

## Course evaluation forms shouldn't be misleading

By JOE MACKENZIE  
Biology Professor

Some four years ago when I first heard about course evaluation, I must confess that I was a little apprehensive about the scheme. At that time this looked like a threat to my academic freedom in that students were going to try to assume power to dictate how and in what way I presented my courses.

My training was at some Canadian universities which are reputed to have high standards. Now in order to rate high on the popularity scale with students as the sole evaluators I would have to lower my standards and end up giving bird courses. The students would be happy and my superiors would be very happy as they would not have to contend with irate students.

I now know that my fears were not justified for several reasons. Most students are smart enough to realize that if the professors were to lower standards to the point where most courses were Mickey Mouse courses, the employers would soon get to know about it and jobs would go to those graduates from universities with high standards. By and large most students are in university to learn how to think and to seek information in order to help them think and they want to receive instruction in these areas. If a professor were to try and achieve popularity points without attempting to give adequate instruction he would get into serious trouble sooner or later.

Evaluation of courses should not only be carried out by the students. I believe that one's courses should be evaluated by professors as well as students. Presumably the aim of the students is to improve the courses in one way or another and there is no doubt in my mind that fellow professors are well qualified to criticize their colleagues and thus improve the courses offered. In the Department of Biology we were privileged to have the Chariman attend a lecture or two in most of the courses given by the department. I remember talking to one of my colleagues about it and he said that this improved the quality of his lectures considerably because he did not know when his turn would come around. My turn did not come around so that I had to be on my toes from the first to the last lecture.

Although to date none of my courses have been evaluated I think that what I have to offer could be improved by constructive criticism. The effectiveness of the criticism could be greater if it were to come from fellow professors as well as students. I know that originally the aim of the students was to provide information to those who wanted to take elective courses as to whether the courses were worth taking. This is a worthwhile objective but further good could come from it because the professor can now use evaluation to improve the quality of his offerings.

In order to achieve the aims mentioned above I would now like to take the opportunity to criticize

the proposed course evaluation at UNB. At the last Senate meeting I was privileged to hear one of the students propose to the Senate a system of course evaluation. The system was a modification of one originally used at McGill University. On the basis of this questionnaire some courses were evaluated last year and since two of those courses were in Biology I have information about them. Some of the questions are very ambiguous. To illustrate: in Biology 1550 there were no laboratories, yet a large number of students replied that the labs were either effective or not effective. There were many similar instances. In one course 60 per cent of the students thought that lab guidance

was adequate yet there were no labs in this course.

The question on total work load is too all inclusive and vague. It could be broken down into reading of text-book and extra reading assignments as well as essays and seminars. No provision is made in the questionnaire for team taught courses or courses that are handled by several professors. The student might be thinking about a particular professor when he answers the questions, or all of the instructors. This is a very important point because more of our courses are being team taught.

The question on class attendance could be broken down. If a professor is going to use the results of the questionnaire to improve his

course then he should have fairly detailed information as to whether the students who are offering the criticisms have actually attended the lectures, seminars, laboratory sections, or tutorials.

As far as work loads are concerned there is no point in doing anything about it if very few people have attempted to do the required work. If students are going to give judgements about the relevance of the reading material then it is important to know how many people have read what was required. If the results of the questionnaire are going to be helpful then it should be so designed that it could not be interpreted as being misleading.

## Rapport needed for evaluation

By MICHAEL RICHARD  
Chairman Senate Committee on  
Course Evaluation

Course evaluations have been the subject of much discussion amongst academic circles at Canadian universities. A great deal of the discussion has been focused on the fallacy that student course evaluations invariably become 'witch hunts'. Fortunately this feeling of apprehension does not seem to have taken root at UNB. Should this unjustified paranoia proliferate on our campus the objectives of such an evaluation will be completely destroyed.

During March of last year, a pilot course evaluation project was carried out under the close supervision of the Senate Course Evaluation Committee. As a result of the rapport which was established between the committee and the faculty involved, as well as the overhaul satisfaction by the committee with the utility of the questionnaire, the committee submitted its report to the Senate in February of this year.

Incorporated within the report were recommendations for a course of action. Senate approval

was obtained, hence the committee is now proceeding to implement the course of action. What essentially will be done, is an evaluation of every course on campus, however no course will be evaluated if the permission of the professor is not tendered. It is interesting to note that of 35 professors that took part in last year's evaluation 33 expressed an interest to take part in any further surveys. This is at the very least some indication of the degree of faculty acceptance which we anticipate.

If one is to examine what has occurred at other Canadian campuses which had the proviso that permission must be given, one will note that an overwhelming majority of the professors consent to such an evaluation, as they are able to obtain valuable feedback on their teaching methods and course content. It has also been observed that such surveys obliterate any unsubstantiated rumours concerning particular courses and have substantially improved student-faculty rapport by providing further avenues for the exchanging of ideas.

The Senate Committee has meticulously examined the data obtained from the pilot project, as

well as the questionnaire itself. The latter has been carefully revised while still maintaining the essential components which were derived by the McGill Centre for Learning and Development.

The total cost of Course Evaluation will be approximately \$2,300.00, 50 percent will be funded by the university, 50 percent by the SRC.

Up to 800 courses will be surveyed, the information obtained from this survey will be compiled into a 'course guide'. This will be distributed free of charge to all students before registration. The format of this guide will incorporate such things as a course description by the professor, the attitudes which were expressed by the students, and the professor's evaluation of the students. Hence the course guide should provide the student with valuable information which will aid him or her in judiciously choosing courses.

If the co-operation of all faculty and students is extended to the committee, we will be able to succeed in our effort to administer the questionnaire and to compile and publish the results in a manner so as to provide the student with a succinct and objective appraisal of every course.

### Letters to the editor

## Athletics Dept. plans tourney

Dear Sir:

This letter is being written as a request from our Department of Athletics.

We are asking for the co-operation of UNB students in relation to our hosting of the 33rd Annual Class "L" Boys Basketball Tournament. This tourney will be played at the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium next Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, March 8, 9, 10.

UNB students will be admitted free of charge to three of the five sessions. The Friday evening and Saturday afternoon sessions will have a "closed gate" and admission will be by ticket or tournament pass.

During the "closed gate" sessions, I am asking that UNB

students wishing to use the gymnasium facilities contact the Athletics Department prior to Thursday noon, March 8th. A special admission list can then be made up and referred to by ticket men at the gate.

Having the opportunity to host this high school event at our University has meant a great deal to those of us involved with Athletics at UNB. We attempt to provide our visitors, competitors and spectators alike, with an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. Student co-operation in our handling of this annual event has meant much to our tournament organizers. I trust we can look

forward to a successful experience again this year.

Sincerely,

Donald K. Nelson  
Basketball Coach  
Class "L" Tournament Co-Chairman

## Mirrors

Dear Sir:

You wouldn't believe it, but there are mirrors in Head Hall's main washrooms now!!!

Engineer

### More letters

in our March 16 issue

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