

# Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

We, the undersigned, are writing in response to an anonymous letter to the Editor which appeared in the October 10th issue of *The Cadre*. That letter raised some concerns about the proposed new Master of Arts in Island Studies. We are members of the committee responsible for drafting that proposal.

We believe that a Master of Arts in Island Studies would enable UPEI to become a world leader in an emerging field of study with particular application to our own home province. Almost without exception, Canadian universities are now searching out niche opportunities in international education — areas where they can make a distinctive global mark while building on a perceived local strength. For UPEI, Island Studies seems an obvious candidate around which to develop such a strategy. It is also one which can include almost every faculty and department in our University.

The Master of Arts in Island Studies, as we have proposed it, would be interdisciplinary, international, comparative, and focussed on public policy. We believe we have designed a programme that would be of serious interest and appeal to students from many islands around the world, including Prince Edward Island. If our proposal were accepted, students graduating from UPEI would for the first time have the option to pursue graduate-level studies in Arts here on the Island. Local students accepted into the programme will be joined by students and faculty from around the world. As the programme grows, possibilities for student travel, exchanges, internships related to the programme will grow also.

A Master of Arts in Island Studies would enrich the University as a whole. We have carefully tailored our proposal to benefit undergraduate students in Arts and other faculties. We have proposed that the University hire a new faculty member in Island Studies, preferably with a background in environmental studies, geography,

or both. He or she would teach at the undergraduate level as well as the graduate level, strengthening undergraduate programmes such as the Island Studies minor and the Environmental Studies minor. International scholars of repute would visit the University to offer special courses, some of which would be open to interested undergraduates. Honours-level undergraduate students would also benefit from new opportunities to take special topics seminar courses cross-listed with graduate courses.

Because of the programme's focus on public policy, we think that the programme will be of substantial interest to students who might seek employment in the public sector. The government sector, both in Canada and abroad, is facing an enormous shortfall of qualified people over the next five to ten years; the proposed Master of Arts in Island Studies would graduate students amply qualified to fill important positions in the public service.

Perhaps most significantly, the Master of Arts in Island Studies would build links between UPEI and other small island universities and institutions around the world, and these links would benefit faculty, staff, and students of the University of Prince Edward Island. Already, faculty and staff from UPEI are much sought after to participate in, give keynote addresses at, and chair international conferences, as well as to collaborate on and contribute to scholarly publications and documents advising government.

We would also like to note that both the letter to the Editor from the anonymous group and your satirical editorial response contain some factual errors. To take but a few examples, none of Godfrey Baldacchino's summer courses have been cancelled due to lack of interest; Island Studies Minor students are not "fantasy students," they are just difficult to enumerate since students do not declare their minors until they apply for graduation; and the political studies department is not being "sucked dry" by Island Studies research (in fact, the department's professors have received

praise, awards, grants, and recognition both locally and internationally for their contributions to political studies and Island Studies research).

Further, it is not true that "The Island Studies program is projected to run a deficit of over 200,000 dollars in the first three years. This money will be taken from the existing Arts budget." The money for the programme is not, in fact, expected to come from the Arts budget, and nowhere does the proposal suggest that it would. Decisions about how the programme would be funded (if it were accepted) would be made by the University's Senior Management, and we would hope they might seek extraordinary funding for the programme. Appropriately, that decision will be taken by the University as a whole. Notably, the proposal projects significantly increased access to national and international research funding if the programme is accepted.

Our committee has prepared a publicly available document with additional information in response to the anonymous "Questions Regarding the Proposed Island Studies Masters." We would be more than happy to share copies of the complete proposal for the Master of Arts in Island Studies with interested students. If any of your reporters or readers would like additional information, we invite them to contact our proposal coordinator, Jane Ledwell, at the Institute of Island Studies (566-0377 [jledwell@upepei.ca](mailto:jledwell@upepei.ca)).

On several occasions, the committee has sought comment from the University community about the proposal for an Island Studies graduate programme, and we have been guided by constructive feedback from colleagues and students. We continue to refine the proposal for a Master of Arts in Island Studies, based on feedback from all sectors of the University. We welcome student interest and comments.

Sincerely,  
Ed MacDonald, Dept. of History  
(Committee Chair)  
Annie Spears, Dept. of Economics

Henry Srebrnik, Dept. of Political Studies

Jean Mitchell, Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology

Barry Bartmann, Dept. of Political Studies

Harry Baglole, Institute of Island Studies

Jane Ledwell, Institute of Island Studies/Dept. of English

Ed MacDonald, et al,

I was disappointed to hear you had found Island Studies Minors "difficult to enumerate." Thankfully the University had fewer troubles counting. There are currently two Island Studies Minors.

I certainly hope that you wouldn't allow either of your students to begin a paragraph with a sentence like this: "Further, it is not true that 'The Island Studies program is projected to run a deficit of over 200,000 dollars in the first three years. This money will be taken from the existing Arts budget.'" This gives the impression of denying the entire statement when it is only the second quoted sentence being contested.

Your own budget puts the Island Studies program \$200,000 in debt in the first year. Your "hope," that University Senior Management will seek "extraordinary funding," rather than taking the money from the existing arts budget is decidedly un reassuring. To many people and departments \$200,000 is a very significant amount of money. How can you assume the money will not come from the Arts budget if no other source of money has been concretely identified?

While the statement that the Political Science department has been "sucked out," was not my own, I wonder: Is it possible that the Political Science department's administrative duties are being neglected because of this phenomenon of being sucked out?

Sincerely,  
Matthew Dorrell, *The Cadre*