

# Free school — do your thing successfully

by Emmi Duffy

"If you can provide somebody with an opportunity to do what they want successfully, they can get a fuller idea of their own potential and capabilities, and recognize that they can do it," said John Ure, director of the Halifax South End Open School.

The school provides an alternate education for approximately 25 students averaging 17 to 28 years. It has been in operation since October 15 and is presently located in the basement of the Dalhousie Grad House (old Theatre Bldg.) on South Street.

The purpose of the free school is "to present an alternative, not the alternative", says Ure. "We don't want to see this as the absolute end of the road kind of thing. We don't want to restrict them in any way — some kids have so much potential, they can do so much".

The students come from all over the Halifax-Dartmouth area and are attending for a variety of reasons.

Some have left school and have a job but want to continue their education. For these students, the school is open Tuesday and Thursday nights until 9 p.m.

Others are still in school but want to come for supplementary education or they come because they are bored with regular school. Some are unable to cope with regular school but don't want to drop out because of the stigma attached to it.

Enrolling in the free school is much less regimented than in regular school. The program is worked out individually.

"When a kid comes in, we sit down and try to figure out where he's at in terms of school: what grade he's in, whether he wants to finish school, go to university, go to vocational school, or doesn't care about degrees and accreditation, but just wants a place where he can find resource material and people to help him for self-motivated work," said Ure.

After a student knows what he wants, the next step is to find the most effective course to follow in order to reach that goal. Ure stressed that a student should not channel himself in one direction but be flexible enough to allow for change. He should be aware of other possibilities and alternatives.

Free school students have the opportunity to study a variety of humanities and science sub-

jects. They are auditing several classes at Dal. This is primarily for those who want to go to university. Individual professors were approached and tutorial sessions arranged.

"It is hoped that students will possibly get recommended if they work satisfactorily", says Ure.

As well as studying "academic courses" (everything is academic according to Ure), the students are undertaking a number of projects.

They presently have a contract to build furniture and redecorate a room in the Grad House, and if it's successful, they may be given a contract to do the whole house. Materials are supplied and the students are paid as well. Ure pointed out that the most important thing is recognition for their efforts.

A mechanic's project has some students working on a motorcycle, and it is hoped that a car will be donated soon. Another is working on a laser beam.

A video-tape production of the free school will be created by people in a multi-media group. Radio plays through D. Ray Pierce are planned for after Christmas. One boy from the school will be working on the lighting for the next production at Pier 1 Theatre. Some of the students may be working with Paul Le Doux on a magazine. Darkroom facilities are available so photography is likely to become a project in the near future.

They are crowded in their present situation and are "mostly getting ideas of what can be done using the available community resources".

Once the topics for study have been chosen, the actual teaching comes into practice. "We try not to use the term 'teacher' as this usually means standing up in front of a class, but basically it's people working on a one-to-one basis. One is a resource person who can provide information, ideas and assistance.

Ure's definition of a "good teacher" is one who is not attached to his subject and able to move onto others. This is in keeping with the school's attempt to tie subjects together, look at them in relation to a certain period.

The teacher doesn't necessarily have to have a degree but according to Ure, it may be indicative of a broad background and "sticktoitiveness". "The most important

quality for a good teacher is a person who is committed enough to the ideas of a particular student to get involved", said Ure.

The students themselves hired the teachers. Six or seven potentials were screened by Ure who was looking for "organizers, co-ordinators, hustlers". "They were able to see the difference between what people said about free schools and what they actually did".

Of the four paid teachers, one is an elementary school teacher, one a high school teacher, another has free school experience in Vancouver, and the fourth is a science graduate. There are also three fieldworkers. One is a practice teacher from Dal, one is from the Art College, and one is from the Maritime School of Social Work.

Ure stressed that they are still in a transition stage. "A number of kids come in and go to work on their own right away; they are the self-motivated ones. Then there are quite a few who have just come out of the traditional high school. They are lost and don't know what to do on their own".

Ure hopes that by giving them some structure they can be "gradually nursed into individual structure. We really try to avoid pressure. We would rather have no pressure at all and limited progress for awhile."

Although the school is functioning quite well in relation to the students and their studies, there are financial problems. "I'm beginning to think we opened too early".

Ure said that one of the main goals is to "secure monies so the school can survive". So far they have received a \$500 grant from the Dal Student Union and \$300 from Nova Scotia Youth Agency. They are planning to apply with the Winter Works program and later on with Opportunities for Youth.

The school is presently not recognized by the School Board. Therefore the courses cannot be used as credits. Consequently a student does not leave with a diploma. Ure hopes that "the resource people can put the students onto jobs".

Ure indicated that more resource people are needed, especially in the sciences. The school needs people to teach there or take students where space is available for projects. Materials, art supplies, books, cameras, records, building supplies, money and leads to

other resources are all needed. Professors, graduates, students and anyone who has

some special interest or skill should get in touch with him at 423-1715.



Free school director John Ure.

(art mckay/dal)

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## Students being forgotten

(cont'd from p. 3)

Honig adds.

Honig's evaluation of the department of Psychology bears some interesting points worth considering by students who will major or do graduate work in Psychology.

He stated that Dal has "unintentionally" forgotten the student in the past few years in their concentration on expansion.

"Now, with expansion completed (for the present) and

the graduate facilities of the Psychology department starting to take shape, the faculty should start paying more attention to the undergraduate level", said Honig.

He welcomes efforts of student evaluation of courses, but feels that the sample should be either a total one, or one that encompasses the good and the bad aspects of the course. However, Honig adds, "at present there is no machinery in the Psychology department for

the undergraduates to organize their critiques, so this problem would have to be tackled first."

Honig would like to see some feedback on the use of video lectures, class size, and class format. For instance, on the first year level, do students want a variety of texts and literature, or would they prefer one text?

The professors are asking the questions; perhaps it would be in the students' interest to answer.