

INCREASE IN OPERATING GRANTS

by Valerie Mansour

Tuition fee increases and further cutbacks in services will be awaiting Nova Scotia students when they return to post-secondary institutions next fall.

The Nova Scotia government has announced an increase in operating grants of 5.5%, substantially less than the 9.5% recommended by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. The MPHEC made their recommendation after

considering the institutions' original request of 17%.

The decision has disturbed members of the academic community and has prompted the resignation of one member of the MPHEC, Guy MacLean, Dalhousie University academic vice-president. He said the government has once again ignored the recommendations of the commission. "It makes me doubtful as to the use of the MPHEC if the

government just goes ahead and applies to universities the guidelines of every other department."

The increase means almost certain substantial increases in fees. And there will be more cutbacks," MacLean said.

B.J. Arsenault, chairperson of the Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS) said he was shocked at the funding level. "It contradicts what the provincial government said earlier. The Universities

are now under tremendous strain. Students are discouraged. They'll be paying more for less," said Arsenault.

"The government is leading universities down a path of self-destruction. Tuition will go up and enrolment will decrease. This will lead to the death of our smaller institutions."

Arsenault feels the MPHEC should abandon its practise of recommending grant levels. "Their research is a service to institutions, so perhaps that's all they should do," said Arsenault.

SUNS has not yet decided what they are going to do about the government announcement but will meet March 3 and 4 to make their plans.

For two years the MPHEC has called on institutions to increase tuition fees with the cost of living. The only Nova Scotia institution to raise their tuition last year was St. Francis Xavier in Antigonish. Rev. Greg MacKinnon, president of the university, said his university is in a difficult situation. "We have to do everything possible to avoid another increase," he said.

John Keyston, executive director of the Atlantic Association of Universities, said the situation looks bad for the institutions. "But the picture isn't exactly clear yet, he said. "We still need more information. Keyston said the 5.5% is actually a decrease in the institutions' actual spending power. "It's not even equal to the increase in the cost of living."

The MPHEC has met and will soon be releasing the specific grants to each university. Until then it is not known how much tuition will rise in the various institutions. Terry Donahue, the province's education minister, has said he hopes administrations will not increase tuition more than the cost of living. Some administrations said the increase could be in the range of \$75-\$200.

Unlike last year the Maritime Provinces did not make a joint announcement. The governments of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are expected to announce their decision within the next few days.



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