

"We've found a lot of things wrong with Ontario law schools"

continued from page 1

and we need Native perspectives within the regular curriculum."

A great divergence

The conference grew out of increasing dissatisfaction among Osgoode's First Nations students.

In a reports last year, members of the First Nations Law Society described classes, curricula and faculty memberships which had no relation to their own experiences, and which sometimes offended and belittled Native students.

They were met with an immediate response — not from the Osgoode administration, but from Native students at other Ontario law schools.

"We realized that if changes were going to happen it wouldn't be the deans making them happen, it would be the students," Hare said.

Some Ontario law schools — notably at the University of Ottawa — have been quicker than others at recognizing the importance of Native justice.

Stephanie Rogers, a University of Ottawa law student, described a "great divergence of understanding of aboriginal people and aboriginal law and aboriginal issues" among Ontario's law schools.

Rogers transferred from the University of Windsor last year. While Windsor barely acknowledges Native law, Ottawa has hired two Native law professors and reformed the entire curriculum.

"I transferred to Ottawa for the opportunities in aboriginal law," Rogers said. "Aboriginal law is incorporated into the curriculum [at Ottawa], and there's an awareness that it needs to be."

Probably the most important goal of the conference was bringing this awareness to all six of Ontario's law schools.

The students got symbolic assistance (as well as funding) from Richard Allen, Ontario's minister of colleges and universities. His presence at the conference — and his creation last year of the Native Education Council — appeared as a welcoming gesture to many of the students.

We'll set up our own

This optimism was dampened by a common fear among Native students: that the sympathetic views currently held by governments and administrations are merely attempts at appeasement, to be withdrawn as quickly as they appeared.

"There are some law schools that have made a big leap," Hare said,



Conference organizer Susan Hare presents First Nations Law Students shirt to Manitoba Provincial Court Judge Murray Sinclair • Photo by Doug Saunders

"but they might just be jumping on a band wagon, a fad for a few years."

One possible long-term solution seemed to be on everyone's mind: the possibility of creating an independent Native law school.

In his opening speech, Judge Sinclair alluded to this possibility by referring to the highly successful Black universities in the U.S.

Other delegates characterized the Native law school as an ultimate long-term goal or as a threat to encourage reluctant administrators to make their reforms happen more quickly.

But there are strong arguments for the independent study of Native law.

For one thing, the concept of a separate Native justice system has recently burst into the centre of official debate, in the wake of Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry.

And although the Manitoba government — following the cue of federal justice minister Kim Campbell — has rejected the immediate possibility of setting up an independent court system, the idea has won the expressed support of all three provincial NDP governments and much of the legal and academic community.

Osgoode Hall Dean Jim MacPherson said he sees separate justice systems becoming a reality by the end of the decade, along with full aboriginal self-government.

And this will require "some rather radical changes" to the way law is taught, he admitted.

Another argument for independent Native law schools is their ability to attract students from Na-

tive communities. Separate Native courts will require more aboriginal judges — far more than the handful of Native students currently enrolled in Canadian law schools.

"People like us are going to be valuable," Gordon Peters, vice-chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said of the students in an opening address.

Affirmative action programs notwithstanding, Canadian law schools discourage Native students in several ways. Their courses are almost always predicated on White Canadian culture; their approach to Native-Canadian legal history is often flawed and uncritical; many of their students (and even faculty) harbour racist attitudes; they rarely offer any support for aboriginal religions or lifestyles.

Although an independent law school wasn't on the agenda of the two-day conference, Hare said it could well become a student effort.

"We have found a lot of things wrong with Ontario law schools. If they're not meeting our needs, and if we can't reform the existing system, then we'll set up our own."

Guarded optimism

But since this was the first student conference of its kind, the items on the agenda were more basic — like getting to know each other.

Even if two days was not enough time to solve many of the tougher problems involved in fighting for a new curriculum, there was a strong consensus on one issue: the need to make Native law and Native culture a central part of legal education at every Canadian law school.

ations" from the students, and said he wanted to see Osgoode have "aboriginal perspectives in law integrated into courses, not just added on," as well as increasing Native faculty and involving aboriginal communities directly in education.

And while MacPherson's commitment is probably genuine (he was active on the federal Marshall Inquiry, which condemned the Nova Scotia provincial court for covering up the false imprisonment of Donald Marshall, a Native man), delegates noted that none of the changes at Osgoode occurred without student pressure first.

"I think our dean has been accessible, but we've made him be accessible," one student said of MacPherson.

The conference ended on a note of guarded optimism — with a sense that law schools may someday become potent institutions, rather than necessary humiliations, for Native students.

Susan Hare remarked that Native law has been around much longer than Canadian law, and may well outlast it.

"This legal system we're all labouring under is just a recent development in the history of Native people. Our laws go back much further, they come from the creator."

And the first step in this direction was last weekend's unanimous display of commitment in front of five law school deans and a cabinet minister.

Osgoode Dean MacPherson said he heard some "good recommen-



Delegates list demands for law school curriculum changes at final plenary session on Saturday • Photo by Doug Saunders

YORK UNIVERSITY TEACHING AWARDS

Senate has recently approved the establishment of two annual University-wide teaching awards, one to a member of the full-time faculty, the other to a person teaching in any other capacity than full-time. To be eligible, instructors must have taught at York for a minimum of three years. The awards recognize such attributes as good organization, effective communication, positive attitudes towards students, fairness in examination and grading, flexible approaches, and appropriate student learning outcomes. These qualities can be evidenced by student assessments, letters from students, alumni and/or colleagues. Award winners will receive, among other forms of recognition, a \$5000 cash honorarium.

Nomination forms and guidelines are available from the Centre for the Support of Teaching, 124 Central Square. Nominations may be made by faculty members, teaching assistants, students or alumni, individually or in groups. The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning will select award recipients. Submissions must be received at the Centre for the Support of Teaching by **Monday, March 2, 1992.**

Nobody Beats TRAVEL CUTS

	Return from	One Way from
LONDON	\$379	\$229
PARIS	\$439	\$279
AMSTERDAM	\$429	\$324
ROME	\$619	\$389
ATHENS	\$769	\$449
TEL AVIV	\$769	\$449
BRUSSELS	\$399	\$330
FRANKFURT	\$499	\$319

The first 5 people to bring this ad in to TRAVEL CUTS win free passes to the movie

WAYNE'S WORLD

York University, Toronto (416) 661-1393
2476 Yonge Street, Toronto (416) 322-6623

Excellent!