

## News

# Co-op students get a taste of real world

by Roxanne MacLeod

A new wrinkle in the Halifax area university education system has been the introduction of cooperative work study programs. The three existing programs at Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent and Nova Scotia Technical University differ somewhat in structure, but all have a common goal - providing students with some "real world" experience to supplement their studies.

Dalhousie and M.S.V.U., which have had co-ops in place for the past two years, require that students complete four terms of work in addition to the regular course content. Tech's program involves metallurgical/engineering and the school of architecture, and requires two, slightly longer work term periods.

Here at Dal, students may enroll in co-op programs offered in the faculties of chemistry, physics and math. A total of 28 students are currently enrolled. Enrollment is limited to honours students, and is mandatory in the final year of honours chemistry.

Sherry Hughes, the first Dalhousie student to complete the program, will graduate with honours in chemistry in December of this year. She sees the program as having been, on the whole, a beneficial experience. "Co-op gives you a chance to really see what type of work you like, and so allows for changes." Hughes, who started out in clinical chemistry has since changed to oceanography, and is presently completing her two final work terms at the Bedford Institute.

There are costs however. Problems included having to

pay interest on her student loan during her work term, difficulties coordinating courses which may be offered in one term only, as well as problems in completing her honours project. However, Hughes feels most of these matters could be dealt with, were the program more structured and attuned to the unique needs of the co-op student.

Student reaction to the concept is varied, according to Dr. Ramalay, who coordinated the chemistry co-op. "Students thinking of going on to graduate school often do not view the program as being worthwhile," he said, referring to a one-term delay before they complete their undergraduate degree.

A difference in approach is evident between the Dalhousie and Mount Saint Vincent programs. The M.S.V.U. co-op, although established at the same time as Dal's involves 200 students in ten different faculties, and employs an administrative staff of three. Dr. J. Blake, director of the program sees the expenditure on a formal structure as crucial to the programs growth and success. It is an investment on the part of the university, with the returns being realized in increased enrollment. He said, "Without a formal commitment to the concept, the program is just not able to get off the ground."

Dr. G.A. Klassen, Vice President Academic of Dalhousie, said expansion of the present co-op programs is an "attractive idea." However, a separate cooperative administration may be difficult to establish, due to a desire on the part of departments to remain autonomous, and to develop their own unique



Mosher/Dal Photo

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programs.

He pointed as well to the financial constraints now facing Dal. However, if cooperative work study were seen as a priority by students, expanding the co-op program at Dalhousie was certainly possible.

All three professors coordinating the programs at Dal agree that industrial response to the plan has been favorable. Dr. Merch, directing the physics department co-op said that once industry knows about the

"product offered - good students," they tend to support the program. However, he points out a scarcity of local industry which could offer appropriate learning experiences as one problem he has encountered.

Cooperative education is an inevitable part of education in the future, according to Dr. Jules Gribble, coordinator of the math cooperative at Dal. As the demand increases, the need for a more formal administration will become necessary, he said.

Blake pointed to the high correlation between cooperative involvement and post-graduate employment identified in more established programs at the University of Waterloo, Ontario and Memorial University in Newfoundland. "Students are beginning to recognize the benefits of co-op study, both in terms of improved employment opportunities as well as providing means of integrating theory with practical experience," he said.

## Students miss the boat

by Cathy McDonald

A request by the Minister of Education Terry Donahoe for student input into an appointment on the student aid Higher Appeals Board went unheeded, resulting in the appointment of Dalhousie student Jill Allen last week.

Donna Stephenson, administrative assistant to the Minister, said when no response was received, the Minister went ahead and filled the position, which had remained vacant during the fall term. The Students Union of Nova Scotia expressed outrage last year at the appointment of a student to this board without its consultation with the students' as a democratic representative body. However, no response was received from two letters from the Minister requesting nominations from SUNS to fill this year's vacancy.

The Higher Appeals Board consists of three people to hear complaints from students who feel they have not been given a fair judgement of their financial needs by the Lower Appeals Board, a body of student aid officers that had not previously dealt with the case.

Sandy Spencer, former chairperson of SUNS and current member of an interim executive committee, said she is "upset" at the appointment of Allen without SUNS input.

"We had been contacted, but we didn't feel we could appoint somebody from our small group," as people might be already overloaded with their involvement with student issues. She said she found out three weeks ago about the request, however, no time limitation for a response was indicated in the letter. Spencer intends to go

ahead with the plan to advertise in student newspapers about the appointment and screen applicants.

"We have the right to a student representative. If we have to fight for it, we'll fight for it."

Spencer said it "slipped her mind" to bring it up at the SUNS conference two weeks ago.

A letter from Donahoe dated February 11, notified SUNS of a vacancy on the Board.

Donahoe wrote he would be pleased to consider any people recommended by SUNS, although this would not necessarily indicate that one of those names would be appointed. Donahoe said he recognized students wanted input at all levels in matters concerning them. The letter asked for a response "as quickly as possible."



Terrence Donahoe, Minister of Education