

the no-response enrolment system

The Voice Response Enrolment System is a continuing nightmare

by NANCY PHILLIPS

The Voice Response Enrolment System (VRES) is continuing to be a nightmare for many York students, and vice-president of institutional affairs Sheldon Levy said, "We should have foreseen it."

Many students are complaining that they had to wait hours, or even days, to get a line into the system in order to enrol for September. There are 31 lines into the system, which cost \$250,000, said Sue Salusbury, director of student records. There is no alternative means of enrolling.

Levy expects 15,000 students from the faculties of arts, science and fine arts to use VRES, which requires the use of a touch-tone phone.

He said, "I think we would have no problem at all if courses were open on demand. We have limited courses in many areas and the students know it." The fundamental error of the planning committee was not realizing that York is different from other universities using this system, which are not as overcrowded, added Levy.

"What we aren't having a problem with is that once a student gets connected the system works perfectly," he said.

Salusbury explained that VRES was implemented because the old system of filling out paper and standing in lines was "far more expensive in terms of people's time. Departments were sometimes at a standstill." The system was used for winter/summer enrolment in 1988 and 1989 and it worked perfectly, said Salusbury.

Along with the difficulty of getting a line into the system, some students have experienced system crashes once connected.

"We should have foreseen it" says VP Sheldon Levy

Assistant vice-president of computing services Ian Taylor said, "A lot depends on when these things occur." He explained that on June 10 the system ran five lines short because of five power outages over the previous weekend. Taylor said the "sudden outages and power surges" hurt the university's main IBM computer as well as VRES. A replacement of VRES' electronic board was required. "It's very hard to pin it down exactly to the power outages, but we're pretty sure. In major electrical storms you can almost be sure computer rooms will be hit. We're exposed to that all year long," said Taylor.

Levy said the university should have had back-up units available in case of problems like this, but "We didn't think there would be a volume problem."

Another concern with the system is the difficulty it creates for foreign students and others who do not live in Metropolitan Toronto. Jane Skinner at Student Programs said, "Foreign students have to attempt to enrol by Voice Response. They have to make arrangements before they leave for home for the summer with someone else. If it is a hardship they are sent to the advising centre." An advising centre spokes-



THOMAS KIM

person said that foreign students who are from countries without touch-tone may register in person before they go home for the summer. There were 1,684 foreign students registered at York last year.

Several students have complained to *Excalibur* about the expense of long distance calls. Student Janice Hepburn said her cost has been \$216.

Solutions for the 1990-91 school year are being investigated, said Levy. "I've asked people to keep a diary of ideas. We'll definitely go back to the students and ask them for ideas and suggestions," he added.

One short term solution was to place advertisements in *The Toronto Star* and *The Sun*. Vice-president of external relations Ian Lithgow said York spent \$31,096 on these advertisements, which stated, "It's not necessary to call immediately on the start date for your year level. . . . We appreciate your patience and regret any inconvenience." Students said they do not want to wait to enrol, however, as they are afraid the courses they want will be full.

Students who are upset with VRES should go to the CYSF office at 105 Central Square and record their complaints on a petition.

ASBESTOS

"Why were we kept in the dark?"

by JEFF KIPPEL

Why were we told two weeks after the fact?" questioned concerned and furious Osgoode Hall Law School staff. "Why were we kept in the dark?"

On June 12 dust that had been found on a shelving unit on the first floor stack area early in the month was positively identified as asbestos. The area was sealed off and underwent an extensive cleaning. At this time it was discovered that a small amount of the material had been missed in the initial clean-up. Maintenance personnel conducted a second cleaning and another set of air samples were taken.

It was not until 4:15 pm on June 29 that the results were received. It took over two weeks until anyone was informed of the potential health risk.

"Nothing was taken seriously," said Professor Tucker, a member of the Asbestos Removal Committee, "there was a gap of two weeks."

Staff, students and faculty at Osgoode were outraged after learning that they had been exposed to the asbestos for two weeks. "Why didn't they close the building right away?" asked Mark Lipman, a third year law student, and "why weren't the appropriate steps taken?"

Catherine Tracy of the Department of Occupational Health and Safety placed the blame on Osgoode's administration. "The administration at Osgoode knew," she said. It was up to the administration to warn those entering the building of the potential danger, not her, she said.

Peter Struk, assistant vice-president of Physical Resources, speaking on behalf of President Harry Arthurs, explained that at the time of the incident it was not believed there was a health risk. "People did not feel that there was a serious situation, to the point of alarming everyone," he said.

Last month's asbestos incident is not an isolated event. For years students and faculty have been meeting and have gotten nowhere, explained Ruben Hason, another member of the Asbestos Removal Committee. "It's a continuing problem that needs to be resolved, and the university is not willing," added an Osgoode librarian.

Professor Ison, chair of the Removal Committee, felt that the delay was unsatisfactory. "There's an absence of an articulated pre-planned response," he said. A committee meeting was held July 13 to discuss what steps will be taken in the future so that this situation will not occur again.

There were three main issues brought up at the meeting. First, Osgoode will be instituting its own internal communications program that will consist of a bulletin board where any concerns or warnings will be posted. Secondly, a memo will be written to the administration itemizing the asbestos problems at Osgoode. Finally, a request for a long awaited fan machine was met with a positive outlook by the administration. The machine is estimated to cost between \$30,000 and \$35,000. It instantaneously detects any fibres in the air. Although the reading will not distinguish asbestos fibres from other fibres, trial and error will indicate if it is asbestos or not.

York's administration acknowledges that the situation was not addressed as well as it should have been and has promised to take a greater concern in the future. "We will be as proactive to the expectations of Osgoode as we can — I'm open for suggestions," Struk said.

This new proposal might be the first positive step taken by the administration in the long fought asbestos battle. The war is not yet over, but a truce may be lying somewhere on the horizon.

YUFA negotiates a new contract

by MARK WRIGHT

and NANCY PHILLIPS

The York University Faculty Association (YUFA) has signed a two-year contract with the administration. Co-chair of the administration's negotiating committee and vice-president of finance and administration Bill Farr said, "It was a money contract."

YUFA has settled for a cost of living increase of 5.75 per cent in

the first year, with a 5.3 per cent increase in the second year. YUFA members will also receive 2.5 per cent of the average salary of \$58,543 in what is called Progress Through the Ranks for both years.

In the second year of the contract some members may receive a further raise, based on performance, of about 0.5 per cent.

YUFA chair Kevin Jones said, "We tried to make it a considerably better deal for our junior

members," and so people who currently receive less than the average salary will get more of an increase, and those above the average will receive less.

Some benefits have also been improved.

Farr said, "The financial settlement will be rough because it will cut into the budgets of other areas of the university, but we think it's fair." The problem is with funding, said Farr, not with the professors.

YUSA still at table talks

While the faculty association has settled with the administration, the York University Staff Association (YUSA) is continuing to negotiate. President of YUSA Celia Harte says that money is the major issue for the first time in the union's history.

At least seven full days of negotiations, which began on June 20, have already taken place.

Harte says the cost of living in Toronto makes it necessary for raises. YUSA is asking for a one-year contract with a salary increase of \$4,930 for all union members.

The administration has offered, however, a two-year contract with a 5.5 per cent increase plus an additional \$500 for the first year, and 6.25 per cent or \$1,550 lump

sum increase — which ever is greater — for the second year. This translates into a \$4,136 increase for someone already earning \$29,809 over two years.

Harte says that workload is also an issue. "Workloads are horrendous. The university has grown but the staff hasn't," said Harte.

YUSA loses its best people because "stress levels take their toll and people burnout," said Harte. There have been 340 jobs posted since January 1989. Departments are functioning short-staffed, and the administration relies on casuals and people from temporary agencies to fill in, which is expensive, says Harte. This is a problem because "if you keep having new people it increases the workload and pres-

sure," says Harte, because new people need to be trained properly.

Training is an issue YUFA would like dealt with. "There is virtually no training on new jobs," says Harte. Although the university does some training, she says it is not adequate. Experienced employees must take time out of their own jobs to help new workers, and efficiency suffers even more.

Harte accuses the administration of asking too much from people applying for entry level positions, which may be a way to avoid training inexperienced people. She said an example is wanting one or two years experience at computerized payroll for a payroll clerk, which "is not really an entry

level job."

There have also been complaints about the people doing recruiting in terms of basic human rights violations, says Harte. Some people have been asked illegal questions about their family status. Harte explained that this may be a result of improper training of those who do recruiting. Harte did say, however, that the university is making its first attempt to deal with this.

YUSA would also like some improvements in benefits, such as an extra week of holidays for those who have worked at York for 15 years or more, says Harte. Currently the ceiling is four weeks for everyone who has worked eight years or more.

York hires counsellor for Chinese students

A counsellor to assist Chinese students at York who are having difficulty dealing with the stress of the Tiananmen massacre and its aftermath has been hired by the Counselling and Development Centre (CDC). Christine Wong is on campus two days a week, and speaks three Chinese dialects — Mandarin, Cantonese and Hakka.

Chairperson of the CDC Harold Minden said Wong is a "very warm, sensitive, concerned person." She is from Hong Kong, and studied counselling in England.

Wong would not discuss the specific concerns of the students she has seen, but she said, "If Chinese students want to see me, they are always welcome."

Group sessions will be set up in the fall that will "attend to the specific problems of students in terms of going back or not going back to China," said Minden.

There are 61 students enrolled at York from the People's Republic of China, as well as between 35 and 45 scholars. There are 831 students here from Hong Kong.