Officials decry Weld proposal on grant funds

by Ken Gornstein

A Weld administration proposal to convert tuition scholarships to loans could discourage many students from beginning or continuing their college studies at Northeastern and other independent institutions, university officials warned this week.

Charles Devlin, dean of student financial services, estimated as many as 30 percent of the 3,000 Northeastern students receiving state grants this year might be forced to drop out or seek cheaper educational alternatives if the scholarship program were altered or cancelled. Annual state scholarship awards at Northeastern average $1,600, and go as high as $3,800, Devlin said. "A student may say, 'I got a $2,000 scholarship and I have to have $1,500 of it in loans. I'm going to have to work 20 hours a week to make that work.'"

Neighbors praise NU, hit dorm plan

by Karen Feldscher

Despite growing sentiment in the Fenway neighborhood that Northeastern has made a commitment to the area, the planned dormitory expansion is going over some neighbors' heads. "We're not against a campus," said one. "But let's not build dormitories on the Kenmore Square property.""We've been told that's not going to be used, but we're not sure."

Curry appears ready to reject two-year college

by Mark DiPietro

President John A. Curry is poised to reject a Faculty Senate proposal to expand the Alternative Freshman Year (AFY) program to a two-year college, saying its implementation may reflect poorly on the university's image.

In a February 26 interview, Curry said he instead favors making improvements to the current AFY program, which serves first-year students academically at risk. The program is under the auspices of University College.

"As Northeastern tries to get leaner, meaner, and better, I believe we won't improve the image of the university through a two-year school," Curry said. "Spending money to come up with a new bureaucratic structure is the wrong signal to send."

Because the cost of attending a two-year college at Northeastern would be about $20,000, Curry said parents of at-risk students would be more inclined to send their children to less expensive community colleges.

Civil engineering chair Mishac Yegian will discuss how to rebuild areas devastated by earthquakes at upcoming Klein lecture. Story, page 8.
Earthquakes raise questions of politics as well as engineering

by Jessica Treadway

When a major earthquake hits, leaving death and destruction in its wake, experts and lay people tend to focus on how similar catastrophes might be prevented in the future. There is much less attention paid to restoration of the devastated areas, notes Mishac Yegian, civil engineering department chairman.

An earthquake specialist, Yegian has conducted extensive studies of the damage caused by the Armenian earthquake in December 1988, and he was the only American invited by the Iranian government to help evaluate the effects of the massive earthquake in the northern region of Manjil in June 1990.

“It’s very important for earthquake engineers to understand and appreciate the major problem of reconstruction,” said Yegian. “And it’s not just technological — we need to look at the socioeconomic and political considerations of reconstruction and relocation.”

As a result of his teaching and research in the study of earthquake prediction and analysis, Yegian has been selected as this year’s Robert D. Klein lecturer. Established in 1964, the lectureship is a tribute to the late math professor Robert D. Klein.

Yegian’s lecture, to be held Thursday, Mar. 7 at noon in the Ell Center Ballroom, will be on “Earthquakes and Their Impacts on Society: Implications for Regional and Community Stability and Development.”

Yegian says he feels fortunate to have seen the way two different countries handled major natural disasters, and to compare the effectiveness of their recovery efforts.

Armenia and Iran are located in the same seismotectonic region, and ruptured faults were a major factor in both earthquakes. Armenia’s quake measured 6.9 on the Richter scale; Iran’s was 7.7. Both killed thousands of people, and left thousands more without homes or any semblance of the lives they had led.

The nature of the damage was different in each country — Iran had more property damage, because of soil liquefaction, which caused buildings to sink or collapse. Most of the fatalities — which occurred in hundreds of small villages at night, while people were sleeping — were caused by unreinforced masonry brick structures.

In Armenia, the majority of victims died in a selected few cities, in buildings that collapsed because they were faultily constructed, although Yegian believes that soil conditions were probably also responsible.

Though the Armenia earthquake happened a year and a half before Iran’s, Yegian believes the Iranians have a better plan in effect for recovery. Because the Soviet and Armenian governments have assumed complete responsibility for rebuilding the devastated areas in their region, work has been slowed down by controversy — for instance, whether to relocate cities or rebuild on the same cities — and a lack of resources and workforce.

By contrast, the Iranian government does not hold itself responsible for providing housing for residents, but it has committed to providing the resources — such as grants, bank loans, and employment — for people to rebuild their own homes. The government’s previous experiences in reconstructing war zones has shown Iran’s leaders that the central government cannot fulfill the people’s economic, technical, social, and cultural needs during the reconstruction process, Yegian said.

“The guy who needs the roof over his head senses the urgency more,” he noted. In Armenia, on the other hand, “the people will spend many more winters without houses.”

Most affected Iranians have chosen to rebuild their houses in the same general location as before the earthquake, so it’s important to study the soil’s geologic susceptibility to liquefaction, in order to mitigate damage from future quakes, Yegian said.

“This region has been and will continue to be seismically active,” he noted. But since damage occurred primarily in fragile one- or two-story single family rural structures, rebuilding them with reinforcement should make them more earthquake-resistant.

In Armenia, the relocation question continues to cause controversy and to stall reconstruction. Engineers produced plans to build a new district, called Marmashen, but it means destroying a large chunk of the land-poor country’s best cropland. With a National Science Foundation grant of $106,000, Yegian is conducting field tests to determine the advisability of relocating cities or rebuilding them on the same sites.

The byproduct of his work is not only creating state-of-the-art disaster management, but also learning to mitigate seismic hazards in the United States, Yegian said.

“I was asked, if there were an earthquake in Boston and 40 or 60 buildings were destroyed, would we know what to do?” he said. “There is nothing in place, like a step-by-step plan, for a major disaster like this.

“We’re learning, through the Armenian and Iranian earthquakes, that reconstruction takes re-evaluation; that we should retrofit our buildings to make sure they are safer,” he said.

And, he stresses, urban planners should consult engineers before deciding what course to take. “In Armenia, when they predicted rebuilding in two years, they didn’t talk to engineers,” he said. “They didn’t ask us, is it possible to do that? Because we would have said no. It’s incumbent on us, as engineers, to understand the main aspects of reconstruction, and be prepared to participate.”