

Acting Associate Dean of the School of Graduate Studies Responds

Graduate School Funding Policies Questioned

PAT FITZPATRICK & GORDON LOANE
THE BRUNSWICKAN

Students at UNB are calling on the School of Graduate Studies to clarify certain provisions set forth in recent letters informing them of the renewal of their Graduate Assistantships. Their complaints deal in particular with the period and total amount of funding, as well as the ability of students to work outside of their assistantships.

All UNB graduate students are eligible for funding in the form of Graduate Teaching and Research Assistantships (GTA / GRA) provided for in the University's annual budget. Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis. Students receiving GTA / GRA funding receive monthly payments from the University, from which graduate tuition may be deducted.

The students with whom the *Brunswickan* has spoken were quick to point out that, in their opinion, it appears to them that the University may have broken the terms of their assistantship contracts by reducing the total amount of funding students will receive.

In May 1996, Acting Associate Dean of Graduate Studies Dr. Janet Stoppard informed graduate students in the Faculty of Arts of the award of an "M.A. Graduate Assistantship of \$9,200 for 1996-97 (September to August)." In the letter, copies of which have been obtained by the *Brunswickan*, Dr. Stoppard went on to inform the students that \$ 6,168 of the award would be issued during the period September 1996 through April 1997, with the remaining \$ 3,032 being awarded between May and August of

1997. Stoppard noted that students receiving Graduate Assistantships were eligible to have the \$ 9,200 award renewed for "a second academic year, that is, until 30 April 1998," based on successful completion of the 1996-97 academic year.

In an April 1997 letter to students holding a Graduate Assistantship, Acting Associate Dean of Graduate Studies James Sexsmith paints a different picture. While informing the students that their award has been renewed, Sexsmith stated "This M.A. Graduate Assistantship award consists of \$ 6,168.00 for the academic year (September 1, 1997 to April 30, 1998) and a Summer Supplement of \$3,032.00 for May 1, 1997 to August 31, 1997."

Asked whether the absence of any reference to the \$ 3,032 (for the May to August 1997 period) promised the students in Stoppard's letter meant that the university was not honouring the twelve-month contracts with graduate students, Sexsmith stated "We are honouring them. In the letters [sent in April] we indicated that each one is renewed based upon performance. So even though the first letter says that it is a twelve month commitment plus renewal, at the end of the first eight months a decision is made whether to renew into the next fiscal year."

"The letters have just gotten more specific in terms of the University's budget year," Sexsmith emphasized, "We are willing to support students for a given period, but the offer has to be in line with the University's budget. I can't make a commitment beyond that any more

than the university can guarantee me my salary level next year."

A graduate student in the Faculty of Arts, who spoke on condition of anonymity takes exception to Sexsmith's views. "They've unilaterally changed the terms of the agreement we made with them," she stated, "I've been informed that we will not be receiving the full \$ 18 400 promised to us in Dr. Stoppard's letter. I based my decision to come to graduate school on the letter promising \$ 18,400 as the total amount of funding."

Other graduate students in the Faculty of Arts with whom the *Brunswickan* has spoken expressed similar sentiments. "Everyone I have spoken with was counting on the \$ 18,400 total that we were promised next year. We all performed adequately and were renewed, and now we find out that we are going to be \$ 3,032 short. That's just not acceptable. It's difficult enough to make ends meet with what we were promised. How are we supposed to concentrate on our studies when our funding is being played with?"

Graduate students working outside of their GTA / GRA funding is another issue raised by Sexsmith's letter to which students are taking exception. While Stoppard's initial offer to students in May of 1996 stated simply "holders of summer supplements are expected to work full-time on their research during these months," Sexsmith again paints a different picture.

The Acting Associate Dean's letter states that "Holders of Graduate Assistantship Awards are expected to not be employed outside of the assistantship to the extent that the employment would

hinder performance and progress in the student's academic program." [Emphasis as in the original.] By way of explanation, Sexsmith referred to similar guidelines used by the SSHRC and NSERC granting councils, which state that work in satisfaction of the requirements of the GTA / GRA award "should be in the order of 100 hours per year."

"The bottom line is that you have to be a full-time, registered graduate student to receive a GTA or GRA, which is money being provided out of the University's budget. So while we can expect 100 hours worth of work, that's in-line with similar regulations," Sexsmith stated.

"While we understand that students sometimes have to make money in order to survive, there are some considerations. First off, the GRA / GTA is provided to allow students to concentrate on their academic work. In that sense, work outside of the Assistantship is a violation of the spirit and intent of the award. Secondly, there is the issue of claiming the education deduction from Revenue Canada, which may reasonably expect that as a full-time student you do not exceed what are reasonably expected to be part-time work limits," he continued.

Sexsmith could not state what limits were placed on outside work. "If it's a project funded by the University, over which we therefore have some control, then the student is expected to consult with their supervisor and the Director of their Graduate Academic Unit. They will approve the work if it is reasonable, provided it does not interfere with studies. If it's outside the university, it is not

something that we can control," he stated.

According to Dean of Arts Dr. Peter Kent, the understanding in the past has been that students are generally not allowed to work more than ten hours per week.

Directors of Graduate Studies in a number of departments seemed to agree. When contacted by the *Brunswickan*, Prof. Tim Dilworth, Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Biology, did not view the apparent change in policy as being particularly concerning, saying "It's technically a policy, but we are not very strict in enforcing it. If no one tells us they are working, there's nothing we can do about it."

Dr. Stephen Patterson, Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of History, took a similar view. "You're not supposed to do much outside of your MA or PhD studies," he stated, "but I'm not certain how closely that's monitored and I don't know that we have ever troubled ourselves with this in the Department of History. Provided the student's academic performance is acceptable, we're not terribly concerned."

"As for the GTA, we usually require students to teach one hour per week, plus their prep time. Students are usually quite eager to do that — it gives them some experience for their CV and may help them decide if they want to teach later in life."

Graduate students with whom the *Brunswickan* spoke agreed with Patterson, but took exception with Sexsmith's view of the policy. According to one, who spoke on condition of anonymity, "We all love to teach to fulfill the GTA requirement. That's a large part of what

we're here for. The thing is, it's really difficult to support yourself, let alone your family, on \$ 9,200 a year. That's why it is nice to be able to work a little outside of class time to supplement our incomes."

For many graduate students, the issue is a pressing one in light of apparent changes to the manner in which graduate students are being funded by the University.

"When we talk of working to supplement our incomes, we're not talking about making money to take an exotic trip or go drinking. We're talking about making money to buy books, pay rent and heat bills, to go to an academic conference. What concerns me most is the room for arbitrary decisions," said one student who has been affected.

Reading from the April 1997 letter from Sexsmith, she continued "...to the extent that the employment would hinder performance and progress in the student's academic program." What does that mean? How is it determined? Without supplementing our income, how can we continue with our studies when we are ineligible for other forms of financial assistance and are having problems making ends meet?" she concluded.

As for future prospects, documents obtained by the *Brunswickan* (which were prepared for UNB's Board of Governors) detailing the 1997-98 Operating Budget for UNB's Fredericton Campus include a reference to a \$ 20,000 increase in Graduate Research Assistantship funding, while funds allocated to the GTA portion of Graduate Assistantships will remain at the 1996-97 level.

In order to eliminate 30%+ vacancy rate

McGee House moves to 12-month leases

GORDON LOANE
THE BRUNSWICKAN

UNB officials have decided to move towards a 12-month lease system at McGee House, a 102 unit apartment complex owned by the University on Montgomery Street.

Student residents of McGee House were informed of the change a few weeks ago, according to Roy Brostowski, UNB's Director of Housing and Food Services.

Residents who have leases that run out at the end of April have the option to renew for an additional four months until the end of August.

Those intending to stay beyond August will be required to sign a twelve-month lease.

New tenants entering the residence beginning next month will be required to sign a twelve month lease.

The change from an eight month lease with an option to renew for the summer months to a twelve-month lease is an attempt to eliminate a 30-33% vacancy rate over the summer months, according to Brostowski.

While students will be required to pay 12 months rent or find a sub-let, the University felt it had to stabilize its finances at McGee House.

"If the high vacancy rate that we have been experiencing continued, we would have to increase our monthly rent to the point where it would not be appealing for people to stay any longer," Brostowski said.

While the 12-month lease means bad news for some residents, the University has announced good news as well.

Monthly rents for one, two, and three bedroom apartments at McGee House will not increase over the next year for the second year in a row.

A one bedroom apartment costs \$369 a month during the summer, rising to \$485 from September to April. The average cost over 12 months is \$446 per month.

A two bedroom apartment costs \$581 during the school year with a lower rent of \$433 a month in the summer, an average of rate of \$532 over 12 months.

Three bedroom apartments rent for \$506 a month during the summer and \$671 during the winter for an average of \$616.

The two-tier monthly rent structure was adopted by the University several years ago to attract tenants over the summer months, according to Brostowski.

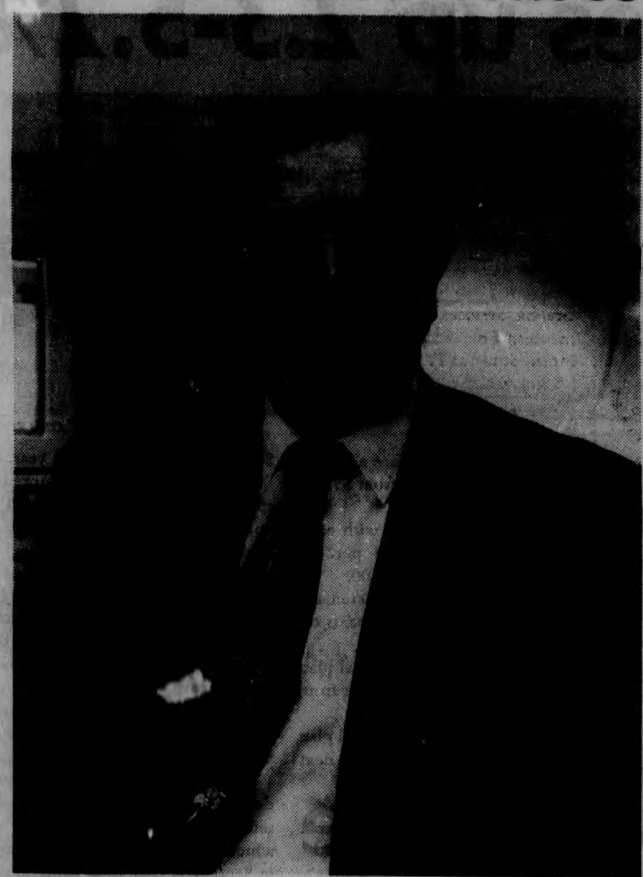
At one time, the monthly fee structure was the same for both the summer and winter months.

Meanwhile, a survey of the Fredericton rental market by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in the fall of 1996 confirms that monthly average rental rates for one, two, and three bedroom apartments at McGee House are less expensive than those available from private landlords near the UNB campus.

In zones one and four near the UNB campus, average monthly rents charged by private landlords were \$482 and \$562 respectively for an unheated one bedroom apartment versus a 12-month average of \$446 for a one bedroom apartment in McGee House with heat and hot water included.

According to the CMHC survey, a two bedroom unheated apartment from a private landlord in zone one and four stood at an average monthly rent of \$590 and \$586 respectively.

A two-bedroom apartment at McGee, heat and hot water included,



Roy Brostowski, UNB's Director of Housing and Food Services

DREW GILBERT PHOTO

costs an average of \$532 monthly over 12-months.

A survey of three bedroom apartments owned by private landlords in zones one and four tells a similar story.

Average monthly rent for a three-

bedroom, unheated apartment runs at \$699 and \$627, according to the CMHC, while three-bedroom apartments at McGee House, which include heat and hot water, are an average of \$616 per month.

Aitken email continued from Page 1

or a Proctor or a Don chose to go beyond expressing their opinion, and attempt to frustrate the remedy that's been presented, such as if an ARP or Proctor was actively broadcasting similar offensive messages as a protest or they were encouraging retribution against a person who spoke out, then we would take the same type of action [as we have taken in this case.]

The fallout of this incident, in the end, will be additional focus on the issues of diversity in the Residence Community.

"The long term solution is education," he mused. "All universities have come a long way, as has society, but there's still quite a ways to go."

"Two years ago, the University had a sub-committee to promote greater tolerance of minorities of any type, and I think that's something we need to revive and work harder at, the educational aspect."

The Board of Dons, which is composed of the Dons from each Residence, has been discussing

increasing training for Dons, ARPs and Proctors during their Orientation period, particular regarding the use of the internet. The Aitken incident has merely added urgency to this training.

But proper use of e-mail is just one part of the training which Dons, ARPs, Proctors and House Presidents will be receiving in the Fall.

Among other concerns which the increased use of the internet within Residence are: internet addiction, where a student spends excessive amounts of time perusing the internet. "It is a minority of students," said Craighead, but he wants the Residence Community to be prepared to deal with it.

Another unexpected development is the added tension between roommates if one wants to use the computer more than the other. Plus, there is a philosophical divergence between the internet, which emphasizes solitary activity and traditional residence activities which promote group activities.

Tuition jumps \$300, 10.6% to \$3,140 continued from Page 1

But Hellmeister adds, "You can't really say that we're cheap." She concedes that UNB places well, but worries about the sudden jump.

"It's great that we have one of the lowest tuitions, and I do believe that we're getting quality for our money, but it's going to be a \$300 increase in tuition next year, and students just don't have that money."

Rouse doesn't concede that UNB has done anything extraordinary.

"New Brunswick cut only 2% from each university, a substantial cut, but the lowest in Canada so it's not surprising to see that New Brunswick universities still have lower tuition than other provinces," he said.

But not all the news is bad, as Parr-Johnston also highlighted some new initiatives and increased spending in some areas.

She reiterated that 12 new faculty positions will be funded at UNB (Fredericton) and one at UNBSJ. And

added that a joint committee between the University and the Faculty Union (the Association of UNB Teachers) is currently investigating performance indicators.

This commitment to excellence will sit well with Knight, if the University follows through.

"When we start seeing \$2-3 million cuts, we have to start worrying about maintaining quality of our programs. That's why we have to push for performance indicators here at the University."

"[We have to ensure] that our professors, and our programs and our department are top level, and if they aren't, they are changed appropriately," he continued.

Parr-Johnston also noted that an amount of money will be set aside for research into the University itself and an internal audit of the UNB finances.

The "institutional research" study will "assist the University in tracking

more accurately how well it does in meeting students' needs, recruiting students, obtaining research funding, and other measures of quality."

The internal audit "will examine the University's financial and business procedures to ensure effectiveness." But, even with the cuts and the tuition increases, the University's financial picture is far from clear, or bright.

"Current projections show the University will continue to face a difficult financial situation in the years ahead," said Parr-Johnston.

"With a planned further cut in provincial government grants, a deficit of \$2.9 million is currently projected for the 1998-99 fiscal year if no corrective action is taken. If not addressed, the annual deficit could rise to as much as \$5.4 million in 2000-01," she cautioned.

"Obviously, we must take action," she stated. "It is clear that we cannot simply do more with less but need to

focus our resources and our energies on the areas that will make UNB a strong and vibrant university for the next millennium - the institution of choice."

Towards that end, Parr-Johnston announced that UNB will revise its budget process, and seeking greater student input by adding a student member to the Board of Governors Finance Committee.

A step in the right direction, but not enough for Hellmeister. "If we pay 25% of the operating budget, then we should have 25% of the say," she said.

"And if they don't want to add seats to the Board of Governors, then they should downsize it so that we have 25% of the say."

Shawn Rouse says the first thing to improve the budget process at UNB is to make it public.

"You can have a hundred students on the Finance Committee, and it means nothing unless the system is transparent," he said.

Mazarolle wins Senate Seat

Sandra Mazarolle has defeated her only opponent Lynn Côté-Hansen by a slim margin of three votes to capture the first ever election for a part-time student seat on the UNB Fredericton Campus Senate.

Mazarolle captured 20 votes to 17 for Côté-Hansen.

Both part-time students on the Fredericton campus and distance education students participated in the election, held April 8th and 9th.

Mazarolle, who is presently working on a Bachelor of Office Management degree, is a full time Administrative Secretary in the Department of Electrical Engineering at UNB.

Côté-Hansen, presently works at NB Power in the Human Resources Division and is enrolled part-time in the Faculty of Administration at UNB.

