

Officials should have known

by Bruce Rolston

TORONTO (CUP) — Concordia University officials failed to take reasonable precautions to control engineering professor Valery Fabrikant's behaviour in the years leading up to his murder of four colleagues, a university-commissioned report suggests.

"The warnings and strictures placed upon him [Fabrikant] which directly related to his behavior, (when they existed at all), were too mild, too vague, or (finally) too slow and ponderous," states the report, written by University of Ottawa professor John Cowan.

Fabrikant, who murdered four Engineering staff members in 1991, had long shown signs of erratic and dangerous behaviour, according to the report.

Cowan was alarmed to find that Fabrikant had been accused of sexually assaulted one of his students many years before the murders.

He found the student's complaint, first made to the university ombudsperson in 1982, was kept confidential from Fabrikant's supervisors for 10 years, out of a concern for the student's privacy.

"Could the Ombudsperson have done anything which respected the confidence but shored up the future?" Cowan's report asks.

"Somehow, universities must find a balance in their obligations towards the privacy of aggrieved persons, the rights of the alleged perpetrator, and the health of the whole institution."

Cowan said the mishandling of the assault complaint was typical of Canadian universities' protection of their professors.

"Behavior by professors which would never have been tolerated if it had been directed towards colleagues has been tolerated when di-

rected towards students," the report states.

"In the case of Valery Fabrikant some behaviours... escaped more than passing notice because they were not yet directed towards his faculty colleagues."

Cowan also found a warning to police about Fabrikant's behaviour, sent only weeks before the murders, was left unmailed for a week so it could be translated into French, "despite the best evidence that the [police] read very well in either language."

Cowan's report was one of two commissioned by Concordia in the aftermath of the killings.

The second report, written by a committee chaired by former York University president Harry Arthurs, looked into allegations made by Fabrikant before and after the shooting that the university tolerated widespread academic fraud in the engineering faculty.

The Arthurs report reluctantly admits Fabrikant was right, noting evidence that he collaborated with three other engineering profs in the submission of the same academic paper to several different academic journals.

The report found that similar papers authored by Fabrikant and his colleagues were submitted to jour-

nals in the USA, Germany, France, and Britain.

All the papers were "quite extraordinarily similar" to work Fabrikant had originally published in an obscure Russian journal in 1971.

The Arthurs report blamed an over-competitive research atmosphere, in which professors are valued

by how often they publish, for what amounted to plagiarism on the part of the professors.

The report also criticizes Concordia engineering professor Seshadri Sankar for using a one-man corporation to compete with Concordia for government grants.

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