

The ups and downs of Romance Languages



Rikens... downstairs; director of Language Lab.

by Ken MacDougall
This is the third of a series of articles on the university and its budgetary crisis. We originally had hypothesized that any programme of economic austerity would result in the weeding out of the non-conformists in various departments. We noted, last week, that in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, two professors not having their contracts renewed fitted this situation.

We now examine the situation in the Romance Languages Department, to see how well the situation there fits our theories.

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For those not acquainted with the department and its inner structure, Romance Languages consists of two almost autonomous language units, Spanish and French. Last year, it became evident that a division was necessary. The professors of Spanish felt they were of sufficient numbers, and that they were capable of administering the day-to-day events of a new department.

Underlying this belief was a feeling that the best interests of the professors teaching Spanish were not being properly handled by the much larger segment of the department teaching French.

The department was also becoming slightly unwieldy, with over thirty members, so all members agreed to the split. Faculty gave its formal approval in December, with Senate passing the motion shortly afterward. The split should take effect in July of this year.

However, differences in the department were not exclusively confined to the professors teaching Spanish and French. Within the French segment itself, remains another dispute to be settled. The opposing factions in this particular battle may be labelled as the "upstairs" and the "downstairs" groups.

The divisions refer to two things — the "downstairs" group are those professors teaching the spoken language, (usually to first and second year students), and who colonize the basement of the Killam Library, while the "upstairs" faction are

generally those who teach French Literature, and frequent the 5th floor of the Killam.

Faculty members are generally found in one or the other of these camps. Each generally maintains that it is their segment that is the lifeblood and mainstream of the new French department at Dalhousie.

Somewhere in the middle there lies a third camp, which generally maintains that the petty differences and the "cut your nose off to spite your face" stances taken by the two factions is a complete waste of the creative energies of supposedly intelligent men and women.

Professor Rasmussen, current chairman of the Romance Languages department, and himself a lecturer in French Literature, states that the reason for the rift is that "there are very few people teaching in both areas, so connection is lost."

Rasmussen maintains that Dean Guy MacLean possibly thought there was a stronger demand for courses handling the reading, writing, and speaking portions of the language, thus placing an undue workload on the Language sector. However, Rasmussen was able to produce figures which he believes showed the Dean's assumptions to be incorrect.

However, other departmental members state, although there may be figures to dispute the Dean's claims, it is obvious that the Language sector is receiving preferential treatment from MacLean's office. Memos, reports, and briefs turn up days earlier in the basement of the Killam, or sometimes never reach the 5th floor. This type of favouritism has some members of the upstairs group worried.

Compounding these nervous feelings are the actions supposedly being taken by the "downstairs" professors. Participation in departmental meetings and committee work is kept at a minimum by the "downstairs" group. Departmental happenings are described as being "of no consequence" to the basement dwellers.

The entire department of Romance Languages was hit with an enrolment drop of between 15 and 20 percent. By far the most heavily hit were courses in Spanish and French Literature. This further aggravates the problem.

THE LANGUAGE LAB

Already in the works for the department is a proposed restructuring of the entire system of teaching French. One

plan proposed by the Dean has already been turned down. No details are available on exactly how the plan was to work.

A second plan, now being considered by the department, would have a Language Centre in the basement which all language departments could use. This lab would have its own budget, and its own director. However, until the plan is formally approved, the department's structure cannot be redefined.

THE CHAIRMANSHIPS

With the splitting of the department into the new entities of French and Spanish, a new problem has arisen. Professor Rasmussen reaches retirement age this year, and will be resigning his position as Chairman in July. However, he will be teaching next year, possibly on a part-time basis. His retirement will mean that two new chairmen must be appointed.

The university has advertised extensively for a new chairman in various periodicals, including the "Canadian Association of University Teachers" monthly. A trip was made to New York to talk to a professor from Temple University who was interested in the French department's post. One member of the department here at Dalhousie is also interested in the same post, as is one other person from the United States.

In the Spanish section, it would appear there is going to be an acting chairman appointed from within the ranks of the department, unless someone comes forward with such excellent credentials that the university cannot afford to turn him or her down.

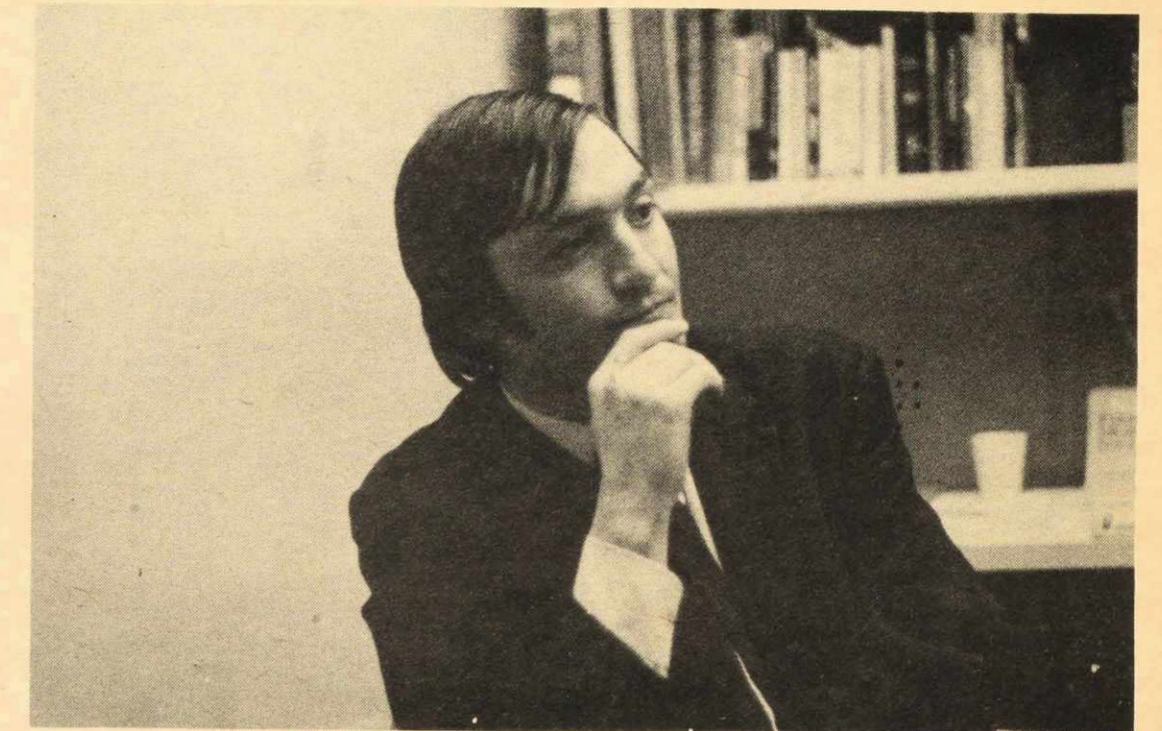
RENEWALS...

A total of seven professors from within the department were up for contract renewal this year. Of these seven, six were from the "downstairs" language group.

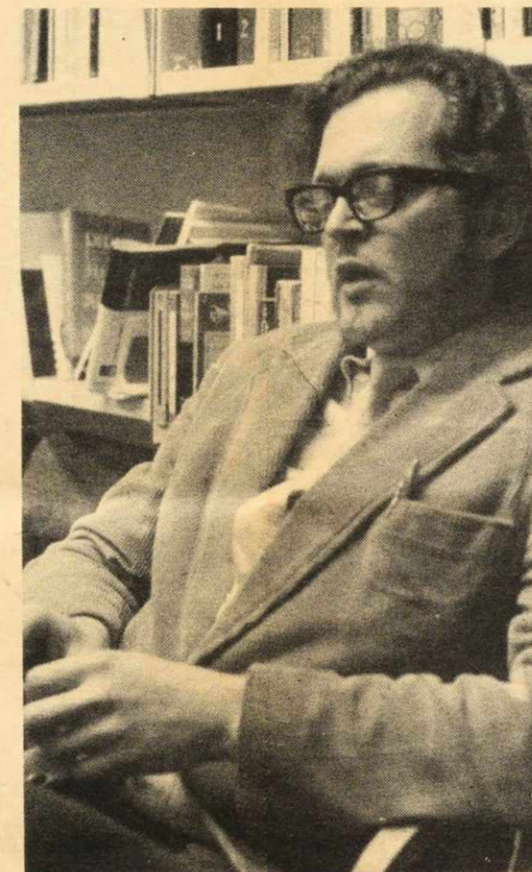
Professor Aikens, who is the current director of the language labs, was asked for his opinion as to the competence of these six, and he recommended that they all have their contracts renewed. Of the six, four were working on their doctorate, and two had already completed their PhD work. All six had their contracts renewed, the four non-doctorates getting one year contracts, while the two others received two-year renewals.

NON-RENEWALS

There are at least three professors who are not returning next year: Professors



Gaillard... upstairs, but down.



Kretschmer... holding down a minority point of view.



Pittas... division was necessary.



Rasmussen... choosing two successors.

PHOTOS BY PAUL DEVEAU,
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