

Soc-Anth Honours

A welcomed addition to the Soc-Anth department

BY SUZANNE WILLIAMS

An honours program devised for the Sociology/Anthropology department was approved January 9. It was created through the collaboration of students and professors in both departments.

The idea for the program was brought into discussion in December of 1996, and a year was spent revising the proposal. Sociology and anthropology students will be able to take advantage of the honours degree beginning in September.

In the past, sociology or anthropology majors from UPEI who were looking to further their education with a graduate degree have needed to take an extra year of schooling, known as a "qualifying year," before entering graduate school.

Because sociology and

anthropology operate as a joint department, one honours degree will be intended for either of the two subjects.

"This makes it a little different than other honours programs," explains Satadal Dasgupta, chair of the department. "It is thought of as a stronger program than if there were two separate ones for

each subject."

Students who are interested in this honours degree must either be completing or in the process of completing their degree in either sociology or anthropology. Through the honours course, students complete a number of courses, as well as a research component and an honours essay.

Unfortunately, most of the students who helped create the programme will not be able to benefit from it, as they are in their final year at UPEI. But, if they opt to, they may return for a year to follow the honours programme and update their degrees.

The development of the programme relied on these stu-

dents and professors of the department working together.

Michael Drake, president of the Soc-Anth Society, said that this collaboration was the key to the creation of the honours degree.

"Students working with the faculty, in any department, can be a valuable asset," he said.

Aboriginal people find gov't response to Royal Commission report disappointing

OTTAWA (CUP)—The federal government has formally apologized for decades of assimilation efforts and abuse suffered by aboriginal peoples as a result of official government policies.

Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart made the announcement Jan. 8, in a much-anticipated response to the 4,000-page report released last year by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Stewart apologized for the government's historic mistreatment of aboriginal people, placing specific emphasis on the physical and sexual abuse many suffered at Canada's residential schools.

Stewart also announced the establishment of a \$350-million fund to help victims of the residential school system.

"[The schools] left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in aboriginal communities to this day," she said.

Canada's residential school system was established at the beginning of the century as part of a federal assimilation policy, which was intended, according to then-Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott, to "continue until there

is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department."

By the 1940s, approximately 8,000 aboriginal children were enrolled in residential schools, which continued to operate until the 1950s and 1960s, when students were gradually transferred to provincial schools.

The residential school system has since gained public notoriety following revelations of physical and sexual abuse of children, suppression of aboriginal languages and traditional practices and mandatory residential-school attendance enforced by the Department of Indian Affairs, even over the wishes of parents.

"Let this moment mark the end of paternalism in our relations and the beginning of empowerment of first peoples," First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine, who accepted Stewart's apology, said.

But other aboriginal leaders present at the apology ceremony dismissed the government's response, citing its various inadequacies.

The statement failed to recognize Metis or Inuit peoples, Gerald Morin, president

of the Metis National Council, said.

"Our people are not going to be satisfied with the response we've had today," he said.

The government's response was also criticized for being far weaker than the apology offered by the Mulroney government to Japanese-Canadians interned during the Second World War.

There are also concerns that the response barely scratched the surface of the recommendations issued in the Royal Commission report. And ironically, some say the federal government ignored one of the underlying precepts of the commission's report when it developed its response.

Paul Chartrand, a commission member and a former professor of Aboriginal studies at the University of Manitoba, says the government should have consulted more with aboriginal people on its response and the policies which emanated from it.

"The main criticism is [the government's] failure to follow a guiding principle for policy that our report urges, which is never to develop policy without the participation of aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately

that happened and that's why you saw some disappointment expressed," he said.

Chartrand adds commission members were expecting something more substantial from the government in its response, to signify the turning of a new page in aboriginal-government relations.

"The royal proclamation that [the commission] envisioned was one that would be given by the Queen's representative, the Governor General, and perhaps ideally, by the Queen herself, to add that symbolism. [A]nd it would be accompanied by some real, institutional change," he said.

Eric Robinson, a member of the Manitoba legislature, says the apology should have come from Prime Minister Jean Chretien himself.

"If we're to hear a true apology, it should have come from the Prime Minister, a Prime Minister who tried to assimilate us into Canadian society," he said.

In 1969, when Chretien was Indian Affairs Minister, his department released a controversial white paper which proposed stripping aboriginal peoples of their treaty status to facilitate assimilation into the Canadian mainstream.



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