

Linda Frum continues her attack 'U of T National disgrace'

by Isabel Vincent

TORONTO (CUP) — The author of the controversial book **Linda Frum's Guide to Canadian Universities** has struck again with a recently published article, *Reach for the Mediocre*, which contends that Canadian post-secondary education has dropped below international academic standards of excellence, and that most universities are "soulless and alienating."

The piece, published in this month's Saturday Night magazine, calls the universities of Toronto, Manitoba, Regina,

Windsor and Laurentian a "national disgrace".

University officials are already attacking Frum's research.

"Linda Frum's article is as ill-documented as possible. I'm fed up with journalism that deals in generalizations and blanket statements. The article is bullshit," said David Klausner, acting director of the University of Toronto's Medieval Studies department.

U of T president George Connell called the article "a worthless piece of journalism."

Frum called the University of Toronto "the most tragically

wasted opportunity in Canadian education."

The writer isn't surprised by all the criticism.

"I didn't expect any of the universities I wrote about to be happy," she said. "But everybody is entitled to their own opinion."

The article is anecdotal and unsubstantiated, claims Terry Johnston, liaison officer at U of T's Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students.

He cited use of the 1984 Report of the Task Force on the Student Experience compiled by the university's Faculty of Arts and Science. The study showed that 42 per cent of students felt alienated, but methods used to obtain the results were 'unscientific', Johnston said. The information was compiled from randomly distributed questionnaires and open forums. Only 800 were returned.

Frum dismissed complaints about her research methods, suggesting that they are a defensive and easy form of attack.

"I feel better already. It's very hard to get figures on student satisfaction. I feel that the surveys I cited were extremely comparable. If people are criticizing me on these points I feel I'm in pretty good shape. I think it (the article) stands on its own." Frum said in her article that the solution to university problems included restricting accessibility and hiking tuition fees.

The U of T's Klausner feels Frum doesn't address the root problem of Canadian universities: government underfunding.

"We have our problems here and we could be better, but the provincial and federal governments have chosen not to fund us adequately," said Klausner. "Our capacity to deliver good undergraduate education is down."

Klausner also disagrees with Frum's notion of a two-tiered university system that would place "gifted" students in two or three elite universities and mediocre students in middling universities.

"It's a hateful idea. The two-tiered system goes against the accessibility of education," Klausner said.

Fred Wilson, president of the U of T Faculty Association, notes that Frum recalls with nostalgia the elitist system of the 1950s. He said the sentiment is "misplaced" as it recalls a time when women and ethnic minorities were barred from post-secondary education.

Officials in the university's admissions department are concerned that Frum's negative publicity may affect U of T enrollment.

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