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Jan. 30, 1990
04-1990

WLU president introduces program for positive gender relations

Dr. John Weir, the president of Wilfrid Laurier University, has announced a program to promote positive gender relations at the Waterloo campus.

The initiatives are based on the 17 recommendations of a committee he appointed in early October to examine the events and implications surrounding two panty raids on the campus last fall.

Although the president announced earlier that panty raids would be banned, he asked the six-member committee to continue to examine issues brought forward by the incidents.

The committee's 28-page report was tabled at the regular meeting of senate on Tuesday, Jan. 30.

In releasing the report and announcing his response, Dr. Weir said, "I am confident that these initiatives will help promote non-sexist attitudes and behavior among members of the university community.

"The panty raids prompted us to review a number of our policies and, where appropriate, changes will be made. We are anxious to ensure that the environment at Laurier is comfortable

and inviting for people of both sexes. We also want to maintain our commitment to high academic standards and further advance our dedication to provide a rich, cultural and social experience for our students."

The initiatives put forth by the president cover a broad spectrum of the university community and its activities.

* A 1985 policy statement and subsequent consultants' report on employment equity will be reviewed in light of a recommendation to adopt a policy statement on human rights and non-discrimination.

On Nov. 12, 1985, the board of governors approved the following policy:

"The university is committed to a policy of employment equity and equal opportunity, and hereby undertakes an examination of current practices with a view towards the elimination of any barriers which reduce or prevent employment equity and equal opportunity at this institution."

This led to a major in-house study, and a consulting firm, the Alexander Group, was hired to provide advice on how certain aspects of the issue could be clarified, to draft a policy and to make recommendations on its implementation. The consultants' report is now being considered by administration.

* A committee on gender relations, reporting to the president, will be created to identify appropriate educational activities and to formulate policy recommendations to foster positive gender relations. Its members will be appointed by the president.

* The president has authorized the establishment of the position of Human Rights and Employment Equity Officer. Responsibilities will be to develop programs to promote equity, tolerance and fairness in internal operations, to serve as resource person with respect to human rights, employment equity and discrimination issues and to develop programs to foster healthy gender relations.

* A draft policy on sexual harassment will be brought to the board of governors for approval this year. In 1987, the president appointed a committee to develop a policy and its report was received in October 1989. It is now under legal review.

* A style sheet for gender-free language will be established as a guide for the university's publications. At the request of the president, Dr. Harold Remus of the department of religion and culture will develop the style sheet. A former director of WLU Press, Dr. Remus has experience in this type of editing.

All university publications will be reviewed within six months and any changes needed to bring them into compliance with the style sheet will be made in subsequent issues.

* The university's promotional material will be reviewed to ensure it portrays Laurier as a vibrant intellectual and cultural community where, among other things, healthy gender relations exist. An advisory committee will assist.

* The academic and cultural components of orientation for first-year students will be strengthened. In addition to discussions of sex and sexually transmitted diseases, orientation

will now include a component on the conditions necessary for positive gender relations, definitions of sexual assault and discussions of date rape.

* Student services and housing, in consultation with students, will examine the desirability of integrating existing residences by floor. Since the project was first proposed, it has been the intention to integrate the new 300-bed residence apartment by apartment.

* The university will seek to increase the number of female employees in counselling and other student services, in security and in housing operations as opportunity permits.

* Counselling services will produce a comprehensive pamphlet on the services and options available to students alleging rape.

* A recommendation to establish an approval mechanism for posters and publications on campus will be brought before senate for discussion. While The Cord weekly, a student newspaper, and various posters have caused offense, the president said he is mindful of the collision of freedom of speech and censorship.

* A recommendation to undertake regular, systematic and effective consultation of students on all aspects of their university experience will be dealt with through the Quality of Student Life Committee.

Formed in the summer of 1989 by the dean of students and the president of the students' union, its purpose is to examine the quality of student life and to make policy recommendations. As part of a needs assessment, the committee will distribute surveys

to 1,200 students in February. Later, other mechanisms for ongoing consultation will be established.

* Suggestions to mount a program for administrative personnel with components on sexism and racism will be incorporated into existing programming.

* Recommendations to create the positions of student life co-ordinator and campus cultural life co-ordinator will be reviewed in light of budgetary matters.

The university has been striving to enhance its intellectual and cultural life over the last few years. The John Aird Centre, opened in 1988, has provided a recital hall, an art gallery and freed the Theatre Auditorium for other cultural events. The drama program has been revived, and the university has offered a series of public lectures for the last few years. As well, the university offers a week-long cultural festival each year.

"We will continue to build on current programs to further enrich the intellectual and cultural experience outside the classroom," Dr. Weir said.

* The provision of day-care and babysitting services, the subject of another recommendation, has been under active consideration by the university. Government regulations with regard to the operation and physical facilities for such services have been obstacles. Because the university has only 65.8 per cent of the space to which it is entitled by ministry standards, academic uses have taken priority. Attempts to secure rental space at two area churches have been unsuccessful.

However, the recent purchase of an additional property and the possibility of a new academic building on campus could make space available for this purpose.

The president said administration appreciates the need for proper day care. "we have been looking for the opportunity to exercise that commitment," he said.

* The president will strike a committee to implement activities this term to address the issues raised by the party raid. Its programming will be offered on a voluntary basis.