

Universities

Cont'd from page 1

N.S. is typical of what happens to universities when young people can't find work.

They go to school, some because they want to improve their likelihood of finding employment, and others because there's nothing else to do.

St. Thomas (STU), a small university that moved from Chatham to Fredericton more than 20 years ago, has had enrolment increases

similar to UCCB's.

In 1980, 736 students attended STU full time. In 1985, that number was 1254, an increase of 709 percent. Once hailed as the university with the small-class atmosphere, STU now has registration line-ups for first year psychology courses that flow out the length of the main building into the parking lot.

Michael Springer, a guidance services consultant with the New Brunswick department of education, says most high school students are considering university carefully now, since they believe a degree will help them find the

work a high school diploma no longer promises.

"There are even a lot of students who go back, and do their grade 12 again to improve their marks so they can get into university," says Springer.

Springer says this trend, again, is more apparent in areas of high unemployment in N.B., especially Newcastle, Chatham and some smaller towns on the province's north western border.

"Unfortunately, unemployment explains a lot of things, including why students turn to the guidance counsellors for answers, and why so many choose university as an out," says Springer.

The last five years have increased student "career planning," he says. In turn, the government-funded guidance counselling services have taken a bigger slice of its education budget, up from \$250,000 five years ago to over \$2 million in 1985.

Springer says to provide a minimum level of guidance to N.B. students he needs about twice that amount.

But all the guidance in the world won't help if there isn't enough room at universities. Keston says the 33 per cent enrolment jump has meant increases in the number of students in every faculty, in every class and in every

programme that the area's universities offer.

And the supply just can't meet the demand. Keston says universities have begun to limit enrolment in many programmes. "It's effectively putting a lid on the institutions," he says.

That means the universities will become more selective. They can become even more of an elitist place, with admissions only to the "cream of the crop" or those who apply the earliest, he says.

Keston was surprised with this year's enrolment increase, which stands unofficially at three per cent. "That increase says that the students who wanted to get in made it," he adds.

In spite of the crowding, universities aren't prepared to expand without help from the region's government.

"The increase in enrolment forced the universities to look at ways to increase their efficiency and cut the frills. Unfortunately, it also has meant cutting things that aren't frills, like lab equipment, libraries and computers," says Keston.

"And it can't go on. We're strapped for money," he says.

Larry Durling, the chair of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, the Fredericton body that recommends to the government how much money the universities should receive, says enrolment is not considered when grant recommendations are made.

"It's taken into consideration in that we are aware of the enrolment figures, but we don't recognize it as a factor," says Durling.

Government funding to universities in the Maritime provinces has increased 63 per cent in the past five years, up from a total of \$196.6 million in 1979-80 to \$276.8 million in 1985-86. The increase does little more than cover inflation, says Durling.



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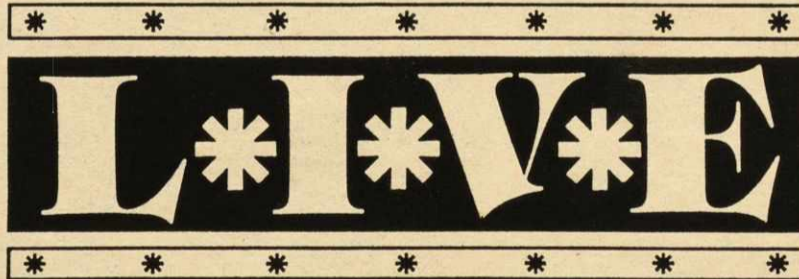
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