

Academic vp represents students to faculty

by Meredith Brown

Students need representation rather than "protection" in university administrative affairs says Students' Union vp academic Ken McFarlane.

"We have the best student representation probably anywhere in North America," claims McFarlane. "We have student parity on almost all committees, except for perhaps tenure and salary negotiations."

And that's primarily the vp's job. As a member of policy-making committees, he takes student opinions to where the decisions are made.

The fourth-year honors poli sci student consults students in four ways. First, he chairs the Academic Affairs Board, which is composed of students representing seven faculties. Then there are periodic meetings of student members of the General Faculties Council (GFC), usually held just before GFC meetings, for briefing on issues and information exchange.

McFarlane attends Faculty Association meetings whenever possible, where students groups discuss specific needs because as he says, "How can I, as an arts student, properly represent the interests of nursing students or others if I don't talk to them?"

The final way McFarlane gleans information is by "beer and coffee in RATT."

An example of such representation was McFarlane's motion brought before GFC last summer that a study break before first-term final exams be instituted.

"Compared to the problem of apartheid that may not seem like much to some, but I think it's important," he says. The new study break will begin in 1978.

Then there's the course guide. After a great commotion over this document which would provide subjective evaluation of professors' performance in class, it was decided that it would not be published this year.

"The questionnaire and organization of the guide was not valid, so I don't think we should

publish an unreliable document," McFarlane says.

But that will all change. A new course guide will be available for students before pre-registration in 1978; it'll be a combined effort of students, profs and administration. The raw data from this year's abortive attempt will be available to professors only. McFarlane considers it a "dry run" for the next guide.

Though McFarlane says students have it pretty good in Alberta, he also concedes post-secondary educational institutions could be in trouble. "The chance to acquire a quality education will be undermined unless the government gives the dollars needed," he said.

Education standards will suffer, he said, unless there is enough money to keep class sizes down and libraries open for as many hours as students' need unless there's money to buy books and technical equipment.

"If we can't do these things, we'll have academic instruction that will be two years behind," he says.

One alternative to spending cutbacks might be the "necessary evil" of quota systems, the vp says. The advantages would be the maintenance of a higher quality of education, and fewer university graduates, who are unable to find jobs as it is, he said.

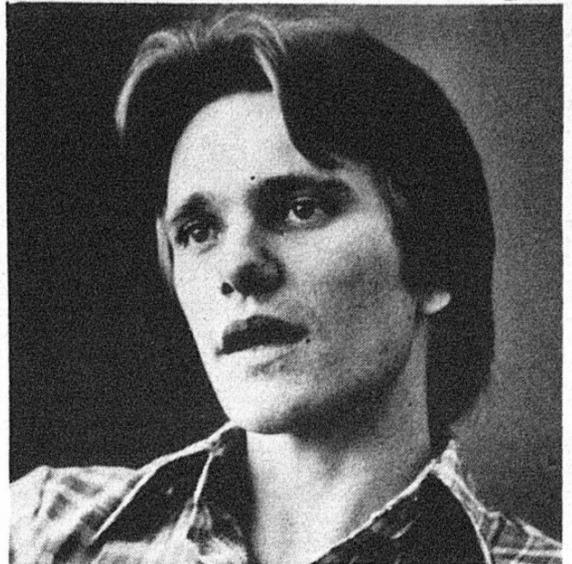
"But I find it hard to believe that there could ever be a surplus of highly-trained, highly-educated and highly-aware people in our society."

"Every student who wants to should be able to go to university," he added.

McFarlane suggested that if a widespread quota system is instituted, he would like to see it done in what he admitted would be a "complicated" manner. This would include entrance based on academic performance, followed by a series of interviews designed to determine a student's level of motivation and whether or not he/she had a "true love of knowledge."

"Everyone suffers when educational standards fall," he says.

"And that goes as much for the short-order



Vp academic Ken McFarlane

cook down the street as for Bert Hohol up the street."

"When people complain about their doctor's poor bedside manner, what they may not realize is that classes can be so large that the med. student may not even have been able to get close enough to a bed to know what to do."

McFarlane, originally from Medicine Hat, came to Edmonton to begin his university education. It's unlikely that he'll return next year, as he hopes to do graduate work in economics, political science and public administration, which, he said, means Queens University or Carleton. Law school may follow.

McFarlane's complaints about his job on the SU exec. are identical to those voiced by other executive members.

"There just aren't enough hours in the day to do everything that needs doing," he said.

"But someone has to care, and someone has to do it. I really believe in Students' Unions and in universities, and that you have to put your money where your mouth is," he concludes.

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