

# U of T students occupy dean's office

By JOHN BLAKE KNECHTEL

for Canadian University Press

Students who staged a dramatic 24-hour occupation of the arts and science dean's office at the University of Toronto last week in protest of underfunding are pleased with their efforts.

"We worked from the grassroots, and we raised consciousness," said Ava Szczerko, one of the spokespeople for the 25 occupiers. "We told people that the education system is in crisis."

Fiona Keith, another spokesperson for the students, said the "spontaneous" action brought together many students who had never publicly demonstrated their concerns about post-secondary education.

"This was the first time any of us had taken part in an action of this kind," Keith said.

The students, carrying banners and marching through hallways in the arts and science building before reaching the dean's office, began the occupation at noon Sept. 20 and stayed through the night until noon the next day. A sign saying "Occupied" was posted outside the office.

While groups of students negotiated with arts and science dean Robin Armstrong about their demands, students in the building and all over campus distributed leaflets and collected more than 300

signatures on a petition supporting the action.

The number of students crowding into the dean's office reached a high of 40 in the afternoon.

"Underfunding, a problem for a decade, has now produced a crisis in education in Ontario," said a statement released by the occupiers. "Classes are overcrowded and qualified students are being denied access to courses they need in order to complete their requirements."

The students demanded the arts and sciences dean admit the faculty is severely underfunded and that the measures taken to alleviate the problem undermine students' right to a quality education. The measures included balloting, a sign-up process where students get the courses they want on a first-come, first-serve basis, limited enrolment in certain programs and the redistribution of funds from one financially strapped department to another.

They also wanted the dean to extend the deadline for enrolment in arts and science courses, which he later did.

After two negotiating sessions, dean Armstrong acknowledged that some attempts by the faculty to cope with underfunding are "band-aid measures." But he quickly added that they do not in any way impede a student's education.

Armstrong blamed what he called the appearance of underfunding crisis on the university's "shopping period," the time when stu-

dents shop around for courses they might like to take. He said this practice means many classes appear overcrowded but will not be when students make their final decisions.

The dean also blamed the university's open admissions policy, saying as faculty attempt to keep tabs on enrolment the situation will remain chaotic.

Emerging from his office after the sessions, he said: "We don't really have any different viewpoints (than before). My mind is not changed in half an hour conversation with everyone."

The students also demanded more student participation on departmental committees, especially those dealing with undergraduate curriculum and the hiring of aca-

demie staff. Armstrong said he has long supported student participation but he also made no move to increase it.

Although the students realized not all their demands were met, they said they enjoyed the oppor-

tunity to demonstrate their collective power.

"The idea of a demonstration is great, people showing their power in the streets (and in the classroom)," said Alan Rosenthal, one of the occupiers.

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## Peace class plan gets blown away

SASKATOON (CUP) — Plans by the University of Saskatchewan to offer a course in peace studies has been nuked, at least until next fall.

The U of S peace group, which plans to offer seminars and lectures

on the consequences of the arms race, wanted to offer a credit course this fall but could not organize the course in time for the opening of school.

They plan to offer the course next fall, if we are all still here.

## Strikes loom on college and university campuses

OTTAWA (CUP)—Faculty and support staff at many Canadian colleges and universities are engaged in bitter strikes, lockouts and stalled negotiations.

A four-week support staff strike at New Caledonia College in British Columbia, which started at the school year's beginning, has put a halt to classes because faculty refuse to cross picket lines. More than 160 support staff walked out on the college's 0.75 per cent wage increase offer and negotiations have not yet resumed.

Only two weeks after strikes were narrowly averted at York University in Toronto and Carleton University in Ottawa, 22 Ontario community colleges are poised for strike action.

The 7600 community college teachers will take a strike vote Oct.

2, with Oct. 17 as the first day the union could legally initiate job action.

The teachers' contract expired Aug. 31 and they have rejected an offer from the Ontario government for an across-the-board two per cent wage increase. The teachers want to have out-of-class work, such as marking papers and lesson preparation, included in their official work week.

In other campus labor news, negotiations between administrators and the universities of Regina and Saskatchewan support staff union broke down Sept. 11. The support staff at the two universities, who both belong to the Canadian Union of Public Employees and bargain as one unit, have called in a government conciliator to intervene in the stalled talks.

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