

OFFICE POLITICS

By RICHARD REAGH

WITH BUDGETS SHRINKING AND DEFICITS ballooning, space management on Dalhousie campus is becoming a big issue among both students and faculty.

Questions are being asked. Why does the president emeritus, senator Henry Hicks, have an office on campus when he spends nearly all his time in Ottawa? Why do professors who teach in three different departments have to have three different offices? Why are labs and classrooms so overcrowded?

In 1982 the University set up the Space Management Department to get a handle on how many precious square meters of space were being wasted. The Department in turn hired Environmental Consulting Services as advisors. Their study found out how many offices, classrooms and labs there were on campus. With the report, the university knew for the first time exactly how much space there was and how it was being used, making it easier to put the finger on those departments guilty of space mismanagement.

Three years later things haven't improved much. Last summer the Department of Space Management did a space inventory. One of those hired to measure classrooms and count wall plugs around the university was the former president of the Student Union, Alex Gigeroff.

"Most space, from my indication, seems to be used, but there are some areas of the campus where there seems to be a lot of free space," says Gigeroff.

"We did notice there was a case in the political science depart-

ment where a professor has been retired but continues to maintain an office."

Another complaint about the political science department is its overall size. The department has its own library and common room.

"There's room for another small department there," says one former member of the council of the Dal Student Union who worked with Gigeroff during the summer.

"I'd say the most blatant misuse of space is when you have cross appointments. A professor who has a cross appointment in political science and public administration often has an office in both the political science department and the public administration department and maybe somewhere else on campus. There's several examples in political science where they don't need a second office like that," he says.

"They also have a library for their students and a student lounge. You can even ask political science students; they don't need that much space."

The Political Science Depart-



In 1982 the university set up the department of space management to get a handle on wasted floor space.

ment isn't the only culprit. The physics department in the Dunn Building has an over-supply of office space and the biology department has underutilized labs.

Departments who suffer most from space shortages are those in a growth cycle. For example, a few years ago the sciences were growing and lab time and space was scarce. Now the trend has reversed and the arts disciplines are

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finding it hard to get enough classroom space to meet demand.

Unlike classes, which expand and contract from year to year, buildings can't. Once they're built a certain size with so many square meters of space, that's it. When money was plentiful, departments could build onto their headquarters to meet new demands. But financial restraint has put new construction out of the question for most faculties.

If a discipline within the uni-

versity has extra space, why would it mind an expanding department using it? The answer lies in the attitudes of the individual departments and those in charge. Many professors fear once they let a room or lab go they'll never get it back. Most departments hope they'll need the space back in a few years when they're going through another growth spurt.

"People tend to hoard space, and for good reasons," says Renata Kartsakalis, director of the department of space management. "They may need it not this year but next year. They may have post-doctoral fellows with a large research grant and they don't want to be in a position where they won't be able to get that space back."

Departments get to the point where they have so much space, big offices and research facilities, but down the road they don't need it," say the former student councillor. "They still have that space while other people are up and coming and having trouble getting new offices or classrooms because there's a space problem.

If a new department was created tomorrow, would the university have the offices, classrooms, and labs needed for it?

"I don't think there's much space ready to be used, but I think with incentives given and awareness raised we could probably accommodate more activities without really jeopardising existing ones," says Kartsakalis.

Incentives would include a system of space management which works. If, for example, the department of biology needs an extra

lab next semester, a request for additional room to the Department of Space Management should get the biologists what they need. A reliable, fair system of space allocation should also make departments less reluctant to give up rooms which they don't really need. Kartsakalis is in the process of trying to build that faith in the system.

"If we could create a climate in which people are confident that if they have space needs they can be met, I think they will be less reluctant to give up space which is currently under-utilized," says Kartsakalis.

Gigeroff says the space problem on campus is no longer an academic problem but a political one which must be dealt with accordingly.

"I think the process has got to be more centralized. It seems to me that if you leave the decision up to individual departments, they're going to make adequate justifications for the space they have and probably some pretty good reasons why they should have more," says Gigeroff.

Another idea which wouldn't distribute space more equitably but would make more efficient use of it, is the proposal to move the university to a tri-semester system. This would make use of classrooms all year around, while giving students more time-table flexibility and the possibility of finishing university a year early. The extra revenue created would also provide more cash for expansion projects.

Putting a price tag on space is one proposed way to get departments to use it more efficiently.

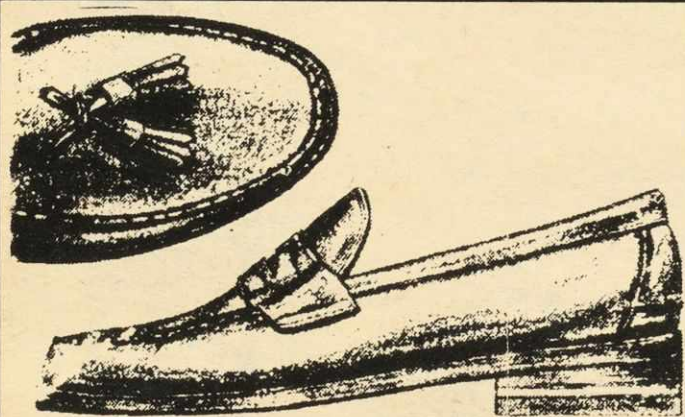
A tri-semester system would make use of classrooms all year round

At the present time, the university pays for lights, heat, and provides the space rent-free. A former Dalhousie student councillor says making the departments more fiscally responsible would change their attitude toward space.

"If departments could save money by trading off a couple of labs to get more money for beakers, you would probably see people being a little more careful on how they went around and utilized space."

With the latest inventory of space now in the computer at the Department of Space Management, the space watch-dog has to prove itself. It must develop an efficient and equitable way to distribute Dalhousie's limited number of labs, classrooms and offices among all the departments. If nothing results, the senate might consider wholesale changes to class scheduling and funding for the different disciplines.

One way or another, though, the departments will find a way to divvy up space. If there's no money around for new buildings, expansion or renovations, they'll have to.



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