

NEWSLETTER


FEBRUARY 1998 VOLUME 24.4 Jeffery Donaldson, EDITOR

Dandelion Futures in the New Global Economy

*Peter Sanger teaches at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College in Truro, N.S., and will be retiring at the end of March. Chair of the Department of Humanities there, Mr. Sanger is author of several books of poetry, including **The America Reel**, **earth moth**, and **The Third Hand**. With his retirement, the Department of Humanities will be closed and its courses phased into one of the science departments. Mr. Sanger gave this convocation address last September as the recipient of a university teaching award. Acknowledgement is made to the Rural Research Centre at NSAC, where the address was first published among its Rural Studies Working Papers. Ed.*



University Proposes New Entrance

 On December 22, 1997, the administration circulated an e-mail outlining the proposed changes to McMaster's Main Street entrance. Buried in that e-mail was a statement to the effect that one aspect of this plan would be to increase traffic flow in parts of the pedestrian core of campus. Like many of you, I missed this statement in my quick reading of the message. However, I was alerted to the threat to the inner part of campus in a chance conversation in January. I have since read the plan for the proposed changes carefully. In summary, as part of creating a new entrance to McMaster on Main Street, the University is proposing to create a new through road on campus. The current plan is to allow regular car traffic along the route which is currently travelled by the HSR buses; i.e., from the Sterling Street entrance, turning south in front of the Divinity College, and continuing straight on to Main Street via a new road to be built between the Psychology Building and the hospital.

The most controversial aspect of this plan is its infringement on the pedestrian core of the campus. This part of the plan envisages opening up University Drive to passenger cars in sections where it is currently only open to buses and emergency vehicles. The plan prepared by Parker Consultants in April 1997 suggests that this section of road will typically carry 275 cars between 8:15 and 9:15 am on the stretch of road from the Health Sciences Complex up to Sterling Street. These numbers translate into one car every 15 seconds along this stretch of road, essentially turning what is currently a relatively quiet spot into a road with continuous traffic flow. This aspect of the plan will severely degrade the quality of life in the inner campus, as well as posing a physical risk to the students who cross this road to attend classes in the Life Sciences Building and the Health Sciences Complex.

I believe that the overall goal of a forward-looking university like McMaster should be to reduce the number of car trips to the campus. While in many circles traffic management would imply a "management of traffic", the aim of this plan appears to be the promotion of traffic flow on campus rather than management of that flow. One of my major concerns about this plan is the role of Parking and Transit Services in developing the overall plan. As a department that depends for its revenue entirely on fees collected by car trips to campus, Parking and Transit Services has no incentive to reduce campus traffic. Indeed, they have the opposite incentive, since organizations prefer to grow rather

than shrink, since growth implies increased budgets, jobs, and prestige for the department. It appears that the overall goal of Parking and Transit Services is to accommodate as many cars as they possibly can on campus. Unless this department pays the University for the value of the land that they turn into parking lots, University land is essentially a "free good", which distorts the overall decision making process in favour of gobbling up land for open-air parking lots rather than constructing parking garages or reducing the demand for parking. Essentially, the current system contains a built-in bias towards a runaway cycle of growth in traffic and land use for parking. Given this situation, it is imperative that other levels of governance on campus, such as the Vice-President's Office, the Senate, or the Board of Governors, examine critically the proposals for increased parking and traffic flow in order to provide for regulation of parking and traffic on campus.

Parker Consultants were also responsible for preparing a report on traffic management in 1986, which also recommended an internal circulation route on campus. Given their previous experience in this area, it is not surprising that they limited their analysis to only four options: (1) the status quo; (2) build additional parking lots; (3) parking lots plus an internal circulation road; (4) parking lots, an internal road, and a new entrance on Main Street. Options for managing traffic by reducing demand for parking were not considered. However, it is relatively easy to come up with suggestions for ways to reduce the demand for traffic on campus. For example, one issue which I heard raised at the information Open House on January 28, 1998 was the heavy traffic flow and on-street parking along streets in Westdale due to students attending night classes. The data in the consultants report show that the Sterling Street Entrance has the highest inbound traffic flow of any of the campus entrances in the period just before night classes start: between 6 and 6:30 pm, the Sterling Street entrance admits 333 vehicles compared to 124 at either the Cootes or Main Street entrance. One way to discourage students from bringing their cars to campus in the evening would be to extend the day-time parking fee period until 8:30 p.m. This increased cost of parking would provide a disincentive for students to drive to campus. Along with a parking fee increase, the one-hour parking limits on Westdale streets should be extended from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm. The one-hour parking limit is quite effective at controlling on-street parking during the day, and I suspect it would be equally effective in the evenings. While these measures would likely be unpopular, they are likely to be more effective in reducing traffic flow through Westdale than those proposed in the consultants' report.

There are many possibilities for managing campus traffic and fixing the Main Street entrance which were not considered by the consultants. One radical proposal would be to close the Main Street entrance altogether as a campus entrance, leaving it solely as a hospital entrance, and direct all campus traffic to the Cootes Drive entrance. A second radical proposal would be to enhance the pedestrian core further by closing the parking lots immediately adjacent to the Psychology Building, and extending the bus-only zone to the western intersection of University Avenue and College Crescent. At the cost of roughly 100 parking spaces, we could connect the Psychology Building with the pedestrian core. We could also close the southern part of University Avenue where it intersects College Crescent and so connect the new Institute for Applied Health Sciences Building to the pedestrian core as well. These two modifications would extend the pedestrian core to the entire southern quarter of the campus!

A very basic modification to the proposed plan is to eliminate the proposed internal circulation route. Modifying the plan to eliminate the internal circulation route would not have a major impact on the plan as a whole and would go a long way towards mitigating the impact of this plan on the campus community. However, to win the acceptance of the surrounding community, we will need to show that the new traffic plan will go a long way towards addressing community concerns regarding University traffic on neighbourhood streets. It is not clear to me that the plan in its current form will achieve that goal. Although a few streets around the Medical Sciences Building (Forsyth, Traymore, and Arnold) may see major reductions in traffic flow, the traffic on Sterling is only estimated to drop by 30%. Also, the stated goal of Parking and Transportation Services to encourage increased use of the King Street entrance to the hospital parking garage may more than offset these minor gains. Finally, the development of a major entrance facing Emerson Street may increase traffic in the neighbourhood south of campus. In contrast, a plan that aimed to reduce the number of passenger trips to campus overall would clearly help to reduce the amount of traffic through the Westdale community.

The April 1997 report by Parker Consultants contains several errors and inconsistencies in both the collection and the analysis of the data that were used to support their final recommendations. (1) Data sheets for traffic flow in the afternoon for the MUMC entrances lump together outgoing and incoming traffic, which makes it difficult to judge the

impact of MUMC traffic on the surrounding neighbourhood. (2) The summary of traffic turning data underestimates outbound afternoon traffic, since the summary period (5:30-6:30 p.m.) corresponds to the inbound peak period rather than the outbound peak, which occurs from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. (The outbound flow from the Sterling Street entrance is 574 cars between 4:30 and 5:30 pm and only 287 cars between 5:30 and 6:30 pm.) (3) The turning data shown are in fact a mixture of real vehicle counts and estimated counts interpolated from surrounding intersections. In fact, traffic flow at the corners of King, Arnold, and Traymore with Forsyth was not even monitored in the study.

I believe the best way to address these shortcomings would be to start with a fresh look at the situation, using either on-campus expertise among the faculty and staff, or a different consulting firm. This new study should consider all options for traffic management on campus, including options for reducing the number of vehicle trips to campus.

*Christine Wilson
Physics & Astronomy, and Westdale resident*



McMaster's Pension Plan


A Performance Review

Actuarial Valuation of the Pension Plan as at July 1, 1997

**Excerpts from Report to the Pension Trust Committee
Prepared by William M. Mercer Ltd.**

The purpose of the report is to inform the University regarding the funded status of the Pension Plan and the contribution requirements for the year following the valuation date and to provide the documentation prescribed by the Pension Commission of Ontario and Revenue Canada.

When conducting a valuation on a going-concern basis, the relationship is determined between the respective values of assets and accumulated benefits, assuming the Plan will be maintained indefinitely.

Click here for report 



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Wednesday, April 22, 1998, 2 pm
Convocation Hall**



Look for a Bigger Paycheque on March 15, 1998

At its regular meeting on February 3, 1998, the Executive of the McMaster University Faculty Association voted unanimously to reduce the mill rate on which the MUFA dues are calculated from 5.3 to 2.64 for the month of March ONLY. This 50% reduction, which might be called a *mini windfall*, will result in a closer correlation between income and expenditures for the Faculty Association in 1997/1998. In addition MUFA reserves are healthy. On April 1, 1998 the mill rate will return to 5.3. You might plan to use this extra money on the second unpaid day off, Thursday, April 9, 1998!

Marilyn Parsons
MUFA Treasurer

New Committee Reps Named

Carol Mazur (Mills Library) joins Sherman Cheung (Finance & Business Economics) and Doug Welland (Economics) as MUFA representatives on the *Pension Trust Committee*.

David Hitchcock (Philosophy) will be part of a small group being formed by the Provost's Office to consider revisions to the 1994 *University Policy on the Encouragement of Teaching Excellence*.

A new Alcohol Committee has been established through the office of the Associate Vice-President Student Affairs. This Committee has been further divided into two working groups, the Education/Programming Committee and the Policy Committee to which MUFA was invited to send a representative. **Stefania Miller** (Political Science) has agreed to represent MUFA on the *Alcohol Policy Committee*.

Modem Pool Funding Increases



Faculty members who have recently logged into their computers through the fee modem pool may have noticed an increase in their paid funding (account balance). On February 9, each account was given an additional \$60 (120 hours connect time).

During the last round of negotiations, a pool of money equal to \$20,000 was set aside to provide financial help to faculty members using the modem pool during the 1997/98 academic year. At July 1, 1997 each account was credited with \$40. Following a review of the first six months of use, the Joint Committee has agreed that the accounts could be increased at this time. This will bring the total funding for each faculty member to \$100 (or 200 hours of connect time).

CIS has no mechanism to reimburse faculty members who, prior to February 9, exceeded the original \$40 which was added to their accounts on July 1, 1997.

Just a reminder that, according to the Joint Committee Agreement, \$20,000 will be available again for modem pool funding in 1998/99. The balance in your account at June 30, 1998 will be set to zero and the new allotment added on July 1, 1998.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the CIS Main Office at ext. 24357 or e-mail: carmela@mcmaster.ca.



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Letter to the Editor

Why in my view the campaign for "more Money for Research Councils" has fundamental problems.

In the recent campaign for "more money to research councils" I see one trend which, in my opinion, seriously weakens the position of the entire Canadian academic community. I would characterize this trend as an unwillingness to face (and even less so, to discuss publicly) the flaws of the Canadian granting system for the alleged fear that any openly voiced criticism can be used by politicians as an excuse not to increase the budgets of granting Councils or even to proceed with further cuts.

To my knowledge, the practice of concealing their own defects (popularly known as a "dirty laundry fear syndrome") has never helped to solve any pressing problem. On the contrary, as a rule it tends to produce the results largely opposite to what is intended. The recent campaign manifestly avoids the most critical question which is inevitably to be asked in any campaign for "more money", namely "is the present funding system doing its best in terms of the most efficient and fair allocation of the already existing funds?"

Unless the affirmative answer to this question can be presented and convincingly defended, there appear to be little logical justification for the call for more money.

I believe that the granting councils will have a hard time if they are pressed to address the key aspects implied in the above question. For example, in his letter to the *CAUT Bulletin* (December 1997), Dr. Mark A. Bisby, the Programs Branch Director of MRC, admits that "many able researchers and much good science remain unfunded by the MRC

and NSERC". However, his explanation why this is the case is given exclusively in terms of the overall budget shortage.

I see logical inconsistency with such flat rate explanation. Should this indeed be the case, it would be natural to expect the unequivocal assurance from the Tri-Council administration that all new money (if obtained) will be used to fund those capable and competent researchers who are presently completely unfunded (infamous "NIL-awards" which amount to about of all NSERC applicants). While we all agree that the incompetent work should not be funded, to presume that ONE THIRD (!) of all Canadian professors are "incompetent" is sheer nonsense (what a lousy university system this country has at first place if the latter is indeed the case!).

But none of the above assurances are coming from the granting councils. On the contrary, they repeatedly reaffirm their allegiance to the policy of draconian competition and "selectivity" in the name of fictitious "excellence"; policy which, as was recently argued by many critics, suppresses the risk taking and forces the applicants to optimize their research along the sure-fire safe lines of "fundability".

The often heard excuse that there is not enough money to fund all (deserving) applicants is hardly sustainable on the basis of facts. For many types of research (especially, theoretical) even a grant of \$3,000 per year makes an enormous difference to no grant at all. Also, to be funded by NSERC in principle (regardless of the grant amount) is often an almost necessary precondition for obtaining non-NSERC funds. At the same time, NSERC Web page shows some individual research grants in the \$100,000 per year range. The question thus pops up what stops NSERC from reducing the above grant to, say, \$90 K (not a great sacrifice, after all) to provide base grants of \$5,000 to two presently unfunded "able and good" researchers? Where are the arguments that the first scenario is better than the second? (Even if the second scenario still may be quite far from achieving a truly fair split.)

We need a clear and explicit guarantee that the "new money" is going first of all to be used to significantly reduce the unfunding (NIL-awards) rate through the institution of base grants for ALL qualified researchers (i.e., those whose research has recognized merit) and only after this is done, the extra funds (if any) can be used to raise grants of those who are already reasonably well funded.

So, let us put the horse before the carriage. As a first step, the NSERC/MRC/SSHRC system has to be reshuffled in such a way that there are no completely unfunded meritorious researchers (even if it means that many grants are to be truly lean). This, actually does not require anything except genuine willingness and can be done in a single executive meeting. But without this fundamental precondition, the "more money" campaign is bound to bring nothing more than a token effect.

*Alexander A. Berezin
Engineering Physics*



Students with Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the procedures for identifying students with Specific Learning Disabilities at McMaster University.

What is a Specific Learning Disability? A Specific Learning Disability is an ongoing condition characterized by a significant impairment in information processing that is attributed to an underlying neurological dysfunction, rather than external or environmental factors. It is characterized by academic ability that is significantly below that expected, given the individual's age, measured intelligence, and level of education. The magnitude of this discrepancy is significantly greater than the normal fluctuations present in the general population. Because intellectual or cognitive ability must measure within the average to above average range of ability, individuals with specific learning disabilities are not 'slow learners'.

How are learning disabilities diagnosed? Not all individuals with learning problems have a learning disability. The

process for making this distinction is often a lengthy, time-consuming and expensive assessment process that is carried out by a qualified professional (e.g., a registered psychologist) who administers a comprehensive battery of standardized psychological tests. A typical assessment battery would include a series of cognitive and academic measures.

Students with learning disabilities are not a homogeneous group. The data obtained from individual assessments are often useful in determining specific areas of information processing weakness and developing appropriate recommendations.

McMaster University Requirements: Because learning disabilities are an ongoing or developmental condition, the vast majority of students with learning disabilities entering McMaster University have previously been diagnosed. If these students are requesting academic accommodations, they are required to provide appropriate and recent documentation (i.e., a psychological assessment carried out by a registered psychologist within the past three years) to the Learning Specialist at the Centre for Student Development (CSD).

Occasionally, students make an appointment to see the Learning Specialist because they suspect they have a learning disability. In these situations, it is the responsibility of the Learning Specialist to screen for a range of factors that may be contributing to the students academic problems, which may or may not include the presence of a learning disability (e.g., work habits, study and organizational skills, personal or relationship problems, medical or mental health issues). If the Learning Specialist suspects the potential presence of a learning disability, the student may then be referred for a full assessment.

Our data indicates that of the 33 students who were screened by the Learning Specialist in 1996-1997, only 9 were ultimately diagnosed with a learning disability. The other 24 students were referred for assistance to address difficulties that were clearly present, but not suspected of being linked to a learning disability.

Referring Students to CSD: Instructors who know students who are having academic difficulties or who are struggling with personal issues, are encouraged to refer these students to CSD. We provide a range of counselling services available to any students who require assistance to develop academic skills or to deal with personal issues. Instructors who would like further information about the services provided at CSD are also encouraged to contact us at extension 24711.

*Anne Chaffee, Learning Specialist
Centre for Student Development*



President Deborah Flynn Talks About OCUFA

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