

# Athabasca University-alive and well in . . .

by John Nash

"\$50 Million Athabasca U. Plan Cancelled." Well, that's one view. The emphasis should be on the \$50 Million, because Alberta's fourth university is far from being forgotten.

Only this month advertisements for five additional staff were issued and a move made from downtown to offices at 14515-122 Avenue.

What has, in fact, occurred is that while plans for an expensive campus building project have been axed, the go-ahead for a five-year pilot project has been given.

This will involve some thirty staff (roughly half of the academic) and approximately 250 students and will use approximately 30,000 sq. ft. of rented accommodation, possibly a converted warehouse. The budget will be between \$600 and \$800,000 per year for the pilot scheme.

According to a provincial government press release of May 31, 72, "The Athabasca University Governing Authority was established by Order in Council in June of 1970. It was directed to bring into existence an innovative university stressing undergraduate programs in the arts and sciences."

The Worth Report defines it more negatively: "Athabasca is not intended to be a conventional university. It will have neither graduate programs nor professional schools."

Dr. T.C. Byrne, President of Athabasca, sees "learning rather than teaching" as the main activity. There will be no lecture courses, and students will be required to work out their own program of study in consultation with their tutors.

**The library or "information center" will be the chief source of study materials, while the book will be heavily relied upon, every appropriate form of information storage and retrieval will be used.**

Dr. Rae Laurenson, formerly with the U of A, took up his post as Chairman of the Communications System on Sept. 1. It will be his responsibility to coordinate the development of learning resources. Communications is also one of the four main study areas Athabasca proposes - the other three are the Humanities (arts), The Environment (sciences), and the Human Community (social sciences). Traditional disciplines will be avoided to promote what Dr. Laurenson calls "controlled freedom" to learn.

Eventually Athabasca is expected to become a cluster of several colleges - the pilot project is envisaged as half a college - sharing central facilities. Dr. Byrne sees the colleges as perhaps evolving different areas of emphasis in study, but would not like to see strong themes developing.

A model not unlike Oxford or Cambridge? In some ways. Dr. Byrne feels one hypothesis underlying Athabasca is that Alberta students,

possibly well beyond the normal university years, will be self-motivated enough to benefit from such an unstructured system. The student won't, of course, be on their own. They will have tutorials involving as few students as possible (maximum five) in order to stimulate more personalized learning than is currently available at other institutions in Alberta.

A further important function of Athabasca will be interaction with the community. Graduates will normally be expected to find jobs in the community and part of their study is seen as concerning the society in which they will live and work.

Their learning experience should be designed to equip them for service in business, government, teaching, and social work. Community outreach and the broad subjects of study are hopefully going to be complimentary in guiding an institution which will reflect and develop "moral values based on man in balance with his environment" (Byrne).

**While students are to be free to learn, some assessment of their progress must be made both as a guide to their own self development and for transferability to employment or other universities.**

A learning assessor is being hired to assist in this regard. Close collaboration with other institutions, U of A, in particular is foreseen as an aid to formulating standards. Decisions have yet to be made on the form of

evaluation, i.e., to examine or not to examine.

Indeed there are many questions still to be answered. While the pilot project goes ahead, Anne-Marie Decore of U of A's Education Faculty who sits on Athabasca's Board of Governors points out that the present Board appointments were supposed to terminate last July, but so far the Government has intimated no changes.

**In the more distant future, a decision will be made whether or not the pilot project has been successful enough to permit expansion to full university status.**

In view of the risk that the Alma Mater may disappear, the first students may not be required to pay fees. The present staff does not seem to be concerned about the possibility of failure because, in Dr. Byrne's words, the staff and students have "a vested interest in success".

But what form of success? Will the futuristic stress on Communications and the Environment place emphasis on the techniques of acquiring knowledge to the detriment of knowledge itself?

Only several years of experience and adaptation will tell, and for the moment we may only concur, perhaps, with the Worth Report: "Irrespective of its physical form, the underlying concept of this institution must not be lost. Its application is an essential ingredient in the transformation of higher education in this province."



## FREE UNIVERSITY NORTH --grant extended

Free University North's local initiatives grant will probably be renewed to November 30. The FUN staff expect their grant to end in September but are now hopeful that it will be renewed again in December, making it possible for the full-time staff of twelve to work on a year-round basis.

According to staff member, David Schleich, enrollment this year for FUN's 61 courses is well over a thousand. Of the 63 courses offered, only two have to be dropped due to lack of interest. It is still possible to revive "Poetry, the State of the Art," however, so if you are interested, give them a call.

Of the new courses being offered this year, the Karate course received the most overwhelming response with 162 registrants. The class is being taught by Sensei Supeene of the Japanese Karate School, located at 112 St. and Jasper Ave. Supeene is offering the first 50 classes in his course free. This would enable the student to advance to yellow belt. Supeene uses the chito ryu method.

Another extremely popular course is the Kundalena yoga class which has an enrollment of 140.

Other new courses this year include a creative writing workshop, Scottish country dancing (they need men), glass-blowing, and even a course on communes.

Although the classes do start this week it is still not too late to register. The only course not accepting any more students is the Karate class.

Should you not see a course

offered in the FUN calendar that you would be interested in taking, give them a call and tell them about it. That is how the knit and crochet classes were born. They proved so popular that the classes were filled in three days and it became necessary to form a second knitting class.

A note of interest: Last year a course was offered in women's consciousness raising. Out of that course was born "On our Way," Edmonton's new woman's magazine.

FUN can be reached at 488-3710, but they request that registrations be made in person at any of the following locations:

Metropolitan United Church, 109 St. and 83rd. Ave. (Alley door)

South District Recreation Centre, 7728-82nd Ave.

West 10, 12225-105 Ave.

Highland Branch Public library, 6710-118 Ave. (4-6 On Monday and Thursdays; 4-9 on Tuesday and Friday; closed Wednesday.) ac

## Clark charges party politics at U

Despite the settlement of the dispute over the chairman of the Board of Governors at Grant MacEwan Community College, it is too early for Jim Foster, Minister of Advanced Education, to relax.

"There have been a few political appointments- quite a few," charged Social Credit M.L.A. and former Minister of Education, Robert Clark, in a telephone interview yesterday. Clark was reiterating arguments he had made earlier when he publicly called for Foster's resignation over the Grant MacEwan controversy.

Clark argues that recent appointments at Medicine Hat and Lethbridge Junior Colleges and at the

universities in Edmonton and Calgary have been given to supporters of the Conservative party.

According to Clark, Jim Horseman, a new appointee to the Medicine Hat board is a defeated Conservative candidate; R.F. Babki, chairman of the Lethbridge board was campaign chairman for the Conservative candidate in the last federal election; one of his new colleagues was a campaign worker for the Conservative candidate in the last provincial election.

Carl Nickle, new chairman at the University of Calgary, was once a Conservative M.P. and F.T. Jenner, chairman at the U of A, is the father of

Foster's Executive Assistant.

Jenner has served on the University Senate for the past four years.

According to Clark, Nickle and his family have made "sizeable contributions to the U of C, mostly through the 3AU fund."

Clark says that when the Social Credit party formed the government, appointees were chosen from a list of nominations which were made in the communities involved.

No new appointments have been made in Grande Prairie or Red Deer.

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