

# UPEI rankings under scrutiny

## Students dissatisfied with UPEI results in MacLean's Survey

By SARAH MURPHY

Once again, UPEI was delivered a blow by the MacLean's Survey on Canadian Universities, and students and administrators are questioning the tactics used to evaluate the institution.

Senator Crystal Doyle, a fourth year biology student, recently asked for clarification concerning figures quoting the university's operation budget, which appeared in the Nov. 98 issue of MacLean's featuring the Survey on Canadian Universities.

UPEI was reported to have the highest operating expenditures per student of the 21 institutions surveyed. These expenditure amounted to \$9577 per student.

After researching the matter, Senate reported that Maclean's figures included all expenditures related to the ordinary day-to-day operations of the university. This includes salaries, utilities, supplies, insurance premiums, equipment maintenance, telephone, postage, printing, travel, and finally interest payments on debt, if applicable.

"The money needed to cover these operation expenditures come mainly from government grants and tuition revenues," explained Vice President Academic John Crossley in a memo to Senate. "Earnings on ancillary operation, earnings on service and research contracts, along with a few miscellaneous sources also contribute to the equation."

Senator Doyle questioned the role of the Atlantic Veterinary College in contributing to an increase of the expenditures.

"If the AVC was not included in the calculations, expenditures per student at UPEI would be 29.4 per cent lower than those of AVC plus UPEI, lowering the figure from \$9577 per student to \$6761 per student," explained Crossley.

This drop in expenditures would place UPEI eighth out of the twenty-one "primarily undergraduate" universities, behind Mount Allison, Lethbridge, Northern British Columbia, Winnipeg, and Laurentian.

The methodology used by the magazine for their popular survey has been criticized and the reliability has been questioned.

"Different universities may report differently on their operations. This would likely result in variations in calculations and discrepancies in results," Crossley noted. "For example certain universities will include the amount of money spent on scholarship and bursaries in their calculation, unlike several institutions which will choose to exclude them."

Doyle feels that the survey is doing a disservice to UPEI by misrepresenting the facts.

"I think MacLean's should make efforts to have a straight line drawn between all universities so that misinterpretations are not made in the future," she says. "This small error on behalf of MacLean's may be replicated in all university stats and could be the cause of many students taking their business elsewhere."

The programs offered by a university will also influence the results. Universities such as St. Thomas or the University College of

Cape Breton which offer very few science or fine arts/music programs – or none at all – have lower operating expenditures.

Senator Patrick Young, a third year political studies student, says that the survey misses a number of UPEI's benefits in focussing on the sketchy financial aspects.

"We are ranked fourteenth," he says. "[But] I think most students here realize the benefits of going to a smaller university rather than somewhere like U of T. [Here] class sizes are small, and programs limited, but nonetheless adequately prepare students to carry on at law school, or grad school, or whatever."

Young added his dissatisfaction regarding MacLean's figures.

"Unfortunately, the MacLean's special issue on universities... is quite popular with the media, people outside the university circle, and with grade 12 students researching post-secondary institutions," he continues.

"Although MacLean's would like people to think that their survey is well-rounded and based on some common norms, it does poorly to assess the value the education received, because this is different for each student."

As problematic as the results of such studies may be, certain students applying to university often have very few sources on which to base their decisions.

"Sometimes, surveys such as this one [MacLean's] are the only thing students can base themselves on," said Jessica Mayville, a first year CEGEP student.

Young also questions the tactics used by many Canadian universities in order to lure students.

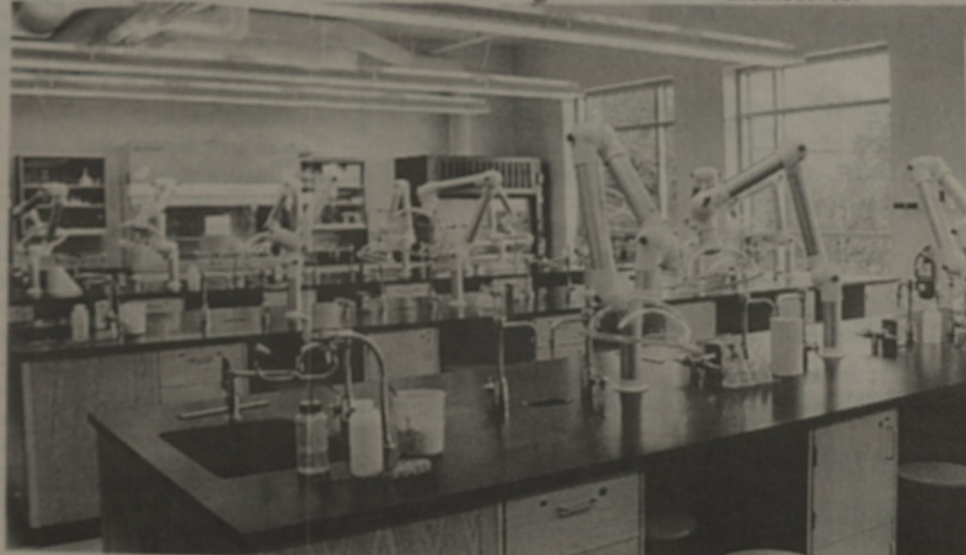
"These students probably make some tough decisions based on this survey, which worries me considerably," he says. "I thought this way, and it wasn't until I arrived here that I realized that I'll be just as prepared intellectually – both in terms of the acquisition of professional knowledge and in aca-

demically mature for law school – as I would be if I went to a school with a pathetically augmented reputation because of some Canadian news magazine," stated Young. "My point is that this survey is mostly hype, and has weight simply because of that, not because it's a scholarly study or credible."

Doyle agrees that the survey is influential for many students, but not to the degree where they would decline acceptance into the only university which accepted them. She adds that the survey would better represent universities with a few minor change to its format.

"I think that the MacLean's survey should be more complete and should delineate exactly what is included in each university," she says.

Crossley maintains that operating expenditures per student reveals little about the quality or quantity of activities at any particular university, or the relative merits of the universities themselves.



Real life, real learning, right here. MacLean's magazine neglects real classrooms in its infamous survey.

-file photo