

Dal enrollment drops unexpectedly

by Dave Langille

The popularity of a university education would appear to be on the decline, both at Dalhousie and across the country. According to Dal's Assistant Registrar, P. G. Griffiths, the various departmental estimates of expected enrollment totalled out at 6,800, whereas only 6100 students have registered to date. The final enrollment figures may vary somewhat as "stragglers" arrive and the cases of approximately 30 "cheque bouncers" are settled. Part-time enrollment has held to estimates of roughly 900 students.

The questions that arise are: 1. Where are these "missing" students and why have they not materialized, and, 2. what repercussions, if any, will this situation have on the university community?

In the case of Dalhousie, the Registrar's Office is at a loss to explain the relative decline in enrollment. Perhaps the fact that the decline has occurred largely in the Arts and Science and Graduate Faculties of Studies would lead one to think that it is linked to a lack of job opportunities for graduates from these faculties.

However, even in the non-career orientated faculties, the number of applications was up from last year, as were acceptances and confirmations of intentions to register. What came up at the last minute to deter these prospective students? Could it be financial problems associated with fee increases and student loan problems? (It must not be forgotten that Dalhousie's tuition is the highest in Canada.)

However the Dal administration needn't worry about losing students to other universities. Enrollment throughout the Maritimes is running about the same as last year; Mount St. Vincent having an increase of 70-80 students due to their new medical secretary and secretarial science courses.

Canada Manpower is understandably quite concerned with trends affecting what could traditionally be regarded as the cream of the labour crop. In order to track down the relative decline in enrollment, they have sent out a questionnaire addressed to the "no-shows" and drop-outs. The results of such

studies point towards the emergence of a new phenomenon, the "stop-out." This new breed are prone to interrupt their studies for a year, whether for financial reasons or merely to make that Great Pilgrimage of Experience to Europe or Beyond.

Canadian University Press, in an article on the enrollment slump, cites an Ontario government study which traced the decline to the frustration and alienation of young people from society and the educational system. They mention a disillusionment with university education and the privileges it is supposed to bring.

With the employment situation being what it is many students prefer a ticket for a job rather than a passport for a profession. But while the community colleges of the other provinces are experiencing an unprecedented boom, with enrollment increases of up to 28% expected this year, our own technical institutes have not yet benefited from a swing in their direction.

One factor of the enrollment issue mentioned in the CUP article is the fact that there were fewer young people of university age now than in the sixties. Enrollment peaked during the last decade, increasing an average of 11% a year. By 1970 this figure was down to 6% and last year the increase fell to 3%.

This brings us to the discussion of repercussions on the university community. The Canadian Association of University Teachers, fearful that departments will have to cut back financially via non-renewal of contracts, is anxious to protect its members. Rumours of budget cuts at Dalhousie as a direct result of the drop in expected enrollment were dismissed as "garbage" by the university administration.

The possibilities exist that the university will lower their entrance standards and / or go on a promotional campaign for new students. The present low entrance requirements at most universities would seem to preclude the first possibility.

It appears that the present policy is to admit nearly all applicants with the hope that those unable to earn a degree

will be weeded out by the end of their first year. In order that students find it easier to register, Toronto's York University answers potential applicants with their "Operation: Break-Through."

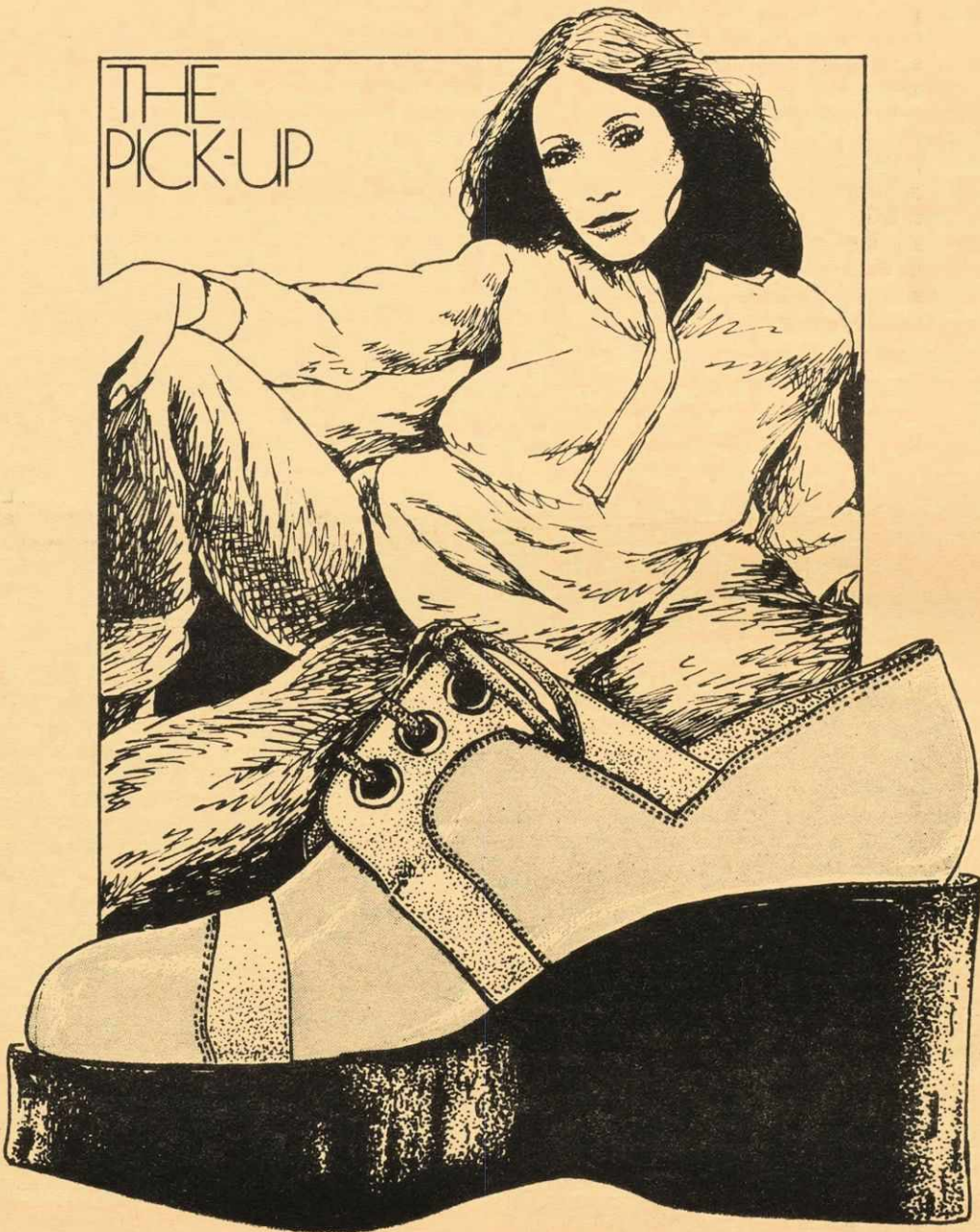
Simon Fraser in British Columbia provides a round-the-clock information service. Ontario's Trent University is

actually easing admission requirements to allow about 50 students to enter first year although they have not passed Grade Thirteen with the standard 60% average, so eager are they to attract students.

Back at Dalhousie we can only hope the departments responsible for the enrollment estimates for next year will see

the writing on the wall and shift their emphasis from the quantity to the quality of the education they give. As for the future of higher education in the Maritimes, the trends would seem to call for an introduction of the community college system which has proved so popular in the rest of the country.

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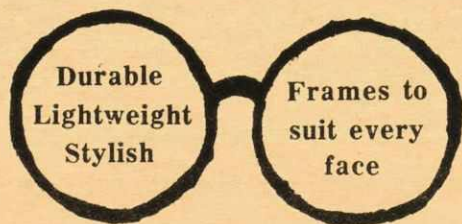


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