

# Committee works to improve U of A teaching

by Pat Sytnick

The Committee for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning was established 16 years ago to assist professors interested in improving their teaching. According to committee coordinator Bente Road Cochran, the committee provides professional development opportunities for academic staff and operates three programs.

The first, offered every fall, can be described as an orientation to teaching for graduate teaching assistants. So far, teaching assistants have responded well to the program and Cochran reported 354 attended last fall's session.

The second program the com-

mittee offers provides peer consultation to teaching staff. Interested professors are paired with a peer consultant from another academic discipline who works with them to improve their teaching skills. All peer consultants are U of A professors.

The third program offered by the committee consists of a series of workshops offered throughout the year. The workshops deal with either philosophical or technical aspects of teaching and are open to all university teaching staff.

Cochran stressed CITL is not responsible for identifying poor teachers at the university. "We can evaluate aspects of teaching, but

we do not go out to a professor and put him through a test, ask him to come to three CITL workshops and then go out and measure him again." The committee doesn't have the mandate to do this; it can only work with professors who approach the organization and ask for help, she said.

This means those who use CITL's services are interested in their teaching, and therefore, they tend to be above average teachers, she added. However, this arrangement has its drawbacks. It means the committee cannot reach poor teachers who have no interest in improving. But Cochran believes this is not a critical problem for the university because "I don't think there are very many professors who are really poor teachers and I'm not

sure there's any hope for them anyway. They probably can't become good teachers because they have already decided that teaching is not one of their priorities."

According to Cochran, the issue of improving teaching is complicated because there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes good teaching and there is no easy way to measure teaching ability.

To stimulate discussion on this topic CITL has held workshops where recipients of the Rutherford teaching award discussed components of good teaching.

While these sessions indicated good teaching means different things to different people Cochran said they did uncover several qualities most experts agree contribute

to good teaching. These include a comprehensive knowledge of one's subject area, enthusiasm for the subject, respect for students and a warm personality.

Asked if the committee would be more effective if it were mandatory for poor teachers to go to CITL sessions Cochran said, "I don't think we would be more effective if that was the case. It's like, if you live in a home where it's mandatory that you clean your plate and you don't like peas, you will eat your peas but you won't enjoy them. But, if you aren't forced to eat them, one day you may try a few and you may discover you like them. I think this principle also applies to improving teaching."

## Prospects tougher

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accommodate them, but by choice a lot go elsewhere. We actually recommend that they go some place else for their internship. They've had enough of us. The biggest percentage though, come back to finish their training here."

For those thinking of specializing, Anholt warns, "You may have to look hard for a position. You may get in without difficulty, or you might have some problems getting into a program. In addition, you may not be able to do it in Alberta... you may have to go to another centre to get that training. We offer 34 or 35 of the possible 41 specialty training programs. Calgary has somewhat less than that."

In broad terms, Anholt said that the surgical specialties are currently the most popular programs, "but that's a trend that comes and goes. It depends on the reputation the program has and it varies from time to time."

To the 600 or so people who are not admitted each year, Anholt advises, "All they can do is just re-apply here and at other medical schools. It also depends on why they want to be doctors I suppose. There's a whole pile of health specialties, some of them long standing professions like Dentistry and Nursing. There are various types of therapists and again you can go to

any degree you like—Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, etc. There's also Clinical Psychology, social work and Pharmacy."

"The thing I wouldn't recommend, regardless of the amount of money you've got, is going to one of those entrepreneurial medical schools in Mexico, Italy or some of those other countries. You can get into them alright, but their training isn't any place near our standards. Although you're a Canadian citizen, as far as your occupation is concerned, you'll be treated like any other foreign graduate. Regardless of the amount of propaganda they give, their training is sub-standard and you will have to take extra training here."

In summing up, Anholt remarked, "No profession can ensure you'll get a job... the engineers don't get jobs, lawyers don't get jobs. Of course, we're not anywhere nearly that badly off, but it's getting to a time when you can't do necessarily what you want, where you want to do it. There's a limit to how many neurosurgeons or plastic surgeons or all the rest we can turn out and expect to get jobs. But you know, they can all work... so far. It's hard to say what the future will bring in that regard though; it's going to get tighter."



Those nutty kooks in first-year engineering were up to their tricks in Stadium Car Park. What a nutty good time.

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