

Cancelled?

by Erin FAGAN

There is a persisting debate regarding the ways in which UPEI reacts to winter weather conditions. Concern peaked on Tuesday, January 22nd, after the campus chose to delay opening until 11:00 a.m., only to close again at 4:00 p.m. due to the weather.

Complaints from some students, staff and faculty come as a result of the poor conditions found on campus at 11:00 a.m., as well as the rough travelling situations they encountered along the way.

"People were getting stuck in the snow, even the walkways weren't cleared properly," noted one department receptionist, "Professors who came in (at this department) cancelled after an hour ... they were not going to risk their lives and those of their students."

"Personally," noted one student from the Hunter River area, "well, I don't think cancelling school is out of the question. I think it's a safety issue. I think that's more important than the money issue."

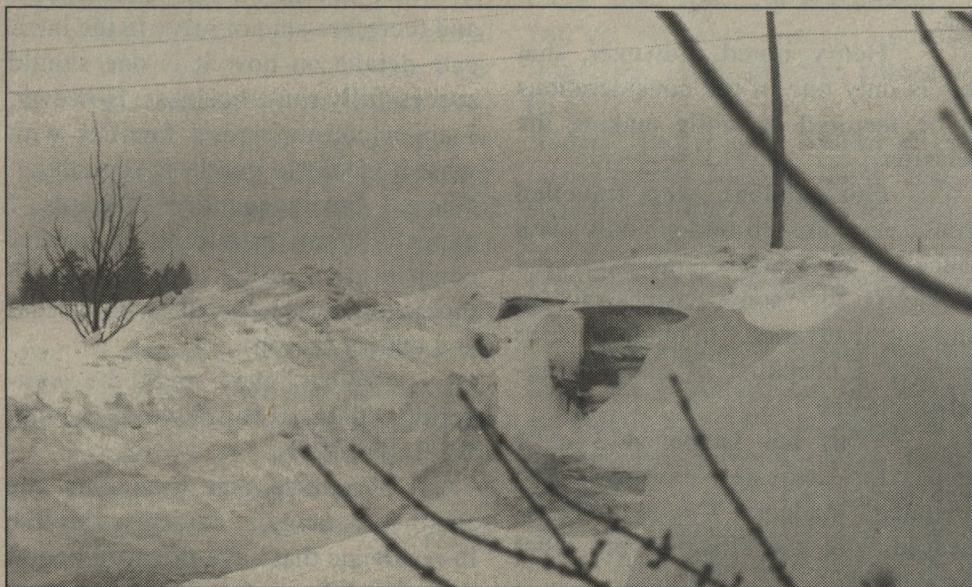
**"It sucks. When it storms, they should cancel school so that I don't die on my way in."
-UPEI Student**

"It sucks," stated another student based in Cornwall, "When it storms, they should cancel school so that I don't die on my way in."

Dr. Gil Germain, from the Political Studies department, says that his vehicle got stuck twice in the parking lot behind the Steel Building, once while pulling in and then again while trying to pull out.

"I do think the administration made a big mistake opening campus for a few hours on the 22nd ... They just goofed up — misjudged the severity of the storm."

"... On principle, it is only fair that the university *actually* be open for business when it claims to be. The campus on the 22nd was most defi-



nately not ready for business when it ostensibly opened late that morning," Germain added.

"It's (the administration's) reluctance to shut down in bad weather is problematic ... Such a policy hurts disproportionately students who live out of town (who rightfully are reluctant to travel substantial distances on bad or deteriorating roads)."

Caolan Moore, the Student Union VP of Campaigns and Communication, also noted that "despite bad weather, the school seems very, very reluctant to close." However, Moore said he knew there were "a lot of tough decisions to make" in the process.

Neil Henry, the Vice-President of Finances and Facilities, confirmed Moore's assumption by describing the decision-making process as "a balancing act."

"Somebody has to make the decision — that's me," he admitted.

While there is no official, written policy determining whether or not the campus is closed, delayed or opened, Henry has a self-developed procedure.

"I shut down the university when I think it's appropriate," he stated initially.

"It depends in part on when the storm hits ... and on the 22nd, the storm had come overnight," Henry said.

"At 6 a.m., I listen to the local

forecast and check the written forecasts on the Internet. I talk to the dispatcher for the highway department and the foreman in charge of snow clearance (this starts at 3 a.m. on campus)." He attempts to make a decision by 6:30 a.m. so that an announcement can be placed on the radio by 7:00.

"It's pitch dark ... (the decision is) based on external information from a few sources ... It's educated guesswork. I have to predict what the campus and the roads will be like later in the morning," he added.

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Henry also noted that, since there is no longer a weather station on Prince Edward Island, the forecast is based out of Halifax, with the information being "only so good." As a result, he relies to a greater extent upon the Highway Department since they are receiving information directly from the snow removal crew.

"The weather was worse than expected ... windier, and it kept on through most of the afternoon."

"I can't make a decision and take it back later."

Henry also added that, "I don't pay a lot of notice to the school board decision."

"The school system runs a public transit system, and we don't. So they have a direct responsibility for the safety of the kids. The students and staff (at UPEI) are adults ... who make their own decisions about travelling to and from the campus."

"Essentially," Henry continued, "an individual has to be responsible for him or herself ... in deciding whether or not it is safe ... whether conditions are such that it is practicable to travel. In a large sense, I am concerned about safety ... [but] I don't feel individually responsible for each person."

Henry said that it is the university's responsibility to maintain campus conditions and snow clearance.

"Clearing [on the 22nd] wasn't as good as it usually is," Henry noted, explaining that the general foreman in charge of directing snow clearance had gone home with the flu in the morning.

Some faculty have also been concerned with how to deal with the reduced class attendance on stormy days.

"Faculty who show up on stormy days to classes a quarter full don't know whether it's fair to consider the affected sessions 'real' or not," described Dr. Germain.

Another faculty member suggested that the administration "take into consideration the consequences for the classroom, and not simply whether or not the buildings can be opened."

"What we are doing here is teaching in the classroom," said the faculty member.

"There has to be substantial teaching for the half that does show, but half of the class misses it. And you can't repeat [the class] for them."

While the professor noted that "there's no easy solution," he did sug-