

EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

BECAUSE OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON HIGHER EDUCATION



THE COURAGE TO PUSH PAST BARRIERS

A YOUNG MAN OVERCOMES OBSTACLES
TO SUCCEED & FOSTER CHANGE AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY

THE SECOND YEAR DITCH

GETTING IN & GETTING THROUGH:
THE CHALLENGE OF RETENTION AT ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES

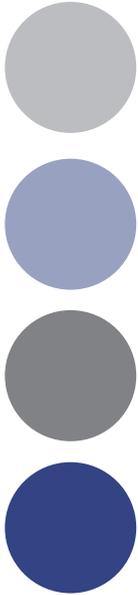
MO' MONEY, MO' PROBLEMS

TUITION, FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE & THE COST OF EDUCATION

PLUS

THE FUTURE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IN CANADA • FREE UNIVERSITY ART EXHIBIT
TALKING STRAIGHT ABOUT TUITION DEREGULATION • TARGETING ACCESS AT AN EARLY AGE

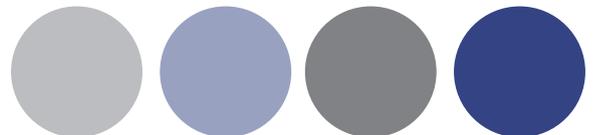
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BY ADAM SPENCE



EDITOR'S MESSAGE



ADRIENNE WATT

Welcome to the second issue of EDUCATED SOLUTIONS, a magazine that recognizes and explores the unique challenges and opportunities facing Ontario's post-secondary students.

EDUCATED SOLUTIONS is designed to provoke thought and promote insightful debate on the issues that affect the quality and accessibility of higher education. The concerns of our province's undergraduates are addressed through their own investigative journalism as seen in the feature articles and also through the perspective articles written by post-secondary stakeholders.

The feature articles in this issue discuss the importance of a well-rounded, high-quality educational experience for all students, from barrier free education for disabled students to the debate around student retention to investigating the current student financial aid system.

The perspective articles present expert opinions on a wide-range of issues related to higher learning, including teaching quality, student financial aid, shaping the future of post-secondary education in Canada and the deregulation debate.

Our future depends on higher education and I hope that the educated solutions presented in this magazine will encourage a healthy debate.

Adrienne Watt
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EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

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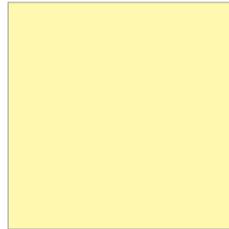


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DR. KENNETH BARTLETT

In recent years there has been a growing perception that Canadian universities favour research over undergraduate teaching. This is especially true of those large institutions like the University of Toronto which aggressively define themselves as “research based” or “research intensive.” Since the 1990s this belief has been promulgated in official reports and reinforced strongly in the popular press, most recently the Robert Fulford contribution to the *National Post*; and evidence can always be discovered to prove that matters of appointment, promotion and tenure are driven by the weight of publication with only a perfunctory glance at classroom performance. However, we must ask what degree of truth exists in this apparent article of faith in which research invariably triumphs over teaching. And, is this division between teaching and research a false opposition, a specious principle of mutual exclusion separating the pedagogically challenged from the publication deprived?

In the first place, I seriously question the notion that our university undervalues teaching. The delivery of the undergraduate curriculum in particular is an important element in every division’s mandate. Teaching awards are celebrated annually, promotion through the ranks (PTR) includes a substantial measure for teaching success, classroom and supervisory skills are important elements in tenure and promotion decisions and many departments and divisions require undergraduate lectures and research seminars of candidates for appointments. Also, a great many divisions have established committees or offices or identified individuals charged with working with their colleagues to improve the quality of the educational experience of our students. And, of course, there is the recent evidence of the establishment of the Office of Teaching Advancement (OTA) to work with chairs, deans and directors to ensure that good teaching is not only required of our faculty but that it is appropriately recognized and celebrated. Indeed, what has struck me most since accepting the position of Director of the OTA earlier this year is the depth of commitment to teaching excellence across the university and the dedication of those of our colleagues who have been so active in their desire to work within their divisions to reinforce the value of teaching and improve its quality.

A HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE EXPLORING THE RESEARCH-TEACHING CONTINUUM

It is, of course, easier to assess publications for promotion and tenure; but teaching plays a vital role in both decisions and can be used as the principal factor in a candidate’s dossier. If excellence in one aspect of our collective professional life is required during these critical moments of election, competence at least is necessary in the other: and evidence must be advanced as proof. The generally held belief that only material in print, weighed in volume, cumulatively paginated and overwhelmed by scholarly apparatus results in success at this University (the University of Toronto) is another of those persistent urban myths. We do value teaching, and this value is increasingly recognized and advertised, even if it is not always acknowledged within or without the academy. Too frequently the committed or gifted teacher has laboured quietly and invisibly, identified only during awards ceremonies or in the recognition provided by their fortunate students. It is perhaps time to develop a culture of teaching in the University of Toronto parallel to the culture of research.

So far, I have only witnessed the positive role assigned to teaching excellence. What is in some ways more significant is to challenge the very idea that there is some kind of divide between teaching and research, and to suggest that there is, rather, a continuum in which classroom performance reflects the hours in the library, archive or laboratory. Teaching, in this analysis, becomes a function of research and research of teaching. The enthusiasm which drove us to enter this profession initially remains the engine which carries us along day after day both in front of our students and in front of our peers.

To prepare a timely, coherent and worthwhile undergraduate lecture or seminar requires precisely the same qualities of mind and effort as preparing original work for publication. The degree of energy is comparable, the method often similar and the satisfaction equal. The discoveries generated by original scholarship become vehicles for instilling in students the same excitement which led the professor to undertake an academic life and showing through example to those members of the class who are there to learn that knowledge is infinitely expandable and worthy of pursuit - and a pleasure in itself, indeed fun. The survival of a sense of discovery is essential to the

exceptional teacher and the desire to share the excitement attendant on discovery is the desire to teach. In our scholarly publications we do exactly this, only to an audience of our peers and clothed in the austere language of probable truth or the aggressive rhetoric of hypothesis. The function is the same when we stand before a class. The audience is different; we alter our style, but the process and the purpose are the same. I mean that we provide models of method, technique, analysis and study when we lecture or conduct seminars; in our classes we lay bare the process that informs our investigation of our subject.

Original research is filtered through our classes and extended to those who in the future will eventually transmit their knowledge to others; and that next generation of teacher-scholars will be built, in part, upon the classroom experience of their first year introductory lectures.

Knowledge is ever expanding and cumulative, and spreading that knowledge through teaching is just as important a mechanism as publication. Most of us have taught students in a first year course who are now preparing a Ph.D. theses in our disciplines. Long ago sparked in a first year course through effective instruction, this student’s subsequent independent research will result in the production of new information which will eventually see print and contribute to the received body of scholarship in our mutual field of studies. This is how the teaching/research continuum operates.

I am not saying that all great teachers are necessarily great scholars or that all gifted researchers are equally skilled instructors. Moreover, some very, very few of our colleagues are neither. Tenure does not protect against failure or cynicism; nor does it hasten it. We all can think of outstanding exceptions to my argument. However, taken in the broadest sense, I believe my contention to be true.

Our university does recognize and value teaching; and most active scholars are committed teachers and teachers make superior scholars, not because the reward system mandates this celestial union but because the celebrated teachers and researchers are the same people merely exercising different manifestations of the same gift.

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ADDRESSING THE INTELLECTUAL HEALTH OF OUR NATION

A PRESCRIPTION FOR A NATIONAL LEARNING & INNOVATION ACT



DR. DAVID JOHNSTON

We all realize the importance of our physical fitness. We value and understand the importance of keeping and staying healthy. Similarly, we value and understand the importance of education and knowledge. But how are we addressing the intellectual health of our nation?

Just as we have the Canada Health Act to protect and enhance the physical well-being of Canadians across the country, so we need a national framework to ensure the well-being of the nation's talent.

That is why I have proposed the Canada Learning and Innovation Act. We must invest in research and development at levels comparable to the best in the world. We must also ensure breadth and depth of learning opportunities that are, again, comparable to the best anywhere.

This act is based on a vision of investment in people, ideas and then applications. The Canada Learning and Innovation Act will establish a framework for a smart nation, encourage innovation, and empower people to use their talent most effectively. Our intellectual health as a nation must be a priority of the new government and of all members of Parliament.

There are three very good reasons for such an act: first, it's a matter of rights. The opportunity to grow intellectually to the limit of one's own capability, and to develop the skills to engage in productive work, is the right of every Canadian. Second, one

The opportunity to grow intellectually to the limit of one's own capability, and to develop the skills to engage in productive work, is the right of every Canadian.

of the best ways to build a civil and prosperous society is to create a citizenry that embraces lifelong learning and innovation. Third, the best way to create new knowledge and its innovative application is to engage every Canadian in its pursuit.

The Canada Learning and Innovation Act will make appropriate learning oppor-

tunities available to Canadians of all ages, no matter where in the country they live. At the same time, it will meet the highest world standards of learning and innovation, and will ensure that those standards never become a place to stop — that the quality of Canadian education continually improves.

One objective of the act will be to ensure that people can afford an education. Rich opportunities and high standards are useless if people can't access them. Recognizing that different people learn best in different ways, the act will emphasize

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innovative techniques for helping individuals learn to the best of their capacities. A primary role of the government of Canada in this bold initiative will be to harmonize the learning and innovation opportunities across Canada and to co-ordinate the efforts of all levels of government, ensuring that the investment is as effective as possible.

If such a program is to succeed, it must be accountable. The act will craft principles to measure and enhance efficiency and effectiveness of investment in learning and innovation to benchmark against the best in the world. Our system's benchmarks must stand with those of the world's leading countries.

The act will recognize the social and economic importance of investing in knowledge and in well-educated, highly skilled people by establishing investment goals.

The act will set up ways of measuring

and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of our investment to ensure the best return. These goals should include:

- Secondary school graduation achievement for at least 75 per cent of Canada's youth and tracked programs to age 21 for the remaining 25 per cent; and
- Trade certification, college diploma, undergraduate and graduate degrees to specific age and percentage targets.

One of the best ways to enhance our educational achievements is to share them with everyone in the world. To do this, we will have to ensure that Canada's immigration and visa policies attract talented people from elsewhere, whether they come as visitors, decide to stay as citizens, or return to make a contribution in their own countries.

It's impossible to overstate the importance of learning and innovation. A well-governed democracy depends on a well-informed citizenry.

And a well-informed citizenry depends on an educational and research system that makes the most of their creativity, energy and intelligence.

We're blessed with a wealth of minerals, timber and fresh water, but our true wealth is in talent — the capacity of Canadians to

We're blessed with a wealth of minerals, timber and fresh water, but our true wealth is in talent — the capacity of Canadians to think creatively and effectively.

think creatively and effectively. Canada's richest resource is brainpower, but we will never make the best use of that resource unless we support it with all our strength at the national as well as the provincial level. With the Canada Learning and Innovation Act, we will express a firm commitment to those goals.



DUNCAN WOJTASZEK

HIGHER EDUCATION IS SO HOT RIGHT NOW TAKE ADVANTAGE BEFORE IT ENDS UP ON *THE SURREAL LIFE*

Everybody wants to be sexy once in awhile.

Metaphorically speaking, the issue of post-secondary education is no different. Having spent a couple of decades being the unattractive wallflower that no government wanted to dance with, post-secondary education was in decline.

No one talked about ignoring it completely, but the past two decades have seen an erosion of funding per student, a drastic increase in tuition and a virtual lack of innovation, save for how to cut costs while maintaining the appearance of providing a reasonable education.

Times have changed. Canada's universities and colleges have gone from ugly duckling to the hot issue of the day; one which governments believe will make or break their legacies.

Students and university administrators will both say it is about time. After years of neglect, the politicians are finally listening to calls for investment and the public has begun talking about issues like student debt,

From the perspective of students, the desired changes seem simple – lower the costs, lower the debt and increase the quality of the education. However, of the current changes being proposed, none will actually achieve those outcomes, while a couple serve to exacerbate the problems even further.

Loan reform that fails to address the growing amount of student debt coupled with continuing the trend towards higher tuition, for example, will not make it any more affordable to go to university. Instead it will serve to accelerate the trend towards passing the costs of education on to students.

The changes in store for post-secondary education should not be feared though, as a refocused look at Canada's post-secondary system is clearly not something to be afraid of. It is something entirely different. It is an opportunity.

Through constant jurisdictional debates and penny-pinching manoeuvres in the past, the concept that any place in Canada

Neither statement is remotely true. The place of organizations like the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is far from guaranteed at the table but with hard work and a strong commitment to making the system better, their role in the conversation will be invaluable and certainly the student voice will be heard.

Professional representation, enthusiastic advocacy and a keen sense of where the post-secondary system needs attention are the keys to success in the world of student leadership.

Without that the changes to our system will certainly be without effective consultation and may well end up being the wrong changes in a competitive world.

However, passion and commitment are not lacking in the world of student leadership, and that is not where the heavy lifting will have to come from. The wave of student apathy and indifference to the world of politics and public policy will have to come to an end to truly seize the opportunity available to the post-secondary sys-

Everybody wants to be sexy once in awhile.
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poor funding and the need for change.

The atmosphere of change is everywhere – both provincially and federally. Both levels of government are talking about changes that will have direct effects on students both in the long and short term.

From the recent post-secondary review, led by former premier Bob Rae in Ontario to the post-secondary education review going on in Alberta, Canadians are talking about change in our universities and colleges.

Of course, not all change is good. In the world of public policy where in the short-term government dollars is a zero-sum game with winners and losers, it is easy to guarantee that some will walk away facing changes that put them worse off when compared with where they were when the conversation began.

would have the best universities and colleges would have been laughable in the past.

Today is different, but students need to make sure that the concept of best includes the issues that face the students of today and of tomorrow.

Cost, quality and access should be the key tenets of change, and students need to make sure that those tenets are a part of any national or provincial discourse on the subject.

Taking advantage of this opportunity will require organized and effective advocacy and representation.

Post-secondary students may take for granted the role that an organized student movement has on influencing a discourse or more likely, many students may assume that their leadership is ineffectual, or worse, irrelevant.

tem.

The changes that are coming will inevitably affect every student in Ontario and beyond, and will rely heavily on those who are engaged and informed. The challenge to all university students is to decide to be a part of that group.

Make no mistake right now post-secondary education is sexy and it is the place we have the opportunity to lead and excel in, on a global scale.

By addressing post-secondary education and focusing on the community that needs these changes we are representing our future.

Now is the time to ensure that student issues drive the changes that are coming. Simply put, post-secondary education should have a student face when it is asked to dance.

KEEPING EDUCATION IN THE “QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION”



ERIKA KUSTRA

Striving for quality in higher education is something exceptionally important both to me personally, and to the growing number of students engaged in higher education.

When I was a student I had the experience, of learning because of, and learning in spite of my university courses. Once I started teaching, I wanted to do everything I could to encourage learning. There are many competing definitions of quality, but to me a quality education is one that is transformative. Changes should take place not only in content knowledge, but also in skills and attitudes, with opportunities to take risks and make mistakes.

Changes should take place not only in... knowledge, but also in skills and attitudes...

Quality is increasingly a topic of discussion. Tuition has increased and private funding has increased as governmental funding has been unable to meet the growing needs of universities with rising student populations. Additionally, there is a change in the perceptions of the role for higher education, moving from a social institution to something closer to an industry or corporation. Pressure to demonstrate accountability has increased, and external bodies, like Maclean's magazine, have begun to publish their own measures of quality.

'Quality assurance', 'quality assessment' and 'accountability' are all gaining more and more attention in articles, conferences and discussions on higher education policy.

Yet, as I listen to these discussions, it seems at times that 'education' is being forgotten. Instead, other characteristics of institutions are being measured, including the amount of research funding, numbers of articles published, size of student population and even the quality of sports facilities. While these things are important, it is critical that the discussion of education is not buried in the process.

Quality assurance is not a new concept, or even unique to Canada. In Europe, the 1999 Bologna Agreement to align higher education in the European community has placed quality assurance as one of its pri-

orities. The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have been focussed on these issues for many years.

In Europe, countries including Hungary and Germany have had External Quality Audits for several years. The government plays a strong role in setting the policy and the procedures. We can learn a great deal from examining these other countries for insight into models that work and those that do not.

In the United Kingdom, one strong cautionary note has been the money and time expenses involved in external quality assessment. Some estimates in England suggest costs of more than 120 million pounds for data returns, inspection and administration.

At times, regulation has the potential to divert attention towards checking boxes on a bureaucratic list, rather than engaging in real changes that will improve learning, according to a January 2006 article published in Perspectives, Policy and Practice in Higher Education entitled, 21st century universities- less regulated but more accountable.

Furthermore, according to a 2005 paper published in Quality in Higher Education, entitled, Is it possible? Investigating the influence of external quality audit on university performance, the actual impact of external audits has been difficult to measure.

Quality assessment can serve many purposes, including comparing universities or accounting for funding. However, it seems to me that the most important purpose is to help institutions continually improve. The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE), led by President Julia Christensen Hughes, has the improvement of teaching and learning as its primary interest. One method of increasing attention on education has been the development of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

"A type of scholarship in which faculty study the impact of their own teaching practice on student learning, respond to the results, and disseminate their findings," said Christensen Hughes.

The STLHE is currently exploring strategies for bringing increased support and profile to this important activity.

Members of the STLHE have also been involved in discussions with the gov-

ernment and other groups to develop appropriate methods for assessing quality on a national level. The scholarship of teaching and learning can help inform the assessment of quality. In a Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. research report published in 2005 entitled, Measuring the quality of post-secondary education: concepts, current practices and a strategic plan, Ross Finnie and Alex Usher summarize the current state of quality assessment in Canada, and establish a framework for further examination of the factors that play a role.

One of the critical issues is the use of measures that make sense. We need to make sure that we are measuring the important factors that actually affect learning, rather than the factors that are easy to measure. For example, class size is a simple number to find and it has a heavy weight in some of the measures of quality.

However, I have seen a small class of five students taught with a monotone lecture, and a large class engaged in debate and discussion. While it is easier to engage students in smaller classes, the actual size of a class is less important than the way the class is taught.

Recently, an American survey, called the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), has been run in Canada. This survey is an example of a measure based on the literature, targeting the aspects of a learning environment most likely to engage students. While this survey is not perfect, and does not measure actual outcomes in

The...purpose for quality assessment is to help institutions continually improve.

learning, it does measure factors that are associated with improved learning. Future measures need to be similarly based on the research literature and studied for their effectiveness, a form of scholarship.

The most important purpose for quality assessment is to help institutions continually improve. It is up to students, instructors and interested groups like the STLHE to make sure that learning and 'education' do not become a footnote in the discussions of "Quality of Higher Education." 



JANET ECKER & NORMAN RIDDELL

GET THEM WHEN THEY'RE YOUNG

MAKING ACCESS AN ISSUE BEFORE STUDENTS APPLY

Few studies have had such an immediate impact on government policy as Bob Rae's report on Ontario's post-secondary education system. Tabled one year ago, the report prompted a significant reinvestment of government funds, including an expansion of student financial assistance for those not able to pay for college or university studies on their own.

Increased funding alone, however, will not go far enough in making access to post-secondary education in Ontario more equitable. Beyond the issue of funding, Rae's

Increased funding alone...will not go far enough in making access to post-secondary education in Ontario more equitable.

report sought to draw attention to the need to better prepare students for college or university. This dimension of the report has yet to attract the attention it deserves.

Two recent studies of applicants to Ontario colleges and universities published by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation highlight the extent of the challenge. They show that too many young Ontarians – and in particular those who need the most help to pay for their studies – are entering post-secondary education with no money in the bank, with little prospect of financial support from their families, and with little knowledge of the costs they will face or the types of financial assistance available.

First, the studies illustrate the financial barriers faced by students from low-income families. High-income parents are twice as likely to have saved money for their child's college education as are their low-income counterparts. Seven out of ten low-income college students and 40 per cent of low-income university students are starting their studies with no savings set aside for their education. It is no surprise that more than two-thirds of low-income students are very concerned about not having enough money to complete their studies.

In order to help them overcome these financial disadvantages, students from low-income families need information and sup-

port to prepare for life after high school. Unfortunately, the very students most in need of this support are the least likely to get it. High-income parents are twice as likely as their low-income counterparts to help their children plan the financing of college or university studies. Among those who do get planning help from their parents, those from high-income families get it at a much younger age.

The information gap runs even deeper. Overall, only one in ten applicants to the province's colleges and universities consider themselves to be well-informed about government student loan and grant programs. Among college applicants planning on taking out student loans, more than half have little or no knowledge of how the complex system of federal and provincial loans programs actually work; the same is true of roughly four in ten university-bound students who intend to borrow.

These students want to be better informed. Nearly six out of ten incoming students from families earning less than \$50,000 a year (those who could benefit the most from public student aid) would like to know more about the cost of higher education and how to pay for it.

The fact that these low-income students have had less support and information to help them plan for their education serves to compound the financial barriers they face. Access to college or university for these low-income students becomes that much more difficult.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that we have an access problem.

Youth from upper-income families are twice as likely to attend university as those from lower-income families.

Youth from upper-income families are twice as likely to attend university as those from lower-income families. While access to college is more equitable, students from low-income families remain under-represented across the post-secondary system as a whole.

This at a time when post-secondary credentials are increasingly important to success in the labour market, and when the earnings gap between those with and without a post-secondary degree is widening.

So where do we turn? More financial assistance for students who need it is important. Indeed, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the Ontario government and the federal government each recently introduced access grants to help students from low-income families pay for their early years of post-secondary studies.

We must ensure that young people in this province are well prepared for post-secondary education...

This increased funding is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the closing of the access gap.

In his report, Rae wrote that “participation and success in post-secondary education are not the result of what happens in the first year of university or college, or the last year of high school.”

The desire and ability to pursue post-secondary studies are shaped by events that unfold much earlier in a student's life. The expectations and encouragement of parents and teachers, academic performance, good information about career choices and the actual costs and benefits of a university or college degree, each have an impact at a relatively early age.

We must ensure that young people in this province are well prepared for post-secondary education long before they graduate from high school. Students need financial and academic support, but they also need to understand the costs, benefits and sources of financial support available to them.

This crucial dimension of the access question, to which Rae tried to draw attention, is in danger of being overlooked, to the great detriment of the province's students and its future prosperity.

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BEYOND THE MILLENNIUM: THE FUTURE OF STUDENT FINANCE IN CANADA



KIM STEELE

Earlier this year, Canadians went to the polls and elected a new government, and with new governments come new ideas. In casting their votes on January 23, 2006 Canadian voters clearly sent a message of change to Ottawa, albeit a somewhat weak one. However, what was glaringly missing from the platforms and platitudes of our political contenders were any serious discussions, legitimate or attempted, surrounding the much-needed policy changes to guide and shape the future of post-secondary education in our nation.

The leaders' silence on post-secondary issues, particularly around issues of student financial assistance, was particularly puzzling, and should cause concern not only to post-secondary stakeholders, but to "average" Canadians as well. The post-secondary discussion - the discussion that didn't happen during the election - has serious implications for our country's people and prosperity. Indeed, given the state of Canada's student financial aid system, it is a discussion that must take place sooner rather than later.

student loans; whereas at present, almost a quarter of those loans have been replaced with grants.

Approximately \$ 2.9 billion of the \$3.8 billion came from the federal government, with the largest portion being delivered through education-related incentives in the tax system and the Canada Student Loans Program. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF), an independent foundation established by the federal government, dispersed almost \$294 million in grants to approximately 95,000 students across the country. The CMSF is the single-largest distributor of grants in the country and deserves some attention here. When the CMSF was introduced in 1999, it caused some ripples in the already complex system of student financial assistance in Canada. The implementation process of the CMSF's need-based grants system was not as seamless as some would have hoped. While students in most jurisdictions began to feel some real benefits of the Millennium Bursaries almost immediately, students in two jurisdictions - Ontario and Nova

with grants, thereby reducing the number of students who are eligible for remission and, therefore, the number of remission cheques the provincial governments have to sign.

The implementation of the CMSF is perhaps the best example of one of the major drawbacks of the Canadian system of student financial aid: much like health-care, it has suffered at the hands of jurisdictional bickering around issues of ownership and half-hearted attempts at collaboration. While the introduction of the CMSF helped draw attention to this, the Foundation itself also worked hard throughout the years to create a national, cooperative system of grants tailored to the needs of students in each jurisdiction and that ensures that the money set aside for student financing actually finds its way into the hands of students. This can't be said of measures like tax credits and cash transfers to the provinces.

It's a shame, then, that this system of grants - and likely the cooperative approach to student finance in this country with it - is slated to come to an end in just

The post-secondary discussion...has serious implications for our country's people and prosperity.

It is important to give credit where credit is due: all of the major parties did outline their plans for post-secondary in their platforms, but few actually addressed in detail the social implications of their plans. Some of the proposed ideas included universal tuition subsidies, increased transfer payments to provinces, an improved system of grants for low-income students, students pursuing apprenticeship programs and improvements to what some might argue is an already too generous system of educational-tax credits. All of these proposed measures were attempts to improve the affordability of post-secondary education, with a particular emphasis on the student finance front. What was missing, however, was a discussion on how these measures, both new and old, will work together in years to come and, in many ways, how they won't.

In 2003/04, Canadian governments collectively spent over \$3.8 billion annually on student financial assistance. This is down from an all-time high in 1996/97, a year in which students received just under \$4.5 billion in need-based assistance. However, almost all of the funding provided at that time was delivered in the form of

Scotia - did not.

Other jurisdictions used the Millennium funds to replace loans with grants or to increase overall student assistance limits, whereas Ontario and Nova Scotia decided instead to use the funds to eliminate debt-reducing provincial programs altogether. Students who received Millennium Bursary cheques also saw their provincial debt-reduction grants disappear, leaving students no better off. In fact, because bursary money is classified as taxable income, many students were actually worse off financially after being awarded a Millennium Bursary.

Fortunately, both of these governments have since re-invested in new student finance programs. And, it is safe to say, I think, that students in both of these jurisdictions have, for some time, benefited from the CMSF dollars they've received over the years by receiving more cash-in-hand grant assistance rather than cash-in-hand loan assistance.

Certainly the provincial governments have benefited. The Millennium Bursary funds put many students under the provincial loan debt remission level in each jurisdiction (\$5100 annually in Nova Scotia, \$7,000 in Ontario) by replacing loans

over three years. Created with a ten year life-span, the Foundation will cut its final cheques to students in 2009. Our provincial leaders are acutely aware that the end of the Foundation will cause a gaping hole of \$300 million annually in the student finance system, a hole which, to this point, no level of government has promised to fill.

In the summer of 2005, in a somewhat unparalleled move, the Council of the Federation called on the federal government to begin discussions on creating a national framework for post-secondary education. Although the federal government has yet to meet this request, they should formally respond sooner rather than later as the provinces absolutely need to know what their intentions are. With the Millennium money drying up in just three short years, both levels of governments should look to develop a joint plan on how to fund student finance in this country.

If they do wait for the money to run out before they implement a plan, it would be safe to say that students in most jurisdictions would see their loans rise significantly leaving a bleak looking future for student financial aid and, more than likely, the students who use it. 



PAT WELSH

LET'S TALK ABOUT WHAT DEREGULATION REALLY MEANS

Make no mistake, I am opposed to deregulation. The Queen's University Alma Mater Society (AMS) is also opposed to deregulation—in fact, they are constitutionally mandated to oppose deregulation.

Despite the existence of the regulation/deregulation debate for the last ten years, despite the time bought for all to assess the current academic landscape through the tuition freeze (due to expire this September), and despite the presence of deregulated faculties prior to the freeze on our own campus, there continues to be a profound and fundamental oversimplification of the tuition quandary.

"I am opposed to deregulation" has become a phrase drilled into the minds of students to the point where it is a Pavlovian reflex. It is the mantra of almost all students at this campus, and for good reason: no one wants to see an increase in tuition.

The fundamental problem is that other stakeholders, such as the University administration and the Ontario government, have tuned out the knee-jerk tendency of students to revert to the standard party line. Just opposing deregulation has become a cliché. It is neither radical nor revolutionary, it's par for the course.

The majority of students, who are well-intentioned and intelligent, should not be blamed for buying into the simplistic binary of deregulation/regulation.

Rather, blame should be placed on the unscrupulous few who have condensed a highly nuanced concept into a sound bite. Student politicians and students at large share an equal membership in this clique, and it is up to the rest of the well-inten-

tioned and intelligent students to crack it.

There are several myths that easily fit into the purist anti-deregulation stance. The first myth is regulated tuition is infallible.

When asked to choose between a deregulated faculty and a regulated faculty, students predictably select the latter. This choice, however, ignores the notion that a "regulated" tuition framework would lead to significant increases in their tuition over

the four years of an undergraduate career. Let's conservatively choose a six per cent increase of tuition. If your tuition was \$4,000 in your first year, by fourth year you would have paid a total of \$1,498.46 more over four years than if your tuition had been frozen.

In other words, an unreasonably "regulated" tuition framework could hardly be claimed as a student victory.

Another myth is that Principal Hitchcock holds the keys to deregulation. Until the official post-freeze framework is announced, the only person who can open

"I am opposed to deregulation" has become a phrase drilled into the minds of students to the point where it is a Pavlovian reflex.

the tuition floodgates is Ontario's Premier,

Dalton McGuinty by way of Queen's Park. Principal Hitchcock is lobbying for "locally-set tuition" (which is in some ways just another term for deregulation), just as the AMS and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) are lobbying against deregulation, as well as for a tuition cap, a robust government investment in financial aid and much more government

increasingly globalized context, the quality of one's training matters far more than the cost of the delivery of that training—provided that it is accessible.

We have been quick to label the concept of "locally-set tuition" as a euphemism for deregulation, but I believe that there is more. This semantic shift is a subtle adjustment in the attack strategy of the administration.

Rather than reverting to the tired question of deregulation, Queen's is making a case to the Ontario government that the administration should be able to set tuition locally because they best know the conditions that are affecting this university.

This is an appealing notion to the government. Rather than costing the taxpayers billions of dollars and issuing centrally planned decrees from the politburo in Toronto, universities would be allowed to adjust their tuition levels according to their strategic plans and market forces.

For students, this would be disastrous. A Statistics Canada report released Sept. 27, 2005 found that sudden and significant increases in tuition harms both lower-class and middle-class accessibility.

But our response is only a predictable and ineffective statement that proclaims—yes, you guessed it—"we oppose deregulation, period."

Deregulation is a buzzword. In the midst of this current campaign season it is all too easy to proclaim "We oppose deregulation." Well done—give yourselves a pat on the back. You're brilliant.

In reality, general statements about opposing deregulation are insufficient, and to

A Statistics Canada report released Sept. 27, 2005 found that sudden and significant increases in tuition harms both lower-class and middle-class accessibility.

drag the student discourse back to the simplistic dichotomy of regulation/deregulation is a disservice.

We must move forward and begin discussing the real issues, such as preserving access while maintaining—or in my opinion, markedly improving—quality. Stop huffing and start talking, because September 2006 is only months away.

Reprinted courtesy the Queen's Journal. ■



THE COURAGE TO PUSH PAST BARRIERS

BY JESSICA ROSE

PHOTO BY BEN C.

AS A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY, GROWING up in Columbia, Edgar Chacòn was expected to have two choices: he could panhandle, or he could accept financial support from his family for the rest of his life.

But Chacòn had larger plans.

He was born three months premature and with cerebral palsy, confining him to a wheelchair. From a young age he knew he wanted to pursue an education. First, he studied film in Cuba for one year, and in 1998, Chacòn moved to Canada to learn English and French, for what he thought would be six months. Eight years later, he is studying film at Carleton University, where people with disabilities are given a chance, he says.

“I was raised in a culture in which being disabled was very rare, and being an active disabled person who went to school and looked for a future wasn’t something that was common. I was the odd-man out in every single situation,” he says, recalling that he was the only physically disabled student in his primary school of 3,000 students.

“When I came to Canada I realized that the world for disabled people was a lot bigger than I was taught or used to. I realized that for the first time in my life I wasn’t the only one trying to struggle to get ahead,” he

says.

Chacòn smiles as he recalls the realization that for the first time in his life people didn’t look at him with confusion or reveal ignorance because he was in a wheelchair.

“For the first time society actually offered me choices. This opened my eyes to a very different world.” Since he began his studies at Carleton in 1998, Chacòn has been elected to student government, made considerable changes as a volunteer at the Carleton Disability Awareness Centre (CDAC), and won a few awards in the process, including CDAC’s volunteer of the year, and the John Burton Award, an annual award presented to a student who is dedicated to disability awareness.

Canadian universities offer disabled students independence and the opportunity to be an active part of the campus community, but Chacòn says there is definite need for improvement.

Approximately 10 per cent of students enrolled in post-secondary education have a form of a physical or learning disability, according to the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), making it crucial that there are no barriers stopping potential students from enrolling.

Barrier-free education that ensures ac-

commodation for all students can be complicated, says Larry McCloskey, director of Carleton’s Paul Menton Centre, which offers a wide-range of services to students, including exam accommodations and preparation, access to adaptive technology, and academic coaching.

“It used to be about ramps and doorways, but there are bigger issues,” says McCloskey. “A lot of barriers have to do with policies and attitudes.”

Concerns surrounding post-secondary education for disabled students include physical accessibility, stereotyping, lack of awareness, as well as funding concerns on a university and governmental level.

Across Ontario, student groups and university centres are working hard to remove these barriers. As a volunteer at CDAC, Chacòn has dedicated years to changing the attitudes of his peers, who may not realize the problems disabled students may face.

“A lot of people don’t know how to approach somebody in a wheelchair,” says Chacòn. While working with CDAC, he tried to change this attitude, and promote the centre as an accepting place for all students.

“It’s not the centre for people in wheelchairs,” he says of the reputation that most campus disability groups have. “It’s the

centre for any disabled person or any student that wants to learn about a disability, or just learned they have a friend who got in a car accident and they don't know how to help them."

To bridge the gap that he often sees between students, Chacòn and CDAC created the Wheelchair Challenge, where they lend wheelchairs to non-disabled students.

"We told them for the day, or the week, you have to learn how to get around campus in a wheelchair," he says, explaining the unique experiment. After navigating campus many students couldn't believe how difficult it was to do the simplest tasks, like balancing their books and coffee at the same time.

"Everyone has unique needs," says Frank Smith, national coordinator of NEADS. This is why university sanctioned support services like the Paul Menton Centre, and student run organizations like CDAC are crucial.

"Centres accommodate students according to their individualized requirements," says Smith. "They give a one-on-one approach to ensure students have support." He says it is crucial for students and faculty, as well as government policy, to ensure they do not generalize the needs of the disabled community.

Chacòn says that university administration is not always inviting to disabled students, planning many events that are not accessible, expecting the university centres to step in and "take care of them."

"I'm not a they, I'm not a them, I'm me," says Chacòn. "I'm not a group, I'm not a category, I'm not a mass group of people."

"I'm not a they, I'm not a them, I'm me," says Chacòn. "I'm not a group, I'm not a category, I'm not a mass group of people. The fact that I'm in a wheelchair doesn't mean I'm exactly the same as the next person in a wheelchair."

The fact that I'm in a wheelchair doesn't mean I'm exactly the same as the next person in a wheelchair. I hate being categorized. Unfortunately administration still looks at the general disabled population as such."

In the past few years, especially since the double cohort, university support services have been growing, requiring them to hire additional staff.

Accessibility Services (AS) at the University of Toronto's St. George campus has experienced "unprecedented growth," according to their 2004/05 annual report.

In 2004/05, AS registered 1333 students, a 16 per cent increase from the year before. This followed a steady increase through the past few years. In 2002/03, AS reported a 27 per cent increase in registered students, which was followed by 10 per cent growth in 2003/04.

While learning disabilities seem to be hidden, they do affect many post-secondary students in Ontario, and they need to be accommodated.

Carleton's Paul Menton Centre has experienced similar growth, projecting that it will soon have 1200 registered students. The major shift says McCloskey, is that more students with learning disabilities are entering university and using these services.

"A lot of it has to do with changes in the Education Act," he says, where learning disabilities are now more effectively recognized in youth during their elementary and secondary school years, giving them more opportunity to become successful and advance to post-secondary education.

While learning disabilities seem to be hidden, they do affect many post-secondary students in Ontario, and they need to be accommodated.

"Often students with learning disabilities require extra time to complete an assignment," says Smith.

McCloskey worries that some students with psychiatric and learning disabilities may be denied accommodation by peers, faculty and administration because they do not physically look disabled.

"People make assumptions on what you appear to be," he says, ensuring that the Paul Menton Centre and similar services across the province are dedicated to providing the documentation and support necessary so these students do not fall behind. In 2004/05, students registered with AS's Learning Disability Unit increased by 11 per cent.

Most campus service centres are exter-

Edgar Chacòn expected to have few opportunities growing up in Columbia. Through various twists of fate, he ended up studying at Carleton University, volunteering at the Carleton Disability Awareness Centre and becoming Vice-President of the campus student union.



PHOTO BY JESSICA ROSE

nally funded. Since education falls under the provincial government's jurisdiction, many students and services are relying heavily on its funding.

"That funding needs to trickle down to support students and services," says Smith. Without this support, thousands of disabled students may be denied access to university, simply because they cannot cover the costs. Many disabled students must incur financial

accessibility. These have included wheelchair basketball, movie nights and discussion groups to encourage more interaction between able-bodied students and those with physical disabilities.

Chacòn says he often sees a barrier between disabled students and their peers, on campus, and off.

"They think of us as angels, who don't do anything bad," he says. "That's not

a much larger organization, representing not only the disabled students, but all students," he says. "Overnight I was representing 2,000 disabled students, and then 3,000 students that were part of campus."

Chacòn is modest when it comes to his success. When he was asked to list his achievements as a nominee for the John Burton Award he felt undeserving.

"What have I done," he asks. "I wanted

Accessibility Services (AS) at the University of Toronto's St. George campus has experienced "tremendous growth" according to their 2004/05 annual report. In 2004/05, AS registered 1333 students, a 16 per cent increase from the year before. This followed a steady increase through the past few years.

burdens that other students may not. For example, the price of tutors, technological equipment and medical supplies would be unfathomable for most students, but many students with disabilities find it difficult to work while going to school.

"They need to have access to enhanced textbooks, technology and software," says Smith, who says that while university centres are doing their best to provide this support, more funding is needed.

According to the post-secondary review, led by former premier Bob Rae, "Ontario currently funds a targeted \$17 million operating grant to support students with disabilities. To enhance these efforts, the government should add an additional \$5 million to this amount in each of the next three years."

"We're still waiting," says McCloskey, but Rae's suggestion is a welcomed step forward in disability funding. The post-secondary review suggests "better coordination between institution's financial aid offices, registrar's offices, and offices for students with disabilities will also lead to an improved level of service."

"Currently, each institution's share of funding is based on its overall student enrolment," reads the report. "It should be based on the number of students with disabilities enrolled and the costs associated with providing the needed support services to those students. That way, the money more closely reflects the level of service required at each institution."

"There needs to be more money put into physical accessibility," says McCloskey. Universities with many older buildings may be more difficult for students to navigate, he says, as well as other barriers on campus including broken elevators, construction and failure to react to weather conditions.

CDAC, led by Chacòn, has implemented many campus activities for all students to ensure that campus events are physically

true."

"I love going to bars! I love to go dancing! It's an aspect that people aren't used to seeing. People aren't used to seeing somebody disabled going into a bar and dancing," he says. He says many students automatically assume disabled students are different, but they aren't.

After his endless contributions to CDAC, a peer suggested to Chacòn that he run for student government, but he was skeptical.

"Number one, I'm an international student, my English is not that good," he remembers responding to the request. "I don't know anything about student politics, and furthermore, I'm disabled!" But Chacòn's supporters were right. He ran, and won, the role of Vice President of Student Services in 2003.

"It gave me the tools of helping the community in another sense. I wasn't the coordinator of one centre, it was me being part of a much larger organization, representing not only the disabled students, but all students..."

"It gave me the tools of helping the community in another sense. I wasn't the coordinator of one centre, it was me being part of

to make movies so I packed my bags and went to Cuba. After that, I wanted to come finish film school somewhere that was English speaking so I came to learn English and French here," he says with modesty. "I didn't do anything that any other person wouldn't have done."

Chacòn says it is his ambition which drives him toward making change.

"I did what I thought was needed in order to further my cause," he says. "In my mind I just did what was expected of me to fulfill my duties as a [campus] representative."

"Students need to have a primary role in addressing administration," says Smith. "Student unions have a vital role to play."

Chacòn suggests that universities need to adopt policies which allow disabled students to take the extra time that may be necessary to complete their degree.

"There should be a specific program in which they understand that for a disabled person, a three year degree may become five, maybe six years," he says. "Instead of every semester costing us the same, which is tons of money, there should be a way to balance it out."

Chacòn says it is important for government and university policy to reflect the reality that many students with disabilities are also prone to additional illnesses and responsibilities, which may lead them to take increased time to complete their studies, especially if they have an inability to work.

Without a degree, it is very difficult for students, especially with disabilities, to enter the workplace, says Smith.

For this reason, NEADS is dedicated to ensuring that universities are implementing transition programs for disabled students to train themselves to be ready for the workplace.

"Post-secondary education can be a gateway toward independence and self-esteem," says McCloskey. ■

THE SECOND YEAR DITCH

THE CHALLENGE OF
RETENTION, ENROLMENT & ENTRANCE STANDARDS AT ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES

BY BRANDON SWEET

THE FUTURAMA TELEVISION episode “Mars University,” which aired in October 1999, contained in it a hilarious twist on a familiar piece of post-secondary folklore. In an introductory lecture in “20th Century History,” a stern professor tells his students, “Look to your left, then look to your right, then look in nine other directions. One of the twelve of you will not pass this class.”

The above example is a humorous take on the issue of student retention, to be sure, but one that should not be taken lightly in Ontario, where student attrition rates are in danger of affecting government-directed enrolment funding targets. Universities don't want students to fail, at least not right out of school, but not necessarily for the reasons one would expect.

In advance of the double cohort's arrival in 2003, Ontario universities tightened their admissions to attract the best and brightest, and the competitive atmosphere forced Grade 12 and OAC students to go above and beyond in their efforts to secure a spot for themselves. The 2003/04 academic year saw enrolments in Ontario increase by almost 10 per cent, the largest jump in Canada according to Statistics Canada.

The enrolment bubble burst in fall 2004, as the number of applications dropped by 26 per cent, leaving universities no choice but to cast their nets ever wider to meet their now-inflated enrolment targets.

Admission standards at Ontario universities have been dropping after peaking during the double cohort gold rush. Wilfrid Laurier University lowered its faculty of arts entrance average, dropping it from 78 per cent to 73 per cent, and offering students a \$500 signing bonus if they accepted a later offer of admission to the Waterloo school after already accepting offers elsewhere.

The World Education News Report suggested that on the whole, Ontario admission standards dropped from 2 to 5 points, leaving them close to where they were in the pre-double cohort years.

As it turns out, getting in was the easy part, it's staying in that's proving to be difficult. The seriousness of this issue is not immediately apparent. In 2003, the same year that the first wave of the double cohort washed ashore at Ontario's universities, Maclean's magazine began tracking and ranking schools based on student retention. Ontario universities boast a high overall retention

rate, with anywhere from 85 per cent to 96 per cent of first-year students making it into their second year. The Maclean's magazine rankings paint a positive picture, but one painted with broad strokes. At the program level, the picture is less rosy.

Trent University is struggling to reverse downward trends in student retention. In the 2003/04 academic year, retention rates from first to second year dropped 6 per cent, from 84 per cent to 78 per cent and in the 2004/05 academic year, as the double cohort students entered their second year, there was a corresponding 7 per cent drop in retention from second to third year—from 58 per cent to 51 per cent.

The University of Waterloo lost 38 per cent of its 2004 software engineering class before their first year of school had come to an end, and its arts and business co-operative program has seen its attrition rate reach higher than 60 per cent as students either drop out or shift into other arts programs. This issue is not limited to universities—Hamilton's Mohawk College reported a 42.6 per cent attrition rate in its Mathematics programs at the end of the fall 2003 term.

Universities have been lowering their admission standards and run the risk of admitting students who are candidates for

perpetual academic probation while at the same time making it easier to stay in school, because the universities need to meet their enrolment targets in order to secure operating funding.

tion. The four-year program was noted for its difficulty. “It's pretty clear that it was tougher in math and science,” says John Myers, a curriculum instructor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. “Some ideas and concepts were brought down to lower grades, so something taught in OAC was now presumably being taught in Grade 12. Many of the things that were expected of students were lowered, even down to the Grade 8 level.”

Compounding the high school program's difficulty was the fact that at the same time a new secondary school curriculum was being introduced, reforms were taking place at the elementary level and there was little to no co-operation or even communication between the two school systems. “The education reforms weren't matching each other,” says Myers, and the end result was that “students weren't prepared for Grade 9 math.”

Studies of secondary students, in particular Dr. Alan King's multi-stage Double Cohort Survey, showed that those students under the new four-year curriculum were achieving lower marks than their five-year counterparts even before they graduated high school. There was no question that this trend would continue once high school graduates reached Ontario's campuses, and the notion was borne out as administrators began studying student performance.

Thomas Ryan and Peter Joong of Nipissing University reported in the April 2005 issue of the Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy that nearly a quarter of high school teachers felt that their students were less prepared for university under the new curriculum. Mathematics programs in particular have been hit hard, however arts students have not been spared either—basic reading, writing, and vocabulary problems have been identified.

A recent study of double cohort students in math programs at McMaster University by Ann Kajander and Miroslav Lovric revealed that the students with five years of high school did significantly better than students with four years of high school at the end of their first term of study in December 2003. They noted that four-year math graduates lacked basic techniques and computational skills, and that five-year students were better prepared for traditional calculus.

Myers notes that there was, and still is, societal pressure to view secondary education

**Admission standards...
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perpetual academic probation while at the same time making it easier to stay in school, because the universities need to meet their enrolment targets in order to secure operating funding.

Ontario secondary school reforms haven't helped the situation any. Some argue that the problem can be traced to Ontario's shift from a five-year to a four-year program and the inability of many first-year students to adjust to the high standards of undergraduate scholarship.

The provincial government's decision to eliminate OACs in Ontario high schools and implement a new four-year program in 1999 sowed the seeds for the current situa-

merely as a stepping stone to university, and that this may negatively impact the choices made by high school students. "Parents are assuming that their son or daughter is going to go to university regardless of the fit or need." Other post-secondary education options, from colleges to apprenticeships and beyond, still don't have the cachet of a university education. "Most students take university destination courses even though most students do not go to university," Myers says.

In the wake of the double cohort's arrival on campus and higher failure rates in first-year courses, faculties at a number of Ontario universities and colleges are wrestling with what to do – dumb down the curriculum to meet the students, who have been short-changed by the rapid shift to a 4-year high school program halfway, or keep their standards high and risk losing students from their programs. "Universities have a poor record of helping students catch up," notes Myers.

Students seem well aware of their shortcomings: a 2004 survey by the Canadian University Survey Consortium showed that only a third of first-year students gauged

their academic performance as 'successful.' Maclean's magazine reports that in the years following the double cohort, a majority of Ontario universities have admitted larger numbers of students with averages between 70 per cent and 79 per cent.

On average, universities report anywhere from 15 per cent to 20 per cent drops in marks as students make the transition from high school to university. For students who enter university with marks in the low seventies, a rough transition between secondary and post-secondary education can mean the difference between good academic standing and academic probation.

Not that the act of lowering admission averages is itself a bad thing – it can promote accessibility and provide traditionally disadvantaged social groups with new opportunities, but cramming as many students as possible through the doors regardless of their ability to perform adequately and shoe-horning them into ever-larger sized classes is a detriment to the high-quality of education offered at Ontario's schools.

This does a disservice to all students, argues Howie Bender, Vice-President, Education for the University of Waterloo's Fed-

eration of Students, and has ramifications in all areas of student performance, including academic integrity. "The lower a student's skill level, the lower their ability to keep up with the demands of their studies," says the student leader. "You must have adequate support services so that students can gain the necessary skills in writing and academic research."

The blunt truth is that keeping students in school is good for the university's bottom line, and they may be willing to sacrifice the quality of the education taught at Ontario schools if it means keeping the lecture halls full.

Core funding is a serious business, and enrolment numbers carry significant weight. A retention task force at Nipissing University noted in 2002 that its 29 per cent dropout rate cost the school over a million dollars in direct revenue.

Enrolment targets have a financial dimension that goes beyond tuition. Basic Income Units (BIUs) are units of funding defined by Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

BIUs are determined by program and level of study, with graduate programs worth



PHOTO BY GRISZKA NIEWIADOMSKI

Thousands of students struggle to get past year one. In 2004, the University of Waterloo lost 38 per cent of its software engineering students.

more than undergraduate programs, and at the undergraduate level there is a range of BIU levels depending on the field of study. Mathematics, engineering and business programs tend to have higher BIU ratings than arts programs.

BIU totals are multiplied by the number of full-time students enrolled at the institution and the result is the school's operating grant, which accounts for three-quarters of the school's funding. Universities are under pressure to keep their enrolment targets up. "Admission should be on merit," says Bender. "However, as long as there is institutional pressure to keep the BIU funding up, universities don't have the capacity to pick and choose."

As increased attrition rates compromise enrolments, universities may turn to curriculum changes to boost student academic performance. An example of a strategy to improve student retention rates at the expense of high-quality education can be found at the University of Waterloo. Between 15 per cent and 20 per cent of its 2004/05 mathematics class were on academic probation, and of those, three-quarters had averages less than 55 per cent.

If the University of Waterloo's mathematics faculty dropped the failing students from their program, they would dip below their enrolment targets for the year and get less BIU grant money from the provincial government. Facing these high levels of attrition, the faculty proposed a troubling solution.

Maximum failure allowances were increased; students would be allowed to fail more courses before being required to withdraw from the honours program or the math faculty altogether. Students would also be able to exclude their marks from failed or narrowly passed courses from their transcripts.

Ostensibly, this would allow students to re-take failed courses without undue penalty, and give students who had a poor start in the program a chance to turn things around. This decision was made in the context of lowered entrance averages as the University of Waterloo tried to shore up its BIU numbers.

Not all students were pleased with this proposal and many protested the faculty's decision. They felt that it devalued the hard work done by students who passed the courses and did little to address the underlying student performance problem. "The faculty's rationale for the move was to solve the attrition problems of the past few years and maintain the operating budget," says Adam Felix, a Math Student Senator at the University of Waterloo. "But their solution will only help the budget problem. Attrition will still continue and students will just have to spend more money before they are forced to leave," he explains. Strung out on

academic probation, students will eventually be forced to drop out of the program.

Calling the University's decision a 'band-aid solution,' Felix notes that it doesn't address the larger problems faced by the institution. "The real problem with most students in math is that they are not prepared," argues Felix. Speaking of the faculty's decision, Felix says that in the past, "they wanted the best so they made stricter academic requirements of their students. Today, they just want to keep them [in computer science programs]."

Lower standards and an easier curriculum are not ingredients for a competitive workforce...

Bender argues that as universities lower admission and curriculum standards to keep enrolment numbers up, they may be creating more financial problems than they solve by admitting students who lack the appropriate skill sets. "If a student fails, that merely removes a potential source of revenue for the university. Those students who stay but are barely hanging on will have to make more use of support systems which means more resources will need to be allocated to retention efforts," explains Bender. "It may end up costing them more than the BIU funding they received from the student."

Lower standards and an easier curriculum are not ingredients for a competitive workforce in today's knowledge economy. Real-world problems that need to be solved by the best and brightest minds are not going to make themselves easier because education has been dumbed down.

With the flow-through effect of the double-cohort set to last for a few years to come, this conflict between accessibility and educational quality is not likely to disappear anytime soon. Alarm bells should start ringing when schools use fiscal considerations to guide curriculum changes eroding the quality of education in favour of keeping the lecture halls and labs packed with students, whatever the cost. Some universities are willing to bite the bullet and miss out on extra enrolment revenue. In 2005 The University of Western Ontario's Ivey School of Business lost out on \$2.3 million in tuition revenue by maintaining its admission standards and accepting lower levels of enrolment.

And Queen's University decided in 2001, well before the impact of the double cohort was felt, that it would not "grow its way" out of funding shortfalls. It has consistently raised its entrance averages in most programs and tops the 2005 Maclean's magazine retention list at 96.6 per cent.

Another solution is to reduce an institution's reliance on locally educated students. The University of Waterloo has taken steps to attract both out-of-province and international students who are not hampered by recent secondary school reforms and subsequently weaning themselves off their Ontario student base while enjoying the benefits of bringing in substantially higher international tuition fees.

Not only do universities need to attract high-quality students; they need to provide extra support to those whose high-school education has short-changed them. The 2002 retention report at Nipissing University recognized that "a retained student is just as valuable as a new student... the old business adage 'it is more cost-effective to retain a customer than to find a new one' is true in universities as well."

Programs aimed at supporting students are critical if the quality of Ontario's university education is to remain at acceptable levels. Math faculty members at Mohawk College managed to improve retention rates by a substantial margin by promoting regular class attendance, increasing the schedule of quizzes that allowed professors to locate and identify students who were falling behind at a faster rate, and improving remedial opportunities.

The faculty also introduced the Lyryx Project, a pilot online learning program funded by McGraw-Hill that was tied to the course's textbooks. The attrition rate of 42.6 per cent in fall 2003 was lowered to 37.1 per cent in fall 2004. Several other universities, including Brock, Guelph, and Carleton have initiated a "learning commons" concept that includes peer assistance opportunities, skills workshops and tutoring services.

Students also have a role to play in getting more education bang for their buck. Kajander and Lovric suggest that students take more responsibility for their education and take initiative to come to first-year math classes prepared. This may require continuing education through the summer after graduation.

Maintaining academic integrity is a key issue for Bender. He advocates modules on avoiding plagiarism, writing clinics, and other forms of student support services and assistance. "Hard work should be recognized," he says.

What's at stake is the sense that on some level a university education should be a challenge. If a diploma, especially one in professional or flagship deregulated programs, is to mean anything, a university education should serve to separate the wheat from the chaff and produce high-quality graduates. The notion of demanding excellence loses much of its sheen when the definition of excellence is reduced to a common denominator that guarantees financial survival for the institution granting the degree. ■

MO' MONEY, MO' PROBLEMS

TUITION, FINANCIAL AID
& THE STRUGGLES OF PAYING FOR A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

BY CARL GOULDSON

AS OF 2004 THE AVERAGE UNDERgraduate student studying at any given university in the province of Ontario will have paid a total \$4,923 in tuition alone by year's end. With specialized pre-med and pre-law programs tipping the scales slightly, the clear fact remains; a post-secondary education is simply unavailable for any less than \$3,000.

This is a cold and bitter truth really, especially in contrast to the stories my parents' friends tell around the dinner table reminiscing about the good ol' days when an honours program or a double-major landed somewhere in the low triple digits. But no such luck as far as we're concerned.

This is a cold and bitter truth really, especially in contrast to the stories my parents' friends tell around the dinner table reminiscing...

The facts and figures speak for themselves, but perhaps it is this obsession with statistics and ratings that has dehumanized the entire process.

These figures, which are considered common place today among campuses across Ontario, may come as a shock to the 'over forty crowd' who may remember surrendering their own tuition cheques with far fewer decimal places.

First-year business student at Ryerson University Mallory MacDonald knew exactly what she was getting into when she was filling out her university applications last February. In a family with two older siblings waist deep in bachelor degrees themselves and one parent currently pursuing further education, to them the rising cost of tuition over the last decade in Ontario is much less a roadblock than a speed-bump, merely a temporary inconvenience standing between the MacDonalds and their future dreams.

Initially for MacDonald, the choice was between pursuing Business or Dance. The decision came as a matter of default when she missed her audition and was banished to the world of statistics, data management and linear algebra for the next four years of

her academic life.

Her admission to Ryerson's business program was smooth and the arrangements to move from her home in Nova Scotia were made in slight haste as the deadline for the first \$1,000 installment of her total tuition drew closer and her scholarship money had yet to arrive.

Even though she was skeptical, MacDonald's \$2,000 scholarship awarded by her high school arrived as promised, in time to preserve her spot in the hallowed halls of higher learning. "Close call," she admitted, now triumphantly sitting at her desk on the fifth floor of Ryerson's Pitman Hall Residence. "There's no doubt I wouldn't have been able to be here without the financial support I got from the scholarships, but even they wouldn't have been enough," she said referring to the \$12,000 she was additionally awarded from federal and provincial government loans. "I was lucky," she continued "I actually ended up with more money than I really needed, at least for one year."

MacDonald's plan is to save the money that will spill over from her first year to support her second and hopefully even third year, though tonight she wonders if she really wants there to be a second or third year. "Exams," she explains.

The scholarships MacDonald was awarded totaling \$6,000 in reward for her high school achievement had nothing at all to do with luck; however, her living situation at home did in fact cater perfectly to her need for financial assistance.

The criteria she met as outlined by the Nova Scotia Student Loan (NSSL) and Canadian Student Loan (CSL) programs in collecting her student bursaries are almost identical to that which is required of a student who seeks any financial assistance in Ontario (OSAP).

Her financial and living situation, as mechanically outlined by the powers that be, was in fact close to ideal for someone whose choice to pursue university education may have been made or broken by additional financial assistance; as hers very well would have been.

Last year The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MCTU), through OSAP, helped out over 135,000 students with financial assistance. "The amount that each student gets is entirely dependant on their individual situation," says Wilma Davis, ministry spokesperson.

Davis recognizes that there is a significant need for financial assistance throughout Ontario among those wishing to pursue post-secondary education, particularly those looking to pursue a university education. "The Ontario government fully recognizes the need for post-secondary education," Davis continued, "all students who want to have access to post-secondary education should have it."

There are however, many factors that come into play when a prospective student applies for financial assistance. "Their parent's income is a significant factor," explained Davis, "their combined income, as well as the number of siblings attending post-secondary are both major factors in determining the amount of, if any, financial assistance the student will be allotted."

For me personally, I was doing all right entering university. There have been a few financial snags already; my high school guidance counsellor told me that my parents made too much money and that I wouldn't be eligible for OSAP for one. I also happened to choose the one program for which I wasn't offered an entrance scholarship, but I suppose that's nobody's fault but my own. Buy the ticket, take the ride I suppose; and at

There are however, many factors that come into play when a prospective student applies for financial assistance.

first it looked like everything was kosher.

In place of OSAP my parents co-signed for a hefty bank loan, and if everything with my part-time job worked out I would have been able to clear residence and tuition fees with limited aggravation. Conveniently enough when the winter break rolled around the building I was living in closed its doors for nearly three weeks leaving me without a place to stay in the city, and a bitch of a commute to my job. Anyone who's worked in retail knows that a no-show during the Christmas rush means no deposit no return as far as your job goes. They canned me.

You'd also know January isn't the best time to be looking for a new job. Two months without a salary meant kosher was quickly turning into a serious headache.

No OSAP, my bank loan chewed up, no job, an abnormally overpriced phone bill, and now on top of it all the housing office at my university wouldn't stop hounding me for their cheque. "When I have it, you'll have it," I told them.

They seemed unconcerned. It was then I learned of a wonderful little un-publicized out for those whose situations appeared as desperate as mine.

The emergency bursary is an option for those who have exhausted all others and can prove they've scraped the last from the bottom of the barrel. Usually amounting to somewhere in the area of just under \$1,000, in a real tight pinch you can usually pry one of these from the cold grip of your financial aid office administration.

Though practical in a 'greatest advantage for the greatest need' sense, there remains several basic flaws with the financial assistance program that have only recently been recognized and addressed by the Ontario government. Along with a massive

budget influx of \$6.2 billion going towards education this year and \$1.5 billion reserved specifically for OSAP, there have also been several fundamental changes to ensure a more inclusive disbursement of financial assistance in the future.

The first of which was a somewhat tricky loop-hole that kept enough students across the province from receiving assistance to incite a change in procedure.

The issue was that many parents of graduating students were expected to contribute an unrealistic amount of money to support their children, making many students ineligible for OSAP, but because a lot of families live closely within their means, many students are left with little or no financial support from home as well.

To combat this and other inadequacies in the application process the Ontario government has introduced a series of "enhancements" to OSAP procedure including reduced expected parental contribution, as well as an increased student loan limit, recognition of a larger financial need due to higher prices in electronics (computers and software specifically) and easier and wider access to grants which are not required to

be paid back.

If in fact a student does become eligible for OSAP, the university application process becomes significantly more comfortable, at least from a financial standpoint. Ontario universities, together with financial aid offices, work with students as well as the sources from which they have already acquired partial aid in an effort to make tuition, living and obligatory costs as small an obstacle as \$3,000 can be.

Ken Frasier, financial aid counsellor at the University of Toronto is directly involved in the process. "We work with students to ensure that it isn't financial shortfalls that keep them from being admitted," said Frasier.

"Often enough we find that a student's biggest problem isn't the total cost of tuition, but that the initial payments are due before OSAP comes in, which is usually sometime during the first semester."

As it turns out, an option many students may not be aware of is a payment deferral. "Most students who are depending on OSAP to pay their tuition apply for a deferral (a scenario wherein the initial tuition payment is delayed until the student is able to make the



Looking out or trying to get in? A student stands outside Kerr Hall at Ryerson University. Many students feel trapped by financial assistance and the costs of education, while some potential students feel the barriers of trying to get into university.

payment) providing they can provide proper documentation that they have been granted the money," Frasier explained.

In conjunction with the initial allotted amount, OSAP also offers the Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship to further assist students who have shown academic excellence throughout high school. This scholarship is worth a maximum of \$3,500 per year, or for the unfortunately branded 'less-excellent' a minimum of \$100 per year.

First-year Ryerson architecture student Aaron Whalen was granted both primary OSAP assistance as well as the maximum possible amount from the Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship, to be delivered in two lump sums granting him a total of \$9,500 this year.

And he's going to need it. While this year, the average first-year journalism student spent between \$200 and \$400 on books and supplies each semester, the situation was quite different for architecture students. Whalen was hit with an initial bill tallying \$2,200 after tuition and before housing.

His experience with OSAP was a positive one, though. In fact, it was "pretty snappy," to be exact. "The original estimate was actually just over \$11,000," said Whalen. "Not that I needed that much; what I got was fine with me."

But unfortunately the financial help he's currently using is the bare minimum as far as he is concerned. "I absolutely needed \$5,000 to stay for the first semester alone," he continued, "I've also been told I may be on the verge of losing my scholarship so now it's like without OSAP I wouldn't even

Purchased in 1998 by Chris Wilkens, founder of SchoolFinder.com, originally as a CD-ROM program Scholarships Canada is now a website used nation-wide listing 90,000 private scholarships worth a combined \$80 million.

Each student in Ontario has access to this database which is only growing with time; "we won't ever stop gathering scholarships," says Rob Taylor, senior editor for SchoolFinder.com. "We're committed to helping students with the cost of their educations through the services our website provides, as well as our own scholarship that we award annually."

Each year Scholarships Canada publishes a book called the Scholarships Canada Awards Directory, listing all the bursaries available for that year. One dollar from each book goes toward the Edge Directory Award, which last year came to slightly over \$900.

But when all the free money is gone to someone else's pocket, and your infinitely dependable government has turned you down flat, often the only places that will open their doors are those temples of ill repute, the banks. Amidst the contracts, red tape and threats on your family's livelihood, Canada's banks insist they have the best interests of the student at heart when it comes to the eternally dreaded student line of credit.

Fifteen years is the maximum allotted time Scotiabank allows students to pay off their 'student line of credit' after graduating. And in case you thought you were in the clear to simply declare bankruptcy following your four years of excessive borrowing,

As much of a pain as it was to hear, my guidance counsellor was right; my folks did make too much for Dalton's liking, but unfortunately they also tend to live closely within their means. For me this meant they gave me toilet paper money every once in a while but not much else.

TD Credit Specialist Julie Roach says that the most beneficial aspect of the student line of credit is that the student doesn't have to begin paying off the actual loan itself until they graduate; only the interest on the amount that has already been borrowed must be taken care of.

"That may not always be the best idea though," said Roach, "I have often seen customers pay their loan off aggressively, they usually only take ten years on average. If it was up to me I'd get rid of it as quickly as possible."

With a child of her own only just entering Ontario's education system, Roach takes a particular interest in the rising cost of tuition across the province. "I've personally seen students coming out of medical and law school with debts reaching one and two hundred thousand dollars, which is ridiculous when realistically education should be free in the first place."

Whether 'free' is the ultimate goal or not, both Whalen and McDonald would be right there with her when it comes to the reduction of tuition fees. "Ideally we need to see lower tuition fees," says Whalen, "but I'd settle to not have to pay back my OSAP!"

Last year Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty approved a province-wide tuition freeze which has just recently come up for

As tuition fees have skyrocketed throughout the nineties and are projected to continue to do so in the future, an entire industry has been created around aiding students in their academic endeavors founded by private organizations that have nothing to do with government funding.

be back next semester."

Although Whalen seems to be keeping his head above water at least for now, he shares the same opinion as an 82 per cent majority of university students nation-wide; that the root of the problem is the cost of tuition in the first place.

As tuition fees have skyrocketed throughout the nineties and are projected to continue to do so in the future, an entire industry has been created around aiding students in their academic endeavors founded by private organizations that have nothing to do with government funding. An example is Scholarships Canada, a website devoted to connecting students and private scholarships.

in 2000 Scotiabank stopped signing the line directly over to the student and introduced the requirement of a co-signer guarantee, with good credit and prompt and efficient repayment of the loan at a mere 18 per cent interest (and for those who haven't seen a Capitol One commercial, that's a lot).

The money is good though. For example Scotiabank offers a competitive \$10,000 per year to a full time student, over-shadowing the competition at TD Canada Trust who only offers \$8,000.

That was my choice of poison. Now locked into this seemingly eternal four-year burn, I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time. Or at least I'd like to think so. In reality it was a necessary choice.

renewal. Votes on campuses across Ontario were met with overwhelming support for the continued freeze and the eventual reduction of tuition in Ontario with no campus voting under a 90 per cent majority in support of the reduction.

Yet in most the most recent developments an announcement which was originally scheduled to have been released toward the end of February 2006 informed students that as of the fall 2006 semester, the tuition freeze in Ontario will be lifted and some speculate increases at an allowed rate of three to five per cent each year.

That increase alone would be set to outpace the current allotted amount set for financial assistance.

PHOTO ESSAY

WHEREFORE ART THOU?

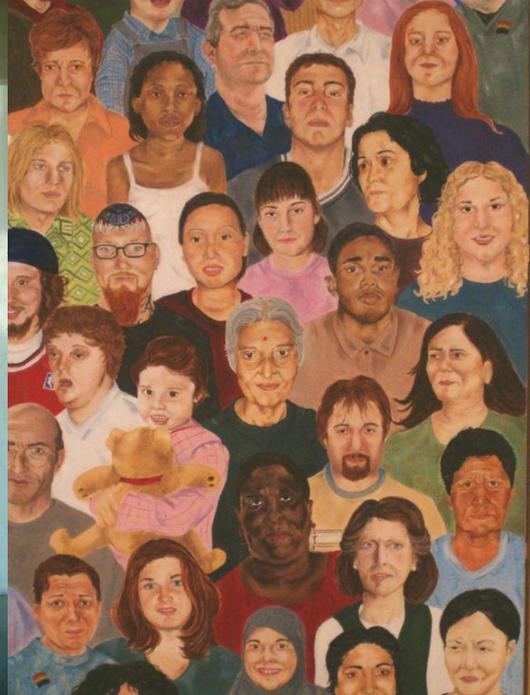
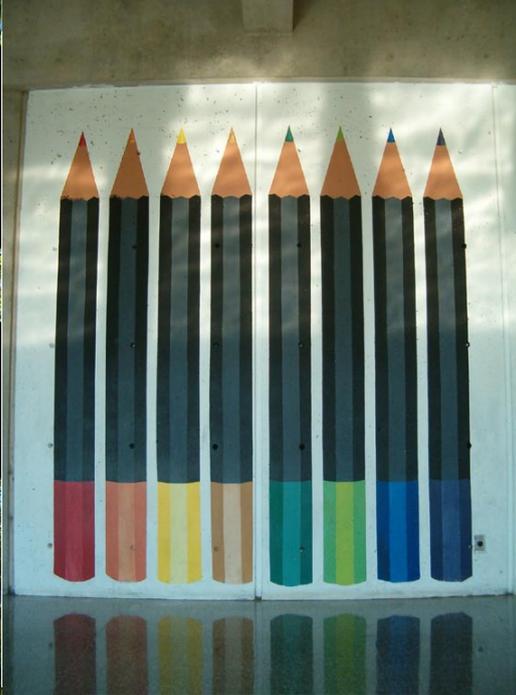
BY ADAM SPENCE



Our world is full of logos, labels and the last names of those with outrageous fortune. Luckily, we still have a place on campus for the contributions of artists who's place is secured not by money, but by their beauty, message or connection to the past.



The images that surround are all of artwork found on campuses across Ontario, from Brock University, McMaster University, Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo.





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