

Funding cuts threaten UNB Arts programs

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THE BRUNSWICKAN

By the end of the coming academic year, UNB's Faculty of Arts will have lost over 25% of its professors to retirement, a total reduction of thirty-six, with little relief in sight.

These figures worry Dean of Arts Peter Kent given the virtual freeze in faculty hirings, with only two appointments joining the ranks, neither of which were in the Arts Faculty. As of yet, no promises have been made to hire replacements.

While hoping for the best, Kent confesses that he is instructing his departments to plan for the worst.

If the funding provided over the past two years which has allowed departments to hire part-time lecturers were withdrawn, Kent fears that the university will have "effectively destroyed programs" or at the very least placed them in "serious jeopardy." While acknowledging that cuts are being felt all over campus, Kent contends that it is "unconscionable" that departments such as English have dwindled from 23 professors to 14.

In addition to maintaining existing programs, Kent's faculty is under pressure to launch new programs such as the BA in Multimedia Studies which began this fall.

While excited about such programs, Kent acknowledges that the cost of running the two introductory courses in media culture and media literacy will require the equivalent of seven of the part-time stipends which have been allotted to his faculty this year. For his part, Kent admits that he was reluctant to give the go-ahead for the multimedia program until he was "satisfied that the other departments were reasonably well looked-after."

On top of this, the two-year funding commitment of the University to fund stipend positions in order that courses previously taught by professors taking the university's early retirement incentive program.

In 1996-97, there are 164 courses which will receive this stipend funding. Given this large number of stipends with uncertain funding in the future, some departments in Arts are beginning to question whether they

university make good on its earlier tacit commitment to renew the faculty or will the early retirement program simply have been a cost-cutting vehicle?

According to Peter Kepros, President of the Association of UNB Teachers (AUNBT), Faculty appointments may begin as early as July of 1997. At the same time, he cautions that, "no one in their right mind" should expect that all retirees will be replaced all at once.

Over the next five or six years Kepros fully expects that retirements will continue to outpace reappointments, but eventually there will be a renewal of the Faculty. Nevertheless, Kepros warns

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- Brian Cupples, Chair, Philosophy

could survive. They fear that unless a number of new full-time reappointments are made to fill gaps created by retirement, entire programs will die.

One such program is Philosophy. This year, the department did not receive all the stipends it had hoped for. Although it will receive eight, this is substantially fewer than the 13 the department requested in order to completely offset the loss of recent retirees William Elderkin and Jack Iwanicki. This shortfall has necessitated some shuffling within the department as Chair Brian Cupples is forced to adjust course offerings to reflect the new financial reality.

Cupples he notes that students "are going to show up for courses in September that are no longer available and they're going to have to scramble." Cupples attributes this to "late planning" on the part of the administration. However, now that the university has lived up to its two year obligation to temporarily fund the courses previously taught by early retirees, the question remains: will the

individual departments not to expect that new appointments will automatically go to departments which have experienced losses.

Despite the fact that a smaller department like Philosophy is hurt more, proportionately, than a large department like History, Chair Steve Turner, points out that retirements have left several gaps in his department which may not be filled anytime soon. Of particular concern is the future of Twentieth century European history. Stipends are in place for courses on the holocaust, fascism and a survey course in Modern Europe for the 1996-97 year, but it is doubtful whether funding will be available next year.

While the loss of advanced courses on fascism and the holocaust will be a significant one, even more ominous would be the demise of the introductory course on modern Europe which has traditionally paved the way for further study in the field. Ultimately, however, Turner is thankful that his department has escaped the funding restrictions relatively unscathed, with losses to his



Tilley-Singer-Carleton, UNB's largest Faculty houses over 1300 students.

PAT FITZPATRICK PHOTO

American and Canadian history sections partially absorbed by other scholars in his department.

"On the whole (with the exception of the European field) I don't see the department's teaching programs as being particularly jeopardized," he says.

Another mainstay of the Arts faculty has not been as lucky. As chair of UNB's English department, Roger Ploude notes his formerly large department's ranks will be thinned to 14 bodies at the end of this year.

Unlike other department Chairs, this professor of English literature, who has also served as University Secretary for UNB for several years is very much reconciled to the new fiscal reality, and refuses to point fingers at a university administration which, he says, "has been very financially responsible."

Instead, Ploude insists that the onus lies with individual departments to find the silver lining in the dark clouds descending upon campus. Departments must, in Ploude's view,

acknowledge that they cannot be all things to all people and must instead concentrate on what they do best. To this end, his department is attempting to identify its strengths - what makes them "unique and special" - and play to these strengths. The English department's graduate program provides a good example of this, having emphasized the MA degree over the PhD and focused on creative writing and Canadian literature.

While the loss of nine professors can be offset somewhat by abandoning certain fields, Ploude admits that class sizes will increase significantly. Core writing courses, which had been limited to eighteen students in order to facilitate weekly review of written work, may almost double in size. Admitting that close student-professor interaction will suffer, Ploude seems equally sure of the fact that departments must be "creative" in adapting to the new reality. However, in spite of their leader's stoicism, students of English will have far fewer options than their predecessors might

have enjoyed.

And Ploude's optimistic outlook is not shared by all in the faculty. Smaller departments insist that without a critical mass of professors, they are hard-pressed to deliver even modest programs. Dexter Noel, chair of the Spanish department sees his own program as teetering on the brink of extinction. Despite a renewed interest in Spanish language among students - owing in part to the NAFTA agreement - Noel says that his department has dwindled from eight professors down to three over the years. Moreover, with two professors slated to retire by 1999, the Spanish department will be left with just one professor. This for a department which last year "served 680 students."

Unhappy that "pretty soon we will not have a functioning department," Noel cites four professors as a bare minimum to run the program. He shows no predilection for a possible merger with other smaller language departments, simply remarking, "we will do it if forced to by the university."

Part-time lecturers future uncertain

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With the significant attrition of teaching positions in the Arts faculty, newcomers have found it increasingly difficult to get a foot in the door at UNB. Moreover, those who have managed to obtain part-time work as stipend lecturers, garnering a mere \$3,240 per (full year) course, are uncertain about what the future has in store for themselves.

AUNBT President Peter Kepros tries to hearten part-time lecturers: "Hang on for a little while and something good may come along," he says. Kepros is also hopeful that the stipend positions are mere stopgaps, which will soon be replaced by permanent hirings.

However, part-time lecturers on stipend are beginning to worry that their prospects may not improve. George Williamson, Philosophy, left a PhD program at the University of Warwick (England) when funding ran

out. Last year he taught four stipend courses and managed to salt away some of his \$13,000 paycheque to further his education.

Recently however, the grace period on his student loan grace ran out and Williamson says his financial resources have been stretched to the point where he can't make the payments on loans that financed his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Indeed, according to the soft-spoken lecturer, such payments "take over half of my current wages."

For the time being, says Williamson, his loans are on interest relief, which postpones payments for a period of up to eighteen months. However, Williamson says, "eighteen months is nothing with the job market the way it is."

Sandra Gereau, who taught European history courses on a stipend basis last year, echoes Williamson.

After spending several years fighting for part-time teaching jobs with meagre pay and few benefits, she says

her standard of living was actually better as a graduate student. If given the chance to take the same career path again - a trail that includes working towards a PhD at Brandeis University - Gereau concedes that she might not do it over.

"I was told ten years ago to do a PhD and that I would be coming into the job market at just the right time. But it hasn't happened and not only has it not happened but there is no plan for it to happen." If prospects do not improve in a year's time, Gereau may consider taking the civil servant's exam again, placing her dream of university work on the back-burner.

Ultimately, Williamson fears that the university's guarantee of a quality education, "falls down," when instructors do not have the "time or money to do independent research in a specific field." As far as research goes, Gereau notes that her lack of a direct departmental affiliation places her in limbo when it comes to applying for research funds through the university.

What's more, Williamson notes that part-time instructors are not represented on campus teaching committees, nor does their teaching benefit as a result of annual evaluations. The stipend lecturer "simply disappears at the end of the year." When asked whether a part-time lecturer would feel secure enough in his position to weigh in on controversial issues, Williamson remarks that, soon there may be "no one to even think up challenges to received opinions because there is no basis for independent research to start with." Gereau is even more to the point: "If I rock the boat, I'm completely expendable."

For his part, Williamson concedes that he will need more funding than his part-time lecturing provides, if he hopes eventually to return to England and finish his PhD. When pressed, he allows that in a worst-case scenario, if the stipends end and there is no further funding, "I'm back to waiting tables."

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