

UBC gets ready to introduce classes with no teachers

BY NICHOLAS BRADLEY

VANCOUVER (CUP) — Student-led courses will be offered at the University of British Columbia for the first time in January 2000, giving students the chance to take full-credit classes for credit without a professor.

"What we're trying to do is to pilot-test some courses just to see whether there's interest among UBC students in this idea," said Neil Guppy, associate dean of Arts.

"I like to think of them as directed studies courses, but that are kind of group-directed courses."

Student coordinators will organize and lead the actual classes while a faculty advisor

will oversee each course.

Nicki Magnollo, an Asian studies student, is a coordinator for one of the five pilot classes — her course is entitled Film in Post-Colonial Asia.

"It gives me a different kind of appreciation for what it takes to put a good course together," said Magnollo.

The other four pilot courses will deal with alternative medicine, artificial intelligence, mathematical patterns found in nature, and resource development on northern Vancouver Island.

Magnollo believes students will be attracted to these classes.

"I think they're going to come away feeling like 'this was really my course,'" she said.

Former UBC Alma Mater Society President Vivian

Hoffmann started the drive for student-led courses.

"I thought it was a really interesting way to diversify the course offerings and let students pursue their own interests," said Hoffmann, who based the project on a program at the University of California at Berkeley.

During her term as president, Hoffmann pitched the idea to Barry McBride, UBC vice-president.

After consulting faculty members, the faculty association, department heads and students, Hoffman put together a proposal.

An advisory committee of three students and three faculty members met during the summer to evaluate her proposals for courses.

The committee had to

ensure the classes had "academic merit to them," said Associate Dean Guppy.

Neither Guppy nor Magnollo had a clear idea of what a typical class would be like, but both agreed there would be room for different approaches.

Guppy said the structure can vary, "as long as [the classes] meet a similar academic rigor as the other courses we offer."

Initially, the courses will have only pass or fail options.

Grades may be assigned in future courses if the class's student coordinator and faculty advisor agree.

Magnollo noted that she hopes to see peer evaluation play an important role in student evaluation.

"[Students will] get to set

the ground rules for what constitutes a good paper, and then have to adhere to the rules that they make," she said.

The Faculty Association has not yet taken a position on the project since it is still an experiment, and since faculty members will be acting as advisors for all courses.

Hoffmann did note, however, that she encountered some opposition from faculty and students.

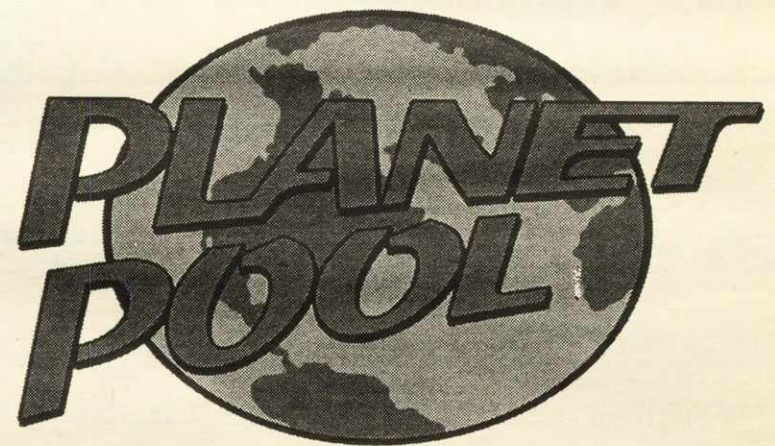
Full tuition will be charged for the classes.

Although there are no professors or TA's teaching the courses, tuition will pay for development and support costs, and the associated faculty members.

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