

# Student Union meet with Minister of Education

On Monday, December 21, 1992 Michelle MacCallum, UPEISU President, and Bruce Davison, UPEISU Vice President External, met with the Paul Connolly, MLA, the Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister to communicate to them the concerns of UPEI students. The following is taken from a summary of the meeting presented by them at the January 10th meeting of the UPEI Student Council:

Specifically, the three objectives of the meeting were: 1) to present the minister with over 200 letters addressed to him from UPEI students calling for: an end to the freeze on funding allocated to the University of Prince Edward Island, a reversal to cuts to the Provincial Bursary Programme, and far better treatment of part-time and mature students by the educational system, 2) to discuss with the Minister the grave consequences of the freeze on funding to UPEI and, 3) to voice UPEI students' extreme displeasure with and problems created by cuts to the Provincial Bursary Program and to discuss with the Minister the future need for the Bursary Program. The meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes.

## *- Letters to the Minister -*

All letters to the Minister signed by UPEI students to that date were delivered and received by him (complete with festive ribbon and bow). The concerns expressed in the letters were then used as a starting point from which to launch discussion on funding and accessibility.

## *- Funding Freeze -*

On behalf of the students we represent, the point was made that the University budget has been strained to its absolute limits. Any further freeze on funding will have dire consequences for the quality of education at UPEI. Mr. Connolly recognized the extreme financial strain placed on the University and we recognized the difficult financial situation of the Provincial Government but we stuck to our point that, in order to maintain our present (& questionable) standards, funding MUST BE INCREASED. Although it appeared that they listened to our concerns attentively and were willing to state that no extraordinary austerity measures would be put in place as had been the case last year, Mr Connolly informed us that the University would be facing a freeze in the upcoming Provincial Budget, as had been previously feared.

## *- Student Aid -*

At our meeting, it had been feared that, following the recent elimination of Provincial

Grants in Ontario, our bursary program (as inadequate as it is) might also be in trouble. Thankfully, the Minister assured us that the PEI bursary program will be left in place. Unfortunately, the cuts made to the program in the last Provincial Budget (making very many students ineligible) will not be reversed. We explained how inadequate student aid, skyrocketing tuition, inadequate funding, and a host of other factors are making a university education impossible for a large and ever-increasing group of students. The Minister and Deputy Minister listened and agreed with a great deal of what we were saying. We also discussed at length rapidly changing student demographics -- how more mature students are going to university, more students are simply going to university part-time for economic reasons, how more students are having to spend more time working

than their academic loads can afford, and students are having to spend longer periods of time to get their degrees due to decreased course loads that result from higher costs. Also the sad truth that the present student aid system almost COMPLETELY IGNORES the unique needs of mature students, part-time students, and students with children. We agreed to meet again next semester, especially after we have had time to further research student demographics.

## *Summary:*

Overall, the meeting with the Minister was a success at least as far as he is now aware of our concerns, even if we did not yet change government policy. This meeting should start the UPEI Student Union Council on a much more vocal stance as we represent our members on the provincial political scene. ●

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