discipline Committee of "encouraging and aiding students to violate university regulations" governing residence life (*Xaverian,* 1971b). When an appeal to the Senate (created in 1970 to replace the University Council) failed to reverse this decision, the students held a mass rally (about 1,500 students were present out of 2,349) at the athletic centre on Sunday, April 4; they voted 890 to 610 to strike. The next morning at about 3:00 a.m. someone threw a fire-bomb into the reserve library reading room. The general strike and picketing of key buildings began in the afternoon and a series of bomb threats added to the uncertainty and disruption (*Xaverian,* 1971c). The new president, Father Malcolm MacDonell, fearing further violence, decided to cancel classes as of midnight, Tuesday, April 12. This was eight days after the strike began and four days before the end of term. He closed the university and used a mail-out final examination which students had to complete at home (STFXUA, 1971b). Convocation was delayed from early to late May.

By next September, the university had capitulated to the students' demands for opening housing. The senate accepted the Dean of Students' report (18 to 11) that students be given the choice of open,

restricted, or closed residences (STFXUA, 1971d). Apparently, 65% selected open, 27% restricted, and only 4% closed. The other 4% didn't care (*Xaverian,* 1971c). The battle over open housing led to further integration of the sexes at St.F.X. Students achieved limited co-ed dining in 1970, and that same year the entire women's athletic program was transferred from the Mount to St.F.X.'s Oland Centre athletic facility. As well, the student councils were unified by permitting the female students membership in the St.F.X. Student Union (St.F.X., 1970, p. 9). Female students continued through the early 1970s to press for later curfews and visiting privileges in their own residences at the Mount (*Xaverian,* 1973, 1974, 1975). They failed. However, St.F.X. bought Lane Hall residence from the Mount in 1976 and made it one-half male. That year Ron Moir, the Food Services and Residence Manager, affirmed that he wanted "to integrate the campus as much as possible, with as close to an equal number of both sexes on both sides of campus as possible" (*Xaverian,* 1976) Gender integration certainly increased the opportunities for male and female students to socialize. However, the absence of records makes it impossible to confirm or deny the perennial allegations that open housing led to more pre-marital sex, sexually transmitted diseases, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, sexual harassment and assaults, and dating and romance on campus.

The conjunction of the trends examined above led to a less traditional and stark Catholic identity at St.F.X. after the 1960s than the university had before. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that mandated the updating and renewal of the Roman Catholic Church also had an effect. The Council promoted an enlarged role for the laity within the church, encouraged ecumenical ventures, and brought about important liturgical innovations. The reverberations were felt on the St.F.X. campus where changes affected the University Chapel — new interior artwork, folk masses, worship in the vernacular, and more student involvement. The department of theology hired Protestant faculty, welcomed Protestant speakers and chaplains on campus, and organized ecumenical discussions (STFXUA, 1965b). More open diversity of opinion among Catholics became common. Some students dissented from church positions on social issues, such as abortion and birth control

(*Xaverian*, 1967a, 1967b). Moreover, it became apparent after 1965 that all was not well with the priesthood; fewer males were becoming priests and some priests decided to leave the clergy and seek alternate types of work (Weber & Wheaton, 1988). Others began to question their traditional priestly role, and some even wondered what the word "Catholic" should mean (STFXUA, 1966). The sisters on campus — the Marthas and the Notre Dames — experienced the same troubling trends (Cameron, 2000).

It also became evident during the 1960s and thereafter that all was not well with religion on campus. In 1966, the spiritual director at St.F.X. reported "considerable indifference" about religion and he predicted that, "Religion as a University influence is in for difficult times" (STFXUA, 1966). Two years later the president informed the board of governors: "The students evidence to some degree the disenchantment and disinterest in 'organized religion' that is typical of their generation." Student religious societies declined. Seminary candidates were more rare, the practice of confession infrequent, and religious retreats or conferences were greeted with little enthusiasm (STFXUA, 1969). Some observers feared that "the Catholicity of St.F.X. [was] on the wane to the point of maybe 'no return' " (STFXUA, 1967a). The students at St.F.X. were no different than Catholic students elsewhere. A 1970 report found that most students at Canadian Catholic colleges and universities had only a vague idea of what it meant for their college to be Catholic and rarely enrolled because it was Catholic (Commission of Inquiry, 1970).

## IMPACT OF POST-WAR CHANGES ON STUDENT LIFE AT ST.F.X.

By the early 1970s, the leading edge of the post-war baby boom generation had left college (Owram, 1996). The era of dissent and protest declined, probably undermined by internal factionalism, violence, the loss of idealism and optimism, family and job responsibilities, and declining prosperity (Owram, 1996). A *Xaverian* editor commented in 1977:

> The student radicalism of the late sixties and early seventies which saw proponents at St.F.X. is long gone. The students of the past few years are willing to sit back and take advantage

> of the gains won by our predecessors, and not move to do a little work by themselves for themselves. (*Xaverian*, 1977)

Their predecessors had certainly made gains (Axelrod, 2002). As Owram (1996) notes, most universities by the end of the sixties had ceded to the demands of the moderate reformers — dismantling of *in loco parentis*, student involvement in university governance, and curricular reform (more relevant courses and more choice).

At St.F.X., the cumulative result of the post-war changes meant the following for students: after the 1960s, they found and experienced a very different St.F.X. from that found and experienced by their counterparts to 1945. In the 1970s, the freshman discovered a campus with over twice as many buildings, many imposing indeed, and participated in a student body over five times as large. In place of a small, intimate, Catholic, liberal arts college, the undergraduate found a growing university, with a more specialized and professional faculty who were discipline-oriented and increasingly involved in research and publication. For most, their backgrounds did not predispose them to be loyal to the institution or to the region. Because of faculty laicization, the undergraduate was less likely to rub shoulders with a priest-professor, indeed, with any professor outside of the parameters of academic course work. Faculty-student relations were now largely established on a formal-professional basis. In addition, the administration was more distant because of mounting bureaucratization and the support staff mostly composed of lay people because of the shrinking number of Marthas on campus.

Since *in loco parentis* had been dismantled, the post-1960s undergraduate experienced considerable personal freedom. Colleagues had virtually claimed residence territory as exclusively student territory to be organized and regulated by students themselves. Drugs and alcohol were now staples in the residence environment. Among the faculty and students, the undergraduate found diversity of opinion on matters of religion and morality. The student could select from a broad range of programs, with the sciences and pre-professional courses boasting the most prestige; the student also discovered significant freedom of choice in the selection of courses. If so inclined, it was now possible to avoid altogether courses in languages, religion and philosophy. The undergraduate after the 1960s

also had opportunities to participate on important administrative councils and committees. The male student found that women were a substantial minority of the student body, and that open housing and other forms of integration had maximized chances for socializing with them. In addition, more women were appearing in the classroom as instructors. Enthusiasm for religious observances was noticeably lacking and the calendar scheduled no retreats nor listed any student religious organizations (St.F.X., 1969–70, pp. 44–45). The university community was less attached to Catholicism, and therefore, less sure about its educational mandate. The official statement of university goals now elevated the "intellectual development" of students above all other goals (St.F.X., 1969–70, p. 3).

Such was the changed character of the institution that the undergraduate discovered in the 1970s.[10] As a result, student life had been substantially transformed. To sum up, the critical transformations that affected the student experience can be described as follows: dramatic growth in size and numbers, declining interpersonal intimacy, faculty laicization, faculty professionalization, expansion of curricular choice, integration of the sexes, increased personal freedom and responsibility, ethical and religious diversity, democratization of university governance, and secularization.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Analyses of these post-war trends at other church-related colleges and secular universities will deepen our insights into how the contours of contemporary student life began to take shape after World War II, and especially during the 1960s. As illustrated above, useful criteria for the analysis of change through time include growth (enrolment, faculty and physical plant), the faculty (origins, religion, gender and professionalism), gender relations, student activism and dissent, the sociology of residence life, student participation in university governance, the curriculum, the moral and spiritual lives of the students, and the role of official religion. A more complete examination of student life would also include close attention to changes in associational life, intellectual life, and the class, ethnic, and geographical origins of students. Historical studies should be made of the impact of the liberalization of rules governing alcohol use on campus

and vandalism, assaults, inter-residence rivalries, initiations, addiction and study habits, as well as of the role of the breweries in promoting alcohol consumption. Research on post-war changes in university life from the perspective of the students will help us understand how a central institution in modern society now shapes and moulds its contemporary youth.

## Notes

[1] For a full institutional biography of St.F.X. University from 1853–1970, see Cameron (1996).

[2] The following profile is based on documentary research and interviews at St.F.X. with Dr. Raymond MacLean (July 27, 1992), Rev. Dr. Malcolm MacLellan (September 19, 1991), and Dr. John T. Sears (August 5, 1992).

[3] The seminaries most commonly attended by St.F.X. graduates in the twentieth century were Holy Heart in Halifax and St. Augustine's in Toronto.

[4] Interview with Rev. Dr. Gregory MacKinnon (September 29, 1992).

[5] STFXUA (1952) and interview with Rev. Dr. Gregory MacKinnon, (September 29, 1992).

[6] Interview with Rev. Dr. Malcolm MacLellan (September 16, 1991).

[7] The University Council was responsible for university policy on registration, programs, the constitution, and discipline. It also selected honourary degree candidates.

[8] Open housing was sometimes distinguished from visiting rights that only allowed for entertaining members of the opposite sex at designated times.

[9] The Student Union surveyed the student body in November 1969: 1,931 ballots were cast with 1,538 voting in favour of open housing (79%), 342 opposing and 61 spoiled ballots (STFXUA, 1970).

[10] Not all members of the Xaverian community nor outside observers were pleased with the new St.F.X. and what it implied for the undergraduate experience. But that is another story.

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