

# Computer Science Program Threatened

By Jessica Beebe

Rumours have hit campus that the Computer Science Department is closing.

In mid-February, a final report was issued by the UPEI Computer Science Program Advisory Committee, which stated that the mandate of UPEI's computer science education should be redefined from the traditional courses to ones with more existing support, such as biology and nursing.

On March 1, the Faculty of Science issued a response to this report. The response included several arguments against recommendations that were made in the report. There was also confusion about the four very different types of programming: Traditional Academic Computer Science, Information Technology, Computer Science "across the curricula", and Interdisciplinary Programs. The Faculty of Science response addresses these issues in a more understandable fashion.

Wade MacLauchlan, President and Vice-Chancellor of UPEI, discussed the reports and what changes may be taking place.

"It's a very complex thing to get into a single report," said MacLauchlan. "If you see one document, there's always been one before

it and one coming after it."

The board has had consultations with the private sector and public sector in the province to address what the university can and should be doing.

"I believe by the end of this week, early next week, a new document will be put out that set out the course that we see ourselves. It's a type of 'map' for us," explained MacLauchlan. "Right now, we are at the stage of finding out what PEI's role is in the computer science department and what the computer sector will be in the next many years."

He feels that some people are looking at this as a negative or threatening thing. "We have to send a broader message to the university. We have a lot to do and we should engage in it together." He concluded, "This must include a strong team behind the computer science department as well. We must move forward and not lose momentum."

Steven Howard, Chair of the Computer Science Program, feels that the report was threatening to the program. "It was shocking to the department," said Howard. "[The report] seemed rushed through and un-researched."

Howard strongly supports the computer science program, but

believes its perceived importance is decreasing. "Computer science is a strong discipline that seems to be forgotten," he said.

He believes that the computer science program was targeted due to a general confusion between using a computer, and the actual skills taught by the Computer Science department. "It's like comparing the instructors who teach you how to drive a car to the engineers who actually design and build the car," explained Howard. "Whenever something goes wrong or involves using a computer, we get thrown on the table."

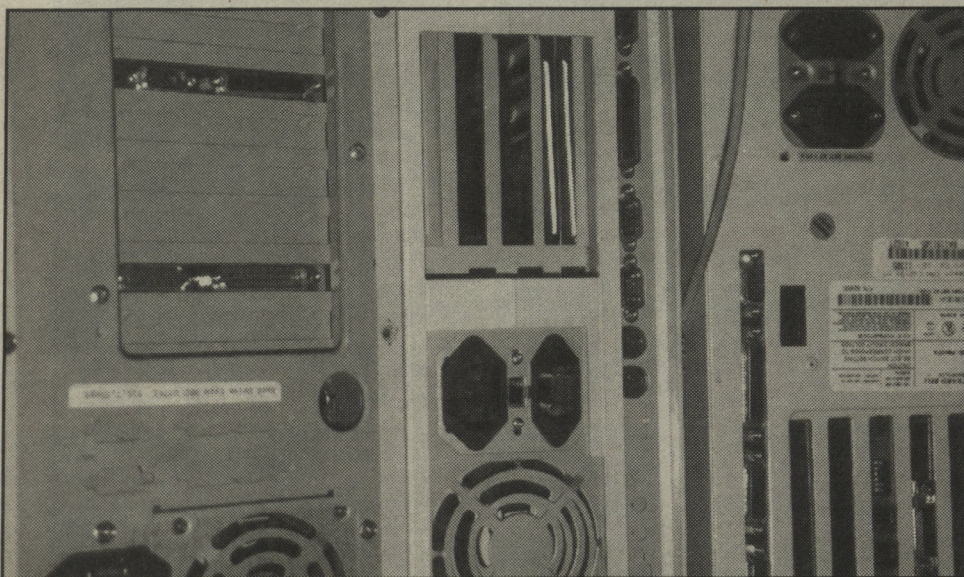
Students also want to have a say in what is going to happen to the program. Greg Scott, a fourth year Computer Science student, is one of several students who decided to voice their concerns.

"Computer science is defi-

nately important to the community and at the same time is also fundamental," said Scott. "Especially with the Co-op Program, it gives companies the opportunity to hire right out of UPEI instead of turning to other universities."

He, as well as other students, have met with the President to discuss this issue. They also plan on talking to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Development and Technology.

"There is no longer a 'hiring freeze' which means things are looking positive," said Scott. "Other Universities are expanding their computer science programs and we should be doing the same. I think we're getting the message across of how important this program is, not just to computer science students, but to all students."



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