

Audit uproar

Value for Money audit

By Todd MacLean

Opinions on the Value for Money Audit presently being conducted on UPEI by the provincial government are varied. Most are in opposition to the audit, particularly UPEI President Elizabeth Epperly, but others feel that such strong opinions towards the audit may be unwarranted.

The main criticism of the audit is its inappropriateness, which was explained in a letter sent by Dr. Epperly to the Minister of Education on the day that the audit was made public.

"This Value for Money Audit is not really about how much money we spend; the proposed audit is an intrusive examination of programs. How would the Auditor General propose to determine the value of programs?" wrote Epperly.

The problem lies in the fact that the government is claiming to "know best" what programs the university should offer. The university's academic programs are already internally and externally reviewed on a regular basis by experts in the respective fields, and it is felt that this government audit, with its extensive criticisms, will only give a negative impression of the university.

"Audits like this only bring out negative points, and nothing positive will come out of it," said Janice Broderick, Student Union President. "They will simply be 'nitpicking' our Liberal Arts programs, more-so than Science or Business. I just can't believe the government has the nerve to do something like this and still be cutting [funding to] us at the same time."

Broderick is in support of Epperly's letter to Chester Gillan.

"I think she had every right to do it, and it was an

excellent letter. Gillan said he'd tell her if the audit was going to take place, and when he didn't, she obviously had a right to be frustrated."

In fact, in a Senate meeting on December 5, 1997, the day after the public announcement was made, Epperly mentioned that prior to the announcement she had been told that there would no be such an audit at all.

Even as the Value for Money Audit is underway, exactly what is being audited is still hazy within the university community. Beyond a study of academic programs, little is known about the audit. Its purpose, and what is expected from the results, is rather unclear.

"The question of 'what's in it?' is a major concern," said Faculty Association Head, Gerald Johnson. "We know that they're basing their study on so-called 'performance indicators' however, what is being studied is still unknown."

Johnson explained that "because the faculty are constantly being evaluated in many ways, we are quite open [to the audit], and have no problem with yet another evaluation taking place. Evaluation by another source is basically non-concerning. [Epperly is] fully aware of our opinion on the matter, and appreciates that the faculty are used to this."

The university's Board of Governors is also taking a "backseat" type of position on the issue, as are many other members of the university community, according to Broderick.

But she also made it evident that the audit's potential for harm shouldn't be taken too lightly, as an Alberta university has apparently already learned its lesson in this area.

"When an audit was conducted at a university in Lethbridge, Alberta, the faculty went on strike, the president was fired, and the university was basically put in 'limbo' for an entire year."

The question of UPEI's autonomy is also arising as a

result of the audit. In her letter, Epperly wrote, "We are not a government department; we are not a business... To be vital and responsive the University must be fully responsible for its own programs." The assistance of both the AUCC and the AAU will be sought on

this issue.

There will be opportunities during the process for the University to question the audit's activity, and also to review and to comment upon the final report when it is finished, before its release.

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