

Dawson tries innovative 'New School' approach

-By ANDY DODGE

Dawson College has announced plans for a "New School" it will open next fall, a separate CEGEP program for 180 students on a separate campus of the Westmount-based collegial studies institute.

The "New School" already has a director, Guy Millisor, formerly a professor of humanities at the Selby campus of the college, who describes the program as "innovative, but not experimental."

The school will be run on a "modular" or "molecular" concept, according to Mr. Millisor, with students collected into "bands," groups of 30 students each of which have chosen one "curricular thrust."

The bands would have general areas of study they might wish to investigate, but the actual program, its branches of study and requirements would be decided upon by the students in consultation with their teachers.

'Curricular thrust'

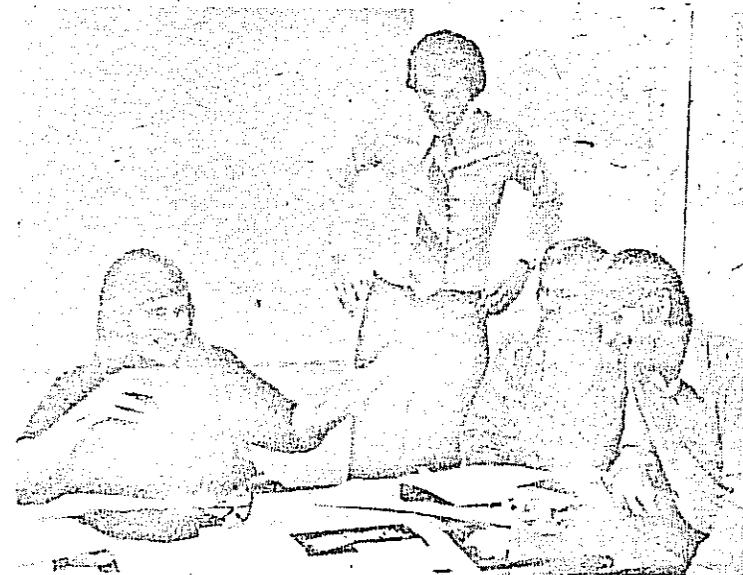
The teachers, hopes Mr. Millisor, would generally be well-rounded, with interests and skills in more than one area. (Perhaps, he suggested, a teacher might have degrees in both math and philosophy.) The "curricular thrust" would be determined by the one full-time staff person assigned to each band; after consultation with the students he would bring in two half-time staff members to add any skills or interests they might be better able to transmit.

The bands, according to Mr. Millisor, would have "an organic relationship with other bands and with the whole school," so that the groups could work together to share their discoveries and share the "community" resources available to them.

"This is not a free, easy, do-as-you-please structure," Mr. Millisor said of the school, which already has received approval from the Quebec government. "It will be much less free than Dawson (the present CEGEP program) is. Nobody is going to do their own thing. We have a responsibility to work with each other."

The theme of the school is "reach in, reach out," signifying the fact that all students will have the responsibility "for the development of the mode in which the learning groups will develop all elements of its life."

Students will be just as much responsible for determining what is taught them as they will be for how much they learn during a



CHARTING A NEW COURSE: New School director Guy Millisor, second from left, sets to work with members of his "shadow cabinet," mostly Dawson College students, planning finer details of the new Dawson program set to begin this fall. Confereres, from left to right, include David Gelinac, Geoff Chambers, 251 Kensington avenue, and Donald MacMillan.

six-credit term. They will, however, be kept under the watchful eye of the "community council," which includes Mr. Millisor, an administrative director, and other school-wide officials. As part of Dawson College, they will also be subject to decisions of the CEGEP's board of governors.

Courageous' step

"It's to Dawson's credit that they took the courage involved in this enormous step," Mr. Millisor said, indicating that he had presented them with a long, intricate document proposing the new program. They approved the proposition and sent it on to the department of education for final approval before word of the program was revealed.

The program in its first year will be somewhat less than Mr. Millisor hopes eventually to have. Structured programs requiring step-by-step processes, such as calculus or biology, are now being studied for implementation in the New School's second year of operation.

In the meantime, the school will restrict itself to less rigid programs in the arts and social sciences, full of "discovery potential" provided through the teacher's expertise, but basically with an "unlimited scope requiring only the creativity of the students."

Certain students might, for example, decide to pursue a piece of provincial legislation, call on teachers with some knowledge of

law, governmental affairs, and the particular area affected by the legislation, and pursue the subject in depth. In this way they would be learning more than the specific parameters of the legislation, including aspects of lobbying, limitations under which legislators must work, and something about the people affected by a government law.

Late starting

One of the most difficult problems Mr. Millisor is facing right now is recruiting students willing to take the program. He is late, since many students already have decided where they intend to go next year.

Schools are frightened by the "New School," he said, and urge their students to follow more conventional modes of education. He expects, however, that many of next year's students will come for the present first-year CEGEP class, from among those disenchanted by the traditional structure and from others willing to throw themselves into a "social contract" situation, where they do much of the work normally assumed by the teaching staff.

Mr. Millisor noted that he wants a "good mix," however, rather than enrolling 180 bold, progressive, dominant students. "We want them to learn how to interact with each other," he said. "They've been kept at the same level all these years. They have to learn that they all think

differently."

In terms of facilities, the New School will be on a completely separate campus from the present Selby and Viger campuses used by Dawson. Several sites are now under consideration, most notably in Notre Dame de Grace and the Town of Mount Royal.

Modular homes'

The building, once purchased, would have "modular homes"—one room apiece—for each band to use as a class-room (they would be able to use the room as they pleased). Beyond this, there would be "community facilities" such as a darkroom, reading room or library, and studio, depending upon the needs of the bands.

Students will receive letter grades at the end of each term, according to government regulations, though the requirements of this grade and of the classes would be up to each band in consultation with the students.

Further information about the program can be obtained in the New School's present offices at 4333 St. Catherine street or at their downtown information centre, 1229 Crescent street. Telephone number for the New School is 861-7970.