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On Tuesday, March 29 Students' Council will consider 2nd & 3rd Readings of a motion to increase SU fees by 10%

All students are invited to attend.

7:00 p.m. Council Chambers, University Hall.

## MORE LETTERS

### Appropriate headlines

Thank you for correctly printing our letter, "Act NOW! for PEACE!". We're also grateful for the very appropriate title, "Act NOW! for PEACE!". Hopefully, the title, along with the letter, helped to portray our message that people who believe in national defense are not "warmongers".

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend your paper for the amount of space you leave for letters, and for the appropriate titles you give to other letters which adequately portray what the writer is saying. Keep up the good work, Gateway staff!

Ken Shipka



Hey Baby do you smoke after Gateway staff meetings too?

Rm. 282 SUB, Thursday, 4 p.m.

### Der Schug unleashes some really keen ideas

Hi, this is me again. I'm not VP External, and it's your fault. So, you don't want to join my drinking team; O.K. bath tub bubble-eaters, this is your last chance to be original like me. This doesn't mean becoming a preppy or fish-head (fish-heads are punk rockers). I guess it is up to me to create an incentive for you to break the mold of conformity. Why not be an individual and:

- run through CAB cafeteria at lunch hour with nothing on screaming, "I'm free!"
  - get five of your biggest friends to force their way into the Students' Union Presidential office and shave Greenhill's beard off,
  - get your friends together during final exam week, place each one in a different building on campus, and simultaneously have all fire alarms pulled to force everybody out of every building.
- I just dare anyone to prove they're an individual.

Martin Schug, Ophthalmology II

## LETTERS

Letters to the Editor should be under 250 words, and must be signed and include faculty, year and phone number. Anonymous letters will not be printed, although we will withhold names. All letters should be typed or very neatly printed. We reserve the right to edit or delete letters for reasons of space or libel. Letters do not necessarily reflect the views of the Gateway.

## The battle for better English

feature by Jens Andersen

*I sense we are into a different era in northern Alberta - a different era in time, in not competing for new opportunities, but in managing the opportunities we have as well. I sense also that as Albertans your test will be: Is it good for the people who are living here now?*

Peter Lougheed (from a speech ca. 1980)

As the above specimen of tortured English dramatically illustrates, the problem of semi-literacy is nothing new at the University of Alberta (Lougheed graduated in 1952).

On January 31 of this year General Faculties Council decided that, beginning in 1987, passing an English competency exam will be an entrance requirement for all potential U of A students. Also, students registering for the first time during the Winter 1983 session and thereafter must pass such a test as a re-enrollment requirement (i.e. they will not be allowed to re-register unless the test is passed by the time they have completed 24 months as a registered student).

Even before this decision, however, the University, government and educators in the province were studying the literacy problem and taking slow steps to deal with it. The most recent report on the subject - "Writing Competence of Alberta Secondary Students" - was put out last September by a joint committee of the U of A and the Alberta Teachers' Association. As well as making original recommendations the report summarized the findings of a number of previous reports. Some of these findings are as follows.

**The Forrest Report, Dec. 1975.** This report, drawn up by a Faculty of Arts committee, noted, "Surely there can be no more damning indictment of defects inherent in the school-teaching of English than that provided by the spectacle of the Students' Union sponsoring and subsidizing this term a series of lectures on the rudiments of essay-writing, and gaining an attendance, not of thirty or forty as

### The Department of Education claims it "has guaranteed the quality of product graduating from Alberta schools."

expected, but of over three hundred." The report pinpointed a number of possible causes for poor English among high school graduates entering university: in high schools many teachers from other fields teach English, fuzzy standards of achievement exist in English courses, defects in evaluation belie the Department of Education's claim that it "has guaranteed the quality of product (sic) graduating from Alberta schools," there is a lack of ongoing training for English teachers, and literature is stressed over language.

The recommendations put forward in the report are strongly reminiscent of those which turned up later in the ATA/U of A joint committee report. The Forrest Report recommended increasing the required number of credits in high school English from 15 to 20 for all students; the ATA/U of A committee made the same recommendation, but only for students in the academic stream. Both committees called for more precise standards of English proficiency, and reduced workloads for English teachers.

**The Johnson Report, March 1976.** This report, by another Faculty of Arts committee, began with a survey of U of A Arts instructors, asking their opinion of the literacy problem.

Of those who taught junior level courses, 88 per cent of those surveyed said their students were

deficient in English skills; those who corrected or evaluated writing were more critical - 93 per cent said there was a problem. The estimated number of deficient students was put at 50 per cent - remarkably close to the number shown later by competence exams here and elsewhere in Alberta.

The instructors also estimated that 42 per cent of those completing the B.A. program had inadequate writing skills.

In addition comments were solicited from the instructors:

- "Remedial instruction is not the task of a university. Such an operation would be a waste of public funds. It is both insane and fraudulent to suggest that higher levels of education should try to provide instruction appropriate to lower levels. The schools do not do a proper job and their inadequacy is supported by this university's failure to provide entrance standards. The inadequate should not be

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given "remedial instruction": they should be denied entrance to the university."

- "I am much concerned about foreign students in large junior-level courses who cannot cope because of their language problems."

- "Some of the most pathetic efforts which I have received come not from the first year but second and third year students in my introductory course. This perhaps indicates that one can pass courses without knowing how to use the English language."

The Johnson Report also gave the results of a diagnostic examination given to 971 freshmen students which showed that the literacy of Arts students was not necessarily higher than that of students from other faculties, that the major weakness among those tested was grammar and syntax, and that there was high correlation between scores on the expression portion of the exam (but not the comprehension portion) and eventual course grades.

**The Martin Report, April 1977.** The drafters of this report confessed that while no one disputed the existence of the problem, no new solutions to resolve it had been forthcoming. The solutions which were reiterated were such familiar ones as tougher training for English Education Students, more precise and complete standards for high school English work, reduced workloads for English teachers, an admission test on English competence (adopted, but only on a remedial basis at first), a revival of the English Language Service for foreign students, etc.

Perhaps the most notable thing about the report is the tart prose of R. Glenn Martin, who scorned the excessive politeness and pussyfooting employed by educators when discussing the issue.

**The Marino Report (June 1978)** was a progress report on the Martin recommendations. It noted such things as the lack of funds for the English 309 course desired by both the Martin Report and the Faculty of Education, the tacit denial by the Board of Teacher Education and Certification that there is any problem in having non-English-specialty teachers teaching English, and the fairly explicit denial by Deputy Minister of Education E.K. Hawkesworth that the current curriculum, specifying only two months of course work in a ten-month course, was in any way deficient.

Recommendation #6 in last fall's ATA/U of A joint committee report repeats its call for a more specific high school curriculum.

to be continued Thursday