

# Fine Arts prof in final year at UPEI; question of money or worth?

BY KRISTEN PATTERSON

This semester will be the last for Fine Arts History sessional lecturer Reg Porter, who has been teaching at UPEI for the past 16 years.

John Crossley, Vice President Academic Support, claims that the elimination of his position through the extension department is a result of budget planning and damage control, but Porter is left with several questions concerning his dismissal.

Crossley insists that the decision to let Reg Porter go was 100 percent budget-driven and that the decision was difficult, and an unfortunate one. He stated that funding has disappeared for two sessional lecturer positions in the Fine Arts department due to budget planning for next year. These cuts leave the department with one tenured professor, Janos Fedak, and one sessional lecturer, Ron Arvidson, who teaches the Fine Arts Studio class.

But Porter remains uncertain as to why his position was cut. He maintains that the university told him his courses were not paying for themselves.

Crossley refutes this, stating that "it is impossible to say that any course pays for itself." Currently, there are 49 students in Reg Porter's Fine Arts History 102, each paying \$315. The total comes to \$15,435, with Porter walking away with only \$2500 and leaving a surplus of \$12,935. Porter questions where the rest of this money went, and wonders why these numbers are not enough to save his job.

Two of Reg Porter's courses were cancelled this school year. In September, his course on PEI Architecture was cut at the last minute because less than ten of the 19 registered students were part time. The university had decided that his course was identical to Fine Arts 452.

In January, Porter found

a notice on his classroom door, stating that his Fine Arts 302 was cancelled. Anna Sawicki, assistant director of the extension department, told him that no one had registered for the course. More than five students who would prove otherwise, reporting that they were turned away at the registrar's desk. They had been told the course was no longer available.

It all comes down to Reg Porter's contract with the university.

The contract for sessional lecturers is generic, and does not stipulate the requirement that ten of the registered students must be part time. It only specifies that there has to be a minimum of ten students registered.

Over the past 15 years, the number of required part-time students has varied from five to ten. The head of the department is responsible for contacting the sessional lecturer and notifying her or him, preferably in writing, of the said requirement. Porter states that he never received a letter from Fedak, and was therefore unaware of the condition placed on his courses. Fedak refuses to comment on personal matters.

No contract had been issued in the summer of 1997 since no one asked for it to be issued. When Porter's PEI Architecture course was cancelled, both the registered students and he were given the same excuse: the university was applying a new, strict interpretation of the contract. Without an issued contract, there was no way to argue this interpretation.

Porter says that he spoke to Crossley in September, who reassured him that if the contract said ten students, not all of whom were part-time, then the course would be safe with this minimum of ten. Crossley then phoned the extension department and asked it to hon-

our the contract.

When Fine Arts 302 was cancelled in January, Porter asked Crossley to investigate the situation, and consulted his lawyer who said that the university can break contracts with sessional lecturers as it pleases, to modify them, even after they have been signed by the lecturer.

Porter says that Crossley did not explain this to him. Crossley denies that contracts can be broken, but admits that exceptions can be made, and emphasizes the actions of department heads, as they are responsible for informing lecturers of contract modifications. The university is now moving to clarify their contracts with sessional lecturers, in order to avoid this confusion in the future.

To complicate matters further, Porter has experienced a decline in what is already poor health. Apart from teaching, he is unsure as to what other work he can commit him-

self to.

Though there could be a possible lawsuit against the university for breach of contract, Porter deems it unwise to become involved with the stress of dealing with "a giant bent on lying." Feeling insecure and fearful of his future, he is sorry but resigned to leaving the university.

"The cold breath of ingratitude is very painful, considering I have contributed so much to the program at such a low price," Porter said.

He believes that certain people are avoiding telling the truth and is not convinced by the university's reasons for dismissing him. As far as he is concerned, it is all about money.

Crossley suggests the same, claiming that "this is not a Reg Porter issue."

But it seems there are two ways to look at the funding situation. Crossley says that there is not enough, but Porter says that there is more

than enough money, but that it is just going somewhere else.

"In view of the number of students who are attracted to the courses, the enrollment and salary don't add up," Porter said.

As a sessional lecturer who has always brought in extra money and whose evaluations were always very positive, Porter feels victimized by the university's interpretation of his contract and the denial of their obligation to honour it. To him, the end of his employment at the university is a waste of resources.

Crossley is sympathetic. "I like Reg," he said. "He is a really valuable asset to UPEI."

It is not only a terrible blow to Porter's professional and personal life, but a huge loss for the student body. UPEI cannot afford to lose teachers like Porter, especially since there is nothing to replace them with.

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