

Profile of Dr. C.W.J. Eliot

By Danielle Christensen

This spring, at the end of his ten-year stint as President of UPEI, Dr. Charles William John Eliot will leave the university with the rest of the class of '95. His career has been a distinguished one, and there are many interesting stories about him which still circulate around campus. Yet even after ten years, there are many things that most students don't know about our Prez (like even what the initials C.W.J. stood for!). To rectify this problem, the X-Press presents this profile.

Willie Eliot was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on December 8, 1928. (That makes him a Sagittarius.) He went to Athens in 1952, and stayed until 1957. When he returned to Canada, he taught Classics at UBC until 1971. He then taught Archaeology for five years before moving to Mount Allison University, where he continued teaching Classics until 1985. When asked what attracted him to Classics and Archaeology, he replied that he had never been attracted to archaeology at all. The things that he might dig up were interesting from an informational point of view, but he has no interest in the actual digging. The time teaching archaeology was a way to work in a university that concentrated a great deal on things archaeological.

When speaking to the students and staff of UPEI, one of Dr. Eliot's traits most frequently mentioned was his accessibility. When asked about it, Dr. Eliot seemed mildly surprised, but said that access to the professor was important to teaching, and he had carried his cognizance of that over into his administration style. He has never posted office hours, but is in his office at seven every morning, usually not leaving until 5:30 at night. "If the door is open, walk in. If the door isn't open, I don't want you to walk in," laughs Eliot.

This sort of accessibility ties in to his attitude towards students. When I asked him to describe his attitude towards students, Eliot's first reply was "Just try and run a university without them!" In fact, some universities could have existed without students some time in the past, and some superfunded research institutions can exist that way today, but that really has nothing to do with reality any more. On something of a poetic track, Dr. Eliot describes faculty and students as all being students who have had different life experiences. He thinks it is important for professors to listen to their students in order to

see what they can learn from a different perspective. Other professors have commented that they feel that such a positive attitude towards students has been instrumental in setting the tone for behaviour demonstrated by faculty at UPEI.

At the end of a term of work, it is usual to look back over the project and see if the ideas, goals and expectations that one had at the beginning of the project held true and were achieved. In Eliot's case, one of his major goals on coming to UPEI was to keep the Atlantic Veterinary College as an integral part of the university as a whole. He feels he has partly succeeded in this regard, that although the AVC does things a little differently, they are still emotionally and functionally a part of UPEI. Eliot's other major goal was to raise the sense of morale among the faculty members, which was at a low ebb when he came to the university, partly as a result of a low level of respect among the faculty.

Before he came to UPEI, Eliot was a Vice-President at Mount Allison. It was a job he found frustrating and in large part unsatisfying, and he left it vowing never to work in administration again. Within months he accepted the posting as President of UPEI, because he had decided that what had frustrated him was not administration per se, but the lack of freedom to make decisions without always clearing it with someone above him. Now, after ten satisfying years of presidency, Dr. Eliot says that the hardest part of his job is not agreeing with the people he deals with or having to tell people no. The easiest part is, of course, saying yes but the most enjoyable part is effecting change. This ranges in scope from planting flowers and hanging pictures to make the campus look like an institution worth learning in, to hiring excellent staff with fresh new ideas who can make a difference to the university.

Making the campus look good and attracting quality faculty leads naturally to a question about UPEI's status as a university. With ongoing talk of cuts to funding and turning money over to a province more concerned with asphalt than Anthropology, UPEI's existence is continually being called into question. Eliot thinks that the sense of the university carrying on the tradition of a place to train the mind with a critical capacity will continue. UPEI should be turning out skilled, civilized people capable of contributing to their

community. As a provider of a solid undergraduate education, UPEI is tested by whether UPEI students are treated like second-class citizens when they go on to other pursuits and other universities. The ways of producing that result, however, may be changing. This is not to say that PEI shouldn't have a university, but more that it might need a different university. Partnerships, both electronic and otherwise, will become increasingly important in years to come.

Dr. Eliot, as might be expected, holds strong views about the value of a university education. He feels that the education should not be a vocational training, but education is worth something on its own such that employers want to hire graduates. Universities have to follow the shift in ideology that their graduates are not headed for a life of study and seclusion, but rather for the job market. But even with this in mind, a university's purpose is to develop a critical capacity among its students, not to give them a trade.

Every time I mentioned to fellow students that I was writing this article, the first question was "Oh! What's Dr. Eliot doing next year?" To answer that question, he plans to take some time off, and stay around the university. If he is asked to teach in some capacity, he would be interested in doing so. (This is not an unlikely event, considering that there is only one other professor in the Classics department.) He'll be maintaining his house in Dorchester, N.B., and hopes to travel to Greece at some point again.

"WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT DR. ELIOT?"

The Actors: Members of the cast of the UPEI Theatre Society's production Mr Pickwick will remember how the Prez, cool under pressure in his daily work, carried that over into his extracurricular activities. In fact, he regularly came coolly to rehearsals and sat coolly reading the newspaper backstage wearing only his underwear. Breezy, sir?

The Diners: People who have had dinner with Dr. Eliot will remember his taste for a treat known as brandy butter.

The Classicists: Members of the Classics 101 class in Greek Civilization will remember Dr. Eliot singing all the bird songs from Aristophanes' play *The Birds*, at full voice, while flapping his "wings" to the beat.

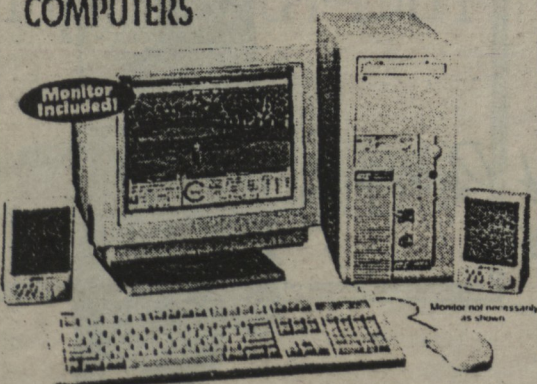
And me? What I'll remember most about Dr. Eliot is his unfailing respect for the concerns of students. I interviewed him during the decisions over whether to remodel Cass Chemistry Building, and at the beginning of the rape crisis of 1992. In the latter incident, a sexual assault had allegedly occurred on campus, and fear was starting to mount among the student population. Dr. Eliot had been fending off reporters from all the local media outlets all day, giving them the no-detail answers appropriate to a delicate situation under investigation by the police. His courtesy to me at that time, making available as much detail as possible without interfering with the confidentiality of the investigation, reflected his concern for the safety and well-being of students. Students took priority over reporters from outside, and I appreciated the recognition of that.

From faculty and students, the X-Press would like to thank Dr. Eliot for his time and concern over the past ten years and wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors.

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Hey, did you realize that this is the second-last issue of the X-Press this year? This is your last chance to contribute to the most powerful force on campus! So get up and write something for our upcoming spoof issue!