

Drop-outs and stop-outs decline

Canadian students are showing a new interest in university education — and the jobs it may help them to get. Enrolments are up some three per cent across the country, with science, engineering and business courses enjoying increased popularity.

The trend leaves educators hopeful they may have seen the last of the “drop-outs and stop-outs” who caused a fall in enrolments over the past few years. The term “stop-out” is applied to high school graduates who decide to take temporary jobs or travel, often in Britain and western Europe, before settling down to higher education.

The emphasis is strong on job-oriented courses, officials say. A. M. Kristjanson, spokesman for an organisation of universities and colleges, says the national pattern shows a strong interest in vocational subjects.

Study for jobs

“Students are tending to concentrate on courses they feel will lead to a job,” he said.

This has resulted in greater interest in science, professional and business curricula. Federal government officials estimate that more than 500,000 students enrolled in degree programmes in 1974-75, and predict undergraduate enrolment will continue to increase at the rate of nearly five per cent a year until 1977.

Nearly all of Canada's 68 degree-conferring institutions reported a higher incoming rate of students, with the three largest Canadian provinces, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, leading the way. British Columbia, a province with a high proportion of younger people and generous student bursaries — recently increased by nearly 50 per cent — sets the pace for Canada in student enrolment, official figures show. The rate of increase in British Columbia is estimated at between five and six per cent compared with three per cent nationally.

Record set

One Canadian university — McMaster in Hamilton, Ontario — set a record for first-year enrolment in 1974-75. Science and engineering courses proved especially popular.

While most officials agree that the emphasis appears strong on vocational courses, there are some schools, such as

York University in Toronto, where enrolment in science programmes is down. The pattern varies somewhat from university to university, officials say. Educators predict the mini-boom in enrolments will probably increase until the early 1980s. Lower birthrates in the early 1960s may cause a tapering off about then.

Farmers dig for gas

Farmers in a rural Ontario community, cut off by the local gas company, are digging gas wells of their own in their backyards.

Once a common practice, the new well-digging spree was spurred by a decision of the local gas company to discontinue service to rural customers in the Fisherville area, about 25 miles south of Hamilton.

When Fred Snider, a farmer, heard from the gas company that his supply was going to be shut off, he said “Like heck!” He joined up with his son and a neighbour to buy an old gas drilling machine and they began drilling under a pasture in their spare time. They have already brought one gas well into production in the younger Snider's backyard and have plans for at least two more.

Ron Snider, the son, says that the well has the potential to produce about 10,000 cubic feet of gas a day. On the coldest day, he reckons that about 1,000 cubic feet is required to heat the house. The drill rig they use is an antique unit, originally a hand-made copy of an old Union Gas drill.

Harold Meadows, a retired farmer living several miles away, has two wells producing gas — one dates back to 1926 — and is now having a third drilled. He proudly declares, “When you have your own gas well, then you don't have to be dictated to by anybody.”

The decision by the gas company to discontinue supplies to some 950 rural residents was made after 24 miles of pipe became corroded. They decided that it would be too expensive to replace. The Ontario Energy Board gave permission for the service to be discontinued but ordered the company to compensate gas-users who had to switch to other energy forms.

The company brought in natural gas from outside the area since most of their local wells were sold or abandoned. Art Newton, a geologist working with Union Gas, says that although chances of drilling a well successfully in this area are good, the costs may outweigh the benefits. Nor can drillers be sure of hitting gas on every attempt.

The drilling and plugging of private wells is carefully supervised by the provincial government's Petroleum Resources Section and cannot lawfully be done without a permit.

Free bus rides

They're giving free bus rides in one Canadian city — to help ease traffic problems. The free transit system, believed to be unique on the North American continent, is operating in Winnipeg, capital of the western Canadian province of Manitoba.

Twelve buses from the city's regular service operate a shuttle system in the centre of Winnipeg, covering main streets in downtown business and shopping districts. The idea is to encourage commuters to leave their cars at home. An average of some 15,000 passengers weekly used the system — known as DASH or Downtown Area Shuttle — in its first weeks.

The experiment is jointly financed by the city and the provincial government. Buses operate at five-minute intervals Monday to Friday. The idea has won enthusiastic passenger approval.

Scott's letters

Researchers at the University of Guelph Ontario, have found 44 letters written by Sir Walter Scott in a paper bag among 14,000 items of eighteenth and nineteenth century documents and manuscripts, recently acquired in Edinburgh.

Professor Stanford Reid, head of the university's history department, enthusiastically describes the collection as the world's leading one of Jacobite material. Recently he declared: “I believe Scottish students will have to come to Guelph in the future if they wish to make a thorough study of their own history.”

The collection also contains letters written by Byron and Robert Burns, written to or collected by the Aberdeen hardware merchant John Even, a patron of the arts.

Guelph University has a strong link with Scotland, being founded by a Scot, John Galt. Professor Reid's own ancestors came from Scotland in 1826 and he proudly declares: “We probably have more people studying Scottish history here than they have in Scotland.”