

# COMPULSORY COMPOSITION COURSE CONSIDERED CRUCIAL

by Claire Nantes

This is the second year that the University of Prince Edward Island stipulated that all incoming students take a course in composition. Such action was prompted by the results of an objective test on basic grammar written voluntarily by many freshmen students in 1975. The fact that 60% failed the examination confirmed the suspicion of many professors that a majority of students had insufficient writing abilities.

## COURSE REQUIRED

Last year all incoming students were informed that they were required to take English 151, College Composition, before completing their degree. The course stressed such things as common errors in writing, how to organize and write an essay, and how to make the best use of a

library. Dr. Terry Pratt, competency test coordinator, stated that most professors who taught the course saw a marked improvement in the work of their students.

Those who completed the course had various opinions on its effectiveness. One student said, "I was glad I was forced to take the course. It was quite helpful." Another student felt it was an unjust imposition and said he "did not learn a thing."

## TEST GIVEN

Due to economic restraints and a great number of freshmen students, there were not enough professors to accommodate all the students who had to take the compulsory course this year. So, for the purpose of reducing enrollment figures, a test was written by the incoming students during orientation week.

This gruelling examination entailed writing a 300-word essay on one of ten interesting and diverse topics. The tests were graded on the execution of the fundamentals of writing such as spelling, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph development, and overall organization and expression. The freshmen students seemed surprised when the posted results showed that only 140, out of the 404 who wrote the examination, employed sufficient writing skills to warrant a pass.

Twelve years of formal education and such a void of knowledge. The problem lies with insufficient adaptation to sociological pressures placed on both the educators and the students.

## CAUSES OF PROBLEM

The idea of higher education going hand in hand with a higher standard of living predominates in our society. A person can no longer quit school with any sort of dignity for the age of the self-made man is dead.

In order to achieve an established goal of education for the masses curriculum must be attractive, and success attainable, in the eyes of the student. To meet individual needs there must be flexibility in education programs, and achievement must be relative to ability.

## SOCIAL PROMOTION

Education boards have recognized a need for social promotion, especially at the junior high level. It is generally an accepted policy that no student should spend more than four years in the three year junior high program. A student is then promoted to senior high. The responsibility moves to the high school to find suitable programs for all individuals in order that they may graduate within a reasonable amount of time.

Most high schools on P.E.I. operate on a credit system. In such a program students take 6 courses each year but it is only necessary that they obtain 15 credits within the 3 year structure. With the exception of 2 math courses,

at any level, and 3 required englishes, students may fail two subjects and still receive a high school diploma.

## RATIONALIZATION

Mr. Steve Connolly, guidance counselor at Colonel Gray Senior High School, expressed the opinion that it is essential that all students be given a good opportunity to complete grade 12.

"Most job entry levels now require completion of high school regardless of whether this program meets entrance requirements of post-secondary institutions. The long range implication of not graduating from high school can seriously affect the entire lifestyle of a student," stated Mr. Connolly.

Administrators recognize that not all students have the ability necessary for university studies even though they have completed high school. But if a student decides to go to university, and he gets accepted, he has the right to attend.

Students may have found it possible to complete their secondary education without too much academic challenge. Many realized this year, in the area of english composition, that this was not to their advantage.

## UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBLE

Once students have been admitted to a university the institution is responsible for their academic development. In order to establish and maintain credibility a school must set standards. And students must meet these standards in order to obtain a degree.

The compulsory english course at U.P.E.I. is a step in the right direction. This in itself is not sufficient in up-grading the standards of an all-round university education. But it is a recognition of an unacceptable level of english competency and a positive attempt to correct it.

Language skills are of major importance and relevance for the entirety of one's life. In the words of Sir Francis Bacon in his essay *Of Studies*, "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man."

## New S.U. Vice-President Speaks Out on A.F.S.

by Kevin Gauthier

During Sunday's Student Council meeting, the council voted to withhold our dollar-per-student contribution to the Atlantic Federation of Students. It was the council's opinion that we could not commit the students' money to A.F.S. until the federation established a clear set of goals and plans for the coming year. We are also waiting for the declaration of a clear, written constitution for the federation.

Everyone realizes that A.F.S. has great potential to work on behalf of the students of the Atlantic Provinces. But, with its members scattered over the entire eastern coast of Canada, it will be difficult for the executive of A.F.S. to maintain close contact with everyone. At present, nobody at this university knows exactly what A.F.S. plans to do this year and where it plans to take the students of U.P.E.I. That is the reason for the council's decision to withhold our contribution. When we are satisfied that we

can hold full confidence in A.F.S. as our regional representative body, then, and only then, will we authorize the donation of our membership fee.

The federation's financial position is very shaky, but this is because they have not yet received money from the member universities. The president of Dalhousie University Student Union has said that his council will not commit themselves to support of A.F.S. until the federation issues a written constitution and plans for the coming year. The U.P.E.I.S.U. council decided that this move was entirely appropriate, and we decided to follow suit.

I hope that nobody gets the impression that the council is opposed to A.F.S. and working against it. The students of Atlantic Canada need an organization like this to help protect our interests against government and university administrators. But just because we need the federation, that doesn't mean that we have to rush into it blindly without any thought toward its actions and possible consequences.