

Mixed reaction to teacher report

by Ryan Stanley

No one is disagreeing much with a report that says Nova Scotia has too many universities training too many teachers.

In a discussion paper released January 14, a committee of academics from across Canada called for five Nova Scotia schools to eliminate their education programs, and for the province to concentrate its teacher training in three remaining institutions.

The schools which stand to lose their education programs under the plan include some of Nova Scotia's largest. The programs at Dalhousie, Saint Mary's and Saint Francis Xavier Universities are all targeted for phasing out within a year. The Nova Scotia Teachers College, a government-run school with over 500 education students, would close its doors, and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design would also cease training teachers.

Mount Saint Vincent and Acadia Universities, two medium-sized institutions, would be left with the job of certifying teachers for Nova Scotia's school system. The French-language Université Ste. Anne would also remain open to serve the province's francophone community.

"I can't do anything but say I agree with it," said Paul Osborne, an education student at Dalhousie. "It doesn't make sense to come out here and find so many universities... There just isn't enough money."

To find ways of saving money was the reason the province established an advisory council in 1992 to look at combining or eliminating academic programs offered at several Nova Scotia universities. The province of about 900,000 has 13 degree-granting institutions and a total student population of 36,000.

The Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, which was given sweeping powers over allocation of funds to universities, announced plans to examine duplication of programs in education, engineering, computer science, business and earth sciences. Education was the first area to be the subject of an external review, and reports on the others will be released before the fall.

The cost-cutting scheme, known as rationalization, also includes plans to centralize the application process for Nova Scotia universities and to make credit transfers easier.

Keith Sullivan, the head of Dalhousie's education program, said the proposals did not take him by surprise.

In November, he said, the head of the council "told us that, in her words, it was going to be a bombshell." The review team consulted heavily with administrators, faculty and practising teachers, he said, and he agreed with the main points of the discussion paper.

Besides closing the five education departments, the report recommends that all teacher-training programs require a general bachelor's degree beforehand, be two years long, and that the remaining schools expand to offer both graduate and undergraduate degrees, as well as training for all levels of teaching.

Currently only Acadia has a two-year B.Ed. program, and Dalhousie offers the only doctorate in education

east of Montreal. Students may also combine a B.A. or B.Sc. with their education degree, or in some cases be admitted directly from high school.

The report also calls for the number of students accepted to education programs to be reduced by half. Currently about 600 new teachers are certified each year, while only about 100 get teaching jobs in Nova Scotia.

A spokesperson for the Students' Union of Nova Scotia, Allison Young, said the proposed changes will make an education degree more expensive for students. "You're going to have to have six years of education to be a teacher — that's a long time. Who's going to be responsible for paying for six years of education?"

Young also said centralizing teacher-training will hurt the quality of education. The report says most education programs in Nova Scotia feature small classes and low faculty-to-student ratios.

But David Muttart, director of Acadia's education school, said Nova Scotia education classes will still be much smaller than those elsewhere in Canada. Acadia now has about 130 education students, and even if the program doubles in size, as he estimated it would, "250 students is still not a large number of students." He pointed out the University of Alberta has about 5000 enrolled in its teacher-training programs.

"I think we can keep the same sense of community we've always had," he said.

Sullivan also noted that the reduction in the number of students enrolled will help keep classes small.

But Sullivan and Muttart agreed that expanding the two surviving programs to accommodate more students and faculty won't be easy.

"It's certainly not all roses for the accepting faculties," said Sullivan. He said departments would be under pressure to change their focus from an influx of new professors, and their traditional areas of specialization might be weakened.

Muttart said because Acadia has a two-year B.Ed. program already in place, "those adjustments wouldn't be as severe as they would be at other institutions." However, he said beefing up existing programs would require a commitment from the government to pay for it.

"One does not expand without appropriate resources," he said.

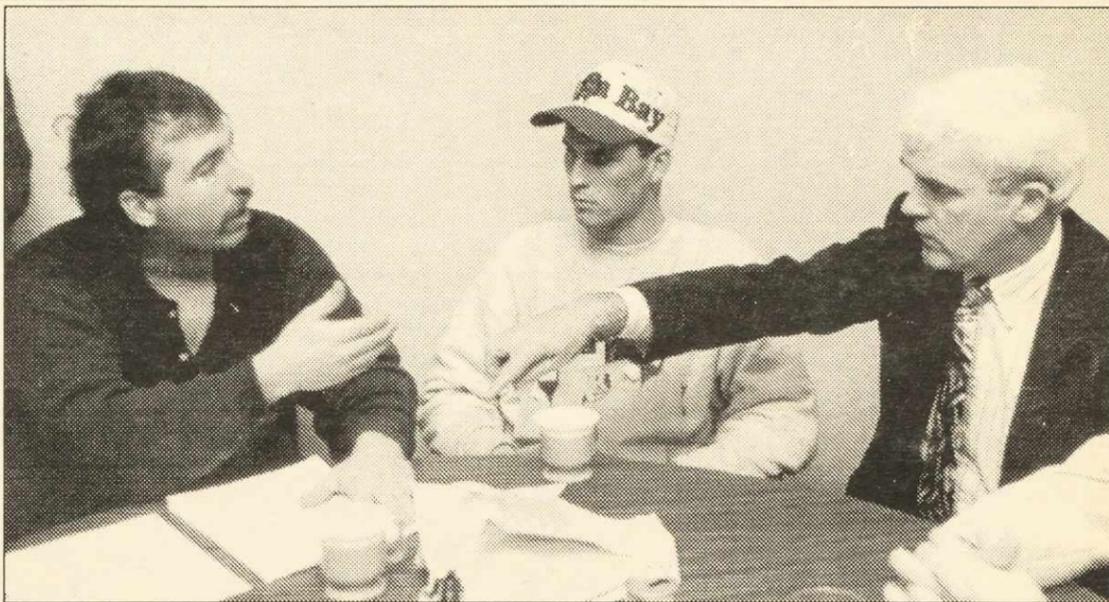
"We sure can't be offering courses on the front lawn."

Young said the team that prepared the report didn't get enough input from students, and is worried students will be left out of the whole rationalization process. Members of the team only spent a few hours visiting campuses, and met with students for less than an hour at each school.

The visits took place in the early fall, when students were just beginning their classes. She questions whether students could be expected to be aware of the issues that early in their program.

"There needs to be more of an effort to solicit views from people who are actually in the program," she said. "Sure they consulted, but was it meaningful?"

The Nova Scotia government has yet to comment on the report. Education Minister John MacEachern has said a decision will be made on teacher training in about two months.



Nova Scotia Teachers' College students meet with Education Minister John MacEachern on Tuesday. Some had walked from Truro to demand their school stay open. DALPHOTO:MIKE DEVONPORT

Students Enrolled in Education Programs in Nova Scotia

UNIVERSITY	FULL TIME	PART TIME
Acadia	355	121
Dalhousie	382	87
Mount St. Vincent	115	198
N. S. College of Art and Design	22	4
N.S. Teacher's College	342	194
St. Francis Xavier	303	31
Saint Mary's	131	299
Université Ste. Anne	138	3

Visa students lose out

by Tran Longmoore

WINDSOR (CUP) — Students from foreign countries at Ontario schools, already paying four to five times what Canadians pay in tuition, will face greater financial barriers when the province eliminates their access to health insurance.

Although the official announcement has not yet been made, Jane Stewart, spokesperson for the Ontario health ministry, said she expects the notice soon. By next September, visa students wanting health insurance will have to purchase it from private brokers, she said.

Health insurance "is meant for permanent Ontario residents," said Stewart. "The Social Contract has put us in a situation where we have to cut our costs, and this is one of the logical places to start."

Most Canadian provinces offer free health insurance to visiting students. But observers say Ontario could be the first of many provinces to cut this service.

Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories have all considered eliminating health coverage

for visa students, said Cathie Sheeran, health insurance administrator at Montreal's McGill University.

Sheeran said she believes these provinces are waiting to follow Ontario's lead in eliminating the coverage. Quebec is currently the only province which forces visiting students to pay for health insurance.

According to health ministry figures it costs \$1,450 to insure each of Ontario's 167,000 temporary residents, 27,000 of whom are post-secondary students. By eliminating their health coverage, the province claims it will save close to \$250 million — approximately \$40 million on the students.

The loss of provincial coverage will force the international students to buy health insurance from private brokers. One major insurance company has already contacted university presidents in hopes of cashing in on the decision. According to its brochure, visa students can purchase limited (basically emergency) coverage at prices ranging from \$635 to \$1,620 per year.

The situation has angered students and administrators across the province.

The provincial office of the Ca-

nadian Federation of Students has denounced the cuts, charging that the government failed to consult visa students during the decision-making process.

Visiting undergraduate students in Ontario typically pay over \$8,000 per year in tuition fees. A permanent Canadian resident pays approximately \$2,500 per year.

"This change will have devastating repercussions for international students who already face difficult financial barriers when studying in this country," said Emechete Onouha, CFS-Ontario Chair.

Onouha said the students are entitled to the same health care that permanent residents have.

"The average visa student injects approximately \$20,000 per year into the economy. No one asks them if they are international students when they pay GST and PST. They should benefit from government programs like everyone else."

University administrators are also concerned about the situation. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU), made up of Ontario university presidents, expressed its objection in a letter to the health minister.

Satisfied customers?

by Michael Mainville

OTTAWA (CUP) — Initial results from a Statistics Canada survey indicate that Canadian university graduates seem reasonably satisfied with their education.

StatsCan is currently analysing data from a 1992 survey of nineties university graduates, which will be released in its entirety next fall.

Part of the survey asked around 53,000 graduates across Canada about their satisfaction with teaching, class size and preparation for future careers. The rest of the survey has to do with their employment histories since graduation.

"I would say students are reasonably satisfied with the skills they are learning," said Doug Lynd, chief of

post-secondary education studies at Statistics Canada. He says the central focus of the survey is students' transition from university to the job market.

The satisfaction portion of the survey was released in advance of the rest of the report for use by Maclean's magazine in its annual ranking of universities last November.

Responses were ranked from zero (very dissatisfied) to three (very satisfied) according to major fields of study. For instance, the satisfaction with class sizes for students in humanities and arts scored a 2.26 out of three, about average for the programs surveyed.

The rating for how well universities prepared graduates for jobs was somewhat lower, with scores ranging

from 1.81 in the social sciences to 2.25 in engineering and applied sciences.

Unlike the annual Maclean's magazine survey, Statistics Canada will not rank individual universities. Instead, it will concentrate on the satisfaction of graduates in general, Lynd said.

"The sample methodology is geared toward process, not institutions," he said. "The sample would have to be larger for a reliable sample of institutions."

Lynd said the survey is conducted every four years by Statistics Canada and funded by the federal government.

A number of organizations use the results, including provincial education and labour ministries, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and the Canadian Labour Commission.