

Largest in Canada

Atkinson, York's community commitment

By ROZA LEVINE

The day students of York University have a somewhat vague and perhaps incorrect idea of what Atkinson is all about. Many presume it is an 'extension' programme for people in the same age bracket as their parents. Atkinson is not an extension school in that all the people attending classes are proceeding towards a degree. The average age of students is approximately 27 — not too many years older than the York student. There are various factors which make Atkinson different from any other college on campus and for that matter any other

to literally thrash out agreements not only within his own college but within York itself. The most vital issue facing Atkinson is money. The college is discriminated against both by the government and the internal distribution of money within the university. Because of the imbalanced budget of the whole university in 1970-71 it was decided that each faculty should cut their budget in order to defray the operating deficit. Every decision, says the Dean, must be made in the open. Although there appears to be a fight ahead, the overall present situation between York and Atkinson is "getting

study to follow but also plaintively need someone who expresses confidence in their ability to cope with studying, passing exams and writing papers. Atkinson College, Mrs. Campbell says in some ways fulfills the answer of "how a woman retains her relevancy". Surprisingly enough, many students ask about vocational counselling. At times they are a bit reticent to admit that, even though they are adults, they do not know what type of work they wish to do after they have obtained their bachelor's degree. Besides personal counselling a writer's workshop has been set up in order

Atkinson that it is hard to know where to begin. The future changes are more interesting than the past ones. Professor Carter is very enthusiastic about Phases II and III. Phase II is the present extension of office space; Phase III will endorse student housing for Atkinson students taking a minimum of 4 courses. There is a lack of that particular ethos usually attributed to students because of the student's other prime interest — his professional, day-time work. Professor Carter hopes that Phase III will enable the Atkinson student to form his own community and one which will take part in the university as a whole, such as the other college complexes do. Carter's decision to join the Atkinson staff which consisted of only about 12 professors five years ago involved a pioneering attitude. "It looked like a worth while attempt to do something new and exciting in a new university that appeared as if it would be one of the better universities in Ontario. It is not often that one can be in at the beginning of a new venture in the academic world and Atkinson was one of those opportunities." Many of the staff prefer the older student for varying reasons. Dr. Ahern confesses that originally he chose to teach at Atkinson fortuitously, but, "Now I stay because I prefer teaching older students."

degree. Teachers return to obtain a higher teacher certification. Housewives tend to desire some outside stimulation. The driving impetus is usually status or money and the intellectual satisfaction is a bonus. Although not as idealistic in motives as the day student, the Atkinson graduate perhaps gets a great deal more satisfaction out of finally obtaining his degree than his younger counterpart. It usually means more years of study and more personal hardship for the older student.

Family concern

When a small survey was done in one seminar group the answers given to "What does your immediate family think of your going back to school?" were very indicative of the problems the night student faces. One woman wrote "My parents are pleased. My husband wonders why I have to stay up each night until 12 or 1 (studying), but is concerned. My children say, 'Do you have to go to school tonight Mom?'" Another student said that his family was divided in opinion, some said it was great if it would help him financially and status wise, others said he was crazy as it takes up most of his leisure time. Day students might envy the manner in which the Atkinson's student's opinion is revered. Being an adult his opinion is perhaps more valued by the staff. He sits on council, runs a newspaper and will hopefully in the future evaluate his Tutor's performance. It takes him longer to realize that he is a very important member of the university community. Standing up for his rights and pressuring the right person to change things is something he tends to be reticent about. When he went to school the teacher's word was not only the law, but was as well, impeccably correct. The first year student tends to be timid and often has to be actively drawn out by the tutor to say something in discussion. They are afraid of stating an incorrect opinion. Tutors have noticed with their own groups, that very often they get the impression their students are hanging onto the tutor's or professor's words and evaluating them as the gospel truth. With time and experience this attitude changes.

What's so special?

What is so special about the Atkinson student? The Atkinson calendar states: "The most distinctive quality of Atkinson is the students themselves, with their high motivation and the wealth of personal experience they can bring to seminars and discussions. The pursuit of a demanding programme of study in the face of both vocational and domestic responsibilities requires a great degree of self-discipline and determination." The students are according to Dean Crowe at a more advanced stage in thinking than the day students. "No doubt they are more mature than undergraduates not simply in age but in general reflection of themselves and society. They relate their work much more immediately to the world than the day student. This can be both a good and a bad thing." To Professor Carter "they are more highly motivated than most full-time students. They work harder. It is rare that an Atkinson student doesn't have his work done." When asked why he is here the Atkinson student does not usually give such an ideal picture of himself as his professor does. Many are returning to school for economic reasons — their company's pressuring of them to get a



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university. The most blatant one is that all staff is full time, while the students are only part time. The people who work at Atkinson not only work at the school, they work for the school in promoting the idea of post-secondary education for working adults.

The personal background of much of the staff gives us a clue as to why they chose Atkinson College over the regular day school. Dean Crowe, who is number one on the hierarchy, was the director of a research bureau involving the railway and transportation unions of Canada. His experience at the bargaining table has undoubtedly aided him at his present post. In a report, given by Dean Crowe concerning the issues confronting the college and its relationship to York he stated, "York is a big operation. There are probably more politics than administration in the presidential job. Our attitude must be one of goodwill to the President and the rest of the University." Unfortunately, as most students learn, politics abound at York and the Dean has

closer all the time". Besides dealing with the enormous administration problems, the Dean teaches an upper level history course and shares a social science course with another professor. The Dean is never allowed to lose touch with the most important group — the students. York should in some ways emulate this policy.

Female support

No one could find a more enthusiastic and knowledgeable person concerning the issue of adult education than Mrs. Sylvia Campbell who heads the counselling service at Atkinson. Mrs. Campbell who was initially hired as an education advisor is keenly aware of what faces the person who decides to return to school after an absence of many years. She is particularly an avid supporter of the female student who may be, as the day student might say, an 'ordinary housewife'. These women who are caught in the "trap of motherhood" need the counselling service not only to direct them as to which course of

to orientate people who have not researched or written papers for a long time, how to go about it. The most vital link though, as Mrs. Campbell explains, between the professor and the student is the Tutor who leads 'the seminar groups.

In classes which number as many as 175 students, the group is split up after the general lecture into discussion or research groups. The Tutor comes into close contact with his particular group and is usually more attuned to the students problems than a professor confronted with an auditorium full of faces. Grievances and difficulties are directed to the tutor rather than the professor in many cases, especially in first year courses where the students look upon the professor as the authority figure, equating him with their boss at work. Dr. Ahern (head of English) when asked if he could make only one statement about his students said, "Concerning my best students... I do not look on them as my students, I look on them as peers." For first year people it is difficult to comprehend this attitude. Being the middleman the tutor himself is often in a precarious position. He is usually a person with another full-time job who wishes to earn some extra money. He does not have the same status of faculty and in some cases cannot offer an opposing opinion to the course director. At present there are 84 tutors leading groups of over 20 people. In order to combat the problem of status, the tutors are organizing as a group into an association. They feel that because of their close contact with the students, the tutors' opinions should be voiced and given recognition as an integral part of the community.

Since Atkinson first offered courses in 1962 the student population has risen from 300 to over 6,000. Professor Carter who is now Director of the Division of Humanities and professor of philosophy was one of the original appointments. He points out that so many things have changed at



Dean Harry Crowe

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