

# OFS and COU blast gov't

By JEFF SHINDER

Last week the Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) and the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) released reports on the financial health of Ontario universities, motivating public criticism of the government's handling of the issue.

Augmenting the furor surrounding the anemic financial position of Ontario universities were comments made by Sheena Weir at a recent press conference. Weir asserted that the university system was in "ruins," adding that university campuses will look like "Greek ruins," if the government fails to double its four year/440 million commitment to post secondary education.

The COU report, entitled "The Financial Health of Universities in Ontario," employed a number of statistical indicators to augment their argument. According to the report, since 1977 the universities' share of total government spending has declined from 5.92% to 4.6%. The report states that the university system's 1.3% loss in the share of the budgetary pie will cost the system \$438 million this year alone. The COU selected 1977 as the base year for its statistical calculations because it was the last year the government accepted the Ontario Council of University Affairs' funding advice. (The Ontario Council of University Affairs advises the government on university related issues.)

Included among the COU statistical indicators were diagrams concerning the ratio of university operation support to the expansion of the provincial economy. The statistics indicate that, in the past decade, Ontario government expenditures have grown at about the same rate as the overall economy. Unfortunately, operating grants to universities have

expanded only 77% as much during the same period.

The report also compares the level of government support for the university system with the funding provided to other publicly supported sectors. Hospitals, elementary and secondary schools and institutions for adult offenders were included in the survey. According to the report, the various public sectors received real increases in government support per client served. In relative and absolute terms, however, government support for universities has declined. The report notes that the hospital system spends 27% more for each day of patient care than it did in 1977-78. During the same time span, university expenditures per full-time student declined by 12%.

The report also makes inter-provincial comparisons to demonstrate Ontario's poor funding performance relative to the other provinces. For example, in 1987-88 Ontario ranked sixth among the 10 provinces in funding support per full-time student. At the moment, Ontario lags \$250 below the national average in government support per full-time student. The report further assails Ontario's funding record by comparing provincial operating grants to universities according to the relative wealth of the province. According to this indicator, Ontario's funding performance lies 25-30% below the national average.

The OFS report, titled "Cut to the Bone," concentrated its conclusions on the practical results of a decade of financial starvation for the university system. Examples include escalating student/faculty ratios, spiraling student/support staff ratios, as well as enhanced faculty/support staff ratios. In addition, the report cites the growing obsolescence of the

university system's research and laboratory facilities. Further, the report indicates that the funding squeeze has decreased library acquisitions, as well as leading to large-scale cuts in periodicals.

The report, citing recent influxes of female students and the revision of the Provincial high school system, establishes that the demand for university positions has steadily increased. This conclusion is counterpoised against the report's contention that the funding squeeze has impaired the university system's ability to meet the demand for spots. According to the report, "Preliminary estimates indicate that about 5% of Ontario's qualified applicants did not receive an offer of university admission in 1987-88, and as many as 10% may receive no offer for admission in 1988-89."

The OFS analyzes the reasons behind Queen's Park's inadequate support for the university system. In



OFS PRESIDENT WEIR: It's a system in ruins.

their viewpoint, provincial budget allocations to the university system do not adequately provide for the effects of pay equity legislation on the university system. Further, the OFS contends that the government does not consider the impact that inflation in equipment, books and periodicals has on university spending. In their opinion, technological change and its corresponding cost requirements are not properly considered.

The report also condemns the government funding record for maintaining the under-

representation of selected groups in the university system. The report states that the "current funding environment guarantees that no progress in improving access to Post Secondary Education for various under-represented groups will be made. This is particularly true of the more expensive 'professional' programs and graduate work, which still remain largely the domain of the select few. This reprehensible situation is due to the excessive admission requirements stemming from the inability to expand enrolment while under such severe constraints."

## Financial Liaison Officer appointed

By ADAM KARDASH

York's newly created position of Financial Liaison Officer has been filled. John O'Neill was appointed to the part-time job last Thursday and will effectively begin working on July 11th.

Upon their request, the Liaison Officer will assist student governments, clubs and other groups funded by the university with their financial management, record keeping, insurance, investments, and other financial matters. The Liaison Officer will also develop educational programmes on financial management and business practises.

O'Neill was selected by a search committee consisting of several university officials and student repre-

sentatives. He has worked in York's accounting department for almost seven years and also has experience in banking, financial consulting and internal auditing.

"He has terrific familiarity with the university and financial affairs," says Assistant to the Provost Brenda Hanning. "We're looking forward to him beginning."

CYSF President and search committee member Tammy Hassfeldt stated that "it was obvious from the interviews that O'Neill was perfect for the job."

"He has an incredible amount of experience," Hassfeldt added. "He also expressed a willingness to work closely with the student governments."

Despite being very satisfied with the candidate chosen, Hassfeldt did state that she was "not completely comfortable with the position itself." Many student governments, including the CYSF, are opposed to the creation of the position because they are being forced to pay two-thirds of the Liaison Officer's \$15,000 salary and operating expenses.

O'Neill was pleased by the search committee's decision. "I hope to be able to work jointly with the parties involved to a point of mutual satisfaction," he stated. O'Neill said that he wanted to support the fiscal responsibilities of student groups regardless of any politics that may be involved.

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