

Maclean's survey again cause for debate

University of Toronto wins top ranks in Maclean's survey again, but students say it's inaccurate

BY CARLA TONELLI

TORONTO (CUP) — Maclean's magazine released its eighth-annual report card on universities this week, once again causing a stir in the academic world over its evaluation methods and rankings.

The 37-page analysis reaffirms the University of Toronto's top ranking in the medical and doctoral category for the fifth year in a row. It also

bumped up U of T's status in three out of four reputation categories.

The weekly magazine's systemic study also deemed Mount Allison University the best in the primarily-undergraduate category, while Simon Fraser University topped the comprehensive category.

Administrators at the U of T were ecstatic about the report card.

"I'm very happy," said U of T president Robert Prichard. "It's a credit to the remarkable work of the faculty, staff, students, graduates

and friends of the University of Toronto and the credit for their ranking should accrue to all of them."

But despite the 20 criteria items used by the edition's consultative crew — consisting of university administrators, high school guidance councillors and chief executive officers — some still feel the ranking system is flawed.

Andrea Syrtash, a radio and television arts student at Ryerson University, says the specialized nature of some universities are not reflected in the final findings.

"Personally I don't take this poll seriously," said Syrtash of the report that ranked Ryerson 19th, nestled between Lakehead and Cape Breton University in the primarily undergraduate category.

"Every year I await it with curiosity, but I always end up laughing at the results."

Syrtash completed her undergraduate degree at Queen's University, which consistently receives high ratings in the Maclean's survey. But she says Ryerson's specialized programming better fulfilled her educational needs.

Anna Chatterton, a graduate of Concordia University's theatre program, agrees the survey overlooks the benefits of some schools.

She says the rankings make sweeping generalizations about schools, often bypassing their quality programs.

"They should examine individual programs at schools, instead of ranking them in this subjective fashion that gives many schools a bad reputation," said Chatterton.

Concordia University placed 13th in the comprehensive category.

Ann Johnston, managing editor of Maclean's, says her magazine is simply trying to interpret how schools are coping in an era of underfunding.

Some institutions are doing better than others and students should be blaming governments, not her magazine, for reporting the consequences, she says.

"My attitude is: don't shoot the messenger," said Johnston.

"People have been asking me if we could have done 100,000 things with this survey, but we've got to be able to focus," she said, adding the magazine will devote two pages to each university when it publishes its more extensive university guidebook later this year.

Criticisms aside, Maclean's has come a long way since its first foray into post-secondary critique some 30 years ago.

In 1967, the U of T garnered top spot as the sole possessor of five stars.

The star indicator left little room for interpretation and starkly spelled out the best and worst. For example, York and McMaster universities were dubbed "glorified colleges", each earning one star.

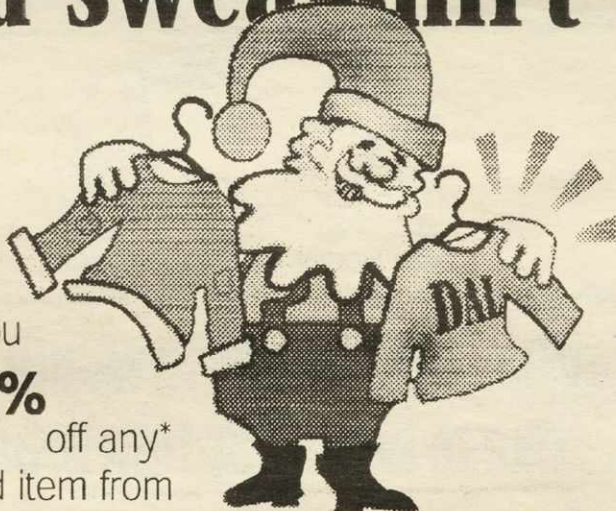
But even as it attempts to become more politically sophisticated in its ranking of universities — complete with protest shots and a sprinkling of references to student debt — student leaders say Maclean's still has a long way to go.

"Unfortunately, they don't rate tuition increases and its impact on accessibility," said Chris Ramsaroop, president of the Students' Administrative Council at the U of T.

He adds that, if the study was serious about documenting the effects of government cutbacks, it would have included tuition increases in its ranking system.

This year's edition, however, does have an article devoted to exploring the effects of underfunding. It includes a chart documenting changes since the magazine first published their post-secondary review in 1995: tuition costs are up 33 percent; the number of full-time faculty is down seven percent; first and second-year classes have decreased six percent; and the proportion of operating budgets spent on scholarships and bursaries are up 43 percent.

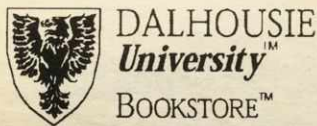
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UVic declines Shell scholarship

BY SARA HOPKINS AND MARY VALLIS

VICTORIA (CUP) — The University of Victoria has declined a \$2,000 scholarship offered by Shell Canada in what local activists are calling a major victory against campus corporatization.

The school's senate decided Nov. 4 to reject the scholarship in a 25-17 vote, which was to be offered to an upper-level geology, geophysics or physics student with a career interest in oil or gas.

In light of Shell's business practices in Nigeria, John Fraser, a student senator for the university's

science faculty, put forward a motion to remove Shell's contribution from a list of new scholarships up for senate review.

"We endeavour to improve human rights, and Shell's profits matter more [to the company] than their principles," said Fraser during the senate meeting.

The oil and gas giant has come under fire for over-riding the rights of Nigeria's indigenous Ogoni people.

In 1995, nine anti-Shell activists were killed by the country's military government, including author Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa.

As a member of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, Dr. Owens Wiwa, brother of Saro Wiwa, said he supports the university's decision to turn down Shell's scholarship.

The president of the school's student council also said he was pleased with the decision to reject Shell's scholarship offer.

"Members of the senate voted with their conscience and in so doing voted to maintain the ethical integrity of this institution," said Rob Fleming.

But Dr. Reg Mitchell disagrees with the decision, saying it's wrong to deprive a student in financial need.

"I for one would rather have their money than not, and if you want to disapprove of Shell you can do that at the pump," he said.

Controversy over the decision has led to a review of the senate's criteria for accepting scholarships.

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