

Book borrowing goes high-tech

By Mike MacInnis

A NEW AUTOMATED SYSTEM INTRODUCED AT Robertson Library promises to simplify the process of borrowing books in much the same way that Automatic Teller Machines simplified every day banking.

Last year alone, 136,400 books were charged out or renewed at Robertson Library, this occupied the bulk of the circulation staff's time. Now, with the advent of the new 3M SelfCheck System, routine checkouts can be done by students themselves, allowing more time for staff to complete other tasks.

Library officials have studied the system thoroughly and are confident that it will be a time-saving device for both library personnel and students. Twenty-five North American libraries with the system in place were surveyed to determine whether the SelfCheck would prove useful at U.P.E.I.

"The University of Toronto has five in heavy use and

stated that they are very pleased with its performance," explained Susanne Manovill, Head of Circulation Services at Robertson Library. Many other Canadian Libraries already have the system, but Robertson Library is the first in Atlantic Canada to obtain the device. The library acquired the innovative system on a free trial basis with an option to buy and the end of this year.

The system is both quick and simple to use. The student simply places his or her Student I.D card in the space provided and then easy-to-follow prompts appear on the color monitor. After a few short steps, the book is desensitized and the student is printed a receipt indicating the name of the book charged and its due date.

Concern has already been expressed over the fear that the automation of what used to be a staff duty will mean a loss of jobs for personnel. Manovill ensures that this will not be the case. "Jobs will not be compromised as there has been a

backlog of work piling up for quite some time now," she said. According to Manovill, with the financial crises universities are now experiencing, it is very difficult to replace retiring employees. This, therefore, increases the workload for current staff. "Any time freed up by the system will be put to valuable use, maintaining the library's commitment to serve its students efficiently," she added.

According to Systems Librarian Suzanne Jones the need for staff at the circulation desk will not diminish. "Not all items will be serviced by the system," she said. "Students wishing to access reserve materials and check-out items such as audio cassettes will be referred to the circulation desk."

With the convenience the system has to offer comes added responsibility for the student. Up to \$1,500 worth of books can be withdrawn at any time, this is based on the fact that a student can borrow as many as 30 books, each with a maximum value of fifty dollars. Therefore, a lost I.D. card in the wrong hands could bring heavy fines to its rightful owner. If you lose your card, you are asked to notify the circulation desk immediately.

Science = fun

By Shannon Younker

IF YOU WERE A TEACHER, WOULD YOU MARK THIS equation right or wrong? Science often gets a bad reputation among children and teenagers. Frontrunners, a group of scholarship science students at UPEI, have made it their mission to show younger students that science can be fun. Frontrunners began in the fall of 1991 as an invitation from Industry, Science and Technology Canada to two recipients of Canada Scholarships to form a group who would visit local schools to discuss science and technology. They have grown steadily since, both in number of students participation and in interest from the community.

The students in Frontrunners visit elementary, junior and senior high schools to promote science education. As well as visiting schools, they also participate in showing students the excitement of doing science by acting as advisors and judges for PEI's Science Fairs.

UPEI coordinator Steven Ellis says having Frontrunners visit a school provides a good way to get the attention of school-age children because the younger students can relate well to university students. The people involved in Frontrunners are students themselves, so they are in the perfect position to answer questions about choosing courses in high school and university and the importance of not shutting one's self out of jobs in science and technology. They are young enough to remember what demonstrations children will understand.

Ellis suggests that students also enjoy the way that

Frontrunners presents their lessons. A visit from Frontrunners is a very concrete, hands-on experience. Students are encouraged to get up, get moving, and try some experiments themselves. Science class at school often entails a lot of writing and little of anything else. Frontrunners shows kids that if they stick with science, they will get to have a lot of fun with experiments later.

Frontrunners is not only educational for the students in the schools visiting. It is a learning experience for the university students as well. Besides organizational skills, they found that you really have to know a subject well in order to teach it. The most important aspect of Frontrunners is the interest and excitement of more young minds being turned on to science and technology.

Debunking myths used to justify Axworthy cuts

By Engin Isis (CUP)

THE EFFORT TO SUGARCOAT THE SOCIAL CUTS relies on a series of often unspoken beliefs. Here's some of them -- and some responses.

Myths: The following are believed to be true among many government agencies and policy-makers:

- 1) Markets can best determine the direction of higher education. Since the old economy based on "manual" skills is dead, the market demands university graduates skilled in research, writing and computer programming. The demands of the market must determine what skills are taught in universities.
- 2) Education is training. The role of university education is to train students in professional skills and prepare them for professional employment. The only reason students attend university is the hope of such professional employment.
- 3) Priorities should be shifted from research to teaching. Many professors consider themselves as primarily researchers and only secondarily as teachers. With declining funds available, in at least some universities this priority should be reversed.
- 4) University students find employment in their fields upon graduation with relative ease. Obtaining a university degree is a rite of passage to professional employment.
- 5) Students don't contribute enough to the cost of their education. Compared with other countries, Canadian university and college students pay a smaller portion of the cost of their education. This portion must increase to reflect not only the costs of education but also the increasing national deficit and debt situation in which we find ourselves.
- 6) Instructional technology can be relied upon to sustain quality with declining resources. Various available technologies such as the Internet, video conferencing, and interactive multimedia

can be used to teach a greater number of students with fewer professors.

Counter-myths: The following are alternative ways in which one can think about what governments are doing about Canadian higher education:

- 1) Markets cannot determine the focus and role of higher education
 - Markets are short-sighted. Markets have a very short memory: what is needed today will be discarded tomorrow.
 - Markets are amoral: markets cannot make moral choices. What the role of higher education in our society should be is not a question that markets can answer. Rather, higher education and its focus, diversity and depth must be an outcome of the democratic will of students, teachers and parents, and the public.
 - Markets cannot guarantee employment. Even those fields that seem to be profitable and marketable now quickly get saturated and those students who are trained in these fields become either unemployed or underemployed.
- 2) Training does not belong in the university. Training, in the sense of teaching certain useful skills, is only a small part of university education, and in large part it is best left to the colleges. To expand and open youthful minds, make them aware of the intricacies and paradoxes of social life and nature, and to inculcate lifelong habits of learning, respecting and questioning our social norms, laws, and practices are among the most important roles of the university. Endowed with these values and knowledge acquired in the university, graduates become active citizens and leaders of our culture as artists, scientists, politicians and professionals. To reduce the university experience to training is risk the annihilation of our

culture.

3) Research and teaching are inseparable activities in the life of an active professor. It is inconceivable that a professor could expose students to an exuberant and exhilarating mind without being at the frontiers of knowledge in her field. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine a professor pushing the frontiers of knowledge without the challenging and refreshing activity of teaching.

4) University graduates do not find employment easily. Those who do find employment related to their field of study are considered lucky. Moreover, many students, in addition to incurring debt through loans, take up temporary employment in the service sector to finance their education. This can affect the quality of their education, which does not make finding employment any easier. As a result of this decline in quality as well as of the difficulty in obtaining employment, many students enter graduate studies while incurring further debt.

5) Students do contribute to the cost of their education. Along with their contributions to our culture as artists, scientists, politicians, and professionals, university graduates also directly subsidize higher education in Canada as taxpayers. The argument that they should contribute through their tuition fees is a cloaking device for taking their freedom of choice away, which Canadian society has historically found valuable to grant.

6) Technology cannot replace teaching. Technology can be used in the classroom but it cannot replace quality teaching. Moreover, using technology while reducing time allocated for certain teaching tasks increases time spent on certain others. Overall, the higher use of technology does not reduce either time needed to teach (professors) or to learn (students).