

Alternative frosh week

BY JILL WINDSOR

MONTREAL (CUP) — Seeking refuge from the beer guzzling, mind-numbing tradition of frosh week, a group of McGill students are hosting an alternative orientation week to bolster student activism.

The activist-style alternative is a stark contradiction to the free-for-all that Paddy Stamp saw when she arrived from England six years ago to begin her new job on a Canadian campus.

"People tend to think of orientation North American style as global, and actually I don't think there is anything similar anywhere in Europe — nothing like this big student-run party.

"I was amazed people came to a university that prides itself on its intellectual calibre and went on to behave like high school students," Stamp said.

The event, organized by McGill's Public Interest Research Group, offers nearly 100 first year students a more political introduction to the University.

While the McGill Student Union is running a traditional orientation week designed to entertain 2,000 first year students, the alternative program offers a workshop setting where students can debate topics ranging from environment and women's issues to human rights and education policy.

"The alternative frosh aims to capture those students who aren't only interested in a good time but an informative

one," said Sarah Mayo, co-ordinator of the week long event.

Jennifer Warren, who participated in last year's alternative frosh — the first ever — said she was looking for something more than chants and beer.

"Frosh week was basically about mindless stuff that didn't appeal to me," Warren said, adding that the alternative one was more exploratory and stimulating.

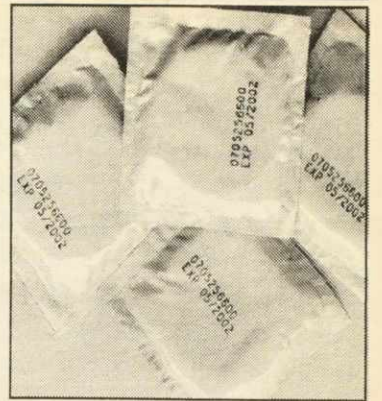
"One workshop was about what the perfect school would be," she said.

Last year's participants, who totalled 40, played a key role

in expanding the project this year.

"Many students feel disillusioned by the educational process," said organizer Suzanne Bradley.

"We students felt we should take charge of our education. No one is going to cater to your best interest, expect yourself."



No condoms in Catholic frosh packs

BY SARAH SCHMIDT

TORONTO (CUP) — Hold back, go without, or buy your own.

These are the options frosh face at a Catholic college of the University of Toronto. There were no condoms included in their frosh packs.

The decision to keep them out, made by the college's orientation committee, was a simple one — it's in line with the Catholic church's teachings on sexuality.

"It's a St. Michael's thing," said one of the student co-chairs of orientation and members of the committee. "We're a Catholic college and that's why we don't promote it."

In official church documents, it states that deliberately frustrating the procreative aspect of sexual intercourse through birth control is morally unacceptable, as is premarital sex.

The condoms, packaged neatly in a match-like box, are provided by the University's Sexual Education and Peer Counselling Centre, and included in the frosh packages of all other colleges of the University of Toronto.

Humberto Carolo, one of the centre's co-ordinators, says the decision is irresponsible.

"I think it's a big mistake. It's very premature to assume Catholic students don't engage in sexual activity. And it's actually putting students at risk," he said.

In past years, orientation co-ordinators at St. Mike's have had to pick through hundreds of frosh packs to remove condoms after they were inadvertently placed there.

But St. Mike's acting principal Mariel O'Neill-Karch, says the issue is one of religious understanding.

"It's about general respect for human life and respect for the Catholic tradition without ramming it down people's throats," she said.

Sandra Margertison, executive director of a community health centre for those aged 13 to 25, says this strategy undermines the work being done on practical safe sex education.

"For that reason alone, it's important for condoms to be

included in these packages. It's promoting safer sex," said Margertison, pointing to studies which show that condoms reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

"It's a myth that if you don't talk about it, it's going to go away. We're all sexual beings. Denying that isn't very helpful to anybody," she said.

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