

# Universities in dire straits, conference concludes

By PAULETTE PEIROL

"Fund the Future" is quickly becoming this year's slogan for the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS). Yet more than just a slogan, it is an active campaign to make the public, corporate, and governmental sectors of Ontario more aware of the urgent need for adequate university funding.

Hence, the Fund the Future Conference held at the University of Waterloo July 11-13 couldn't have been more timely. While addressing such topics as strategies to raise community awareness and establish a positive image of post-secondary education in Ontario, the conference illuminated some startling facts about Ontario's chronic history of underfunding.

In the 1950s and '60s, "university access to university education was seen as a legitimate investment and as an important political goal," writes Katharina Klassen (University of Waterloo) in *Who Pays? (A funding crisis in our universities)*.

In the 1970s, however, the Ontario government cut university funding by approximately 30 percent. By 1972, there was a near moratorium for new buildings and equipment. Ontario universities receive the least provincial funding in Canada, and York ranks 14th out of Ontario's 15 post-secondary institutions nibbling the same meagre financial pie.

"University education has become a low priority in Ontario," said Gerard Blink, President of the Council of the York Student Federa-

tion (CYSF), "and York has suffered more than other universities."

The effects of underfunding are now widespread, as outlined in Klassen's report:

- Classes and laboratories are overcrowded, while buildings are in need of repairs.
- Since 1970-71, the average student/faculty ratio has risen by 20 percent.
- Faculties are overworked, and staff morale is low.
- There is a dire need for state-of-the-art equipment, as students are forced to go into the workforce to be educated on modern equipment.
- Libraries are lagging in their acquisitions programs, due not only to underfunding but also

inflation and the declining rate of the Canadian dollar.

- Researchers are "selling out" (leaving the country) to foreign institutions for higher grants and salaries.
- Professors, especially in engineering, computer science, and business, are earning half the salary of their colleagues in industries. At the University of Toronto, for example, the starting salary of an assistant professor is almost \$24,000—less than that of a Toronto Transit Commission bus driver.
- Tenured positions outnumber new positions three to one, resulting in hiring freezes.

Since the 1960s, Ontario has been committed to a policy of accessibility. Yet the province's tuition fees are the highest in Canada, and fears were expressed at the conference that Ontario's universities are moving toward a "user pays" system of education.

The Fund the Future Conference outlined three ways to establish a positive post-secondary education image in Ontario. Their goals are to use local media, speak to MPs and MPPs, and to promote "universal access" to higher education. One of the first steps to this end will be the formation of Campus Groups or Alliances comprised of faculty, students and administrative staff in each university.

The Metro Universities and Colleges Caucus, a liaison between Ryerson, U of T, York, and Toronto

area colleges, are planning to hold a city-wide food-bank this fall to help increase public awareness of universities. They also plan to speak with high school presidents about "the realities of universities," said Blink.

Meanwhile, the York University Development Corporation is appealing to the private sector for support. Blink cautions, however, that "initial funds are good, but they must be long-term to be really worthwhile. They need special guidelines."

"If you allow business funding, it will mean even more loss of autonomy," Klassen said, "and that would be a shame."

Reservations are also being expressed on the provincial government's \$80-million "Excellence Fund" to improve library and research facilities in 1986-87, and their \$1-billion high technology fund, available to universities on application. They are "one-shot funds which 15 universities must share," Klassen reports, and "are earmarked—most of them designated for 'high technology' purposes."

This is especially problematic at York, since it does not have many "high-tech" programs. Most of the recent provincial funds, notes Klassen, "are not applicable to humanities or social science research." As long as the provincial government continues to favour high technology research funding, York's underfunding crisis will continue.

## Meters installed for short visits

By LORNE MANLY

In an effort to provide cheap short term parking to York students, faculty, staff, and visitors, as well as generate revenue for the Parking Office, 35 parking meters have recently been installed at various locations around campus.

According to John Becker, the chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Parking, drivers were forced into parking illegally due to the shortage of short term parking areas. "As chairman I read all the parking fines appeals," Becker said, "and there seemed to be an incredible amount of violations (by people) who simply wanted to run into the building and pick up an essay, or pick up a friend, for example."

"As there were no short term parking areas," Becker continued, "they were forced into either parking in fire routes, or pulling into service and medical areas, or parking on the sidewalks. The idea (behind the parking meters) was to supply each building with a few spots close to the front door so people can do 10-minute errands—and do it all legally," Becker added.

These concerns voiced by Becker prompted the parking committee to allocate funds for the purchase of 35 parking meters, costing about \$700 each. The meters charge 25 cents for 15 minutes, up to a maximum of one



GARY BLAKELEY

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hour, and are located in service areas close to entrances of buildings and in many of the parking lots.

Before the installation of the parking meters, drivers could leave a deposit at the parking lot attendant's booth and receive most of their money back when they departed. Don Whitty, the Parking Operations manager, feels that there are a fair number "of people who say, 'I don't

want to pay \$2.75 up front, even if I'm getting the money back—I want a better deal.'"

The parking metres provide this better deal for the driver and also help make up the money the Parking Office was losing by people parking illegally. "This way we get some money for it (short term parking)," Whitty remarked, "and it's fair to both us and the drivers."

## Blink supports strong central gov't but not at expense of York colleges

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to create a stronger central government," Blink said, "but it shouldn't be at the expense of the colleges. The colleges have an important role."

The Faculty of Arts, for example, is so large," Blink continued. "It has about 14,000 undergrads and it could be very difficult to become involved. The colleges are a much easier way to become involved."

But hanging over the Gilmor report, according to both Blink and Lumsden, is the spectre of the Presidential Commission on Non-Faculty Colleges (otherwise known as the Hare Commission). The three person commission, chaired by Provost Hare of Trinity College at U of T, has a mandate to examine the whole nature of the college system at York and is expected to present its findings in about a year—after Gilmor's final recommendations are to be implemented.

"The Gilmor report is slightly premature as the two task forces should have worked concurrently," Blink said. "All the Gilmor (final) recommendations could be reversed if the Hare taskforce comes out for strengthening the college system."

In Lumsden's opinion, "it's simply impossible to discuss student government without reviewing the college system. It's a reciprocal system—you can't disentangle the two and treat them in isolation."

But, according to York Provost Tom Meininger, they are not being treated in isolation. "From the very beginning," Meininger said, "it was admitted there would be some overlap and the two studies are being done in some degree of connection. Gilmor has met with the (Hare) Commission, and the University will be attentive to the College commission to make sure there's no incompatibility."

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