

## CHAPTER 5

### RE-EXAMINING THE UCN IDEA: THE CONCEPTS CONFERENCE, INUVIK, NOVEMBER 1971

The Concepts Conference was conceived and structured as a weekend of workshops and plenary discussions. On the Monday following, The University of Canada North would hold its first annual general meeting followed by the Executive Committee meeting. The conference itself was intended to clarify the "precise role the University should fill" because the directors were unable (or reluctant) to do so themselves.<sup>154</sup> The first annual general meeting would follow so members could adopt any useful proposal that arose from the conference discussions.

#### The Conference Format

The conference was to be a working weekend. Dick Hill had prepared a package to introduce the participants to the aims, goals and style of the conference. Introductory material sketched the evolution of the UCN concept and explained that the directors had agreed there was a place for a northern university, but that "no action should be taken until the appropriate needs and opportunities for a university type education facility in the North were thoroughly studied and clearly stated."<sup>155</sup> The conference was to provide a forum to do just that. Hill's document claimed the directors had received many suggestions for the form of the new university:

Some see it as [a] centre for native culture or as a source of information on how to operate in the North. Others see the university as a research centre or as a specialty campus with students from all over the world coming to learn about the North.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 4.

<sup>155</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 1. Used with permission.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

## The organizers

proposed that the aims of the Conference should be:

1. To examine the need for a University of Canada North;
2. To examine the academic approach that should be taken, particularly with regard to the needs of the native people;
3. To examine the approach which should be taken to the development of a physical plant.<sup>157</sup>

To facilitate a "broad, open discussion" the participants were organized into eight panels. There were to be no lectures *per se*. Each panel would discuss a particular topic with specialists and respondents. People not specifically chosen as either were encouraged to witness the opening statements and participate in the ensuing discussion. The specialists were to begin by presenting their thoughts on a specific aspect of the panel topic,<sup>158</sup> the respondents would comment and then the entire group would discuss the issue. Discussion was deemed central to the success of the conference and the participants were sternly reminded that they were "expected to take part in every discussion."<sup>159</sup>

One hundred and twelve people took part in the Concepts Conference.<sup>160</sup> Twenty-one (18.8 %) were academics from Canada, the United States, Sweden and Norway. The rest were northerners representing a variety of interest groups. Many more, northerners and academics, representatives of the conference's sponsors and various officials, also attended the conference. Between thirty-two and forty (28.6 % to 35.7 %) were First Nations from the territories, Alaska, Arizona and southern Canada.

Some of the transportation between Inuvik and Edmonton was provided by Alberta Gas Trunk Line Company. It, and a commercial Pacific Western Airlines flight, brought the southern participants into Inuvik in the early afternoon on Friday 19 November. That evening, at the opening banquet, Nellie Cournoyea gave the keynote address on the "involvement of northern people in a northern university."<sup>161</sup>

Hill's introductory material lists the topics of the eight panels and under each heading

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> The specialists had been given a topic before the conference.

<sup>159</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 2. Used with permission.

<sup>160</sup> A list of participants is included in Appendix II.

<sup>161</sup> The conference program has Agnes Semmler scheduled to give the address but, for unknown reasons, Cournoyea replaced her.

he had listed about ten questions designed to direct the discussions. The questions underscore the depths of the directors' uncertainty about what northerners needed or wanted in a post-secondary educational institution. It is possible, however, that the directors simply wanted to ensure as complete a discussion of the matter as possible. The substance of much of the panel discussions has been lost. The panel sessions were audio-recorded but the tapes have not been located; they were also broadcast live throughout the Mackenzie Delta by CBC television.<sup>162</sup> The audio tapes were given to John Hallward of Toronto after the conference who used them to compile the proceedings.<sup>163</sup> Several participants took notes, which, along with the conference program, the published proceedings and Dick Hill's account that appeared in the Inuvik *Drum* have been used here to reconstruct some of the content of the panel discussions.<sup>164</sup>

### The Panel Discussions

Participants in Panel I were to address the question of the need for a University in Canada North:

The purpose of this panel is to discuss the real need for a university in the North from the viewpoint of the original people, northern communities, northern government, and northern industry. What is a university? Is a northern university relevant? . . . Is the time right for structuring a university? . . . Should there be a university in the North now, sometime in the future, or never?<sup>165</sup>

The speakers for the panel were Roy L'Hommecourt (IBNWT, Yellowknife), Paul Kaeser (Mayor, Fort Smith), Ken McKinnon (Territorial Councillor, Whitehorse), Wilf Bean (Fort Simpson), and Jack Underhill (Imperial Oil, Toronto). The respondents were Garth Graham (Whitehorse), Tadit Francis (Chief, Fort McPherson) and Ruth Spence (YWCA, Yellowknife).

The speakers did not answer the panel questions. Three of the four felt post-secondary education in the territories ought to be focused on job training. Only one accepted the premise of a northern university but, even then, not entirely. L'Hommecourt thought a university was

162 "University Idea," *The Drum*, Inuvik, NWT, 24 November 1971.

163 They may have been returned to Dick Hill. He mentioned in a later letter that the editing was nearly complete. However, his reference may be to the film or video recordings. When interviewed, he did not say he had either audio or video recordings of the conference.

164 The conference proceedings excerpt portions of the participants' comments but do not place them in context of the particular panels. With the notes taken by W. Peter Adams, Garth Graham and Flo Whyard, and the panel reports prepared for *The Drum* by Dick Hill, however, some of the excerpts can be located in the discussions.

165 Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 2. Used with permission.

premature: there were too few high school graduates and no jobs available for the UCN's future graduates. Kaeser too, thought education ought to be related to northern job opportunities.<sup>166</sup> McKinnon agreed there was a need for academic post-secondary education but its form should not be a southern "transplant." He also thought that the two territories were going to have to go their own ways because their different education problems were going to require different solutions.<sup>167</sup> He thought the Yukon should have a junior college "so young people can take their first years of university in a northern setting."<sup>168</sup> Bean felt the north needed not an "educated elite" but technicians and builders. Underhill also thought that jobs and technical/ vocational training should be the first priority. A community college could be the next step.

The respondents were also divided. Francis said "we are all waiting for one another; who's going to move? I think we should have [a] UCN. Alaska has [one, as does] Russia. We should."<sup>169</sup> Graham felt the speakers had prejudged the case and they had not "coped with the question of need because they dealt with the practical rather than the impractical."<sup>170</sup> Graham was convinced a northern university would be of benefit to all northerners. He thought it would "help us know who we are."<sup>171</sup> Spence thought that going away to southern schools gave northern students exposure to new things.<sup>172</sup>

Dr. W. Peter Adams (Chair, Department of Geography, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario) felt that there was such a multiplicity of wants and visions for the UCN that a university would be the only institution "capable of meeting such a variety of needs and fulfilling such a variety of functions." He also thought, as he had in the past, that a university "pitched deliberately at the national level could succeed. Then it would fulfil all of the needs expressed

166 Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 10.

167 Graham personal files, [file 1] "UCN 1970-73," MSS notes on Concepts Conference (hereafter Graham Concepts Conference notes), Graham personal files, [file 7] "Flo Whyard," Whyard, MSS notes on Concepts Conference (hereafter Whyard Concepts Conference notes), and Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," Adams, MSS notes on Concepts Conference (hereafter Adams Concepts Conference notes). Used with permission.

168 Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 10.

169 Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

170 Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

171 *Ibid.*

172 Whyard Concepts Conference notes and Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

at this conference better than any other institution."<sup>173</sup>

The First Nations position was less certain. Nellie Cournoyea, COPE spokesperson, asked, Will you institute ideas which are for your benefit or will you simply come and research us and go away and write fat books? . . . Token participation is not enough. Something imposed from above will not reach us.<sup>174</sup>

The Native people had not yet decided to support the UCN and were at the Concepts Conference to make up their minds. Their experience told them that a university, like any number of other institutions established to benefit people, might only benefit its founders. Cournoyea and the others were still not convinced of the need for a University of Canada North.

Panel II, "Northern University Experience," acknowledged the presence of southern universities in the North. The panel was to discuss "current university experience in Canada North and in other comparable areas." Some of the suggested questions included

What university programs are in North now? What research is being carried out? Could a university in the North help or hinder these activities? . . . Is there enough university activity in the North now? Are these activities best coordinated by a new university in the North or by a southern organization?<sup>175</sup>

Under the chairmanship of Rolf Hougen, five speakers, from Canada, Alaska, Norway and Sweden, outlined their experience of university activities in their parts of the circumpolar North. Dr. R. G. Williamson (Rankin Inlet, NWT; University of Saskatchewan) and Dr. John Stager (University of British Columbia) talked about the northern teaching and research work being done by southern Canadian universities. The universities were teaching northern studies courses whose curricula were designed for southern students. Research, much of it funded by the federal government, was shown to be unco-ordinated but a body called the National Northern Research Group had been established to remedy that problem. The problems were many. Stager emphasised that current northern research practices had alienated many northerners. Researchers must work to improve the quality and relevance of northern research by involving northern people.

Dr. Victor Fischer (University of Alaska College [Fairbanks]), Professor Karl-Gustav Paul (Umeå University, Sweden) and Professor Oernulv Vorren (Tromsø University, Norway) outlined

<sup>173</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," MS text of an address to UCN Concepts Conference. Used with permission.

<sup>174</sup> Nellie Cournoyea, quoted in Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 11.

<sup>175</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 3. Used with permission.

their institutions' experience in the North. Without exception, each was located in a region with a greater population than that of the Canadian North. The University of Tromsø was not yet open but Professor Vorren was able to contribute useful suggestions on how the UCN should relate to government:

1. tell politicians how you are going to solve their problems;
2. tell them what you are going to do and get their consent;
3. good results force politicians to give more money;
4. the plan must have only a short lag between investment and results;
5. people must trust you.<sup>176</sup>

He suggested the best way of approaching the UCN was to get going as soon as possible. The organisers should determine their minimum requirements and match them to existing buildings. The UCN should make the new university fit into society. Establishing a new institution provided an opportunity for thought and consideration. It must teach and research but most important of all, it must serve society and maintain a strict loyalty to that society. The university and society must trust each other.<sup>177</sup> Professor Paul explained that his university had contributed to a brain drain from the North; educated graduates could not find work in the region. The situation was less critical by 1970 and teaching professors were beginning to be less difficult to attract.

One of the respondents, Cliff Reid (Local President, United Steelworkers of America, Pine Point, NWT) thought the university would train workers for northern development and improve the "quality of living"<sup>178</sup> and that all negative thinking should cease and planning for the university should go ahead quickly. Another, Marshall Smith (Geologist, Whitehorse) was concerned about curricula. He wondered if the UCN would end up offering basic southern-university-type courses merely sporting a bit of tacked-on northern content.<sup>179</sup>

Panel III asked participants for their ideas on the organisational structure for the UCN. The directors recognised that a northern university would need to relate to the needs and aspirations of northern residents. The main question for the panel was what kind of

<sup>176</sup> Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>177</sup> Graham Concepts Conference notes, Whyard Concepts Conference notes and Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>178</sup> "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 1 December 1971.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

organizational structure would be most likely to be responsive to northern needs.<sup>180</sup>

Ron Hodgkinson (Executive Assistant to the Commissioner of the Yukon) began with a presentation on the UCN's possible relations with northern government. He pointed out that the territorial governments were not eligible for federal universities support. The UCN might well be in a precarious position because it "straddles political boundaries of two governments"<sup>181</sup> and would need the approval of both.<sup>182</sup> Lorne Johnston (Ontario Department of Colleges and Universities, Toronto) spoke on the possibilities for administering the UCN. Based on his experiences in Ontario, he suggested six principles to guide the UCN as it moved towards a new system of education:

1. try not to copy any existing system; pick the best one and incorporate sensitivity to public concerns;
2. the UCN should offer students a second chance at higher education;
3. it should provide for requalification;
4. it should make provisions for students to drop in/drop out;
5. it should accept life experience as education; and
6. it should operate year-round for extra flexibility.<sup>183</sup>

Phoebe Nahanni, the student who had initially raised the northern university issue at the University of Western Ontario in 1969, addressed the UCN's involvement in the northern community. She insisted that most northern institutions were informed by non-Native cultural ideas to the detriment of the Native people.<sup>184</sup> Northern Native people should question the ideologies of those institutions for they presented a "one-way street" that leading directly to a foreign place.<sup>185</sup> "Native people," she said, "must have their own institution;"<sup>186</sup> a university must not "be forced on them."<sup>187</sup> She thought that "nothing new should be created but that the available skills should be channelled into existing structures such as the Tree of Peace

<sup>180</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 3. Used with permission.

<sup>181</sup> Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>182</sup> Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>183</sup> Whyard Concepts Conference notes and Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>184</sup> Graham Concepts Conference notes and Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 12.

<sup>187</sup> Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

organization in Yellowknife."<sup>188</sup>

Professor Walter O. Kupsch (University of Saskatchewan) talked about the UCN's relationships with other universities. He saw that the UCN could go in one of two ways: either as an independent institution or as one tied to an existing university. He preferred the latter: a formal connection would ease the problem of transferability of credits. Whichever route was chosen, Kupsch emphasised that quality was the key to anything the UCN hoped to do. Dr. William Waines (Associate Director, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa) addressed administrative structure. He explained how many of the AUCC members administered their institutions. He suggested that UCN decide first what it was going to do and then adapt the administration to achieve those goals. He acknowledged that an administrative structure capable of the required flexibility would necessarily be fairly complex.<sup>189</sup> The respondents' comments were only briefly noted. Charles Taylor (Whitehorse) thought UCN's inter-territorial links were an advantage. Fred North (Principal, Sir Alexander Mackenzie High School, Inuvik) thought the UCN should be entirely student-run.

Panel IV was devoted to discussion of the physical form of the UCN. Traditional university campuses are generally composed of many buildings constructed fairly closely together but would UCN need that kind of arrangement? Would it be a head office of some kind, effectively operating as a sort of organizational umbrella (as Adams originally suggested)? Participants were also asked if the open university concept would be useful to the UCN.<sup>190</sup>

James Arvaluk (Director, Inuit Tapirisat, Iqaluit) explained how the informal Eskimo University<sup>191</sup> at Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) met two to three times a week in a borrowed building. Dr. Fred Terentiuk (Director, Department of Continuing Education, University of Calgary) advocated the UCN adopt the flexible "Open University" distance education model, obviating the immediate need for dedicated buildings. Thomas Atcity (Vice-president, Navajo Community College, Arizona) suggested the founders ask the people who would use the university what they wanted. Flo Whyard (Whitehorse) suggested that a number of resident northerners, mostly

188 "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 1 December 1971.

189 Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

190 Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 3-4. Used with permission.

191 The Eskimo University was the name for an informal gathering of people interested in learning Inuit culture and Inuktitut. An elder was asked to instruct.

professionals, might be able to teach in the UCN.<sup>192</sup> Nellie Cournoyea understood the term "facilities" in a more figurative sense. She said that the "real university of the North was in the oldtimers who taught the lore of the land and a special way of living."<sup>193</sup> She thought "the facilities needed are just the mobility to give anyone a chance to do their own thing."<sup>194</sup>

The respondents seemed particularly affected by Cournoyea's presentation. Their comments echoed the themes she had raised: identity, control, empowerment, and cultural preservation. A consensus, however, was not reached about the facilities the UCN was going to need.<sup>195</sup>

Panel V concerned the curricula for a University in Canada North. In the statement of assumptions guiding the discussions, the organizers appeared to be veering from their more recently-stated goal of having the UCN focus primarily on meeting (undefined) northern needs. "To be successful," they thought, "the University of Canada North must offer relevant programs serving the community, regional, territorial, and national needs." Many of the panel's suggested questions emphasised possible areas of academic specialisation and specifically directed discussion toward "effectively [involving] the Indian and Eskimo people of the North."<sup>196</sup>

Professor Louis-Edmond Hamelin's (Laval University, Quebec City) presentation on possible northern specialty courses was explicit and focused:

The university should be developed around the things of the north: 1) native languages; 2) emerging problems related the people and the environment; 3) medicine. Important courses would be: 1) perma-frost engineering; 2) biogeography; 3) political science and economics; 4) Eskimology study of the history, language, habitat and cultural anthropology of the Eskimo people. There should be a study of Indian and Eskimo rights by historians and ethnographers rather than by lawyers. The lateness of Canada in this field is something to be ashamed of.

What is needed in this university is a high standard and quality based on a few subjects. We badly need cooperation between existing universities operating in the north.

We must communicate the need for a university in the north to the people of Canada. We cannot continue studying the north (from the outside).<sup>197</sup>

192 Graham personal files, [file 7] "Flo Whyard," MS text of address to this panel. Used with permission.

193 "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 1 December 1971.

194 Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 11.

195 Graham Concepts Conference notes, Whyard Concepts Conference notes and Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

196 Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 4. Used with permission.

197 Louis-Edmond Hamelin in Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 9-10.

The other speakers discussed the issues in more general ways. They emphasised the importance of a balanced presentation of course material; curricula should avoid a racial basis of organisation.<sup>198</sup> Mark Poudrier (Inter Universities Office, Le Pas, Manitoba) told how in Le Pas, 4-6 percent of the population had taken advantage of the adult education and extensions programs offered in the community. Tracking the demand for such courses provided the University of Manitoba with the data to judge the need for further post-secondary facilities. The consensus of the participants in this panel was that the university could teach anything people wanted to learn: "a university is an umbrella under which anybody's ideas can take root."<sup>199</sup> Terry Forth (NWT Continuing and Special Education, Inuvik) spoke about existing facilities that could be used immediately.<sup>200</sup> Peter Adams (Trent University) addressed the question of attracting southern students to the UCN and Father Lemeur of Tuktoyaktuk stated that he hoped the UCN would forge links with the schools "so that the pupils will have a chance to learn directly."<sup>201</sup>

The sixth panel was asked to consider the situation of northern research and the research opportunities of a northern university. It was recognized that much northern research was being conducted by southern organizations and universities, so some of the questions the UCN directors wanted the panel to consider were:

Could this research be carried out better by resident scientists attached to a northern university? Would the research be of a better quality with northern in-put? . . . Should the University of Canada North contain an Arctic Science City for specialized northern research? Are the research aspects of a university important for the University of Canada North?<sup>202</sup>

The speakers were asked to address specific aspects of northern research. Professor Walter Currie (Chair, Indian and Eskimo Studies, Trent University, Peterborough), who had been asked to speak on "Northern Culture and Involvement Programs," stated that "involvement" was an empty word for most Native people and that Native education in Canada had been a matter of cultural genocide. Northern involvement in northern research was imperative to reverse the

198 Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

199 W. P. Adams in Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

200 "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 8 December 1971.

201 *Ibid.*

202 Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 4-5. Used with permission.

damage.<sup>203</sup> Jim Lotz (Cody International Institute, Nova Scotia) "described the needs for social research in the North and how northerners must participate in doing their own thing for their own good."<sup>204</sup> Dr. Art Pearson (Canadian Wildlife Service, Edmonton) thought the UCN could provide an "academic community [assembled] around the university research structure that would provide [an] unbiased group" able to approach northern research with a less southern perspective.<sup>205</sup> The consensus was that northern research would benefit greatly from having a local university involved. The criticisms of contemporary northern research were too loud to avoid and the UCN would offer a neat solution to many of them. Bob Christie (Geological Survey of Canada) outlined his northern research program and stated that "many of his native acquaintances in the North had the natural inquisitiveness to make them good researchers."<sup>206</sup> Gerry Glassford (Physical Education Department, University of Alberta) talked about recreational research and cited the successful Territorial Experimental Cross-Country Ski program (TEST) as a good example of what could be accomplished.

The seventh panel was to focus on the people the UCN would likely serve. The participants were asked to discuss who (and how many) could be expected to come to the university and what special arrangements might be needed. Would the university attract students from elsewhere? How could northerners be "trained to participate?"<sup>207</sup>

The chair of the panel, Bertha Allen (Inuvik) thought that northern students would find a home-grown university a boon as northern students were often disadvantaged by southern academic standards and competition. She thought UCN entrance requirements should be based on intelligence rather than on southern academic standards.<sup>208</sup> Bob Spence (Giant Yellowknife Mines) provided estimates of the number of northern students who might want to attend UCN. Subsequent discussion revealed that the panel could not come up with many answers to the questions because it did not know what UCN was going to be. The form and purpose would

<sup>203</sup> Graham Concepts Conference notes, Adams Concepts Conference notes and Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 9.

<sup>204</sup> "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 8 December 1971.

<sup>205</sup> Hallward, ed., *Concepts Conference*, 9.

<sup>206</sup> "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 8 December 1971.

<sup>207</sup> Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 4-5. Used with permission.

<sup>208</sup> Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

influence what kind of people attended UCN and where they would come from. The discussion in this panel also showed that many of the young people at the conference wanted a panel session of their own. A special Youth Panel was therefore arranged.

The Special Youth Panel was convened in the afternoon of the 21st. Flo Whyard, writing for the *Whitehorse Star* described the session:

Speakers included university and high school students and graduates from the Indian, Eskimo and white communities, chaired by Jennie Jack of Whitehorse. Gordon Duncan, Ron Chambers and Andy Joe were other Yukoners taking part. George Erasmus of the Tree of Peace told the gathering "most people here want to do something good for the Yukon and the Northwest Territories but if we build a university tomorrow, white people would come from the south, there would be a sprinkling of Indians. It's time to slow down for a minute, looking for the answer. We don't have Eskimo or Indian people here in the university because they don't have anything to do with the present education system. We must move to Eskimo and Indian thinking before we set up this university."<sup>209</sup>

Some students discussed their university experiences. Mike Smith stated that the non-Native post-secondary system had "screwed up our minds. [We] go Outside, come back and [we] don't fit in."<sup>210</sup> James Arvaluk told the panel that he had found out who he was, his identity, at university in Alaska. Noah Carpenter, a Sachs Harbour resident interning at a hospital in Edmonton, spoke of the need for youth to become more involved in current events.<sup>211</sup>

The UCN seemed a good opportunity for the northern students but only if they had some say in how it was going to be. Gordon Duncan insisted northerners must have control of the UCN, which he thought might best operate as a resource centre. Andy Joe agreed with him. Knute Hansen, a University of Alaska student from Aklavik, thought UCN should be a university for northern people first but open, as well, to people from the south.<sup>212</sup> Arvaluk thought credit should be given for Native languages. Addy Tobac outlined some of the programs UCN could offer:

In the UCN History [there is a] definite need to record the history of native people; [a] definite need for geography of the Eastern and Western Arctic use travel to gain knowledge. Languages: we need Indian and Eskimo in schools right now. We need a good school of psychology and counselling services in communities and in schools. The north can contribute to Canadian culture.

209 Graham personal files, [file 7] "Flo Whyard," MS text of a news story. Used with permission. The Tree of Peace was an experimental Native folk school formed in Yellowknife on 26 June 1970 (see first Tree of Peace annual report in YA, UCN Records, COR 0321, file 3).

210 Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

211 "University of Canada North Conference," *The Drum*, 8 December 1971.

212 Adams Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

Politics should be one of the first things taught. . . . We need teachers to learn from us rather than teach us what they think we need to know. We're coming back, here, realizing that all the universities in the south can't make up for half of what our own people can teach us.<sup>213</sup>

The student panel received quite a bit of attention from the media in the days and weeks after the conference. For many it was the most poignant part of the two days of talk.

Panel VIII focused on the gritty question of financing UCN. How much might it all cost? Who would pay? How much could students be expected to pay? UCN wanted to know how much support it could expect from government, industry and other funding sources.<sup>214</sup>

Don Rickerd (President, Donner Canadian Foundation, Toronto) told the panel that the government was the only source of capital for major expenditures. UCN should "opt for a wide variety of approaches"<sup>215</sup> as it was possible to raise funds for modest programs from non-governmental sources. He cautioned that the ultimate problem might well be a shortage of people and ideas. He urged UCN supporters to take the initiative and, in that, the Donner Canadian Foundation could "provide encouragement"<sup>216</sup> but not direct funding. Jack Underhill (Corporate Frontier Coordinator, Imperial Oil, Toronto) stated that industry advocated and supported greater opportunities for advanced education. UCN, however, should not look to industry as a source of major financing. Most companies would be willing to cooperate as partners in certain projects but would not directly underwrite educational institutions; Imperial Oil, he said, would rather provide money for scholarships to fund people rather than contributing directly to the institutions.<sup>217</sup> B. C. Gillie (Department of Education, GNWT) told the panel that the NWT government was already spending \$30 million a year on education and costs per student exceeded \$1600 per year. He did not offer much encouragement and regretted that the UCN and the NWT Department of Education had not been involved together from the outset.<sup>218</sup>

One respondent, Jake Harron (Inuvik), suggested that portions of northern oil royalties be contributed to higher education in the territories so that northern products could pay for

213 Addy Tobac quoted in Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

214 Adams personal files, file "UCANORTH Conf.," R. M. Hill, "Concepts of a University in Canada North," 5. Used with permission.

215 Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

216 Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

217 Adams Concepts Conference notes and Graham Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

218 Adams Concepts Conference notes and Whyard Concepts Conference notes. Used with permission.

northern education.<sup>219</sup> Paul White (Yukon Airways, Whitehorse) proposed that the matter of aboriginal rights (i.e., land claims) be settled quickly and some of the "material rewards gained therefrom" be used to assist the "financing of higher education in and for northern Canada."<sup>220</sup>

The conference closed, on November 21, having raised many more questions than were answered. Political, moral and social issues had all surfaced during the discussions. The Concepts Conference had been a unique forum. It assembled people from across Canada and from elsewhere and gave northern people, particularly Native people, a chance to voice their concerns. The cause of UCN may not have exactly benefitted from the result. It was, however, the kind of discussion some of the founders hoped would become a permanent feature of any University of Canada North.

#### 1971 Annual General Meeting and Directors' Meeting

The following day, UCN held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM). Hill thought that having the meeting immediately after the conference would allow "the full membership of The University of Canada North [to] hold the . . . election of directors, discussion of conference presentations and the drafting of a program for future action."<sup>221</sup> The uncertain results of the conference, however, limited the actions the directors and members could undertake immediately.

The members passed several resolutions.<sup>222</sup> The first was to ask the GNWT formally to include post-secondary education as a parameter in its incipient commission of inquiry into education in the Northwest Territories. The second directed the UCN executive to establish close liaisons with both territorial Departments of Education. The third, sponsored by Ron Chambers of Whitehorse, directed the Executive to confirm the eight resolutions that formed a part of the incorporation documents. Flo Whyard, UCN director and editor of the *Whitehorse Star*, reported on the meeting. She focused particularly on the third resolution and noted it was agreed that "the UCN constitution should be amended at the 1972 annual meeting to provide [that] sixteen of the thirty-one directors and eight of the twelve executive committee members be

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> Graham personal files, [file 1] "UCN 1970-1973," Paul White, proposal. Used with permission.

<sup>221</sup> YA, UCN Records, COR 0321, file 7, "Draft of University of Canada North, RMH, 24 September 1971."

<sup>222</sup> A complete list of members was not located.

northerners of native origin."<sup>223</sup>

Following the AGM, there was a Director's meeting. Several of the UCN executive positions were filled: Richard Rohmer, Chair; Rev. Fr. Charles Gilles, Treasurer; Dick Hill, NWT Chairman; Georges Erasmus, NWT Vice-Chairman; and Flo Whyard, Secretary. Directors were also elected. The Yukon executive positions were to be filled at a later meeting in Whitehorse.<sup>224</sup> The NWT Division held its meeting immediately after the annual general meeting. The, primarily Native, directors agreed to try to meet in Yellowknife within three months "to begin definite programming for establishment of a University of Canada North."<sup>225</sup> Dick Hill noted, with some pleasure, that the Concepts Conference marked the real beginning of UCN "because of the free exchange of ideas among educators, industry, northern residents and native peoples."<sup>226</sup>

### Initial Public Assessment and Reaction

David N. Wilson of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Department of Educational Planning, wrote about The University of Canada North in 1972.<sup>227</sup> He said that the "re-constitution" of the NWT directors was important because it led to "greater proportional representation for Indians, Eskimos and Metis than were included on the earlier, interim Board of Directors."<sup>228</sup> The influence of COPE members, he thought, would ensure the UCN would "concentrate on local culture and the welfare and advancement of the original inhabitants of the Territories."<sup>229</sup> Wilson, like many of the conference delegates, hoped UCN would take special

223 Graham personal files, [file 7] "Flo Whyard," "UCN names directors." Typescript of newspaper story. 2. Used with permission. In the letters patent application the figure for number of Native directors was nineteen, not sixteen.

224 A complete list of members is not available, but the Yukon Directors elected at the meeting were (of Whitehorse unless noted): Garth Graham, Renée Alford, Ken McKinnon, Aubrey Tanner, Jack Bredin, Mike Smith, Buzz Hudson, Flo Whyard, Andrew Joe, Rolf Hougen, Ron Chambers, Eric Wurmman, John Hoyt, Mike Stutter (Dawson), and Dixon Lutz (Watson Lake). Graham personal files, [file 7]. "Flo Whyard," "UCN names directors." Typescript of news story. Used with permission.

225 Graham personal files, [file 7] "Flo Whyard," "UCN names directors." Typescript of news story. Used with permission.

226 *Ibid.*

227 Wilson wrote two papers on the UCN for The Comparative and International Education Society of Canada's 1972 Annual Meeting but did not attend the Concepts Conference.

228 David N. Wilson, "University of Canada North: Promise For An Alternative University Structure" (unpublished paper prepared for The Comparative and International Education Society of Canada, 1972), 8.

229 *Ibid.* It appears Wilson uses the term "COPE" to mean politically-active First Nations people generally and not that organisation specifically.

care not to "replicate the alienation and de-culturation manifested, not only in 'southern' universities, but also at all levels of education experienced by Indian and Eskimo youth."<sup>230</sup>

The mixed hopes and visions that emerged from the Concepts Conference predictably fostered mixed reactions. The conference proceedings stated that the exercise had been useful and had provided some direction for UCN. The conference summary stated that a consensus had emerged, but it was not what the organizers had hoped for:

There is a widespread agreement that fresh evidence should be given to post-secondary or further education in the north and that, as a first step, a community college or its equivalent should be established in the Territories. At the outset it would have no degree-granting function and would be conceived in such a form as to meet the need of northern residents and in particular, of the native people. . . . It is also agreed that, regarding the Northwest Territories, the native people should have a major if not [a] controlling voice in deciding what is to be done and how.<sup>231</sup>

Their envisioned university had been demoted to a community college.

The press was perceptive in its assessment of the conference. The *Native Press* of Yellowknife reported the results of the conference in cautiously positive terms, emphasising the hope the UCN might be a Native university: "the people agreed that we need a university and we will work to see that it is really suitable for native People and not just an imitation of Southern Colleges."<sup>232</sup> It reported that nine of the fifteen NWT Division Directors were Native.<sup>233</sup> Its correspondent reported that the proceedings had been occasionally acrimonious owing to the vastly different concerns of the Native and non-Native delegates:

A lot of arguments surrounded the idea at first when he [Rohmer] was accused of trying to force his ideas of what the university should be on the people and not having anything but token Native representation on the Board.

All through the meeting, Native people were always asking if this university was really needed. Will it really be for us? These questions that were always coming up bothered some white people there and one lady tried to whitewash the Native People's attitude as childish.

Walter Currie, an Ojibway professor from Trent University in Ontario, crushed this very quickly by pointing out that Indians and Eskimos all over North America are worried about their

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>232</sup> *Native Press*, Yellowknife, 26 November 1971.

<sup>233</sup> The NWT Directors were: Chief Tadit Francis (Fort MacPherson), Addy Tobac (Fort Good Hope), James Arvaluk (Frobisher [Iqaluit]), Dr. Noah Carpenter (Sachs Harbour), Richard Hill (Inuvik), George Erasmus (Yellowknife), Rosemary Thrasher (Providence), Phoebe Nahanni (Fort Simpson), Prof. R.G. Williamson (Rankin), Ches Russell (Rankin), Fr. Charles Gilles (Fort Smith), James Mason (Fort Smith), Cliff Reid (Pine Point), Rev. Turk McCollom (Hay River), and Mona Jacobs (Fort Smith). Richard Rohmer was elected Director-at-Large. Graham personal files, [file 7]. "Flo Whyard," "UCN names directors." Typescript of news story.

identity and losing the traditional ways.<sup>234</sup>

The editor of *The Drum* was negative but astute:

Even at a week away from the UCN conference it is difficult to determine whether the delegates laboured and brought forth a mouse, made a beginning or delivered the embryo of a northern university stillborn.

What is clear was that it was much too early to discuss 'ways and means'. . .

What did happen at the University of Canada North conference? Where is the concept going?

The DRUM suggests the concept has been put back 10 to 15 years. Probably this is just as well for the concept as advanced was more vision than reality.

How fortunate the delegates never really got around to talking financing. They, at least, spared themselves the disappointment of discussing that painful but most important necessity.<sup>235</sup>

The correspondent for Yellowknife's *News of the North*, in contrast, was positively overwhelmed by the conference proceedings and what had been accomplished. The reporter wrote that

something great happened here over the weekend. . . . There is no way any participant can be truly objective in reporting what happened. It was a tremendous emotional experience. Most people came with preconceived ideas, but left shaken and confused. . . . many more meetings will be necessary, but something good something northern has been started.<sup>236</sup>

The *Whitehorse Star* was also positive. This may have been because its editor (and the reporter filing the story), Flo Whyard, was actively involved with UCN. Its Monday, 22 November edition proclaimed that The University of Canada North was a "'Unique Opportunity' in North for University."<sup>237</sup> An article in its Thursday edition read "Northern University: You're Launched."

The article reported that:

Directors of the University of Canada North were given a mandate from the final conference meeting here Monday morning to proceed with further planning for 'an experimental program-in the light of the expressed needs of the native peoples.' . . .

Conference moderator Dick Hill said the meeting at Inuvik had been the true beginning of a university because of the free exchange of ideas among educators, industry, northern white residents and native peoples. He congratulated those who took part on their open-minded approach to the university concept.<sup>238</sup>

Some of the directors had apparently ignored the writing on the wall.

Arnold Edinborough, a Toronto-based freelance journalist who attended the conference as an observer for Rothman's, reported on the conference in the *Financial Post*. As an observer

<sup>234</sup> *Native Press*, Yellowknife, 26 November 1971.

<sup>235</sup> *The Drum*, Inuvik, NWT, "Publisher's Comment," 1 December 1971.

<sup>236</sup> *News of the North*, "Northern University Moving Ahead," 25 November 1971.

<sup>237</sup> *Whitehorse Star*, 22 November 1971.

<sup>238</sup> *Whitehorse Star*, 25 November 1971, 36.

his vision was clearer, for he saw a deep and important difference of opinion at the conference that stemmed from the different racial balance in the two territories. Yukon supporters favoured a conventional university. The NWT First Nations delegates "wanted a university that would be a centre for study of the native cultures by the natives themselves."<sup>239</sup> Edinborough concluded by speculating on the direction the UCN would realistically have to adopt to be successful:

A junior college in Whitehorse which could serve those who have not the qualifications to go south for a full university course and yet need a good post-secondary vocational education. An Institute of Indigenous Studies with one branch in Inuvik for the Indian Culture and one at Rankin Inlet for the Eskimo. . . , plus a research centre for the social and natural sciences at Yellowknife.<sup>240</sup>

Edinborough's assessment might well have been accurate had UCN evolved that far. The two territories were significantly different enough that a common approach to higher education was unlikely to work.

W. Peter Adams reported to his MP, Hugh Faulkner, after the conference. Adams called the weekend "a most enlightening experience." He also said he had received the impression that "the Yukon will likely 'go it alone' in this matter."<sup>241</sup> Faulkner wrote back saying that he had mentioned UCN to the DIAND minister. Though the department had been asked its opinion on the incorporation, its scientific advisor and assistant director of its education branch had discussed the subject at great length, a specialist from the department's Northern Science Research Group had been at the conference and the newspapers had carried stories about UCN, the minister told Faulkner "[we] apparently do not know anything about its aims and plans."<sup>242</sup>

CBC Yellowknife conducted a short interview with Georges Erasmus in early December that illustrated First Nations qualms about the UCN project and underlined the position Erasmus had taken at the conference. The interviewer said that Erasmus "feels there has to be more input from people right across the Territories and from all sections of the community before the university ideal will work."<sup>243</sup> Erasmus then said that he thought the success of the

<sup>239</sup> Arnold Edinborough, "Out of the dark, a northern university and native protest," *The Financial Post*, Vol. 65, 4 December 1971, 17.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Adams personal files. "UCANORTH Conf.," W. P. Adams to Hugh Faulkner, MP, 23 November 1971. Used with permission.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, Hugh Faulkner, MP to W. P. Adams, 9 December 1971. Used with permission.

<sup>243</sup> Hill personal files, CBC Yellowknife, transcript of "Mackenzie News" interview with Georges Erasmus, 2 December 1971. Used with permission.

UCN would depend on the people in the Territories. "We could start constructing the buildings and everything but I don't think this is what we want especially, but I haven't heard too many people saying things on it yet."<sup>244</sup>

By the end of 1971, The University of Canada North was no closer to reality than it had been a year earlier. Some thought had been given to its form and organization but the UCN concept seemed even more elusive than it had been the previous spring. The bold plan outlined in Rohmer's background report that classes would commence in the Fall of 1972 seemed impossible. Closer examination of the whole idea had shown UCN directors that establishing some kind of university was going to be a great deal more difficult than anyone had imagined. Garth Graham of the Yukon Division conceded in an interview, some twenty years later, that he thought some of the biggest obstacles the University of Canada North faced were the inexperience of its founders and their lack of unified vision. The Concepts Conference made that brutally clear.

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244 *Ibid.*