

Student evaluation of teaching now mandatory

Six professors cast opposing votes

By Shannon Younker

DURING THEIR SEPTEMBER 30 MEETING, the UPEI Senate voted on student evaluation of teaching. The motion to make evaluations mandatory passed by a large margin, with only six professors casting "nay" votes. Student Union president Andrew MacPherson considers this a "victory for students in that they will now have some input into what and how will they will be taught in the classroom." MacPherson added that he was "pleasantly surprised by the strong majority that the vote received in senate."

UPEI is primarily a teaching institution and, according to its mission statement, the university's first goal is "to promote excellent instruction." Many students feel they are the best judges of their professors' effectiveness. Students now have an official voice in such judgements.

Student evaluation of teaching is an issue that has been continually discussed at UPEI for at least ten years. In 1991, the senate

committee on evaluation of teaching, chaired by Sean Hennessey, published a report titled "A Survey and Recommendation for use at the University of Prince Edward Island". Senate used this report as a basis for their decision.

In 1990, faculty members were surveyed on this topic. A majority of faculty already used evaluation forms of some type, but there was little consistency between departments and, in some cases, within departments. A majority of professors even then preferred making the use of evaluations mandatory. This vote is not only a victory for students but also for those professors who wish to improve their style and effectiveness.

It was agreed that the methods of data collection and administration should be uniform throughout the university. The suggestion of adopting a standard evaluation form was not preferred. Instead, a database of questions could be prepared from which professors in each department can choose. This

allows for some specialization of questions. (English classes need not be asked about the effective use of laboratory time, for example, but a Chemistry prof. could choose this question.)

Some concerns about student evaluations raised in the committee's report to Senate are that they may not be reliable or valid. Studies show that the average reliability, that is, the amount of agreement between members of a class of forty students is close to 90%. Student evaluations are also remarkably stable --there is an over 80% agreement in student's responses to a professor over time. Professor Larry Hale told the X-Press his "personal opinion was mandatory evaluations are a good thing". While admitting to possible concern among faculty about the design of the evaluation mechanism, Hale has "enough faith in the ...UPEI community to believe that these concerns will be solved in a just and imaginative fashion."

Student evaluation of teaching at UPEI will not be used to formulate an "anti-calendar". Instead, the results will be used by professors to see how they measure against a standard effective teaching style. Answers to questions on organization of the course will allow for feedback on that matter as well. A secondary use for the results of these evaluations is for administration purposes -- promotion and tenure decisions, for example.

It is also important to note that the formulation of an effective teaching evaluation system does not end with the recent senate vote. There are several other potential methods of evaluation, including: consultation of alumni, peer evaluations by other faculty, and the aforementioned anti-calendar format. All of these steps would contribute further to developing unbiased evaluations. The senate vote, though, is the first and most vital step in this process to date.

The News From Student Council -- October 2, 1994

STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING NOW MANDATORY -- Senate representatives had news of a victory for students. In their most recent meeting, the UPEI senate voted in the adoption of mandatory student evaluation of teaching.

TUITION TO RISE 145%? --Rory O'Connor and Andrew MacPherson both expressed concerns about the effects of Federal Human Resources minister Lloyd Axworthy's proposed social policy reforms. If the federal government pulls its share of money out of UPEI's funding, the university stands to lose 14 million dollars. If the university was forced to raise this money from students, tuition would rise by 145%. That figure roughly equals an additional \$3500 a year--over and above the \$2600 students pay now.

COMMITTEE STRUCK TO ORGANIZE LOBBYING -- A new committee struck this year is the campaigns committee. The committee's goal is to organize the lobbying UPEI students do during the school year. Issues the committee will address include student loans and social policy reform. MacPherson and Patricia Embleton will be meeting with Dr. W.J. Eliot, PEI Student Aid administrator Dave MacPherson, and provincial minister of Higher Education Jeannie Lea to address these and other student concerns.

REMAINING PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES TO VISIT -- The remaining three candidates for president of the University of Prince Edward Island will be visiting UPEI

later in October. They will each have the opportunity to give a public address as well as speaking to student union. Dr. Tim Easley will be here the week of October 11-14.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE, IN CFS, THAT IS -- The status of the Canadian Federation of Students and the status of UPEI within CFS were also discussed. UPEI has served notice to CFS that we are considering leaving the national organization. UPEI cannot pull out without first having the motion passed by a student referendum. This referendum was suggested during council, but it was decided to postpone the referendum until the committee can study the situation and report to students.

AFRICAN STUDENT VISITING -- WUSC (World University Services Canada) is sponsoring a student from Ethiopia to come to Prince Edward Island to study at UPEI and learn Canadian culture.

CHECK YOUR BILL AT THE PHARMACIST'S COUNTER -- At the end of last year, council voted that UPEI's health plan be changed from a \$5.00 co-pay system to an 80% reimbursement plan. Last year, students were charged \$5.00 for any prescription and Mutual Life paid the balance. This year, students will be charged 20% of the price of prescriptions. Medical Plan cards are expected to be in at the end of the month. Until that time, students will be required to pay the full cost of any prescription. Simply fill out a claim, and the remaining 80% will be reimbursed later in the year.

--Shannon Younker

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