

'Specialization' success story doubtful

By Ron Charles

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MONTREAL (CUP) — It's 1986. Upon graduating from high school, Kim, an average community college prospect, must choose between two professional programs.

One is the traditional diploma program that offers a wide range of study, including humanities and English courses. The other is a new certificate program. It focuses on one discipline, requires fewer arts courses, and discourages Kim from taking complementary courses outside her program.

Kim, very interested in electrotechnology, chooses the narrower certificate program.

At first it seems a success. She gets her certificate and lands an excellent job in her field. But the rapidly changing market and the introduction of automation soon catches up with her. Employers find they need broadly educated, flexible people: Kim's education is simply inadequate.

Kim is a victim of a Canada-wide trend. "Specialization" is the buzz word governments use to introduce narrow programs aimed at specific job markets. And if the Parti Quebecois government gets its way, Quebec will soon jump to the front of the bandwagon and make Kim's scenario a reality.

The PQ call it PREC — Project de Reglement des Etudes Collegiales. It means sweeping reforms to the college system

and to make it official policy the Quebec government will only seek the agreement of cabinet.

Currently, the specialized certificate program is only offered to adult continuing education students.

But Quebec education minister Camille Laurin says the PREC would open up CEGEPs (Quebec community colleges) to a new group of students. Just before the Dec. 5 parliamentary hearings on PREC, Laurin said the choices currently offered to vocational students are "insufficient", and a "new clientele must be welcomed."

"What can the colleges offer the unemployed or the worker who needs retraining, or the high school graduate who don't continue their studies? And especially what are they proposing for the numerous CEGEP students who quit before finishing?" asked Laurin.

Laurin says the new certificate program would not detract current diploma students, but Julia Newell, academic dean at Dawson College in Montreal, disagrees.

"The problem is with the certificate is that it is too similar to a regular diploma," Newell says. The only major differences between the two is the certificate requires two fewer English courses and three fewer humanities courses.

"The real problem with (the certificate) is that it looks really good to the students," says Pat Powers, a Dawson teacher who sits on a committee studying PREC. "It shows that CEGEP education is only to get a job ... I don't know where they're supposed to make it easier to get a job than a student with a (diploma)."

A PREC pamphlet distributed at Dawson last year says the certificate program "would have you slide through Dawson with the minimal skills necessary for a 'job' ... You are supposed to be packaged to fit the job description."

The Parent Report, the document responsible for the founding of the CEGEPs, organizes the system so students in professional and academic programs could mix through complementary courses which would help students get a broader education and experiment.

According to Laurin, the policies in the Parent Report are only experimental although they've been used for more than 15 years.

International Women's Day was March 8

Woman profs face doubts and discrimination

By Canadian University Press

First class of the term. You survey the cluster of nervous first-year faces and wish your students did not, like your academic colleagues, automatically underrate your teaching performance. But you know, sure as your salary is lower than average, sure as your chances of promotion are limited, sure as you'll be the first to go in a cutbacks crunch, that by the end of the week students will transfer out of your class. For you are a woman.

"What do you do when you discover that students are walking out of your class at the beginning of the term because you are a woman?" asks University of Toronto professor Kathryn Morgan in her paper "Amazons, Spinners and Women: A Career of One's Own."

What do you do? The question is generating controversy at campuses across the country as educational institutes frantically set up committees, establish affirmative action programs, and publically proclaim their support for women in the face of increasing criticism against sex discrimination.

Morgan, who teaches philosophy and women's studies, says in her paper women professors are subject to alienation and self-consciousness because male professors and students judge them on the basis of sex. She points out women professors are greatly outnumbered, occupy lower-paid positions, and face reprisal if they take time off for pregnancy.

"Given these stresses and forms of alienation it is not surprising that many women decide to leave the academy," she says.

Her points are clearly backed up by Some Questions of Balance, a recent report by the Commission on Canadian Studies. The report discusses the larger issue of education's future in Canada, but 20 of the commission's 85 recommendations relate to the status of women.

Despite a 50 per cent increase in women students over the last 15 years, the report says women faculty have not increased. "There has to be more women for the health of the system," says James Page, one of the report's two authors. "Women should be encouraged to pursue academic careers. But when only 15 per cent of faculty are women, there is a lack of role models (for female undergraduates)."

Some institutions have dealt with the problem through affirmative action, but not without a great deal of opposition,

even from women. At Concordia University in Montreal, the senators who objected strongly to the establishment of a committee to study the status of women at Concordia were two women.

June Chaikelson, Dean of Arts and Science, told the senate at a November meeting affirmative action is demeaning. "It may put women in the positions, but they'll have less status because of it," she said after the meeting.

Chaikelson said she had achieved her position through her abilities, not because she had been artificially promoted to

increase the amount of women in top-level positions. "When I get my next position, people will say I got it because I was a woman," she said.

Concordia education professor Arpi Jamalian said a status of women committee would do little to ensure women get fair treatment. "If we have one committee, five committees, 10 committees, how is the situation going to be different" she asked.

Despite the arguments, the senate voted 25 to 11 to establish an eight-member body with the power to take action on achieving equality of the sexes. Senate also advised the administration to hold open senior positions and posts in male-dominated faculties like engineering until qualified women can be found to fill them.

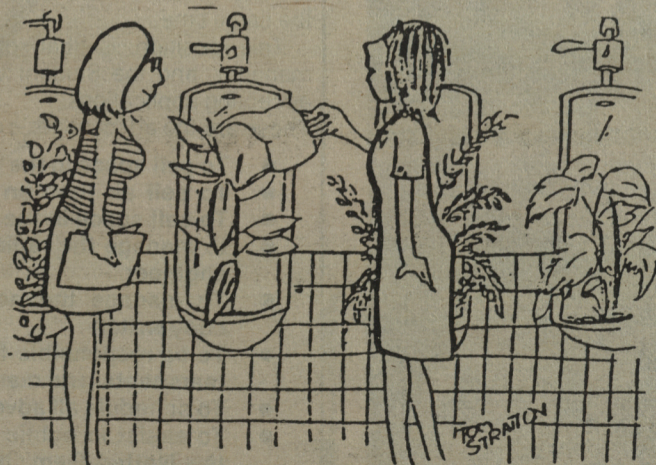
Another institution that has taken concrete steps to increase the number of women professors and their salaries is Dalhousie University in Halifax. Since the release of a status of women report four years ago, the faculty association, the president's committee on the employment of women and the Dalhousie Women's Faculty Association have succeeded in attaining better conditions for women.

"There are now more women in teaching and administrative positions and relative salaries have improved," says professor Judith Fingard, history department chair and vice president of women faculty. But she stressed the needed for further work.

One victory women attained during contract negotiations last year was an agreement to make part time professors — of which a high proportion are women — eligible for tenure. "We are all very very pleased (with the new collective agreement)," said women's faculty president Christine Boyle. "It shows that this university is a progressive employer that is not prepared to allow women to wallow in the ghetto of secondary employment and job discrimination."

Despite such victories, women still face a difficult struggle in academia. And that struggle gets even tougher as government funding for education shrinks.

Phyllis Leonardi, coordinator of the Carleton University status of women office, says cutbacks are often used as an excuse for not hiring women. And Page, in Some Questions of Balance, says the wage gap between women and men is steadily widening.



"So when I took over the company I discovered we didn't need quite so many male executives."