

NEWS

Deadline: Wednesday at 12:00 noon. News Desk: 453-4983

Teaching at UNB: a question of attitude

by Allan Carter

The UNB Teaching Center is in its second year of operation and director, Dr Reavley Gair, claims that it's "here to stay forever."

In October of 1991, the Commission of Inquiry On Canadian University Education stated that the value of teaching at Canadian universities is overshadowed by the overriding commitment to research.

In a recent interview with *Maclean's*, commission chair Stuart Smith claims that although many university administrators have announced a renewed commitment to teaching, he views these claims as empty rhetoric designed to deflect criticism.

"It is now politically correct to speak favorably of teaching," Smith stated in the *Maclean's* article. "But a researcher who can barely express an idea outside of the laboratory can still make it to the top."

Gair believes that over the last four years there has been a tendency for universities to place more emphasis on research over teaching. "There is a need to redress that balance - not to make research less important but to make teaching equally important," states Gair.

"It is a question of attitude. If we see teaching as a serious scholarly activity in the same way as research, then teaching will improve."

The main role of the Center, describes Gair "is to provide guidance in teaching methodology and to run courses in faculty development for every instructor at UNB, whether they are full time or part time."

Presently, the Center has focused primarily on working with teaching assistants and new members of faculty. Gair believes that since these people are "the professoriate of the future, the attitudes they have will determine the way the faculty of the future operates with regard to teaching."

Gair maintains that once the faculties and the UNB administration recognize that "teaching is a serious scholarly activity and people are promoted for innovation in teaching the

same way they are promoted for innovation in research, this will improve the entire atmosphere for all graduate students because the teaching will become more important."

The Teaching Center offers many services to graduate assistant instructors and full time professors. For instance, a mandatory course for all graduate students who are teaching has been implemented. As of next January, the teaching Center will be providing instruction for graduate teaching assistants on how to deal with students who have learning disabilities.

Presently, Gair is seeking to develop a diploma of teaching in higher education. He explains that this diploma would be available to graduate students at the PHD level and probably the MA level.

In order to receive this diploma students will be required to gain experience in various kinds of teaching methods appropriate to their subjects, attend workshops, prepare a teaching dossier, provide a summary on their own views of teaching, videotape themselves teaching and then have their methods reviewed.

In addition, Gair says that it is possible that these assistant instructors would also have to take courses to receive this diploma. Such courses would include a course in communication and speech skill.

Gair points out that this diploma is only in the draft stage, but he hopes to have it effective by next September. When the diploma is established, Gair believes that students who receive the diploma will have "a distinct professional advantage" since it will be the only university diploma of its kind.

The Center also runs a monthly development seminar for faculty members in which different topics are brought up for an informal discussion session. Further, formal workshops for faculty development are offered several times during the year.

If desired, faculty members can be videotaped while they are teaching a class and the tape will be analyzed by Gair with the

faculty member present. In such a case, Gair will give suggestions and recommendations to the faculty member.

Gair says that the response from faculty members "has been very positive." Gair believes that some people saw the Center "as a cosmetic exercise paying lip service to the current fashion". However, he says that this is not the case and that it was not UNB president Dr. Robin Armstrong's intention when the Center was created last year.

Armstrong echoed this sentiment in a *Brunswickan* interview last week when he stated that the Center is "not a fly by night operation."

"We are trying to create an environment where people are comfortable in devoting time to teaching and every aspect of it," noted Armstrong.

With regard to workshops and services provided to faculty members, Armstrong notes that everything is done on a voluntary basis. "We are not forcing anyone to take advantage of what the Center offers." Instead, by their own choice, a professor can seek help or advice from the Center.

The Center also publishes the *Teaching Voice*, a bulletin which discusses different teaching issues such as how to teach larger classes. The bulletin has a circulation of about 12,000 and is sent to every faculty member at UNB in Fredericton and Saint John plus other universities in Canada and the United States.

The university requires that all



Shown is Professor Reavley Gair, head of the UNB Teaching Centre. Gair says "if we see teaching as a serious scholarly activity in the same way as research, then teaching will improve." James Rowan photo.

faculty members submit a teaching dossier when applying for tenure or a promotion. The Center will assist faculty with their dossiers. Dossiers include: a faculty member's statement on his/her philosophy of teaching, a

list of courses taught by the member, and a letter from the Department Chair describing the member's contribution to the department's teaching obligations.

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Downey president of Waterloo

by Mimi Cormier

Dr. James Downey, an English professor and former president of UNB, has accepted a new position as president of Waterloo University.

Downey is expecting to assume the duties of his new job before July 6 of next year. He says he sees it as a "stimulating challenge."

"I was asked if I had an interest in the position," Downey

explains. After visiting Waterloo, and meeting with many people associated with it, Downey says that he found it "a very attractive and appealing place."

Waterloo was ranked number one among medium sized universities in a recent report done by *Maclean's* magazine. When asked if this ranking had any influence on his decision, Downey replies with a firm "no."

"I had known for some time of [Waterloo's] reputation" as a good university, says Downey. Downey adds that "I had already made my own decision" before the rankings came out, and that it would not have made any difference "if it had ranked first or tenth."

Waterloo has been much praised for its innovative approach to university education, which Downey wishes to encourage as Waterloo's president. An innovative approach is "a good characteristic for universities to have," Downey says, "mind you UNB does too."

According to Downey, one of his goals as Waterloo's incoming president is to "get to know it and the people there" and learn "why and how" it came to be a successful university. He does not see any immediate changes he would want to make at

Waterloo, and says that any changes depend "upon circumstances that evolve, challenges that have to be met, support received."

"Who's to say what the 90's have in store" for Canadian universities, Downey says, adding that if he has "the same wonderful support received here at UNB, (he will) enjoy being president at Waterloo."

Downey was president of UNB from 1980 to 1990. Besides his teaching duties, Downey is also co-chair of the Premier's Commission on Excellence in Education in New Brunswick.



James Downey

Political parties recognized

by Karen Burgess

At the Student Union council meeting of November 9, the Council voted to reject applications from political parties for recognition as Student Union Clubs and Societies.

This week the council voted to amend the Student Union by-laws to allow for non financial recognition of political groups.

The Union passed, as an interim policy, a list of stipulations to apply specifically to political groups. The Council will work toward a bi-law amendment to the same effect,

but notice of changes must be made, and no action can be taken for three weeks.

The new amendments specify that political parties cannot use the UNB Student Union name in conjunction with their own, that the groups will receive non-financial recognition only, and are not permitted to apply for grants, and finally, concerning the use of Student Union services like the poster run, that the SU reserves the right to refuse posters it considers improper.

Representatives from various political parties who have

applied for recognition attended the meeting, including Mary Ellen Kenny of the Young Liberals, Chris Rogers of the NDP Youth Party, and Dennis McCarron of the PC Youth.

The Reform Party's youth party has also submitted a constitution for consideration for recognition.

The PC Youth, whose constitution was approved by the SU's constitution committee earlier this month, was recognized under the terms of the new amendments at Wednesday night's meeting.