

STUDENT POPULATION, UPEI and HOLLAND COLLEGE

By Kevin Gauthier

Recall, if you will, Dear Readers, the very first column by this humble writer that appeared in issue I of our venerable SUN, the subject of which was a review of the 10th anniversary U.P.E.I. Day festivities, and which ended on a somewhat despondent note by questioning the usefulness of U.P.E.I. to Islanders, (or at least the perceived usefulness), and asking why the indifference to the "Island university" is so pervasive on the Island. The limits of space (or rather the limits of the Editor's patience with my journalistic rantings) forced me to delay further exploration of that particular topic until today; and so, by a rather circuitous route through which I managed to draw the wrath of every business, science and engineering student on campus, I have finally returned to my original topic. (Cheers of Joy and Elation.)

Having taken the time and trouble to make a few inquiries, I have unearthed some rather telling information that appears to support the thesis being proposed. The Registrar's Office, after a suitably impressive period of official silence, has released estimated enrolment figures for this year. U.P.E.I. currently has 1365 students enrolled, which marks a 1% increase over last year's enrolment. In addition, there are 731 part-time students (taking less than 3 courses), which is a modest increase over last year. The trend at UPEI over the past five years has been one of declining enrolment, which in itself is no cause for wailing and gnashing of teeth, since it is a trend common to most North American universities, a trend due largely to the rather predictable increase in population which resulted from the return home of soldiers after World War II.

This trend towards declining enrolment does cause some consternation, however, when one places it side by side with the opposite trend that is developing at Holland College and other similar institutions across Canada. The College has recorded

modest increases in enrolment for several years now. This year, enrolment at Charlottetown Centre is 721, at Summer-side 265, and at Royalty Centre over 800. Charlottetown Centre alone had 1947 applications. And how did UPEI do?

(All the above-mentioned figures are for full-time and part-time students.) Perhaps even more telling is the fact that since 1969 enrolment at Holland College has increased almost 700% and the College has expanded to 4 "campuses", while UPEI enrolment has declined and we have failed to broaden our physical base beyond what we now occupy.

Now that such a flurry of statistics has you convinced that perhaps I am not entirely crazy, allow me to put forward what my barely adequate intellect suggests might be the cause(s) of our apparent decline. First and foremost, and this should come as no surprise to anyone who reads the SUN regularly, the situation UPEI finds itself in today is caused by the tremendous lack of interest and enthusiasm that exists in today's high school graduate for a liberal arts education, which is what UPEI is supposed to be built upon. Secondly, UPEI has suffered greatly because of the shoddy, if not downright neglectful, treatment we have endured from the provincial government and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. (But let's save that juicy morsel for later for herein lie many volumes of potential inflammatory future articles and reports! Watch this space.) Thirdly, and perhaps most annoying of all, is the negative attitude many Island school teachers, guidance counsellors, and principals have toward UPEI. Believe it or not, some of these people still advise Island students not to attend UPEI if they want a "worthwhile" degree. Why? Good question. As far as I know, a degree from UPEI is every bit as "worthwhile" and valuable as any other, at least from the viewpoint of personal development, (although if one measures the value of a university degree in dollars, one might argue otherwise). Frankly,

UPEI has failed to reach out to Islanders and make itself relevant for them. We can sit here on our grassy hill and whine about being unappreciated, but if whining doesn't solve our problem then action must. Our Extension department, which offers 19 courses to 414 students has not been allowed to expand rapidly enough to keep UPEI abreast of Islanders and what they want.

Of course, one must not underestimate the effects of the merger which created UPEI in the first place. Interest in the old institutions of St. Dunstan's University and Prince of Wales College was always great in P.E.I. and when the government of Alec Campbell

threw the whole bunch, Protestants and Catholics alike, into one barrel, the very heavens shook. And now that the commotion has subsided, perhaps Islanders have turned their interest elsewhere. There are no sides to choose at UPEI, and the old battle of the Orange and Green in which Islanders have always taken great amusement, has declined to the occasional

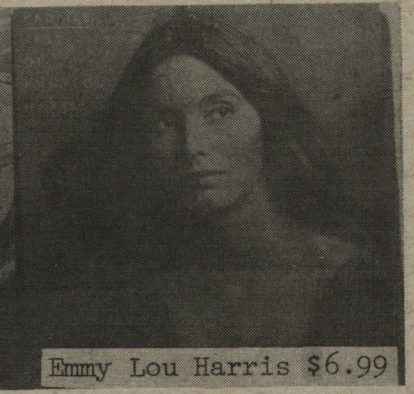
rude joke perpetrated by one side at the expense of the other. Perhaps if we could convince our Chaplains to engage in a brief holy war on campus we might win back the attention and devotion of a few of the natives for whom this place was built.



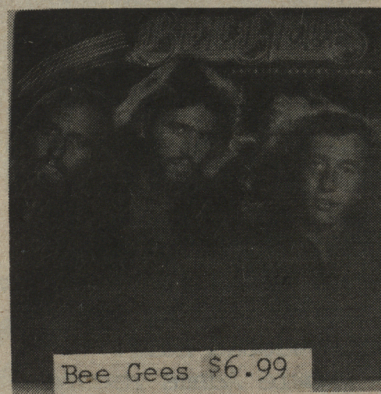
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