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Metro universities react to cuts

BY SAM MCCAIG

The seven metro universities have teamed up to cut costs and pressure the federal and provincial governments to moderate upcoming budget cuts.

Over four years, the Metro Halifax Universities Consortium plans to save \$17 million through the centralization of administrative services and the non-replacement of academic staff.

A working draft of the Consortium's proposal was released to the Halifax university community on November 21. Two days later, Dalhousie president Tom Traves addressed a crowd of approximately 500 students, faculty, staff, and concerned onlookers in the McInnes room of the Student Union Building (SUB).

"All we have is a proposal for the government...we want to limit government cutbacks to sustainable levels...[but] the government has the final decision," he said. "We're encouraged that we can limit the damage."

The "damage," according to a report released by Dalhousie's Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) last Monday, will be funding cuts of up to \$46.3 million over the next three years for Nova Scotia universities. The BAC projects that funding by the province will decline from \$195.4 million this year to \$149.1 million in 1998-99.

The Consortium, however, expects a "system-wide goal of \$171 million of provincial funding by 1998-99."

The BAC projects that cuts to Dalhousie's operating budget will total \$19.8 million over the same three years. This is a drop to \$63.7 million in 1998-99, from \$83.5 million this year — a cut of 25.9 per cent.

The numbers in the BAC report assume a "worst case" scenario. The Consortium plan is more optimistic.

"The Consortium is saying to the government that cuts are inevitable — make certain cuts but go no further," said Traves at a Senate meeting on Nov. 27.

An assumption made by both the BAC report and the Consortium was that the federal Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) payments to Nova Scotia would be reduced by a total of \$330 million over the next three years, from this year's \$615 million to a 1998-99 total of \$285 million. In addition to post-secondary education, the CHST helps the provinces pay for health care and social services.

For Nova Scotia universities, this represents a reduction of \$37.1 million in federal funds. The province has budgeted an additional \$9.2 million reduction.

If the Consortium proposal is accepted by the provincial government, Nova Scotia universities will face a budget cut of \$24 million, instead of the \$46.3 million



Before the cuts...

After the cuts?

predicted by the BAC. Metro universities' share of this reduction would be \$17 million.

"Dal will lose \$10 to 11 million over three years instead of \$20 million [if the Consortium proposal is accepted]," said Traves.

In total, savings of up to \$17 million over three years are predicted by the Consortium. \$10

million of that will be through academic change. This includes \$5 million in savings "from the non-replacement of faculty through normal and early retirements, resignations and other vacancies." Another \$5 million in "academic savings...will be identified over the course of the plan."

The Consortium predicts savings of the remaining \$7 million

over the next three years from the centralizing of administrative services, such as computer services, financial services, and physical plant.

The Dalhousie Board of Governors approved the Consortium plan in principle last Tuesday. The proposal will be presented to Education Minister John MacEachern on December 1.

12 per cent tuition hikes recommended

To increase revenues, Dalhousie's Budget Advisory Council (BAC) IX report, released on Nov. 27, "is recommending an additional 2 per cent general increase in tuition fees beyond the BAC III recommendation of 10 per cent."

"In addition to the 12 per cent general increase in all tuition fees, the BAC is recommending additional increases of \$135 per student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and \$100 per student for undergraduate Public Administration and Commerce programs," the BAC wrote.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

Atlantic School of Theology, Dalhousie University, University of King's College, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), Saint Mary's University (SMU), Technical University of Nova Scotia (TUNS)

PROJECTED CUTS TO DAL

According to...

The Budget Advisory Council:
\$19.8M over 3 years

The Consortium:
\$10 to 11M over 3 years

DSU questions Consortium proposal

BY MILTON HOWE

This week, the seven Halifax universities unveiled their business plan for future co-operation and resource sharing.

The presidents of the seven schools endorsed the proposal as a response to "actual and proposed funding cuts confronting the universities."

Academically, the proposal includes a collective planning process, grade sharing, ease of student movement from school to school, and common course numbers.

David Cox, president of the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU), is concerned about some of the academic issues in the report.

"I don't think Dal students will support SMU students bumping them out of their class, for whatever reason," he said by way of example.

The plan also calls for \$7 million in savings from reduced duplication in administrative services, including computer services, registrar and admissions, human resources, physical plant, and libraries. Cox sees this as a particular area of concern for Dalhousie students, as it is likely that most of the retained infrastructure will be Dalhousie's.

"The biggest worry that I have,

*"I don't think students — maybe even the university community in general — realize the magnitude of the cuts that are coming in the next three years."
— DSU President David Cox*

is that as fees go up, will our students be paying for the bigger burden of student services if everyone's sharing them?" he asked.

Although cautiously optimistic about the Consortium's plans, Cox feels in some ways that the Consortium did not go far enough.

"I'm an advocate of a complete merger, and that's what Dal's original position was. I think that true savings comes when you eliminate all the presidents (except one), when you eliminate all the VP academics, when you eliminate all the faculty department heads, all the chairs," he said.

"I wholeheartedly believe that this Consortium will either lead two things: because it's not binding, it might fall apart, or it's the

first step towards a merger. And if it's the first step towards a merger then we could be accomplishing those savings now," he said.

Many critics of the university rationalisation plan worry that the plan will destroy the individual identities of the schools, especially the smaller institutions. Cox dismissed that concern by pointing out the inevitability of the funding cuts.

"Schools like NSCAD are going to have to sit down and say 'well, what quality of education do I want and how do I want to pay for it' — because if we continue on the route that we are on, without the Consortium, in five to six year's time, to pay for the quality you want, you're going to be paying a lot of money. Or we can start

rationalising."

"If we don't want to merge, we are going to have to reduce the amount of programs. And some schools have done that already, like Acadia and Saint Mary's," Cox said.

The Consortium suggests, however, that the collective Metro University could support some new programs such as Film/Media studies and Material Culture studies which they could sell to students from New England and other out-of-province markets.

Cox hopes that this report will raise awareness among students of the problems facing the universities in the years to come.

"I don't think students — maybe even the university community in general — realize the magnitude of the cuts that are coming in the next three years," he said.

The Consortium estimates savings of \$5 million through non-replacement of retirements (including some early) and resignations of professors.

This worries Cox.

"The only sad thing about all these cost savings is non-replacements of professors. You're getting rid of these profs, with early retirements and stuff, and you're not hiring anyone back," he said.