

Memorial Opens Phys Ed to Disabled

By David Cochrane

(CUP) - Changes to the admission requirement at Memorial University's department of physical education will make it easier for students with disabilities to enter the program.

Earlier this month, the department's faculty council decided to drop a standardized fitness test from its entrance requirements. The test required students to perform various exercises, the most gruelling of which was a 12-minute run.

But some in the department argued that the test discriminated against people with disabilities because, depending on the nature of their disability, they may not be able to meet some of the test's minimum requirements.

"The argument I made was more on a human rights issue," said Greg Wood, a professor who had argued for the change for the eight years he has been on faculty.

"If you use a fitness test to remove or to screen out a certain group of potential candidates from your degree program, and the test you use is one which is essentially 80 per cent genetic, you are screening out people who might otherwise be great teachers but who can't do a push-up because they've only got one arm," he said.

"That would be criminal."

Wood gave one example of a student who couldn't pass the fitness test because she was asthmatic and had to drop out of the program and transfer to another school that didn't have the fitness test as a requirement.

That student has since earned her undergraduate degree in physical education from another university and is now enrolled in Memorial's masters of physical education program which, ironically, has never required students to take a fitness test.

But Wood admits that the decision was not popular with all students or faculty members within the department. He said that a lot of people felt the fitness test should remain a part of the entrance requirements because it was an incentive for students to stay in shape.

The decision is, however, drawing some praise from the school's student council. Shelley Freake says this move opens some doors.

"We may not have an influx of people with disabilities but at least the option is there for them," she said.

"They won't just automatically be turned away as they have in the past."

Phillip Strong, president of Memorial's Organization for the Disabled, says the decision recognizes that people with disabilities can overcome them and this has resonance outside of the university.

"It's a start but I think it needs to go further back than that," Strong said.

"It needs to go back through the grade school system where [physical education] needs to be opened up more to students with disabilities."

Strong said that enabling people with disabilities to teach physical education will provide disabled students with role models and help them get involved.

By Samer Muscati

Wildlife Legislation

(CUP) New wildlife legislation will do little to protect endangered species such as the whooping crane and bowhead whale, Canadian environmentalists say.

The proposed legislation protects wildlife on federal land and northern territories, as well as migratory birds across the country and marine animals off its shores, but fails to protect other species crossing provincial boundaries.

The bill, announced on Oct. 31, also provides stiff penalties of up to \$1 million for anyone who kills, sells or captures endangered species, but would still let people kill many vulnerable animals such as polar and grizzly bears.

Environmentalists say the tough prohibitions apply only to the actual den, burrow or nest inhabited by the animals, and does not guarantee the protection of habitat.

Habitat destruction they say, accounts for 80 per cent of species loss in Canada.

"There's a difference between leaving one tree standing in a clear-cut because it has an eagle's nest, and protecting the critical habitat of a species," said Elizabeth May, executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada.

May says the bill does not go far enough in preserving the wetlands, forests and other wilderness areas animals and plants need to survive. The burrowing owl, for example, will continue to decline as its grassland home is destroyed.

She wants the federal government to set national standards that will protect animals which migrate across political boundaries. Six provinces currently do not have any legislation to protect wildlife.

But Environment Minister Sergio Marchi says the government now has a new tool to protect species at risk. He said the new law would be examined in three years to see how well it's working and to be fixed if necessary.

"Our direction is clear--we are building the road to recovery for our species at risk. We aim to prevent any other species from becoming extinct," Marchi told a news conference.

The legislation fulfills a 1992 promise made during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, when Canada, along with 163 other nations committed themselves to pass legislation protecting species from becoming extinct.

Stewart Elgie, a lawyer who works with the endangered species coalition, says the bill is a good first step but hopes key parts will be changed. He is worried that federal politicians, and not a committee of scientists, will have the final say on what species make the endangered list, and which animals will be protected.

While the bill may help some endangered wildlife, he says that the majority--60 per cent of the 276 species at risk--will not be covered.

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