

Maclean's university survey comes under fire - again

BY ANDREW SUNSTRUM

TORONTO (CUP) - Amid a magazine buying frenzy the likes of which Canadians see only once a year, the Maclean's annual university rankings hits news stands this week.

At the top of the three categories into which Maclean's separates Canada's universities to rank them were familiar names. All top-ranked schools came first in their respective categories last year as well.

Topping the medical/doctoral category, which contains schools with a broad range of doctoral programs and research and a medical school, was the University of Toronto, marking the fourth year in a row U of T has copped top honours in this category.

Simon Fraser University in B.C. took first in the comprehensive category, which ranks schools with substantial programs at both the graduate and undergraduate level, and have significant research. Repeating in the primarily undergraduate category was Mount Allison University in New Brunswick.

But despite the 20 criteria used in determining the winners and the losers, some still feel that the ranking system remains flawed.

Kerry-lee Clarke, director of enrollment management and institutional advancement at Lakehead University, says the specialized nature of some universities are not reflected in the final findings.

"It's truly unfortunate that the problems in Maclean's will continue to encourage them to highlight schools that they don't adequately capture the essence of," she said. Lakehead finished fifteenth in the primarily undergraduate category.

Alison Ogilvie, a second

year theatre major at Concordia University "which has come dead last in the comprehensive category the last two years" agrees.

"Maclean's doesn't reflect Concordia adequately. My program is really well rounded and I don't think I would have found that anywhere else," she said, adding that Concordia has excellent fine arts and communications programs.

Similar complaints are being heard on the campus of York University. The school ranked fifth in the comprehensive category.

"What I like about York isn't found in Maclean's," Joel Harden, president of York's graduate student union, said. "York chose not to raise graduate tuition last year, when every other university in Ontario did, which shows a certain amount of commitment to graduate students. But you don't see that in Maclean's."

But Victor Dwyer, education editor for Maclean's magazine, says people shouldn't read too much into the rankings.

"It looks broadly at university campuses. We don't do anything more and don't pretend to," he said, adding the magazine is very open about how its research is conducted. "We show you exactly how we did it, what we measured, how much we weighted them and you can read it anyway you want."

U of T's continued survey supremacy has led to celebratory congratulations on campus.

"I am absolutely delighted to see the University of Toronto recognized as Canada's pre-eminent research university," U of T president Robert Prichard said, adding that the rankings are a useful tool.

"I believe it is good. The

issue of Maclean's, including the rankings, greatly increase the profile of higher education in Canada and is very good for all universities," he said.

But other institutions aren't as convinced as to the positive effects of the survey.

Bruce Hubley, director of institutional advancement at the University College of Cape Breton, says UCCB has been discriminated against in the survey for not having the access to the alumni and corporate dollars that Ivy League schools like U of T does.

"We are a young institution without large endowments so the survey's not weighted in our favour," he said. UCCB placed twenty-first in the primarily undergraduate category this year.

This year 42 English-language and nine French-language schools participated in the survey, the magazine's seventh. This year, eight French-language schools ended a boycott of the rankings over what they said was inaccurate information in the survey which mislead readers.

The comprehensiveness of the survey is what makes it popular, says Dwyer.

"Given that we're the only people who display all this data, I think it's quite popular among the public," he said.

But because of this popularity, schools may be forced to participate in a ranking which they don't agree with, Ross McMillan, a member of the York student union, says.

"We can't not cooperate without looking very bad and when we do cooperate we're not being judged fairly," agreed Clarke from Lakehead.

Cup Briefs

Misquote angers student demonstrators

BY NEVIN THOMPSON

VICTORIA (CUP) - Students at the University of Victoria are concerned about an erroneous newspaper account of a campus demonstration which reported that a student leader led 1,000 students in chanting death threats against the school's president.

A news article and editorial, both written by David Lennam, news editor of the Oak Bay News, reported November 12 that students shouted "Kill Dr. Strong" during a rally protesting the deteriorating quality of education at UVic.

The students were in fact chanting "Bill Dr. Strong" at the November 5 protest.

The story appeared after an estimated 400 students staged a noisy, but peaceful protest in front of the school's library. Students started chanting "Bill Dr. Strong" after fourth-year political science major Rebecca Whitley addressed the crowd.

Whitley told the crowd that six of the eight political science courses she had registered for over the summer had been cancelled in September and vowed that if she were forced to remain for another year at UVic she would "Bill Dr. Strong."

While Lennam acknowledged concerns with the way he covered the story, he has refused to comment until officially contacted by the UVic student union.

Students will hit "debt wall" in two years, says government

BY DAVID COCHRANE

OTTAWA (CUP) - The federal government has finally admitted that student debt has reached crisis levels.

And the government predicts that in under two years, students will be overwhelmed by debt, igniting sharper increases in bankruptcies and student loan defaults.

The Department of Human Resources Development is projecting that by 1998-99, student debt levels will grow too large for a post-secondary graduate making an average income to keep up with monthly payments on that debt.

In 1998-99, the average debt incurred while obtaining a four-year undergraduate degree will be \$25,000, burying the average graduate salary of \$30,000, department officials told a parliamentary committee earlier this month.

In 1998-99, the average graduate will have to spend more than 25 per cent of their disposable income based on an annual salary of \$30,000 just to meet minimum monthly payments on their student loan.

Student groups have been warning of the dangers of rising student debt for years, and Brad Lavigne, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, is wondering why it took the federal government so long to wake up to reality.

Last year, almost 12,000 students defaulted on their loans, four times the amount that experienced repayment problems in 1990. In that same period, student debt levels have almost tripled.

This year alone 540,000 students nation-wide received loans that were at least partially funded by the federal government.

The federal government continues to say the student debt problem is an important issue, but generally stops short of publicly offering any concrete solutions or proposals.