

# Backlash to Differential Fees

by Roseanne McCabe

If fees for foreign students at the University of Prince Edward Island increase, Islanders could be shortchanging themselves of an education.

Higher fees could mean foreign students won't choose to come here and P.E.I. could lose its only real avenue for international contact.

Threat of higher fees looms after the Maritime Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) recommended the three provincial government reduce its foreign student grants by \$750.

Unless universities are willing to take the loss, foreign students could face higher fees.

Dr. Peter Meincke said he is not sure what the Maritime premiers will decide. And, if fee hikes are possible, if government reduces foreign students

grants, he said: "With financial pressure already on the universities, there is a likelihood of at least some type of hike."

The Maritime Provinces wouldn't be the first. Ontario, Quebec and Alberta have already accepted a differential fee system.

UPEI has 54 foreign students - not a great number. Last year alone UPEI received 442 applications and accepted 44. Majority of applications were from Hong Kong and Malasia.

The influence of foreign students would be missed on P.E.I., culturally, economically and spiritually, says Baird Judson, advisor to the overseas students. The foreign students have a "missionary" presence - they enrich lives, he says.

Emmanuel Amobi, 24, of Nigeria, junior business administration student at

the university, says "increasing fees for foreign students would work against the university and hurt the Island."

UPEI is not as well-known as some western universities. But cheaper fees attract foreign students.

If fees increase, these students may as well apply to other more well-known universities, he says.

He says P.E.I. should wait before increasing fees, to see if UPEI gets the influx of foreign students from other universities. Then, if UPEI has to increase fees, then chances of some foreign students staying is greater.

Prof. Judson who teaches engineering courses says professors have to teach classes that are "not even full anyway", so in fact foreign students are not costing the university any more; professors still have to be paid.

He says a decision to cut foreign students grants would be a political move by government to win the public's favor.

Mr. Amobi says P.E.I. would even hurt its tourist industry by hiking fees.

If by losing students they lose "an important avenue for international contact," this does not help P.E.I.'s image to the tourist.

Mr. Amobi says choosing UPEI was "a leap into the dark" for him which he has never regretted. "There's a lot to learn from this Island apart from school-work," he says.

Mr. Amobi, representing students at regional, provincial and national conferences, has had much exposure to other parts of Canada, and other students.

There exists on P.E.I. a "sincerity" to learn about foreign countries, he says. He has also spoken to high school students, city and provincial leaders, women's groups and to the elderly.

"The intrinsic reward for me, as I explain my country, is that I see a real sincerity, as the part of Islanders an inquisitiveness to study, and to learn about others," he says.

He says influence of foreign students increases the scope of the Islander, and lets both cultures see the "commonalities".

The students affect religious attitudes here, as well. Mr. Amobi, Prof. Judson and fourth year physics student Chester Ng of Hong Kong says overseas students and Canadian students differ in this way. Religion plays an important part in the life of Nigerian and Hong Kong youth, but is not nurtured among many Canadian youth.

"Young people in Nigeria preach the gospel with youthful exuberance," says Mr. Amobi. And Prof. Judson says Canadian parents often fail to communicate basic faith to their children.

However on P.E.I. basic Christian principles seem more alive than in large Canadian cities and Mr. Ng says "this adds to the peace and tranquillity" of the Island.

Mr. Judson who with Dr. K.S. Jammu operate the volunteer advisory services for the overseas students says the Island is not "maximizing" on the foreign students and their knowledge of the countries.

Overseas student services should be organized and financed to promote students in the Island community.

As it is now, it's strictly volunteer, and he and Dr. Jammu co-ordinate their activities into the community as well as they can.

Dr. Jammu was a foreign student himself in 1959 at the University of Toronto. He says the "intermingling of students leads to insight into cultures. But Canadians can be generous in keeping fees down only if they can afford it.



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