

UPEI aims for higher education

Plans for a Masters degree in Education program begin next year

By Todd MacLean

As of September 1998, UPEI may be offering its first graduate program ever, aside from those given by the Atlantic Veterinary College.

After all requirements were met -- including sufficient student demand, adequate academic justification, and a well designed program -- the Senate recently passed the motion to begin offering a Master of Education program next year.

A report released in 1996 showed that PEI had the lowest percentage of teachers with graduate degrees in the region. This prompted the PEI Teacher's Federation to conduct a survey of Island teachers on the subject of a possible graduate degree, and the results indicated a positive response.

"The lack of a Master of Education program on PEI is a barrier for many Island educators," said Vianne Timmons, Dean of the Faculty of Education. "Positions of added responsibility are often closed to Island educators because they do not have graduate degrees."

The university has plans to enroll 16 to 25 graduate students in the two year program. To be admitted, teachers must have a Bachelor of Education degree with at least a 70 percent average, two years of "successful" professional experience, and a valid teaching certificate from any province.

"I think it is an excellent idea," said J.P. Hogan, a current education student at UPEI. "It will be most beneficial for those who want to further their education in this field who have prior commitments on PEI, and who can't afford to go off Island for their

graduate degree."

UPEI's program will be unique, focusing more upon upgrading leadership skills, rather than those of administration. This is based on the view that all educators are potential school leaders. But it is also being hoped, by possible entrants into the program, that more practical experience will be used in the courses, as opposed to theoretical learning.

"The B.Ed. program does not adequately prepare an undergrad for the many varied and complex situations that can arise in today's classrooms," said one graduate of the UPEI Faculty of Education. "If the Masters program offered more

hands-on experience with given situations, and if the professors were more aware of the existing reality of education problems in the public school system, then I would endorse a Masters degree."

UPEI will not be receiving funding from the government for this project, and therefore the costs must be covered exclusively by tuition fees. The costs per course are thus estimated to be set around \$480-\$500. Even though these rates are reasonable and comparable to other graduate programs in the region, some students think this may be a factor in attracting enrollment.

"In comparison with the

undergraduate degrees, it appears to be quite expensive in the monetary funds category," said Hogan. "This may deter some unwealthy people away from taking the course."

But aside from the question of obtaining funds from the government, before proceeding with formal planning, UPEI must first clear up a policy in the University Act, which currently restricts UPEI from granting graduate degrees (with the exception of the AVC). This amendment must be made in the spring sitting of the legislature at latest for the program to start next September.

UPEI must also await

authorization from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, the body that approves the academic merit of proposed programs, before it can go ahead with administering.

But after all formal requests are granted, UPEI will then be well on its way to finally offering its first non-AVC graduate degree program.

"Offering a Master's degree to educators represents a milestone in the history of education on PEI," concluded Dr. Timmons. "It is essential to ensuring that our children receive the best possible education."

Teacher begins fast to stop bill 160

By Sarah Schmidt

TORONTO (CUP) An Ontario religion teacher has begun fasting in an attempt to halt the provincial government's education bill which he characterizes as draconian and unjust.

Finding sanctuary in Trinity-St. Paul's United Church, a congregation known for its social justice work located just west of the University of Toronto, Gary Connolly's fast officially began at an evening religious service Nov. 23.

"It's not I, it's we," the veteran religion teacher at Robert F. Hall Catholic school in Mississauga, a city just outside Metro Toronto, told the church full of supporters.

"We are here to attempt to speak to the truth about Bill 160, to challenge not only our government policy markers

around Bill 160, but to look at the power of the bottom line.

"We need to break the concept of the bottom line," Connolly said, emphasizing that youth will get trampled underneath this line if the controversial legislation is passed.

He added that the education restructuring bill is just one in a series of

moves against the disenfranchised at the expense of profit in Mike Harris' Ontario.

After the congregation voted unanimously to open its doors to the fasting teacher earlier in the day, the church's minister lent her unequivocal support at the service.

"This is a problem in our backyard, but it's also a larger problem," Joan Wyatt said. "And we seek a different vision."

Connolly, the father of two who weighs approximately 125 pounds, will remain at the

church for the duration of the fast.

Brenda Holtkamp, the chaplain at Connolly's school, says she came out to show her support for her colleague. She says the act of fasting, which enjoys a rich tradition in many faiths, is about bringing to fore injustices in order to right them.

Connolly began his fast just days after fellow religion teacher Dwyer Sullivan ended his five-day sit-in in the office of the education minister. Sullivan, along with three colleagues from the Toronto Board of Education, spent a weekend camped out in Dave Johnson's office.

Sullivan says he is fully supportive of Connolly's faith-based action.

"Fasting to me calls upon each of us to do what is right. For this, I am tremendously supportive," the 36-year veteran teacher at St. Benedict

Catholic school in Cambridge, said.

"Fasting as a way to bring justice may be a last recourse. Teachers have tried everything else," Sullivan said.

"The 82 Tories have to look within themselves, at the deepest consequence," he added, alluding to an important lesson of Ghandi's — if he looked in the eyes of the poor and it hurt them, he abandoned that route.

Bill 160 could pass as early as Thursday. Connolly's fast continues indefinitely.

Daily services are being held at the church for his supporters.