

# "Ombudsman"

A couple of years ago, a major change in the admission requirements for this university was undertaken, and applied specifically to non-native speakers of English. As laid down in the University Regulations Calendar (#14.3) in 1974-75, the requirement said that non-Canadian applicants whose mother tongue is other than English are required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and their applications will not be considered complete until the results are available to the University." This seems reasonable.

If you have problems you want the "Ombudsman" to help with, or if you're someone who wants to help solve others' problems, contact Dirk Schaeffer at 439-6486, a person at 1010 Newton Place, 8515-112 St.) or Kevin Hoggins in Gateway 432-5178 (Room 282, SUB) or at home, 433-2136.

But, after an intermediate version in the 1975-76 Calendar, the present version of this section reads: "Since the language of instruction at the University of Alberta is English...applicants must possess proficiency in both oral and written English. Those applicants whose native language is not English and who, therefore, have studied English only as a second language, are normally required to demonstrate this proficiency, regardless of their academic qualifications, by presenting a score of at least 600 on the TOEFL's." College St. Jean is exempted, and some provision for alternative but equivalent tests are allowed. A score of 600 is, apparently, equivalent to the 75th percentile on this test.

On the face of it, this regulation appears blatantly discriminatory, unjust, and diametrically opposed to reasonable educational principles. On further examination, it looks even worse. There are, however, reasons to be adduced for its introduction. I'll try to hit the cons and pros.

Since this regulation was put into the Calendar,

two shifts in attitude have occurred at this University, as well as one change in practise, all of which argue against the advisability or legitimacy of the regulation.

First, we are now, or will soon be, discriminating against foreign students financially, suggesting that the need to discriminate against them test-wise is no longer as pressing as it might once have been.

Second, we have recently come to recognize that native-English speakers aren't very hot at "oral and written" English either. Perhaps the TOEFL could more reasonably be used as a screening device for all students, not just non-native English speaking students.

Third, it is unclear who had the authority to put this regulation into the Calendar in the first place, or to enforce it. The GFC Committee on Admissions Requirements, which debated this issue at great length and which is chaired by the Assistant Registrar who apparently wrote this part of the Calendar, does not apparently have such authority. It's terms of reference allow it only to "develop...admission policy" and to "bring recommendations to" GFC. But GFC never ruled on this change. Unfortunately, the Admissions Requirements Committee no longer exists, and its replacement's terms of reference and authority have yet to be decided. Nobody seems to know who is responsible for what the Calendar says, nor how much authority is vested in it. (But the word "normally" in the above quote means, according to the Registrar's Office, that a Dean may bend it, but a student-applicant may not appeal it.)

In addition to these three problems or irregularities, there are some further drawbacks.

First, TOEFL instructions advise users of the test not to try to attach meaning to the total score (summed over five different sub-tests) and not to use any arbitrary cut-off score as a single rigid requirement for anything. It just doesn't pretend to that much accuracy.

Second, any good test-user knows that no test makes sense until you have local norms. Requests to standardize this test of U of A were, apparently, turned

down on grounds that the \$3,000 this would cost could not be afforded. (But when the President can drop \$800 on a ballot for a Chairman's report that was so absurd or trivial or unwholesome that two-thirds of the faculty didn't even respond one wonders why this should be a problem.)

Given all of this, why was this requirement introduced in the first place? Well, essentially because all other Canadian universities were making this requirement, so that Alberta got flooded with "poor quality" foreign applicants. Apparently, when Alberta lined up last year, Calgary, the last hold-out, was hit with a more than 300 per cent increase in foreign applicants, so U of A climbed aboard this year too.

Well, that's a reason: but it relates to the efficient running of institutions, not to education.

What can be done?

a) GFC can review the whole thing, beginning with how the regulation ever got made without its authority, and going on to whether we really need it. As a guess, a quota system for foreign students (which is reasonable) would seem to make arbitrary cut-offs on the TOEFL superfluous anyway.

b) In any case, if TOEFL is to be given, it should not be given indiscriminately, nor in the absence of local norms.

c) "Since the language of instruction at the U of A is English", is it unreasonable to ask non-native-English-speaking faculty to present similar, or higher scores? My guess, from looking at the test and talking to a number of students, is that there are quite a few that couldn't meet the requirement either.

Right now, no matter how you look at it, the situation stinks. It reeks of discrimination, both against foreigners and native Canadians, including Quebecois students trying to reconcile themselves with the English-speaking majority; it is wantonly arbitrary; it appears not to have gone through any of the carefully-designed checks-and-balances procedures established by this university. Somebody must be able to do something about it.

—dls

## Week set for Feb. 3-11

by Doug Torrance

Community Involvement Week begins Thursday, Feb. 3 despite a disappointing lack of participation from university faculties.

But SU executive vp Howard Hoggins says he's confident the project will be a success even though only eight of the anticipated sixteen faculty associations will be involved.

The program, running from February 3 through February 11, will involve student representatives from the faculties of Agriculture and Forestry, Education, Home Economics, Medical Laboratory Science, Medicine, Nursing and Science. They will be speaking at various community leagues and setting up information booths in major shopping malls.

Hoggins said the aims of the project are to give the taxpaying Edmontonian some idea of what is going on in the university and provide some practical information on relevant topics in which the faculties specialize.

The speakers will appear Monday, February 7 through Friday, February 11, at Allendale,

Belvedere, Duggan, Glenora, Queen Alexandra, and Thorncliff community leagues. This Thursday, February 3, the faculties of Agriculture, Education, Forestry, and Science will have information booths in Meadowlark Mall, and on Friday, Home Economics, Medicine and Nursing will be at Kingsway Garden Mall.

Hoggins said he hoped that

Community Involvement Week would eventually lead to the establishment of a permanent "speakers' bureau" which would provide faculty representatives to talk to community leagues and other groups on topics of public interest. He pointed out however, that this was a long range goal, which may take up to five years to realize.

## Dean of Students office begins travel info bureau

An overseas travel information service is now being offered by the office of the dean of students. Over 500 pamphlets and other reference sources have been accumulated and the collection is expected to grow rapidly said coordinator Vicki Sand Friday.

The service provides a centralized collection of travel, study, and employment information on foreign countries. The

files contain cross-references on accommodation, employment, volunteer programs, funding opportunities, vaccination requirements and immigration regulations.

Sand urged students and faculty to take advantage of the informal service before planning their next trip abroad. The collection is located in the Office of the Dean of Students on the second floor of University Hall.

The Equal Access Committee of the Students' Union has organized a speakers workshop Feb. 3 at 3 p.m. in the same room, a public organizational meeting of the committee will be held to discuss other methods of combating the differential fee proposal.

## GFC course guide group

General Faculties Council (GFC) voted Monday to approve the formation of a joint committee of faculty and students which will develop a course guide and evaluation questionnaire.

The committee will begin by devising appropriate procedures for student evaluation of instruction and for distributing the information so obtained. It will

decide whether the results should be published or if they should be made available in some other way.

In a Gateway interview, Ken McFarlane, SU vp (academic), said that if the committee meets this summer, a course guide and evaluation questionnaire could be distributed, at the earliest, next fall.

## Kusin to speak

The Central and East European Studies Society of Alberta and the Hungarian Cultural Society of Edmonton is sponsoring a series of lectures on Communism in Eastern Europe during the first week of February at the U of A.

Professor V. Kusin of the University of Glasgow will deliver the lectures starting Feb. 1 in room L 12 at 7:30 p.m. His talk is titled "The Communist Way to Power: A Repeatable Experience?"

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