

# UNIVERSITY BLUES

**Mature and part-time students are altering campus student populations, but many feel short-changed by the education system**

By Arnold Hedstrom and Bob Heine  
for Canadian University Press

**I**T'S 7:30 MONDAY MORNING AND LIKE ANY STUDENT WHO HAS A NINE O'CLOCK CLASS TO CATCH, ROBIN MEEKING IS STUMBLING OUT OF HER VANCOUVER HOME.

After her two hour class there's no time to waste. It's right to the library to do research for an almost due term paper.

At 3 p.m. her afternoon lecture ends, and it's off to a full-time job at a computer centre. Robin usually works during the day, but she's changed shifts with another

worker in order to attend the University of B.C.

Midnight comes fast, and 6:30 Tuesday morning comes even faster. That's the time she has to get up to make it to work for her regular shift.

On Wednesday, the routine starts all over again.

Robin, like a quarter million others in Canada, is a part-time student, and must juggle her steady job, private life and courses.

Susan, a twenty-five year old single mother taking computer courses full-time at the University of Calgary, also faces unique pressures. Looking for a chance at more meaningful work and some self respect, she also represents a new growing population of students.

Mature students (over 25 years old) are entering post secondary schools in increasing numbers. They are upgrading their skills to compete in a rapidly changing economy, and many are women attempting to break out of low-wage ghettos that entrap them.

Susan's schooling is complicated by three children ranging in age from two to seven. The two youngest spend the day at a daycare facility and the oldest is looked after by a friend.

After a day on campus, she picks up her kids, makes supper, cleans and spends time with her family.

"I don't get any homework done at home. The kids keep me busy and I'm too tired to work by the time the housework is done."

Susan depends on government grants and loans to sustain her while studying.

**R**OBERT, A 40 YEAR old computer science student at the University of Calgary used to be a real estate salesman. But he said he "could see the end of the boom coming," and he was tired of selling.

Robert is going back to school as a matter of survival in Canada's changing job situation.

They all face an education system that discourages and discriminates against their kind. But some part-time students are working for change.

Meeking, for instance, is the B.C. director of the Canadian Organization of Part Time University Students, and is working to improve the situation for part-time students on campuses. Changes in Canada's education system are needed to meet the needs of both part-time and mature students, but institutions and governments are slow to recognize the new realities of today's education consumers.

Course scheduling and the availability of student services pose problems for part-time students. Meeking says getting all the required courses for a basic arts degree is difficult at UBC because

evening course are offered in some professional faculties only.

**W**HAT MEEKING HOPES to do at UBC and on other campuses in the province is work for changes to help part-time students achieve total equality with full-time students.

"You can't solve all the problems overnight. It takes lobbying and allies," she says. The attitudes of governors, education ministries and students themselves must first change.

Part-time enrollment has increased dramatically in the last decade—more than twice the rate of full-time enrollment growth. Statistics Canada predicts 50 per cent enrollment will be part-time by the year 2000.

The increase in part-time enrollment parallels the surge of "mature" women entering post-secondary schools part-time—250 per cent increase between 1970 and 1979.

This new type of student often cannot go to school full-time for financial reasons, or because of family responsibilities.

The federal government recognized part-time students' need of government support only last year.

The Canada Student Loans Act now allows eligible part-time students assistance to the tune of \$2,500 at any one time, a move the Canadian Federation of Students sought for many years.

The loan accrues interest after one month and must be repaid in two years.

A federal NDP brief also applauded the move, but called it "token recognition"—a cash flow aid that does little to help a potential student without the funds to attend, even on a part-time basis.

"Many part-time students are just that because of the increasingly prohibitive costs of obtaining a full-time university education," the brief states, pointing to studies that show part-time students tend to come from families where parental income and educational attainment are lower than full-time students.

The pressures faced by single parents in balancing childcare with studies make part-time schooling attractive, but their need for financial assistance is often high. Some provinces offer special assistance to single parents, based on a course-load of three. But in one province even that is being eroded.

In Alberta, special consideration now given to single parents may soon be restricted. Currently, students can qualify for maintenance grants up to \$15,000 a session, loans up to \$4,300 a year and cheaper day care, if they are enrolled in three courses.

But the Alberta Students' Finance Board wants to increase the course load to five.

Single parents take longer to complete their education with the smaller course load, the Board says, making their accumulated loan too difficult to repay.

"You can take all the courses except three or four and then you get stopped short," she says. The only alternative is to take a year out to study full-time.

Many campuses limit childcare services to the daytime. Restricted by limited funds, bookstores, counsellors, administrative offices and food services cater exclusively to the day students on most campuses.

**S**USAN DROPPED HER course load to four from five this year, to cope with her family commitments. And she is worried the new regulations will mean she cannot continue with her education goals.

"We have more pressures than other students, so to cope we should have the option of taking fewer courses," she says.

Lorna Cammaert, faculty association president at the University of Calgary, agrees that women with children at home must deal with a major transition in going back to school. Cammaert strongly recommends they should go to school part-time while learning how to mesh school and home responsibilities.

However, she added that with the increased enrollment on university campuses combined with government cutbacks part-time students are at a disadvantage.

"Part-time students stand behind full-time students for preference. Part-time students find that their choices (of available classes) are limited. As well, part-time students have trouble getting financing," Cammaert said.

In a society where new technologies are rapidly making current job skills obsolete, the preference shown to full-time students must soon change. Reentering school is a stressful experience for mature students, especially those with children to care for, but their growing numbers show a need for redirecting university and government resources.

