

Numbers Continue To Rise, Despite Predictions

by John Gushue of the Canadian University Press

THE 1980'S WOULD BE THE DECADE during which post-secondary enrollment bottomed out, the demographers predicted.

But the demographers were wrong. While the age group that traditionally has the heaviest post-secondary participation rate — 17 to 21 year-olds — has narrowed considerably in the last decade, colleges and universities across the country are reporting another year of steady enrollment increases.

An informal telephone survey conducted by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada confirms that predictions made 20 years ago are completely wrong.

"We originally saw the group of 17 to 21 year-olds declining, and we expected the participation rate to be about the same," said AUCC researcher Marino Kristjanson. "Perhaps we were relying too much on connecting these two."

According to the AUCC, enrollment across Canada has increased for the seventh consecutive year. Full-time undergraduate enrollment is up by 1.3 per cent, with the largest increases — 6.3 and 4.4 per cent, respectively — reported in Newfoundland and Saskatchewan.

"We would have predicted differently," said Kristjanson. "I think we would have expected an overall decrease of at least that much."

AUCC statistics estimate there are about 414,000 full-time undergraduates enrolled in Canada's universities this year, with 255,000 part-time undergrads, 57,000 full-time graduate students, and 37,000 part-time grads.

In the 1982-83 year, statistics were 376,000, 233,000, 50,000, and 33,000, respectively.

"These are significant increases, and in a short period of time too," said Kristjanson.

Most education groups and critics say high unemployment rates are keeping many young people in school.

"What we have now is the unwilling student," said Lynn McDonald, federal New Democratic post-secondary education critic. "Enrollment is up because jobs are scarce."

Kristjanson says several factors influence enrollment changes, but agrees poor employment prospects place greater demand for higher education.

"Good jobs aren't easy to come by for young people, and so there is pressure to go to school," he said. "Full-time first year enrollment in Alberta increased more this year than last year, which isn't surprising."

Jean Wright, an accessibility researcher for the Canadian Federation of Students, said groups that traditionally have avoided universities are now unexpectedly enrolling for post-secondary education.

"For example, women who are older and who are going back to school is the trend that no one really predicted," said Wright.

But for the record number of students in Canada's schools, life isn't easy. Besides dealing with jammed classrooms, inadequate resources and outdated equipment, many students are forced to take on student loans — increased in most provinces in favor of grants — to finance their education.

"On the one hand, it's good that the money is available," said Wright. "But it is unfortunate that students have to borrow heavily into debt to go to school." The average debt for a student with a Canada Student Loan is about \$5,000, said Wright. "And that doesn't include provincial student aid debts."

In British Columbia, where the Social Credit Government abolished the grants portion of its assistance program two years ago, the average student aid debt has skyrocketed to \$15,000, an increase of \$12,000 since 1984.

Howard McMurdy, former NDP post-secondary education critic, said rising fees and enormous debt loads "are scaring away the people who benefited for decades by increased accessibility — women, disabled, natives, minorities and low income groups."

Said counterpart McDonald, "Our participation rate is much higher than in other countries, but we still don't make university or college education very accessible. Financial difficulties here are much greater than in other countries,

particularly in Europe."

Part-time university enrollment has been steadily increasing, but not to the rate that Kristjanson

and other analysts predicted. "We were expecting a greater increase [there], which we didn't see," he said.

"However, some registrars have said that part-time students are taking more courses than they were before. Instead of taking one course, they're taking two or three," he said.

With federal and provincial governments restraining post-secondary funding, education lobby groups say the quality of education in Canada is being increasingly threatened.

"The problem is really one of quality, not accessibility," says CFS researcher Wright. "The education is still there, but it is not as good as it used to be."

Increased enrollment means heavier workloads for the country's faculty, whose numbers have far from matched the swell in classroom sizes.

"There are no resources to cover the increased enrollments," said Vic Sim of the Canadian Federation of University Teachers.

"Students have been affected by a lower quality education, but it is the faculty who have been bearing the day-to-day effects of underfunding," he said. "There is a limit to what can reasonably be done."

Read All About Him — Vander Quotes

By James Young of the Canadian University Press

VANCOUVER (CUP) — THE GLOBE AND MAIL once described him as "one quote away from political disaster."

But now, journalists are calling B.C.'s new premier, Bill Vander Zalm, a "teflon politician", a comparison with Ronald Reagan's ability to get away with outrageous comments and slips of tongue.

In the past, Vander Zalm referred to former to former Quebec premier Rene Levesque as a "frog", and during the recent election campaign, suggested students lacking regional post-secondary facilities should continue their studies in "basements and warehouses."

The day after being swept back to power in the October 22 election provincial election, Vander Zalm commented on the sparse representation of women in the new Socred caucus — 4 of 49 — and said that a greater number "would certainly dress up the cabinet room and make for better decor."

He also said women would add to the decision-making process as they are "very perceptive."

While other politicians might fear being raked over the media's agonizing coals for such sexist remarks, the normally good-humored and confident Vander Zalm evades most criticism.

Given the premier's history of contentious comments, Brian Webster, a staff member of the University of Victoria's campus radio station CFUV, compiled a list of "Vander Quotes" from the leader's previous forays into politics. With some more recent ones, here, now, is the "best" of Bill Vander Zalm:

April, 1972: On success in B.C. politics — "If knowledge, experience and intellect were the only prerequisites for the job, [controversial former post-secondary education minister Pat] McGeer should have been premier 20 years ago. I don't think people are necessarily looking for all those qualities."

May, 1972: Expressing his worst fear — "The continued use of the bandaid approach to solving society's problems will destroy us morally, socially, physically, mentally, economically, and lead us to certain rebellion or Communism."

May, 1975: On sex education — "We should keep this propaganda of the provincial Department of Education out of the schools. Teach numbers, not sex. Better to take a child out of school than to let them see this. I'd rather have a child with no education than a child with no morals."

December, 1975: On welfare recipients — "If anybody has to work, but refuses to pick up the shovel, we will find ways of dealing with him."

November, 1976: On the protection of minority rights — "Do we have to support a minority group when that minority group is wrong? It's fine to be tolerant, but do we have to tolerate the wrongs? Tolerance is for exceptions, but exceptions tend to become the rule."

November, 1976: On the election of the Parti Quebecois "Certainly I wouldn't lose any sleep if Quebec separates. I doubt, frankly, if there are too many people who will lose very much sleep if they were to separate. I don't think it matters

much." March, 1980: On the B.C. Resources Investment Corporation, whose shares originally sold for \$5.00, but are now worth about \$ 1.30 —

"Don't you think, Mr. Speaker, it's leadership when we can introduce a great program like BCRIC, which is an example for the whole of the free enterprise world....a program which is now giving every British Columbian a chance to invest in the future of this province and get back some of its wealth?"

August, 1986: On his first weeks as premier — "So far it's a piece of cake....I have to attribute much of that to my own attitude, and I think I came into this thing really believing that I'm not going to care much about what the opposition says, I'm not going to care about what the various pressure groups say, I'll just go by what I think is right and treat them all as friends."

September, 1986: On the free enterpriser's right to buy South African Wine — "Pretty soon the government will be telling you when to go to bed and when to eat."

September, 1986: On the importance of style vs. issues — "Style should mean a lot in any campaign because it is what the people see when they come to British Columbia. It's not only the style of the premier, it's the style of government, it's the style of the legislature, it's the style of the people in the province."

September, 1986: While singing at a community dinner, Kingcomb Island, B.C. — "On top of spaghetti, all covered in cheese, I lost my poor meatballs, when somebody sneezed."

