

Language commissioner to speak

Canada's Commissioners of Official Languages have long been critical of the English-speaking universities' failure to ensure that their graduates have a working knowledge of both official languages. The present commissioner, Maxwell F. Yalden, will speak to this issue at UNB on Thursday.

His address, to be presented in English and French, is entitled, "The Role of the French Language in Canada's English-Speaking Universities: Traditional Offerings vs. Future Needs". The public is invited to attend at 8 pm. in Room 26 of MacLaggan Hall.

Mr. Yalden's visit to UNB coincides with the efforts of the university's presidential committee to implement a French language policy. The implementation committee, headed by Bernard L. Vigod, professor of history, was formed as a result of a report on French language policy approved and endorsed in principle by the UNB Senate in April, 1981.

Their report contained five recommendations. First, the university should not require proficiency in French as a condition of admission. There are still a considerable number of high school graduates from this province and the rest of Canada who matriculate without French language skills, and the committee believes that the university should instead encourage the provincial government to achieve its declared aim to give all children a real ability to communicate in both languages. To this end, the university should strongly support the second language program in its faculty of education as well as the upgrading of secondary school French teachers.

Second, the committee found that French should not be a compulsory subject for all students attending university. Instead, they recommend that every faculty and division should counsel its students in the importance of French with respect to that discipline, draw students' attention to the French Language Proficiency Certificate program already being offered, and make an effort to coordinate timetables

with the French department so that students will have an increased opportunity to study French.

The third recommendation proposed an expansion of the current course offerings of the French department as well as advanced training for its faculty members.

The fourth recommendation was particularly significant because it will have far-reaching effects throughout the university. The committee recommended that in every faculty or division where it was logistically possible to arrange, sections of introductory courses should be taught in French. Dr. Vigod's department, for example, has already committed itself to offering several history courses in French. Dr. Vigod, himself bilingual as a result of his doctoral research in Quebec history, points out that some departments, particularly

those with high enrolments like engineering or computer science, may have difficulty freeing a faculty member to instruct a smaller number of students in French. Dr. Vigod foresees no trouble, however, in offering a variety of general, non-technical electives in French which any student could take to fulfill degree requirements.

Recommendation number five anticipated the potential difficulty in implementing French language policy uniformly throughout the university and its two campuses. It urged that this not become a cause of contention and delay.

The report unofficially touched on three other, lower-priority objectives of French language policy, including courses in conversational French, bursaries for students and grants for faculty as incentives to improve language

skills, and the need for faculty to acquire bilingualism not only to teach but also to enhance scholarly communication within Canada.

The implementation committee has scheduled a luncheon meeting with Mr. Yalden November 26 to discuss the strategies of executing the policy. Dr. Vigod said the committee is eager to hear Mr. Yalden's reaction to their policy statement, although they are aware he does favor proficiency in French as a university entrance requirement.

Mr. Yalden has described his position in three ways: as an ombudsman who accepts complaints, an auditor and a spokesman for the official languages act. He has been Commissioner of Official Languages since 1977, when he appointed for a seven-year term. Mr. Yalden has served



Maxwell F. Yalden

the Canadian government in a number of important capacities since 1956. As a member of the department of external affairs, he was posted to Moscow and Paris, he represented Canada at the Geneva conference on disarmament, he was assistant under-secretary of state from 1969 to 1973, and, prior to his current appointment, served as deputy minister of communications.



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