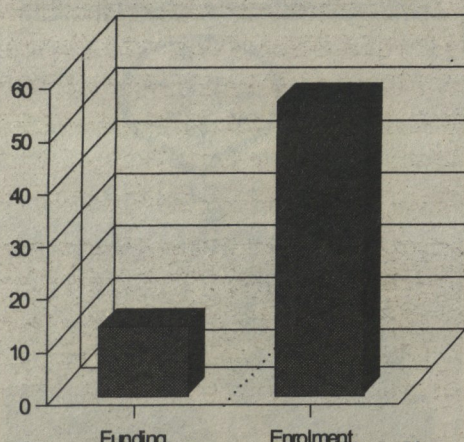


## PSE: Looking More Closely at the Government's Picture

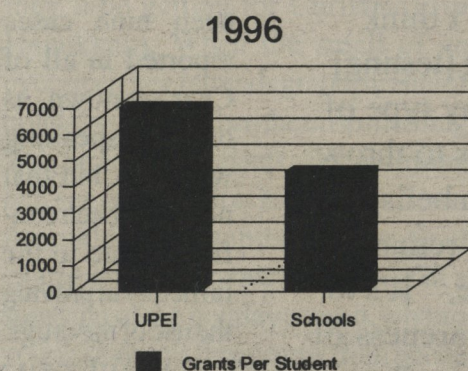
During an interview with the Honorable Mildred Dover, Minister of Education, that was printed in the November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004 issue of *The Guardian*, it was evident that she was trying to convey a certain image of post-secondary education on PEI. Minister Dover spoke about how much the Island government cares about UPEI and how much it has increased the funding to this institution. Since the Conservatives gained power in the Provincial legislature, funding to UPEI has risen from \$21.9 million to \$27.8 million (UPEI & AVC): representing a 31% increase. However, over this same time period inflation has risen by 17.9%. Subsequently, when one re-examines the numbers, there was only an increase of 13.1%. During this same time, enrollment in UPEI's undergraduate programs has risen from 2200 to 3430 students which represents an increase of 55.9%. Figure 1 depicts



**Figure 1: % Increase in Funding and Enrollment at UPEI from 1996-1997 to 2003-2004**

The government has made commitments during their mandate to the Kindergarten to Grade 12 school program in an attempt to have the smallest class sizes in Canada without laying off teachers. Since the Conservatives took power in 96/97, school board enrolments have fallen from 24,747 to 23,083 dropping by 6.7%. It is interesting to compare funding numbers within the education portfolio on PEI. If one was to look

closely at the numbers when the Binns government took office in 1996-1997, operating grants per student at UPEI were at \$6,958.45 while school board grants per student were \$4,497.51. Last year these numbers have made a dramatic turn as UPEI grants per student are now at \$5761.45 while schoolboard grants per student have risen to \$6422.31. Figure 2 depicts this graphically.

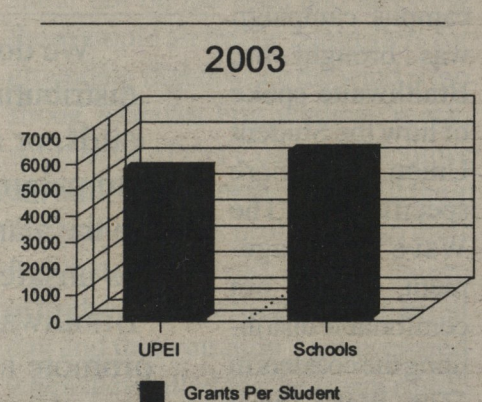


These numbers give one pause. How is UPEI supposed to maintain the same level of services with such a substantial drop in funding per student? It seems as though there is an inverse correlation between funding dollars and enrollment. Perhaps if UPEI was to see a decrease in students, the government would ante up more operational dollars. Since 96/97, tuition at UPEI has increased by 49%. Over this time total Government revenue has increased by 28.91% (which excludes the transfer increases which were negotiated recently.)

Students, faculty and staff at this University are well aware of the challenges that face this institution. As operational funding from the government fails to keep pace with the needs of this University, the ramifications are felt all over the province. The number one concern of Islanders today is health care, but ask yourself this question: where is it that nurses, for example, receive the training necessary to work in Island hospitals? It is in post-secondary institutions like UPEI. The govern-

ment needs to see post-secondary education as a pre-emptive form of dealing with the concerns of a nation: health care shortages, shortages within economic sectors. Education is necessary for the continuation of our society and economy and if the public and government do not start recognizing this, it will fast become a bigger concern.

Perhaps it is time for radical




ideas. If the government does not want to delegate funds to the University, perhaps the University should take matters into their own hands. We've seen proposals for racinos to be built to try to save the dying harness racing industry. We would like to propose that the

university consider buying the old Cat building across from Blanchard field and open a casino, with real tables, not those computerized coin monsters. This could create student jobs and bring in a different clientele. This would create new opportunities for tourism and revenue generation. We'd merely be following the governments lead and making lemonade out of the lemons we have been dealt.

In all seriousness, we realize that this is not an appropriate solution to the post-secondary education problem, but the point is that something needs to be done and if we, as students, don't ensure that this remains an issue, post-secondary education will continue to decline in importance to government.

Sincerely,  
 Clare Henderson, President, UPEISU  
 Mark O'Halloran, Exec VP, UPEISU  
 Britt Burns, VP Finance, UPEISU  
 Peter Grandy, VP Activities, UPEISU




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