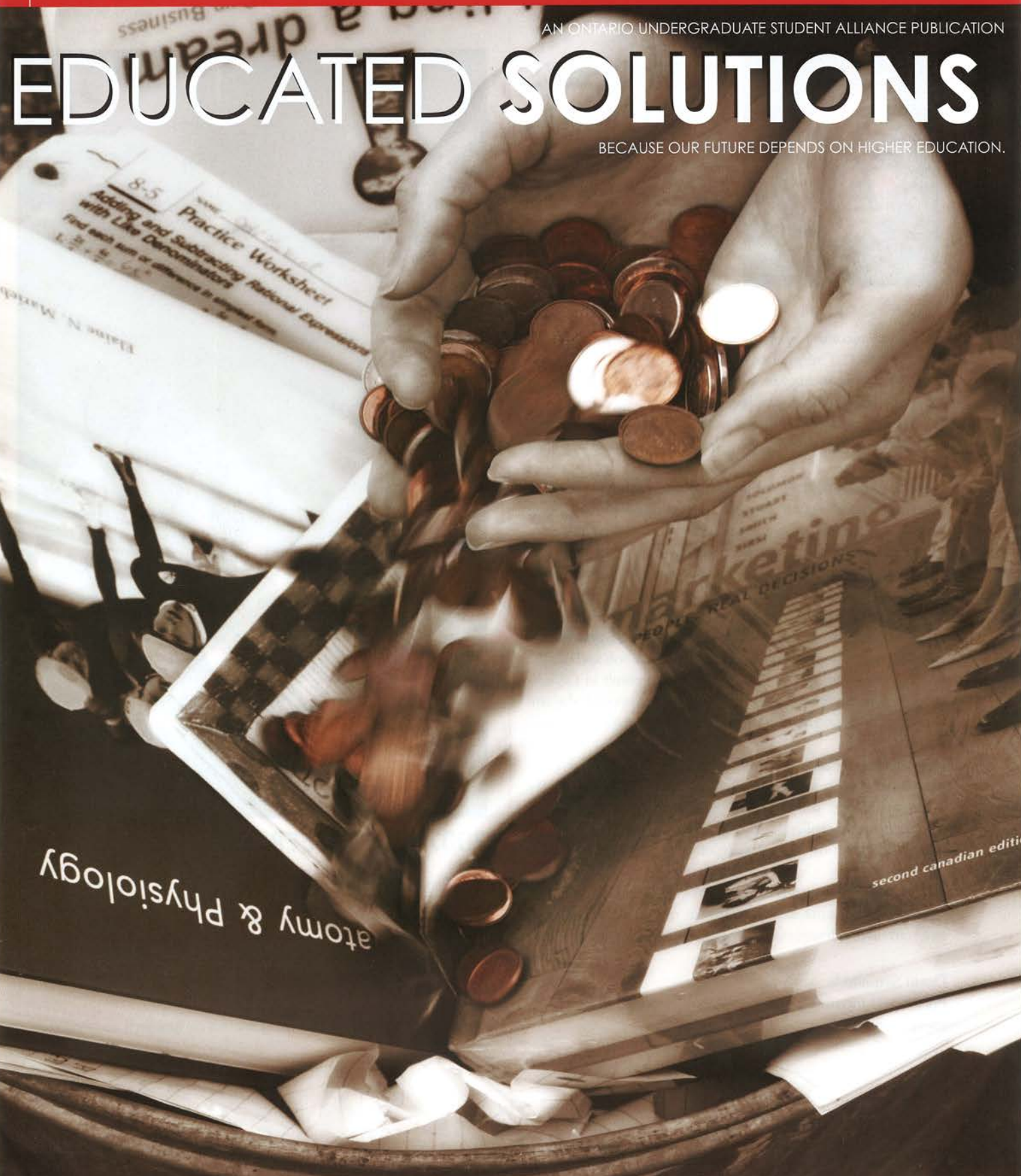


- **FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** FIGHTING FOR NUTRITIONAL DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS
- **HALT THE PRESSES!:** HOW CAMPUS NEWSPAPERS ARE ENCOURAGING CHANGE
- **A MYTH OF YOUTH APATHY:** A STUDENT-RUN ORGANIZATION HELPS FIGHT POVERTY

AN ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE PUBLICATION

EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

BECAUSE OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON HIGHER EDUCATION.



- A NEW ORGANIZATION CHAMPIONS LOAN REFORM • INCREASING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
- MODERNIZING STUDENT ASSISTANCE • PARTISANSHIP: NOT THE WAY TO MAKE CHANGE



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'd like to welcome you to the latest edition of *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS*. The goal of this magazine, along with our annual Partners in Higher Education Dinner, is a lofty one: to spark insightful discourse on higher education issues in Ontario, and encourage a general spirit of intellectual risk-taking in the development of higher education policy.

Encouraging discourse, particularly airing opinions that may run contrary to the current policy positions of our organization, may seem to be a counter-intuitive tactic for an advocacy organization. While it is true that we have a very specific advocacy agenda, we strongly believe it is our responsibility to foster debate, and continuously challenge the underlying assumptions and policy prescriptions held by ourselves, governments, and other post-secondary stakeholder groups. We believe a failure to do so will result in the stagnation and decline of the post-secondary system, and will also result in OUSA's views becoming increasingly irrelevant in the eyes of the students we serve, and the policy makers we attempt to influence.

Please enjoy our humble contribution to a new spirit of intellectual risk-taking among post-secondary policy makers. We hope our efforts will begin to yield increasingly innovative solutions to the challenges facing higher education, and raise the overall level of debate surrounding contentious issues.

To close, I'd like to extend a big thanks to Chris Locke, Howie Bender, Petra Bosma, and Jessica Rose, our fabulous home-office staff and volunteers, for making this publication a reality.

David Simmonds
President, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
uscyped@uwo.ca



2007-2008 STEERING COMMITTEE

Back Row: Arati Sharma (McMaster), David Simmonds (Western), Lauren McNiven (Laurier), Julia Mitchell (Queen's), Alexi White (Queen's), Damien O'Brien (Brock).

Front Row: Jonah Levine (Waterloo), Zach Cranny (Windsor), Chris Locke (Executive Director), Howie Bender (Director of Communications).

Missing in Picture: Petra Bosma (Director of Research and Policy Analysis)

FEATURE ARTICLES

12 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

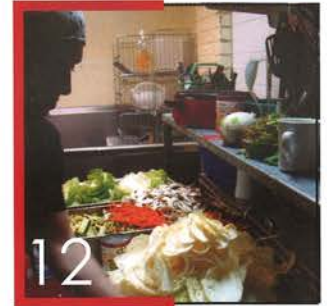
Student organizations and activists at universities across the province are attempting to ensure a diversity of nutritional options on campus, to meet the needs of all students.
ERIN LETSON

16 HALT THE PRESSES!

For almost as long as universities have existed in Ontario, so have student-run newspapers. They strive to raise awareness of student issues and injustices on campus.
JESSICA ROSE

20 A MYTH OF YOUTH APATHY

Students challenge a common belief that youth are apathetic to politics and social concerns by tackling food insecurity.
SARAH YUN



Cover photo: PROVIDED BY THE CANADIAN ALLIANCE OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS.

PERSPECTIVES & OPINIONS

NEW ORGANIZATION CHAMPIONS LOAN REFORM
JULIAN BENEDICT

6

A NEW STORY ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION
JAMES DOWNEY

7

BARRIER-FREE EDUCATION IN MATHS AND SCIENCES
MARGARET-ANN AMOUR

8

WHY MODERNIZE STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN CANADA?
THE CANADIAN MILLENNIUM SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION
NOEL BALDWIN AND ANDREW PARKIN

9

INCREASING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS
SCOTT COURTICE

10

PARTISANSHIP: NOT THE WAY TO MAKE CHANGE
PARIS MEILLEUR

11

REVIEW

24 BY THE NUMBERS

OUSA's Executive Director Chris Locke presents a brief review of OUSA's activities over the past year.

PHOTO ESSAY **25**

WELCOME BACK!
CAMPUS ORIENTATION WEEK





EDITOR'S MESSAGE

EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

BECAUSE OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR
HOWIE BENDER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND EDITOR
JESSICA ROSE

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
CHRIS LOCKE
PETRA BOSMA

PHOTOGRAPHY
AMANDA ONO, JESSICA ROSE, DAN EPSTEIN, MATTHEW MASON-PHILIPS, PHIL VACHON

EDITORIAL BOARD
DAVID SIMMONDS
ARATI SHARMA
JONAH LEVINE
JULIA MITCHELL
DAMIEN O'BRIEN
ZACH CRANNY
LAUREN MCNIVEN

PRINTER
PULSAR PRINTING

ADDRESS
EDUCATED SOLUTIONS MAGAZINE
345-26 SOHO STREET
TORONTO, ON M5T 1Z7
T: 416.341.9948
F: 416.341.0358
W: www.ousa.on.ca

EDITORIAL MISSION
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Welcome to the third issue of *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS*, brought to you by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS* is a magazine that recognizes and explores the unique challenges faced by Ontario's university students. This publication provides a much-needed forum to address the concerns of our province's undergraduates, both through their own investigative journalism and through perspective articles by individuals and groups who are working to change the system and those working within it.

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 passions, interests, and concerns of students are important in perceiving a larger picture of the province's post-secondary picture. The students/recent graduates who contributed the features for this issue bring attention to different ways in which engaged students bring about change on campuses across the province. Low voter turnout among our demographic is often referred to as evidence that today's youth do not care about our province's or country's future. As the features in this issue point out, that assumption is not entirely correct.

The perspective articles in this issue present expert opinions on a wide-range of issues related to higher learning, including student engagement, student loans, shaping the future of post-secondary education in Ontario, and the value of investments in post-secondary education in our province.

Our future depends on higher education and OUSA works hard to improve the affordability, accessibility, accountability, and quality of post-secondary education in the province to help make this brighter future a reality. Forums such as this, where students and stakeholders can come together to discuss and debate how improvements to the system can or should be made, are important to help us create a better system.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS*. Please feel free to contact me with your questions or concerns — we look forward to hearing your feedback.

Howie Bender
Editor, *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS*
howie@ousa.on.ca

CONTRIBUTORS

ERIN LETSON

Erin Letson recently graduated from Carleton University with a Bachelor of Journalism and a minor in political science. She has been published in the *National Post*, the *Ottawa Sun*, *Fashion18*, and *Burnt Toast* magazine, among other publications. Her interests include food (which helped to inspire this article!), architecture, environmental politics, and independent film. Erin resides in Toronto and is a copywriter for an esthetics company. Her dream is to work at a Canadian magazine and be able to dine at great restaurants frequently.



SCOTT COURTRICE

Scott Courtrice is the Policy Analyst for the University Students' Council at the University of Western Ontario. Scott has over nine years of leadership experience in non-profits serving youth, which include tenures as Executive Director of OUSA, Executive Director of Meal Exchange, a national organization dedicated to eliminating hunger through student solutions, and President and CEO of the Alma Mater Society, the central student government at Queen's University. An avid political junkie and amateur historian, he currently resides in London with his partner, Megan, and his newborn daughter, Ava.

JESSICA ROSE

Jessica Rose is a freelance writer and editor. She graduated from Carleton University in 2006, with a Bachelor of Journalism and a minor in history. She has been published in a number of Canadian magazines, including *Blackfly* and *Hamilton*, as well as a number of newspapers in the Ottawa and Toronto areas. She is also an intern and contributor for *rabble.ca*. She is happy to have transitioned from a writing to an editing role for the 2007 issue of *EDUCATED SOLUTIONS*.

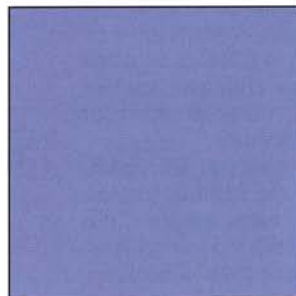


DR. JAMES DOWNEY

Dr. James Downey is the President and CEO of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and former President of the University of Waterloo, the University of New Brunswick and Carleton University.

NOEL BALDWIN

Noel Baldwin is a Policy and Research Officer at the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. He worked in public policy for the federal government and public sector NGOs prior to joining the Foundation. He was President of the Mount Allison Students' Union in 2000-01, where he studied international relations and economics.



SARAH YUN

Sarah Yun is currently pursuing an Honours B.A. in political science and English at the University of Toronto. She is passionate about social justice issues. She spends her spare time working with other youth in campus and community organizations. Sarah has been involved with Meal Exchange, a national charity devoted to fighting hunger, since her freshman year and she has served as coordinator for her campus. She looks forward to acting as a Meal Exchange mentor for student leaders in the 2007-2008 academic year. After her undergraduate degree, Sarah plans to pursue a career in law or public policy.

JULIAN BENEDICT

Julian Benedict is the co-founder the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness. He has an honours degree in history from Simon Fraser University and he writes regularly on the subject of post-secondary financial aid funding.

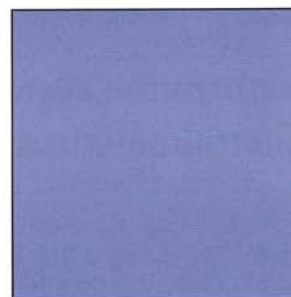


PARIS MEILLEUR

Paris Meilleur is the Executive Director of the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In 2006-07, Paris was Vice-President Education for the University Students' Council at Western and also served as President of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

DR. MARGARET-ANN AMOUR

Margaret-Ann Armour was educated at Edinburgh University and the University of Alberta, where she completed a Ph.D in chemistry. She then joined the University of Alberta and is currently Associate Dean of Science, Diversity. She is a founder and Past Vice-Chair of WISEST, Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology. Her awards include a 3M Teaching Fellowship, the Sarah Shorten award from the Canadian Association of University Teachers, a Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case, the 2003 Honour Roll of Maclean's magazine, the Montreal Medal of the Chemical Institute of Canada, and membership in the Order of Canada in 2006.



DR. ANDREW PARKIN

Dr. Andrew Parkin is the Associate Executive Director of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. After earning his doctorate as a Commonwealth Scholar at the University of Bradford in England in 1993, he held a Killam postdoctoral fellowship at Dalhousie University before becoming a research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University. He taught political studies, sociology, and Canadian studies at several universities in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and Ontario. He has served as research director and subsequently co-director at the Centre of Research and Information on Canada (CRIC), where he oversaw a series of studies of Canadian public opinion and political institutions.



JULIAN BENEDICT

NEW ORGANIZATION CHAMPIONS LOAN REFORM

According to the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP), almost half of all student loan borrowers, 49.6 per cent, reside in Ontario — with just over one quarter of all part-time borrowers coming from the province.

For decades, our nation's post-secondary students have been amassing more and more student loan debt, while at the same time struggling with an increasingly cumbersome and antiquated financial aid system.

Currently, Canadian borrowers endure some of the highest student loan interest rates in the industrialized world — with most paying between 8.75 per cent and 11.25 per cent in interest, compounded daily.

Most students who have taken out a government loan will be the first to tell you that the system is broken. Every year, thousands of borrowers complain about having their loan applications delayed, their forms lost, and their questions and concerns unanswered or mishandled. Indeed, a 2006 survey, conducted for the federal government, found that a remarkable 52 per cent of those who had ever applied for a government student loan were unsatisfied with the service they received.

That is why I and my good friend, Mark O'Meara, decided to create the first national,

want the government of Canada to make eight key reforms to the student loan system; we call it our Eight-Point Plan.

The plan includes a significant reduction in, or the elimination of, all interest charges on student loans. Currently, Canadian borrowers endure some of the highest student loan interest rates in the industrialized world — with most paying between 8.75 per cent and 11.25 per cent in interest, compounded daily. The federal government, meanwhile, only pays about 4.15 per cent in interest to borrow the funds it lends to us. Canadian students, in fact, pay far more interest than people in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, and Germany.

At the same time, the government's own annual reports indicate that up to 75 per cent of all borrowers who default do so in the first three years of repayment — when most of what they are repaying is interest. In other words, if we reduce or eliminate student loan interest, we also can seek to reduce or eliminate student loan defaults.

The Coalition also wants to see significant improvements to the existing Interest Relief program. As the name suggests, this program offers short-term interest relief to borrowers experiencing financial difficulties. But the program is littered with inequities — not least of which is its rigid eligibility criteria.

There must also be improvements made to established debt reduction programs, as well as further streamlining of provincial and federal loan programs to improve efficiency.

The CSLF also wants to see an ombudsperson office established to help the thousands of borrowers who experience difficulties dealing with the system every year. The Coalition, too, seeks a crackdown on abusive collection agencies that unduly harass or abuse student loan borrowers struggling with repayment.

Finally, we advocate the reinstatement

responds with meaningful change, however, remains to be seen.

The federal Conservative Party has been tight-lipped about its plans for the system. The minister responsible for the loan program, Monte Solberg, has repeatedly said a review of the CSLP is underway, with an announcement on reforms expected in 2008. To date, the Coalition has received no assurances that these reforms will seek to address the number one cause of student loan defaults: sky-high student loan interest rates.

Up to 75 per cent of all borrowers who default do so in the first three years of repayment — when most of what they are repaying is interest.

The Liberal Party of Canada, meanwhile, appears poised to support much of our plan, while the federal New Democratic Party has already officially endorsed it.

One thing is for sure: all federal politicians know that there are a lot of student loan borrowers — a significant voting block, to be sure. Even though our group only started in April 2007, prominent post-student organizations, including OUSA, have already answered the call. The CSLF has received over a dozen official endorsements for our plan, and continue to create new partnerships each day.

But more work still needs to be done. Please help us reform the system by logging on to our website at www.studentloanfairness.ca

Please help us reform the system by logging on to our website at www.studentloanfairness.ca and getting involved.

non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to representing the needs of Canada's 990,000 student loan borrowers: The Coalition for Student Loan Fairness (CSLF).

The Coalition has a simple mandate. We

of the six-month interest-free grace period following graduation.

Our plan, then, is not only simple and moderate — it is also realistic and it is achievable. Whether or not the federal government

[ness.ca](http://www.studentloanfairness.ca) and getting involved. We need volunteers and financial support — maybe you can help.

It's time for change; it's time for student loan fairness.



JAMES DOWNEY

A NEW STORY ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

For a generation or more, advocates for higher education have promoted investment on the basis of economic realism. The pitch is by now familiar: it's a competitive world out there; students need to prepare themselves for the knowledge economy; governments need to invest in education and research if Canada is to keep its privileged place in the world; colleges and universities

I believe that Canada is ready for a new, more inclusive story about why education is so vitally important. This would be a narrative that speaks to our wish for a just and civil society, as well as a productive one. Canada is ready for a narrative that combines social idealism with the pragmatism of economic interests.

are the engines of innovation and economic growth.

Occasionally, someone will acknowledge that education might have something to do with civic engagement or social justice or personal fulfillment, but usually only in passing. The primary rationale for education has for sometime been explained in terms of dollars and cents.

I have no doubt, as someone who himself has traded in this currency, that the knowledge economy narrative is both valid and useful in garnering attention and support for colleges and universities. That being said, there is evidence that the narrative is losing some of its resonance, especially with those who matter most, those on whose engagement and performance the

future of our society and economy depend. And I don't mean professors or university presidents or politicians or public servants. I mean students themselves.

I believe that Canada is ready for a new, more inclusive story about why education is so vitally important. This would be a narrative that speaks to our wish for a just and civil society, as well as a productive one. Canada is ready for a narrative that combines social idealism with the pragmatism of economic interests.

The heightened interest in the quality of post-secondary education, of which the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario is a concrete expression, presents a valuable opportunity to consider the broad value of higher education to an individual, a province, and a nation. As we weigh how best to eliminate obstacles to student access and mobility, we need to be mindful of the substance and quality of what it is we are trying to ensure access to.

As we consider how to measure quality in higher education, we should be careful not to neglect indicators related to social gains for graduates and their children, such as improved health, greater engagement in community organizations, reduced crime rates, or enhanced environmental awareness. And as we formulate research and innovation strategies for economic development, we need to remind ourselves that the cultivation of talent and tolerance may be as important as the new knowledge and technology we are striving to develop.

I recognize that this view presents its own challenges to the entire post-secondary education sector. If we expect our institutions to produce graduates who can think critically, who are ethically aware, who can engage fully as citizens, and who are equipped to learn throughout their lives, then we also need to ask whether our curricula incorporate those objectives, whether our faculty teach them, whether students are learning them, and whether those who fund higher education — governments, students, employers, and donors — are providing resources that are adequate to the task.

Does this mean that we should ignore issues that bear on economic returns and productivity gains of higher education? Not at all.

The most effective productivity strategy is to strengthen the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, so that graduates, no matter what their choices of careers, have the skills and knowledge needed to succeed as people, citizens, and workers.

What it does mean is that it's time for a more inspiring and encompassing narrative about the purpose and value of higher education. The Canadian who knew most about narratives, their origins, purpose, and forms, Professor Northrop Frye, once said:

"Every person with any function in society at all will have some kind of ideal vision of that society in the light of which he operates. One can hardly imagine a social worker going out to do case work without thinking of her as having, somewhere in her mind, a vision of a better, cleaner, healthier,

The most effective productivity strategy is to strengthen the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, so that graduates, no matter what their choices of careers, have the skills and knowledge needed to succeed as people, citizens, and workers.

more emotionally balanced city, as a kind of mental model inspiring the work she does. One can hardly imagine ... any professional person not having such a social model — a world of health for the doctor or of justice for the judge — nor would such a social vision be confined to the professions."

The challenge for education in a democratic society is to equip all of its citizens to live productive and fulfilling lives, not merely as producers and consumers of goods and services, but as creators and enjoyers of their capacities for skill development, for rational understanding, for moral judgment and action, for aesthetic expression or contemplation, for friendship and love.

If this is so, then the stories we tell about education should be broad and deep enough to reflect that challenge.



MARGARET-ANN AMOUR

BARRIER-FREE EDUCATION IN MATHS AND SCIENCES

“This is science, I can do it,” exclaimed Tasha, a young woman in her second-to-last year of high school. She had just spent six weeks in a university research laboratory studying chemistry.

Careers in science and engineering offer students like Tasha the opportunity to work in a highly stimulating environment with a very wide range of work possibilities. These include hands-on bench and field work, as well as manufacturing, design, marketing, and management. In academe, there is the excitement of curiosity-driven research and the rewards of teaching and community interaction.

Why is it then, that even in 2007, when across the country, over 50 per cent of students in first-year science classes are female, there are still relatively few women choosing and continuing in careers in the sciences and engineering?

For example, in Canadian universities, 14.5 per cent of faculty in the mathematical and physical sciences are women, and the figure is 11.2 per cent in engineering and the applied sciences. In the sciences, the numbers have not increased over the past five years.

Some of the issues that are discouraging women from entering these careers include attempting to manage a career and a family, a sense of isolation in a male-dominated field and systemic biases.

One of the most common questions among female undergraduate and graduate students is how can they juggle a demanding scientific career and having a family. The issue is especially important to women since they often carry a greater responsibility for child and elder care. Large businesses and industries can often offer part-time work, flexible hours, and opportunities to take leaves of absences when needed. However, workplaces with fewer employees may have a more difficult time when a highly technical and key employee wishes to reduce work hours or take a leave.

Universities and colleges in particular are struggling with this issue. The demands of a heavy teaching load or of research and teaching can be particularly time consuming. In talking with female graduate students, in the sciences, about the possibility of careers in academe, I often hear the phrase, “I do not want the lifestyle of my supervisor.” They see someone who spends many hours a week in the office or in the lab, with many pressures on them.

However, there is another side of academic life: there are few careers which allow the independence of a faculty position where

one can choose their own research and pursue their greatest interests. Working within a university and interacting with people in the forefront of their disciplines is highly stimulating.

Students who choose an education and a career in science or engineering can expect benefits that they might not experience in other disciplines. These can include the op-

Students who choose an education and a career in science or engineering can expect benefits that they might not experience in other disciplines. These can include the opportunity to travel to scientific meetings and to share the excitement of a discovery with others in the field. Sometimes this side of academe is a well-kept secret ...

portunity to travel to scientific meetings and to share the excitement of a discovery with others in the field. Sometimes this side of academe is a well kept secret to the beginning graduate student. For this reason, effective mentorship for students can have a considerable influence on the decision to continue in the sciences and engineering.

A survey of American graduate students in chemistry has shown that the advice and mentorship given to female graduate students is different from that given to male graduate students. Women are still less likely than men to be encouraged to apply to high profile faculties for post-doctoral positions, or to receive positive career encouragement.

There are some areas of responsibility

where students such as Tasha might find themselves as the only woman, or at least one in a very small group of women. This can result in a sense of isolation and a feeling of being an outsider. As with graduate students, it is well recognized that effective and sensitive mentorship, not only of new employees, but all through one's career is a major factor in being successful.

Many universities request department chairs to assign mentors to new faculty and often workplaces intentionally assign mentors. Mentors can not only provide relevant information about the job and the workplace and answer specific questions, but they can also share unwritten rules and unrecorded wisdom. The sense of not belonging and of isolation is considerably mitigated.

This sense of isolation is related to another issue which is a more difficult one to address. It is the culture of a predominantly male workplace in the sciences and engineering with its hidden and systemic biases. Both women and men have a tendency to unconsciously undervalue women's qualifications compared to those of men.

For example, a recent study has shown that women's curriculum vitae still tend to be rated lower than comparable ones of men. An example of unintentional bias was found by two researchers at the University of Gothenburg. They studied previous fellowship applications to the Swedish Research Council and found that to be judged of equal competence, the women applicants had to have published three more papers in prestigious journals, such as *Nature and Science*, than male applicants. Raising awareness of these biases is the only way that they can be addressed and changed. They can be particularly problematic in the hiring process in universities, where paper qualifications are heavily weighted.

Universities are investigating these issues and putting into place measures to effect change. Science and engineering faculties need students such as Tasha. A workplace with a diversity of employees is more family friendly and more inclusive of all employees. A business with a diverse board provides higher returns to its shareholders and the more diverse the group of people seeking to solve a complex scientific or engineering problem, the more robust the solution.

Tasha may face some difficult choices as she pursues her scientific education, but her presence will make it easier for those who follow her, and she will be able to look back on a challenging and satisfying career with the words “That was science; I did it!”

WHY MODERNIZE STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN CANADA?

NOEL BALDWIN AND ANDREW PARKIN

Canada's student financial assistance systems have been in place (and remained largely the same) for more than 40 years. Their importance is undeniable: They allow countless young people to access the higher education they need to participate more successfully in the economy and in society. Student assistance in Canada is as important as it is complicated. In part, this is because there is no single system of student assistance in Canada, but a collection of systems that reflect the politics and priorities of each jurisdiction.

Why talk about modernization now? The spotlight is shining on the need to modernize student financial assistance in part because the federal government has raised the subject in its latest economic documents. Budget 2007 stated that: "the Government [is] committed to working with the provinces and territories to modernize and simplify the administration and delivery of student aid in order to make supports more effective, transparent and predictable." It also launched a review of the Canada Student Loans Program that will result in changes announced in 2008.

Several provinces are also considering policy changes. Reviews of post-secondary education are underway or have been completed in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario. Many have produced recommendations about their respective student aid systems. In some cases, policy and program changes have been implemented.

Whether explicitly under the guise of "modernization" or not, provincial governments are moving ahead independently of the federal student loan program to change how students receive funding. What's less clear, however, is the reasoning on which governments are basing their decisions and the impact these changes will have.

A final development that should encourage us to re-examine aid in Canada is the publication of new research. Today, our understanding of the needs of different types of students is much more advanced than it was just five years ago. We also know much more about the ways government funds are being used to support students, the impact of different policies, and the evolving profile of the student body. Ideally, this understanding should underpin any discussion of how best to modernize student financial assistance.

What do we know and what do we need to know? Over the past several years, agencies such as the Foundation and Statistics Canada have published research relevant to the discussion post-secondary access and financial assistance. Much of this research was recently summarized in the Foundation's "The Price of Knowledge 2006-07." A (admittedly, very) short review of some of the key findings can be summarized as follows:

- There are significant participation gaps between different groups based on income and parental education. At the same time, First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth are completing secondary school in devastatingly low proportions, which

presents unique challenges in provinces such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where a significant portion of the youth population (and future labour force) are First Nations, Inuit or Métis.

- Canada's demography is changing such that the youth cohort (aged 18-to-24 years old) will begin to shrink in five years and, within ten years, will be smaller than it is today. Several hundred thousand fewer young people will be available to go to post-secondary institutions at a time when more jobs will depend on it. If the absolute number of college and university graduates is to be maintained at current levels (let alone increased), more and more students currently under-represented in post-secondary education will need to participate.

- We know that need-based grants do not always reach those students from under-represented backgrounds (such as those from low-income families), who need non-repayable aid most, simply because these student do not always have the largest loans.

- We know that providing high-need students a mix of loans and grants (as opposed to only loans) can improve rates of persistence and completion, in some cases by as much as 30 per cent.

- We know that financial and non-financial barriers interact, compounding the challenges for young people who are already under-represented in post-secondary education.

- Finally, we know that most of the new government spending to support students has come in the form of untargeted, non-need-based funding to individuals through tax credits, savings incentive programs and universally available grants.

In addition to research findings, there are a number of lessons that have been learned through practical experience. One is that national "one-size-fits-all" programs will seldom fit well against existing provincial programs, resulting in duplication, "displacement," and an inefficient use of resources. Without compromising national objectives — such as facilitating access for under-represented groups of students — programs that vary in their implementation across jurisdictions can be more responsive to the needs of students, while ensuring that existing provincial funds are not displaced. Another lesson learned is that much can be gained by evaluation programs, rather than simply assuming that they are achieving their intended objectives. Despite what we have learned, there is still a lot that we don't know. Because of the difficulty in accessing student financial aid data, we still don't know enough about which types of students end up with what combination of loans and grants (not to mention aid from their institutions), which students don't get any or enough assistance and how recent or proposed policy changes will affect them.

Where do we go from here? The federal government's stated priorities for reforming student financial assistance are that it should be: modernized, simple in administration, effective, transparent and predictable. These objectives provide a fine

start, but they do not answer all the questions about what modernization should mean and the basis upon which policy decisions should be made.

The Foundation believes that any conversation about modernization needs to begin first with a discussion of the principles upon which a system of student financial assistance should be based. By establishing, first and foremost, the goals and character of student financial assistance, the mechanics of the system will begin to become clear. Briefly, then, in our view a modernized system of financial assistance is one that:

- 1. Has clear objectives and effective targets**
 - a) Controls debt of high-need students.
 - b) Lowers financial barriers for students from under-represented groups.
 - c) Covers "unmet need" where possible.
- 2. Is integrated appropriately with provincial programs**
 - a) Varies programs across jurisdictions to marry national objectives with local priorities.
 - b) Makes use of existing provincial infrastructure.
 - c) Guarantees stable funding, at least over the medium-term.
 - d) Seeks opportunities to create joint programs and partnerships with provinces to provide additional benefits for students.
- 3. Is accountable and transparent**
 - a) Guarantees that funds will reach target populations and can trace payments directly to individual recipients.
 - b) Evaluates programs through independent research and makes adjustments in view of lessons learned to maximize results.
 - c) Anticipates the possibility of "displacement" and ensures reinvestment of equivalent funds.
- 4. Is comprehensive in its approach**
 - a) Acknowledges that financial barriers exist alongside other barriers that require different policy responses.
 - b) Seeks to build better "pathways" from high school to post-secondary education for students from under-represented groups.
 - c) Targets persistence as well as access.
- 5. Uses an evidence-based approach to policy development**
 - a) Collects relevant data, tests new policy tools, and documents best practices.

If these principles make sense, then the question inevitably turns to which policy instruments can be effective in achieving them. From there, the mechanics of delivering programs will flow naturally. We believe that proceeding in this way increases the chances of developing a truly modern student financial assistance system that best serves the next generation of young Canadians.

The opinions expressed in article are those of the authors and do not represent official policies of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.



SCOTT COURTICE

INCREASING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

With the political season upon us I thought I'd share a sober lesson I've learned during my time as a student advocate: youth-centric issues, which I define as issues affecting the under-30 crowd, aren't a priority for politicians because as a demographic we lack real political influence in the halls of power. As such our issues rarely become a political priority unless they intersect with the desires of older generations or other influential interest groups.

I don't make this observation to be dispiriting. I make it because I believe the time has come for our generation to begin reflecting on how this has come to be, and what can be done to remedy the situation for future generations.

With few notable exceptions — most recently the 2005 mass mobilization of students in Quebec — youth have traditionally lacked an ability to obtain and sustain influence, primarily due to an inability to harness the holy trinity of levers that grant political influence: capacity to channel money into political party coffers, ability to mass-mobilize voters at election time, and the power to influence public opinion through effective engagement in shaping the political discourse of the country.

Working for short term solutions to enlarge our influence, such as increasing voter turnout in elections and mobilizing en masse to put our issues on the front page will remain critically important, but I believe real solutions will emerge only when we move beyond our conventional short-term tactics and begin working to answer a more strategic question: how do we build a culture of civic engagement among youth that empowers us to be more active and valued participants in Canadian political life?

We've started to make progress. A recent Stats Can report demonstrated that the tide is turning on 'non-voting' political activity, such as joining an issue-based club like Amnesty International, or attending an issue-based event or speaker. Evidence is also emerging that another core civic activity, volunteerism, is also on the upswing.

If civic engagement is growing in the non-political arena, why aren't we also seeing increases in voter turnout and participation in party-based politics? My personal belief is that civic activities on the rise have one significant advantage over voting and party-based political activities: they provide us with a nearly limitless range of choices, tailored to our individual interests and values.

Many youth, raised on a consumer culture that provides us with nearly unlimited choice

and instant gratification, aren't willing to park our votes within the narrow ideological confines of the traditional political parties, and are easily dispirited when politicians' promises of change don't materialize as advertised.

I'd argue that those of us who do join parties do so primarily because 'you have to pick a team to play', not because we feel good about it. I often hear the lament from friends that "I'm more liberal than the Liberals, but less liberal than New Democrats", or "I'm more conservative than the Liberals but more liberal than the Conservatives."

We've started to make progress. A recent Stats Can report demonstrated that the tide is turning on 'non-voting' political activity, such as joining an issue-based club like Amnesty International, or attending an issue-based event or speaker. Evidence is also emerging that another core civic activity, volunteerism, is also on the upswing.

Rather than compromising, and settling for the option that comes closest to their values, many decide to dedicate their energies to non-governmental organizations that are better aligned with their values, and provide tangible results for their efforts.

Turning the tide on non-voting civic engagement is a positive trend, but unfortunately holds little currency in increasing our influence over political decision making. As such, we need more youth to engage with the political process, and we need more of

us heading to the polls on Election Day.

So how do we build a culture of political participation? I can't pretend to have the solution, but I'll humbly offer three ideas to get the conversation started:

- Return to a more civil politics. Our politics should appeal to our better instincts, not inflame our fears, prejudices, and insecurities. End the personal attacks, improve decorum in legislatures, and stop focusing on wedge issues and begin communicating compelling and inspiring ideas that will make a real difference in the lives of Canadians. The negative tone of politics is especially dispiriting for today's youth because we can't remember a time when things were better.

- Change our voting system to give voice to a wider range of political perspectives in our legislatures. We can continue to haggle over the best system to do this — be it pure or mixed proportionality, single transferable vote, or some other system — but I believe that youth won't begin turning out to the polls in droves until they have a wider range of choices, and a degree of hope that politicians sharing their values will actually have voice in legislatures, even if that voice is in the minority. Having heard my grandfather always complain about sending 'the same old bums to Ottawa', this would certainly resonate well beyond the youth demographic.

- The time has come to reduce the voting age from 18 to 16. Reducing the voting age would allow good civic habits to be normalized earlier in life, and the High School civics curriculum could be harnessed to ensure youth are empowered to make good ballot choices. This isn't a radical idea when you consider that many youth who have not reached the age of majority begin assuming critical civic responsibilities that warrant enfranchising them with the vote, such as paying income tax, driving cars, facing the potential of being charged as an adult for a range of criminal offences, and joining the Canadian Forces.

In the mean time, I hope you voted on October 10th. If your choice was 'none of the above', you could have gone to the polls anyway and exercised your democratic right to spoil your ballot! After heading to the polls add your efforts to achieving the larger goal of building meaningful and sustained engagement in the political process among youth.

Your student leaders will thank you. And you'll ultimately thank yourself for strengthening our democracy, and ensuring public policy reflects the values of our generation.



PARIS MEILLEUR

PARTISANSHIP: NOT THE WAY TO MAKE CHANGE

I have a confession to make: I used to be involved in partisan politics. I used to have entire discussions about politics using only party slogans; supported issues and candidates because they were my party's issues and candidates; and used to think that the only way to affect meaningful change was to be a member of a political party.

But I've changed.

You could say I've become embittered, disillusioned or cynical. But none of those things are true. I still vote in elections. I still support many of the same issues and candidates that I used to. I still believe that partisan politics can be a meaningful way to engage in making change.

But I don't believe that strict adherence to party lines, to party ideology and dogma, is helpful in making change. In fact, I think it takes our attention away from discovering ways to really affect public policy.

Political parties are encouraging our apathy and our lack of engagement.

But so what? Why should we even be talking about partisanship? It's clear that our generation isn't particularly interested in parties and even electoral politics at all. We don't show up to vote, we don't hold party memberships the way our parents and grandparents did. So this should be a non-issue for university students, right?

Wrong. I think there's a reason we're so un-engaged with political parties, reasons outside of the curse of the MTV attention-span and assumed youth apathy. Actually, I don't buy the youth-as-apathetic argument at all. It's too easy.

I think students are actually too idealistic, too hopeful that a better world is possible. As we go to university, learn more and more about the world and how it works and how it should work, we become more discerning of the information around us, more critical of what's promised versus what's delivered. And when we look around us, we just don't see any institutions, especially political ones, promoting any real alternatives, options or vision.

We're not the cynical ones; political parties are. Through targeting the lowest-common denominator, relying on crass pol-

ing numbers to determine what issues matter and don't, political parties are encouraging our apathy and our lack of engagement.

To illustrate this, let me use an American example. Okay, it's not a real American example, it's from *The West Wing*, but that's close enough. There's a small sub-plot in an episode where the President's assistant, Charlie, tells a food critic that the President doesn't really like green beans. This then becomes a political issue for the President's staff because they need the votes of the green bean farmers in Oregon for their re-election campaign and are worried that the President not liking beans will lose them. So they start discussing a photo-op with the President eating green beans and make plans to visit Oregon one extra time in the upcoming election. Charlie can't understand why this is such a big deal — so what if the President doesn't like beans? The people of Oregon aren't stupid. C.J., the Press Secretary, says to Charlie: "Everyone's stupid in an election year." To which he responds "No, everyone gets treated stupid in an election year, C.J."

Okay, it's a corny illustration, but I think it speaks to this broader issue. Political parties don't expect enough from us, from our engagement, from our brains. They expect that we're stupid, that we need them to dumb-down the issues during campaigns, that we can't figure what we believe without sloganeering and pandering.

In addition to the dumbing-down of political discourse, we also have the problem of how dissent within parties is managed and how, even when we do get engaged in political parties, our dissent is ignored.

In political parties, especially in Canada, where party discipline is so strong, there is often a "you're either with us or against us" mentality where the internal workings or external critiques are concerned.

This is especially difficult because it often translates into token youth involvement, instead of meaningful participation. I got to be involved in my party because they were always looking for enthusiastic youth. They made me a riding association president and youth representative to the provincial executive; in return, I founded a campus club for them. Everything was working out beautifully because I bought what they were selling and put a youthful, female face on the party. But then I started disagreeing with what the party was doing, with tactics, with philosophy, with election strategy and candidate-selection.

And I didn't keep it quiet. I was vocal

within the party about changes we should have been making, about where we were going wrong. I was accused of being disloyal, against the party, contrary. My comfy position in the party as an up-and-comer soon became a historical footnote (as if we keep records that well, but you know, theoretically). Again, I'll restate here that I'm not embittered by the process or even cynical; instead I'm disappointed that the one place I thought dissent was supposed to matter, ended up being a place where it was least welcome.

In discussing the United Nations, Stephen Lewis wrote that "There is a tendency to think that dissent should be contained or that self-censorship is to be applauded. I regard both as the last refuge of an intellectual wimp."

Our challenge is to engage ourselves in various change processes, including political parties, organizations, and associations.

I think these oughta be fightin' words; a rallying cry for young people and university students who should take offense to dissent being equated with loyalty within parties. J. William Fullbright said that, "In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith." Surely we should be able to say the same thing about the political parties that are supposed support our democracy and democratic principles.

So what is our challenge then, as educated students, focused on providing educated solutions to the problems we see everyday, whether in the post-secondary education system or with health care or with the economy? Our challenge is to engage ourselves in various change processes, including political parties, organizations, and associations and become agents for change. We need to become our political party's or organization's most passionate cheerleader, while at the same time remaining its harshest critic. That's how we'll be able to develop institutions, political or otherwise, that we'll be proud to be part of, that we won't have to feel ashamed to admit our participation in and ultimately, we'll create meaningful change while we're at it.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BY ERIN LETSON

PHOTO BY MATTHEW MASON-PHILIPS

ON A FRIGID FEBRUARY DAY IN Ottawa, Evan Oxland is patiently trying to get an ambulance-turned-food-transporter to start. Appropriately dubbed the “ambu-lunch,” the vehicle is a necessary part of the Garden Spot, a pay-what-you-can vegan food collective that offers healthy alternatives to students four afternoons a week at Carleton University. With minus 30 degree weather and the graffiti-covered truck sputtering, Oxland eventually concedes to taking a cab to make a food pick-up in the city’s west end.

Since 8:00 a.m., Oxland and three other volunteers have been preparing food, in a clean but run-down kitchen, a short distance from campus. A large fridge is filled with spices, garlic, ginger, canned tomatoes, beans, noodles, and rice. Today’s menu consists of curry with sweet potatoes, a Greek salad (minus the feta cheese), and chocolate banana bread.

The cooks are cheery in their work, sipping on Yerba Mate in hollowed out gourds while chucking food scraps into a giant blue box. They discuss both the “fifth taste” in Japanese cooking and what they see as the many negative aspects of Carleton’s campus food provider, Aramark.

The Garden Spot (nicknamed the G-Spot) is one of a handful of student-run

alternative food organizations found at Ontario universities. It operates under the belief that a corporate monopoly over university food services limits the number of affordable and healthy eating choices, and students suffer the consequences.

“Universities have a medieval command-and-control model that can limit student’s choices,” says Brenden Murphy, a master of philosophy student who has been volunteering with the Garden Spot since its early days. “It’s problematic to offer only one [food] choice, especially when it’s not very affordable.”

While the issue of providing healthy food options in elementary and high schools has become a high priority of the provincial government and a target in the media, universities are staying largely under the radar thanks to their private status and the assumption that adults don’t need to be told what to eat. But when vending machines chock-full of chips and soft drinks are commonplace and readily available fast foods are easier on the wallet than nutritionally balanced meals, the danger of universities becoming part of the obesity cycle is higher than many people might expect.

According to Statistics Canada, 8 per cent of Canadian youth aged two to 17 were obese in 2004, and medical experts and stud-

ies consistently warn that being overweight contributes to illnesses like cancer and other health problems, such as high blood pressure.

“As a nation, we have gotten accustomed to high sugar, high salt, low fibre, very processed foods that are almost half-digested,” says Anne Zok, nutrition manager at the University of Western Ontario. “We need to take a step back and start looking at foods in terms of how processed they are.”

In the past two years, public schools in North America and Europe have been criticized — and scrutinized — for their poor selection of cafeteria foods like greasy pizza and fries. The issue was brought to the forefront largely thanks to British chef Jamie Oliver and his 2005 hit program Jamie’s School Dinners, where he proved he could make healthy lunches for the same price as the poor-quality food being served at most schools.

Research cited by the Dieticians of Canada concludes that a poor diet adversely influences a child’s ability to learn and decreases motivation. It also reveals that by the time children reach the ages of nine to 12, many of them have eating and lifestyle habits that could lead to cardiovascular disease as early as their 30s.

The federal government has responded

through measures like the newly refurbished Canada Food Guide, and the provincial government states elementary schools can only permit fruit juices, bottled water, and low-fat and non-fat milk in vending machines. High schools are under stricter measures to carry diet pop.

With unhealthy diets and habits starting at a young age, adolescents could be set for an even worse nutritional path when they head off to university at 17 or 18 years old. Zok says the combination of stress, socializing, and a myriad of unhealthy choices can mean gaining what's known as the "Freshman 15" is not hard to do.

She explains that an extra 250 calories a day — about the number that's in a bagel — equates to gaining an extra half pound a week, which is roughly two pounds a month. A 2002 California State University study suggested almost half of students gained weight after starting their post-secondary education, with students citing "lack of time" as their biggest barrier to healthy eating.

Tiffany Duncan, a fourth-year health sciences student at the University of Waterloo, says the nature of food venues on campus makes her question if students can resist the convenience and temptation of

unhealthy foods like cheap pizza slices and giant chocolate chip muffins.

"I'd say the food services on campus are

While the issue of providing healthy food options in elementary and high schools has become a high priority of the provincial government and a target in the media, universities are staying largely under the radar ...

sending a message, based on how visible the fast food outlets are, that it's acceptable to eat bad foods on a regular basis," she says.

At the Aramark-run Oasis café at Carleton, pizza, fries, and burgers, as well as creamy soups and croissants are all daily offerings. While there are healthy options like salads, sandwiches, and sushi, they cost significantly more — a stir fry is \$6.30, a fruit cup \$3.29, and a single banana \$1.05. On the other hand, a personal pepperoni pizza can be had for \$3.59 and a BLT sandwich and fries for \$4.64. Fountain soft drinks cost considerably less than the bottled juice and fruit smoothies that are available.

Maxime Wood, the marketing program manager for Dining Services at Carleton, says the price of fresh produce on campus is based on the supplier, which ships fruits and vegetables in daily from the United States. She adds that Aramark wants to keep the price of fresh produce constant throughout the year, which is why things like bananas cost more than what you would find them for in the grocery store.

These extra costs can be prohibitive to students, says Donald Lesar, a health sciences student at the University of Waterloo.

"I think [responsibility] partially lies on the student to make healthy choices, but I think it's partially the university's responsibility to offer an affordable, healthy eating en-



PHOTO BY MATTHEW MASON-PHILLIPS

Student volunteers at Carleton University's Garden Spot load vegan food into the "ambulunch," an ambulance-turned-food-transporter.



The Garden Spot is a pay-what-you-can vegan food collective that offers healthy alternatives to students four afternoons a week at Carleton University.



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW MASON-PHILIPS

vironment because of how much it reflects on higher education,” says Lesar. “You’re more able to concentrate if you eat healthy foods and you’re properly nourished.”

Most Ontario universities are outfitted with one of two major food providers — Aramark and Chartwells. Both companies are American chains that service offices, along with elementary schools and universities.

Along with these providers offering their own cafeterias and cafés, universities are also home to retail chains like Tim Hortons, Pizza Pizza, A&W, and Pita Pit. Starting in first year, most students opt to put money on their campus cards and have easy swiping access to as many fast food meals and double-double coffees as they choose. Some schools even have cards that work in pubs and restaurants off campus.

“There are so many more selections — good selections and not-so-good selections and food is a social thing,” says Zok. “Many students are eating at all hours and ordering food with friends.”

Because of the contracts food providers have with universities, there seems to be hostility toward students who try and provide other food options on campus. Murphy recalls the difficulty the G-Spot had staying open, especially when Chartwells was Carleton’s food provider (the university switched to Aramark in 2003). He says the company would send health inspectors down to the serving room almost every day.

The G-Spot secured extra funding last year thanks to a \$2.00 levy students voted on. However, the food co-operative still doesn’t have a kitchen space on campus and their serving area is designated to a tiny room down a long and narrow hall in the university’s student centre.

“The administration is content for Aramark to have a monopoly and doesn’t want to deal with us,” Murphy says. “But Aramark food is really expensive and not very good for you.”

It’s evident that the alternative food model is becoming popular at universities across Ontario. Trent University in Peterborough is home to the Seasoned Spoon, a not-for-profit vegetarian café that serves a selection of soups, salads, sandwiches and fresh baked goods made with organic ingredients. Students purchase memberships for \$5.00 and become part of the cooperative, which entails making decisions about how the café operates and getting discounts on the food (wraps cost about \$3.25, soup \$2.75). There are ten paid staff members at the Seasoned Spoon.

At the University of Ottawa, the People’s Republic of Delicious (PRD) operates in a similar way to the G-Spot. Run by the Students with a Collective Conscience, the food cooperative has been unable to secure

a kitchen on-campus and is run on a completely volunteer basis. Murphy says more Ontario universities should follow the example of Concordia University in Montreal, where the school’s administration is open to allowing alternative food choices.

“The People’s Potato at Concordia were squatting on places on campus and within a year they secured a free section of the university kitchen and don’t have to pay rent,” he says. “We’ve never had a kind word from Carleton administration.”

The People’s Potato, which began in 1999, now serves between 400 and 500 students a day, compared to the G-Spot’s 75 to 100. It is still run mostly by volunteers, but has a few paid staff members and is able to hold workshops about healthy cooking on a budget and education about food and poverty issues around the world.

Most Ontario universities are outfitted with one of two major food providers—Aramark, and Chartwells. Both companies are American chains that service offices, along with elementary schools and universities.

Although these student-run outlets may appear to be competing with the contracted food providers on campus, Murphy insists that isn’t really the case.

“We appeal to the \$2 lunch crowd, not the \$9 lunch crowd,” he says. “We also appeal to vegans who aren’t really being catered to at Aramark locations.”

Many universities and food providers seem to be catching on that healthier eating choices are needed on campuses. Aramark recently released a program called Campus Dish, where students can access daily menus and find links to general health information websites. This program will be extended next year at Carleton, where touch screens will be added outside cafeterias for students to view their food choices. Wood says Carleton’s Dining services are also working on a program with Aramark called Green Thread to promote locally grown organic food on campus.

Universities like Waterloo and McMaster were recently commended by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the world's largest youth animal-rights organization, for having accessible vegetarian and vegan options.

At the University of Western Ontario, most food outlets on campus are not contracted out to a food provider. Instead, the university operates its own food services, which Anne Zok says helps serve students better.

Zok gives the example of a vending machine pilot project the school embarked on this year. Two "Lifestyles" vending machines were put on campus and filled with healthy snacks like nuts and seeds, dried fruit, cereals and energy bars. The project is going to be reviewed at the end of the school year, and Zok says she hopes it can be expanded.

"I think most people going to a vending machine are typically not looking for

reflect market prices.

"Certainly there are students that are on a strict budget and price can act as a deterrent," she says. "Some people argue that we need to get the government to subsidize some of the produce farmers so that benefit can then trickle down to the consumer."

Some health sciences students at the University of Waterloo also suggest that campus food outlets raise the prices of unhealthier foods, like chocolate bars and fries, to subsidize the cost of healthier options, including ethnic vegan foods and fruit cups.

Of course, many people argue the best thing to do is simply to bring a lunch and avoid processed foods as much as possible. Zok suggests students bring snacks like yogurt with frozen fruit, or mixed nuts for energy.

Josh Tiessen, who is also a health sciences student at the University of Waterloo says he chooses to bring his lunch whenever

support, including one-on-one counselling about dieting, weight management and vegetarianism. The University of Western offers a program called PENS (Peer Education and Nutrition for Students), which trains upper-year students to go into residences and do talks on nutrition. The University of Waterloo offers a first-year service course called Health 102 that has a nutrition module to gauge eating options and habits.

"Food is such a personal choice," says Zok. "You have to want to make the changes and you have to resign yourself to that fact that it's not always going to be easy, especially when we have bad eating habits for extended periods of time."

And despite efforts to make universities healthier, Wood points out dining services must appeal to all their customers and they can't take away all the unhealthy choices that are offered.

"There will always be students who want



STUDENTS ACROSS THE PROVINCE ARE TAKING NUTRITION INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.

something healthy, but if they know that one vending machine is devoted specifically to healthy options, they might come over and select something from there," she says.

At the University of Waterloo, another school that isn't completely outfitted with one contracted-out food provider, a farmer's market comes to campus once a week in the fall months so that students can buy cheap, locally-grown produce.

Duncan says she would like to see the market continue into the winter months.

"The farmer's market we had here was awesome and I think they should find some way to have produce that's in season in winter, on a smaller scale," she says. "It's great to be able to get cheaper local produce on campus."

Zok says the problem of expensive fruits and vegetables is a difficult one to address for food providers because the items simply

he can.

"With the monopolization the campus has on food, they mark things up so much," he says. "I will make my own lunches every day because it's too expensive to buy on campus based on the choices that are offered."

Still, if high schools are getting flack for serving too much greasy food, shouldn't universities also be criticized, especially when convenience and affordability often trumps healthiness for students who already have a lot on their plates?

"I think encouragement is a big deal," says Tiessen. "I know when I was in first-year my parents weren't around so I got pretty intense with eating chicken fingers. But it tastes so good and that's what you would like to eat because it tastes great, even though realistically you'd like to make better decisions."

Most campuses do offer nutritional

burgers and fries, and who are we to take that away?" she says.

While campuses work to figure out the balance between profiting and social responsibility when it comes to food services, operations like the G-Spot continue to provide an alternative to students to make sure healthy eating isn't restricted to only those who can afford it.

Evan Oxland plans to start a garden this summer and can the vegetables to use at the G-Spot during the winter months. Murphy says he other G-Spot volunteers will continue the battle with Carleton administration to secure a spot on campus, and hopefully expand the number of students the collective can feed.

"No one gets paid at the G-Spot," says Murphy. "Aside from the fact that it's fun to cook, it's important to us to have good food on campus for everyone." ■



HALT THE PRESSES!

BY JESSICA ROSE

PHOTO BY JESSICA ROSE

IT IS A FRIDAY NIGHT AT MC-Master University's student centre. Classes have already ended for the evening, but it is hardly quiet. Students still linger with book bags slung over their shoulders and steaming coffees in their hands. Small groups of them stand together, discussing weekend plans and looming essays.

As groups disperse they mutter best wishes for the weekend ahead and exit the crowded centre. Most pause by the large glass doors to pick up the latest copy of *The Silhouette*, McMaster's student-run newspaper.

The Silhouette is just one of dozens of university newspapers in Ontario that are run almost entirely by students. In fact, some of the country's best journalists emerge from these small, independently-run presses that flourish because of bright, young students who are willing to push the envelope and encourage change on campus.

One of these students is Ian Horsewood, a fourth-year English and geography student at McMaster. In a typical week he spends 30 hours in *The Silhouette's* newsroom acting as the paper's opinions editor. Though he gets paid for only about half of the time he dedicates to this job, he says he wouldn't change a thing.

"I just love it and I can't believe I get paid to do it," he says in between sips of his tea. Despite juggling a nearly-full course load and his editorial duties, he's more than happy to get together to talk about *The Silhouette*. He sees the paper as "a voice that people don't always have." This is the role that his opinions section plays, he says, calling it a "good place to ensure diversity."

"The opinions section is always available to everyone," he explains, of the opportunity for students to share their own experiences in print and to have their work read by thousands of their peers across campus. At the time of this article, *The Silhouette's* online version of Horsewood's section includes everything from hard-hitting topics such as stem cell research and American bully tactics, to a lighthearted look at a group of peppy burlesque dancers in the mainstream media, better known as the Pussycat Dolls.

For almost as long as universities have existed in Canada, so have student-run newspapers. *The Varsity*, which is run by students at the University of Toronto, is the country's oldest. Since its inaugural issue it has tackled controversial topics and acted as a watchdog for the campus community.

In 1880, the first issue of *The Varsity* was

available to students. On its front page was a divisive article that caused quite a stir on campus. The newspaper, which was strongly in favour of co-education at the time, featured an article by a student named William Houston. Raising the question of allowing female students to attend the school, the article concluded with the triumphant statement "let a few young ladies muster courage to break the ice and they will soon find a numerous troop plunging in after them and the young gentleman generously applauding their intrepidity." From the first page, of its first issue, *The Varsity* played a crucial role in encouraging campus dialogue. Only a generation later, by the beginning of the World War I, 87 per cent of modern language students and 64 per cent of English students at University College (University of Toronto) were female.

The student press plays a crucial role in campus life, says Erin Millar, former president of the Canadian University Press (CUP). CUP publishes a daily newswire for campus universities, as well as grants legal aid and mentorship opportunities for student writers.

"It functions like the regular media, to keep a critical eye on government and to see

that they're functioning like they should," she says. This goes hand-in-hand with "making a campus feel like it is an engaged place and a fun place," she adds.

For Horsewood, and his team at *The Silhouette*, the newspaper not only provides McMaster students with information on news and events, but it also gives campus teams and organizations publicity and an audience.

"There are a lot of groups on campus that are doing really neat things," he says, acknowledging the unique environment that university offers, where it is so easy for students to get involved in student politics, art, or groups that cater to issues such as the environment or student activism. He adds that student newspapers make time for subject matter that the mainstream media might not have the time, or space, to include.

A recent study by the Canadian Newspaper Association found that young Canadians who are frequent readers of newspapers are "more likely to vote in elections, volunteer time in community service, and be more socially active than less frequent readers."

Jordan Bimm, the arts and entertainment editor for *The Varsity* agrees. As an artist himself, involved in both music and theatre, he is happy to see how the student press awards young artists by giving them recognition and exposure.

"A real important issue for us is to have a diverse voice," says Bimm. "As a campus newspaper we are looked to as an alternative voice. If people want to hear a mainstream opinion, they'll pick up *The Globe and Mail* or the Toronto Sun. People pick up *The Varsity* because they want to hear what's going on around campus and because they want to hear stories that might not make it into the other papers and are noteworthy." He says this is especially important in the arts and entertainment section.

"In the arts section, that means a triptych divide between the campus and the local arts focus, and international trends and styles,"

he says. "To ensure diversity I try to make sure there is equal coverage between all the arts. It's really tempting to focus on film and music because they're glamorous and very popular." The pages of the newspapers art's section includes "a lot of visual art coverage and dance coverage, photography exhibits, modern art and some weird, experimental music." Bimm says he's even found ways to include fashion and make-up in his section.

"We try to keep people guessing. It could be anything, but hopefully it will always be interesting and relevant," he says.

Contrary to stereotypical views of iPod-wearing, videogame-toting, cellphone-obsessed youth, the newspaper is hardly a dying medium among teens and twenty-somethings. A recent study by the Canadian Newspaper Association found that young Canadians who are frequent readers of newspapers are "more likely to vote in elections, volunteer time in community service, and be more socially active than less frequent readers."

The study finds that those who get into a habit of getting their news from a newspaper at a young age, will remain lifetime readers. It finds that "young newspaper readers are socially active and outgoing," meaning that they are more likely to enjoy local culture, such as restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

Both Bimm and Horsewood agree that working for a student newspaper can mean a place to have fun, while providing the community with valuable information.

However, like the mainstream media, campus newspapers can also be found guilty of libel or be ruled distasteful.

In March of 1952, two editors resigned after publication of *The Varsity* was suspended when a "gag" issue was released. The staff had replaced the word "English" with the word "sex" in an annual report that called for remedial English instruction. Of course, at the time this was an inexcusable act and led to great controversy among staff and students. The university's disciplinary committee found this issue to be in "shockingly bad taste." Notorious Canadian journalist Peter Gzowski was an editor of *The Varsity* at this time.

Student newspapers have been no stranger to freedom of the press issues in recent years. In some cases editorial decisions have been considered tasteless and in bad humour, while others have been considered offensive enough to lead to the resignation of editorial staff.

Like the students at *The Varsity*, staff from *The Carillon* were accused of offending their peers in a case of a joke-gone-wrong. In an article called, "To Skeet or not to Skeet," two male students discussed the pros and cons of picking up "unattractive" women at a bar. Though it was intended as a joke, the

article prompted dozens of students to reply with angry letters. This is a case of a student newspaper pushing too hard to differentiate themselves from the mainstream press and becoming offensive. The newspaper printed a full-page apology for the situation.

In some cases an editorial decision can lead to the cancellation of a publication all together. In 2002, *The Pillar*, a paper put out by engineering students at the University of New Brunswick, was halted after a story appeared that said wet t-shirt contests would be a good way to increase enrollment to the faculty.

Currently, the editorial staff at the University of P.E.I is debating whether or not to split from their student union, after the union pulled an issue of a student paper from the newsstands. *The Cadre* had made the

"I think one of the big hurdles is our funding model," says Millar, of a system that relies almost entirely on student levies and advertising sales. Because support from student government and university administration is limited, staff is forced to work long, unpaid hours, while utilizing limited resources to meet a deadline.

controversial decision to publish cartoons picturing the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. Security guards rounded the campus and confiscated copies of the paper. This cartoon controversy came in the same year that *The Sheaf*, at the University of Saskatchewan, came under fire for publishing a cartoon that showed Jesus Christ involved in a sex act with a pig. This led to the resignation of editor-in-chief Will Robbins, as well as an apology from other members of the editorial staff.

While the newspaper's autonomy from the union might further ensure freedom of the press on campus, it might lead to a financial struggle for the publication, which relies on the union for funding to cover costs such as wages, printing and equipment.

Erin Millar says an outdated funding

structure is one problem that faces the university press, often causing too many corners to be cut in the editorial process.

"I think one of the big hurdles is our funding model," says Millar, of a system that relies almost entirely on student levies and advertising sales. Because support from student government and university administration is limited, staff are forced to work long, unpaid hours, while utilizing limited resources to meet a deadline.

Ian Horwood says that *The Silhouette* is generally successful at adhering to a strict budget, though they "are a few computers short," and sometimes have to cut corners on printing costs if necessary.

Like most publications, *The Varsity* relies on both student levies, and advertisement sales. "It's about 15 per cent levy and 85 per cent ad sales," he says.

"We're very self-sufficient in that sense," he adds. "We're campaigning for a levy increase this year, because the last time it was increased was 1974, and it isn't tied to the rate of inflation, so technically it's been getting less and less every year since then."

He says that since the publication turned 125 years old last year, it's the perfect time to increase the levy.

Millar says that funding goes beyond printing and distribution costs and extends to an inability for many student papers to properly pay their staff.

"There is a real culture of not paying people well," says Millar. Many student writers are volunteers who are paid in experience and clippings for their portfolios. The ones who are paid often end up spending double the hours in the newsroom than they are actually paid for.

that you could actually live off of," says Millar. For this reason CUP is "focusing on creating more opportunities for awards and scholarships."

Many student writers are volunteers who are paid in experience and clippings. ... Millar says that this means that students who have their universities paid for by their parents are more likely to be able to work a campus job such as this. It forces students without financial flexibility to abandon their passions and find jobs at local coffee shops or sports pubs instead.

"We don't want to create a culture where the only people who are working for a paper are the ones who can afford to be there," she says. Such a pay structure leads to apathy on campus, she adds.

extra-curricular activities, as well as a financial pull due to rising tuition fees and living costs.

Getting involved with a large newspaper, such as *The Varsity* can mean some sacrifices, but Bimm says it is worth it.

"It's a really busy paper. There's a lot of stuff to do, so as a result a lot of people that work there takes a reduced course load, but that's a trade-off that most of us enjoy," he says.

Bimm even finds time to sit on *The Varsity's* Board of Directors, as the Chief Financial Officer.

"We've had some issues in the past with the Board of Directors being taken over by people whose interests weren't necessarily in journalism," he recalls. "Their interests were about controlling an aspect of the university. We've had issues with the Board of Directors trying to change the way the editors were elected one year, from free election to appointment by the board, which really is not in line with good journalism." This incident led to a legal standoff, and prompted Bimm to join the board "to make sure that this sort of thing never happened again and that there was always the voice of the editorial staff on the Board of Directors."

Another problem facing the university press is the quality of writing, says Horwood.

"It has been disappointing at times," he says, noting that McMaster joins most undergraduate schools in the country by not having a journalism program. "Communications studies is the closest we have," he says, noting that most of the writers come from political science or English backgrounds.

"I went in blindly like most people do at



PHOTOS BY DAN EPSTEIN

Since 1880, student staff and volunteers have been behind *The Varsity*, Canada's oldest university newspaper. Here, students Jordan Bimm, Chandler Levack, Mark Veloso and Dan Rios are hard at work in *The Varsity's* newsroom.

Millar says that this means that students who have their universities paid for by their parents are more likely to be able to work a campus job such as this. It forces students without financial flexibility to abandon their passions and find jobs at local coffee shops or sports pubs instead.

"A lot [of newspapers] don't pay a wage

Ian Horwood agrees.

"We're seeing a little more apathy on campus [then in the past], when it comes to students getting involved," he says. He lists a number of reasons for this, including competitiveness within the university that gives students little opportunities to venture outside the classroom to get involved with

The Silhouette," he says. Currently, the number of undergraduate university programs, in Ontario, specializing in journalism can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

However, for those aspiring writers who are willing to put in the time to learn, volunteering at student newspapers can be an excellent way to learn and to take the first



PHOTO BY DAN EPSTEIN

Many writers at student-run newspapers are volunteers who are paid in experience and clippings for their portfolios. No campus newspaper would survive without these volunteers and a small group of students who are paid. Many of these students spend double the hours in the newsroom than they are actually paid for.

steps toward an exciting journalism career.

"They are a place for people to apply the theories that they learn," says Horsewood, allowing them to take their knowledge or their beliefs and put it to paper in an unconventional way.

"University is geared only to essay writing," he adds, commenting on the lack of hands-on work in the classroom that can be found in a newsroom.

"I learned as much in my newsroom as I did in my classroom," says Millar, recalling her three years at *The Capilano Courier*, a student newspaper at Capilano College in British Columbia. For two of these years she acted as the publication's editor-in-chief.

"[The student-run press] gives students the opportunity to be more critical and to think outside of the box," she says, speaking of the ability to both learn and adapt as a writer, as well as the benefit of gaining the confidence to go after tough stories. These are lessons that can't usually be found on the blackboard of an English or history course.

Like *The Varsity* students who encouraged a discourse on the women's movement, today the university press remains crucial in getting students interested in campus news and world news.

"When our Executive Editor got fired a lot of people would come up to me," recalls Horsewood, of the buzz that *The Silhouette* was able to create when they felt that student's questions were not being answered by McMaster's administration.

"The only way they know is through the front page," he says. "I really saw the way that the media can definitely control the public dialogue."

This can go beyond student politics and affect student policies, he says.

"McMaster prides itself on being a forward, innovative place," he says, "but we still don't have a proper recycling and composting policy." By raising issues such as these in the campus press, he says that students get interested and create change by ignoring the trend of "too much talk and not enough action."

Bimm has also seen the way that the student press in itself can be a form of student activism, to make the community a better place.

"A couple years ago we broke a really huge story about a sexual assault scandal," recalls Bimm. "We knew for a fact we were going to get sued by the other party in this if we ran the story." He says that in some cases these risks need to be taken in order

to ensure the safety and happiness of students.

Above all, the campus press can unite students over common causes, and help them to share experiences, that otherwise might make them feel isolated.

"It's easy to get lost. U of T's a giant school, with 50,000 students," says Bimm. "It's very easy to get caught up in [academics]. We want to get people out and let them know what's going on."

Horsewood agrees, saying that it is "easy to live in a bubble. You cannot always be in tune with the outside world." The university press gives students this connection, whether they are weekly readers, or they prefer to casually peruse it while sitting and waiting for a bus, or while standing in line at the coffee shop.

"I'd obviously like to see every one of those papers off the shelf and being read," says Horsewood, because he knows of the hours that he and his peers dedicate to its creation and of the voice that it gives to his fellow students.

"Freedom of the press is one of the most important things in democracy," says Bimm. "[Attempting] to stifle it in any way, other than when it is extremely hateful, is doing a disservice to the public at large." ■

REAL STORIES OF YOUTH ACTION ON CAMPUS

A MYTH OF YOUTH APATHY

BY SARAH YUN

LOW VOTER TURNOUT AMONG youth has often led to the simplistic and inaccurate conclusion that the younger demographic is apathetic to today's pressing political and social issues. A closer look reveals, instead, that a simple electoral statistic far from captures the desires of youth to create positive change.

Youth action is thriving in ways other than voter participation and in spheres other than the electoral process. In fact, post-secondary campuses and local communities are home to the burgeoning of student-led change across the nation.

To charitable organizations, such as Meal Exchange (MX), youth leadership is the most crucial ingredient in its recipe for success. Student-founded in 1993, by 17-year-old Rahul Raj, MX has now spread to 50 university campuses across the nation and has generated donations of over \$1.6 million worth of food or 625,000 meals to address local hunger.

Meal Exchange's mandate is to help

eliminate the root sources of hunger and poverty by engaging tomorrow's leaders, today. The MX mandate is well expressed in the tagline, "Hunger Problem. Student Solution."

HUNGER PROBLEM

The term, "food security," reflects the multi-dimensional nature of hunger and speaks to the assurance of the physical and/or economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and preferences. According to Statistics Canada, almost 15 per cent of Canadians or 3.7 million people are considered "food insecure" by this definition.

Although Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, the Canadian Association of Food Banks reports that food bank use is at a record high, with 753,458 Canadians relying on them in a one-month period. Forty-one per cent of these food bank users are children.

This growing group of food bank users includes children, seniors, persons with disabilities, single parents, and the working poor.

STUDENT SOLUTION

Students are proving that they can be part of the solution. Youth are not apathetic to the growing hunger problem in our country; rather, we are actively engaged in finding local ways to alleviate the burdens of food insecurity by mobilizing student support on post-secondary campuses and promoting partnerships within the community.

One way that Canada's youth have engaged with these issues is through the programs and opportunities provided by Meal Exchange. Examples of this engagement are apparent in the charity's four-pronged approach: donate food, educate students, provide students with meaningful volunteer opportunities, and implement student solutions to hunger. Thus, not only are MX



PHOTO BY AMANDA ONO

Students at the University of Toronto participate in Meal Exchange's Trick or Eat campaign.

Top Row: Vanessa Corlazzoli, Josef Szende, Marcel Sekine **Bottom Row:** Kelly Robertson, Sarah Yun, Monica Yeung

programs developed to engage students in fun and meaningful ways, but the successes of these programs are a direct result of the fierce and united leadership of today's youth.

Through my own experiences as a student leader on the University of Toronto's St. George Campus, I can attest to the value and true presence of youth activism.

U of T's MX chapter is based within the Hart House Social Justice Committee. For the past year, I have had the pleasure

a whopping \$507,069 in donations from 36,000 students on 24 campuses. In March 2005, a University of Toronto student, inspired by the great response on other campuses, implemented the program for the first time. In its first run, the program raised \$14,400, all of which was donated to the Daily Bread Food Bank. The local food agency, in turn, distributed the purchased food items to areas in the community based on need. With a renewed effort this spring, the University of Toronto is seeking to sur-

The web dimension also allowed students to sign up in different teams within their campuses. This provided a fun way to "compete" for the glory of amassing the greatest amount of pledges, as a team and also as a campus.

In addition to incorporating a new social dimension to the program, the online campaign provided a different way for Trick or Eat to make an impact on the local community. Both the food donations and monetary donations are given to food agencies or local

The Canadian Association of Food Banks reports that food bank use is at a record high, with 753,458 Canadians relying on them in a one-month period. Forty-one per cent of these food bank users are children.

of overseeing the MX portfolio and working closely with a group of highly dedicated students. This campus has not only seen the successful implementation of MX's three staple programs, but it is also home to a powerbase of youth who are passionate about food security issues.

One of these staple programs is Skip A Meal. Skip A Meal is a practical and innovative program that allows students to contribute to their local communities. More specifically, it is the perfect answer to the common year-end predicament of residence students: "What to do with all the points left on my meal card?"

Skip A Meal is an especially important part of Meal Exchange, as it is its founding program and gave it its "student-run" label. In 1993, seventeen year-old Wilfrid Laurier University student, Rahul Raj, saw a disconnect between the hunger he witnessed in India with his fellow peers' end-of-the-year rampage to spend the remaining balances on their meal cards. To address this problem, Raj founded Meal Exchange and organized the first Skip A Meal drive at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Skip A Meal allows students to donate portions of their meal card balances to purchase food at wholesale prices. Students acting as campus coordinators consult with local food banks and agencies to determine which food items are most in need.

In this way, youth are key in ensuring that items that are not regularly donated through food drives are provided to local food agencies. Scarce food items may include baby food, foods low in sugar, and foods that are specific to the needs and tastes of cultural communities. After purchasing the food, campus coordinators and volunteers personally deliver the goods to the local community.

Since 1993, Skip A Meal has generated



This past Halloween, each of the three U of T campuses collected 3,000 lbs of food. All non-perishable food items from the St. George Campus drive were donated to the U of T Food Bank, while monetary donations from the online campaign were given to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

pass last year's amazing success.

Another program is Trick or Eat. On Halloween night, costumed students canvass local neighbourhoods for non-perishable food items, instead of candy. At the same time they raise awareness about local hunger and volunteer opportunities that allow their neighbours to get involved in addressing hunger.

In 2005, Meal Exchange launched the Trick or Eat online campaign where students could collect pledges for their canvassing,

community groups, based on the discretion of each MX chapter. However, the monetary donations, much akin to Skip A Meal, allow these community food-providers to purchase food based on need.

As Meal Exchange's most successful program, Trick or Eat has involved over 8,700 students in 47 different communities and raised a total of over \$1 million worth of food. This past Halloween, several hundred U of T students came together in the campus' first-ever united community food drive. Youth from different colleges, professional associations, sororities, fraternities, and local community groups came together to represent U of T while canvassing the local communities and raising awareness about local hunger.

After the Halloween canvassing, students came back to Hart House to drop off the collections, enjoy some sweet refreshments, and most importantly, celebrate the success of the evening. This past Halloween, each of the three U of T campuses collected 3,000 lbs of food. All non-perishable food items from the St. George Campus drive were donated to the U of T Food Bank, while monetary donations from the online campaign were given to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

Therefore, in this one night, students not only had a positive impact on their own campus community, but also on the local community.

Due to the program's fun but also meaningful purpose, the event spread rapidly across campus media. Student newspapers covered the innovative event, and Trick or Eat even made the front page of U of T's faculty newspaper *The Bulletin*. The feature article raised awareness about the event and through this, students were able to encourage U of T's first-ever faculty involvement. In an effort to reach out even further, U of

T's St. George Campus raised community awareness through an appearance on the university radio station.

The last of Meal Exchange's staple programs is Clear the Shelves!, which mobilizes

As Meal Exchange's most successful program, Trick or Eat has involved over 8,700 students in 47 different communities and raised a total of over \$1 million worth of food.

students to donate food and clothing to their peers in need. These campus-wide drives take place at the end of the fall and winter terms. Campus coordinators and volunteers collect the donations from each location and

deliver them to the charity of their choice.

Not only is this a great bonding experience for those involved, it also provides youth with a special opportunity to witness the impact of their work first-hand.

The 15 campuses across Canada that participate in Clear the Shelves! have generated a total of \$88,393 in food and clothing. As a result of the leadership of a group of hardworking U of T students, our campus was able to expand the scope of its drive by setting up collection bins in more residences and popular hang-out locations for non-resident student donations. In 2006, we set our own record when 6,000 lbs of clothing were gathered for the U of T Clothing Bank and the Scott Mission in downtown Toronto. The tradition has since continued and we are preparing for an even greater student response in the future.

However impressive these figures may be, they represent only one aspect of the true success behind MX and youth-led programs in general. With all three programs running across Canada, MX-connected youth effectively put a spotlight on hunger and food security issues. Through a local campus and community focus, MX events provide a gateway for youth activism in the national

and international spheres.

One way that students have become engaged with food security issues is through the educational opportunities that come with involvement in MX's core programming. Ingredients for Learning, for example, is

The 15 campuses across Canada that participate in Clear the Shelves! have generated a total of \$88,393 in food and clothing.

an online knowledge centre that provides resources on hunger, food security, social innovation, youth engagement, and non-profit management. This information is easily accessible to the student leaders who regularly update their MX campus homepages or to interested student participants who sign up



PHOTO BY AMANDA ONO

Trick or Eat is Meal Exchange's most popular program. Students canvass neighbourhoods on Halloween, collecting for non-perishable food items for local food banks.

for MX events on their campus.

MX also hosts an annual leadership conference called *Esurio*, which is Latin for “to hunger,” or “to yearn.” For three days, 50 youth from across the country including Meal Exchange coordinators, Student Food Network members and Change-Maker mentors, come together to celebrate the success of previous years, exchange ideas, and continue to explore community-based solutions to hunger. The conference provides young leaders with the training, tools, and networks to succeed with their goals of addressing hunger on their campuses and abroad. In short, *Esurio* is THE conference for students interested in food security in Canada.

Youth-led ideas flourish at the annual leadership conference, but they don't just stop there. The Social Incubator is Meal Exchange's commitment to support new ideas initiated by youth. The Social Incubator is in sync with Meal Exchange's mandate to address the root causes of hunger by promoting the development of youth-led ideas.

Meal Exchange will also be launching a National Social Plan competition to identify those youth-led ideas that would be supported through the Social Incubator. MX has committed to providing funding to these plans, as needed, as well as organizational support from Change-Makers mentors and community professionals. The basic criteria for the National Social Plan is the desire to create change and engage fellow peers in the fight against local hunger. More specifically, plans were considered based on a list of criteria including:

- Level of youth engagement
- Potential impact on the community
- Uniqueness
- Education
- Engagement and collaboration with community agencies and community groups
- Sustainability and long-term impact

The first project that arose from the Social Incubator is youth-led initiative called The Student Food Network. The Student Food Network connects campus food centres with each other and a network of resources. The program is based on the belief that every student has the right to adequate nutrition. It is the unfortunate fact that many students across Canada are denied this right each day because of rising tuition costs and other financial barriers. Hence, The Student Food Network exists today to work with students and their campus communities to address this growing issue.

The Student Food Network is organized on the premise of peer education, combining youth engagement with information sharing. Student involvement can range from

establishing partner organizations, advocacy, and setting guidelines for campus food banks. Currently, Meal Exchange is supporting The Student Food Network's path toward eventually becoming a completely student-run organization. MX's reasoning for this is that “the dimensions of student poverty and hunger are best understood by the student community.”

As Amanda Ono, Meal Exchange's development and communications director says, “Developing Canadian leaders is at the core of what Meal Exchange brings to the table.” Truly, all MX programs work on the same premise of youth action and youth impact.

Another Social Incubator project, entitled *Portraits of Hunger*, is a national youth-led dramatic writing competition and theatre project that will feature stories of hunger in Canada. The purpose of the program is to educate, entertain, and promote dialogue on hunger, both as a personal story and as a multi-dimensional national issue.

In terms of education, *Portraits of Hunger* seeks to engage students through the drama to provide a greater understanding of hunger. The program will involve collaboration with local community groups and foster youth engagement and youth leadership. But most importantly, this program is a gateway for increasing dialogue on hunger and empowering youth with the knowledge to find solutions.

Although the majority of Meal Exchange's work is geared toward engaging and empowering students at the undergraduate level, MX's Change-Makers Mentor Program provides meaningful opportunities to alumni and young professionals between the ages of 24 and 35. The Change-Makers Mentor Program arose from the awareness that informal mentoring often leads to more effective campus programming with a broader com-

munity reach. The networking also provides continuity from year-to-year as leadership changes hands. Aimed at also developing mentors personally and professionally, the Change-Makers Mentoring Program offers exciting opportunities for graduating students to continue to contribute to MX programming and community development in a whole new way.

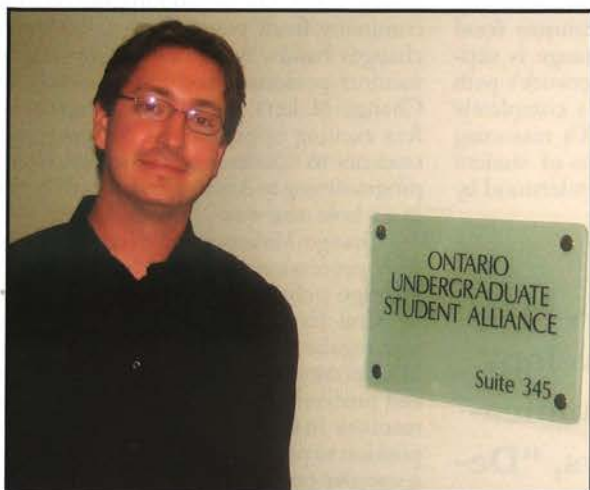
Change-Maker mentors are provided with professional leadership training and undergo online learning tutorials provided by Meal Exchange. This training, coupled with regular progress evaluations, represents MX's commitment to facilitate the personal and professional growth of Change-Maker mentors. In turn, the mentors are in the best position to provide the same support to their respective campus coordinators. In addition, Change-Makers also have the opportunity to network with fellow Change-Makers, the Board of Directors, professionals, volunteers, and community supporters.

As Amanda Ono, Meal Exchange's development and communications director says, “Developing Canadian leaders is at the core of what Meal Exchange brings to the table.” Truly, all MX programs work on the same premise of youth action and youth impact. It is my own hope that such exciting and inspiring youth-led events will characterize today's youth population, rather than a dismal number generated by election officers. We are passionate about our world, and our campuses and communities provide a space for our engagement with its difficult issues. This is the real story on youth engagement and student-led change. This is the story that needs to be told.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

1. Join your campus Meal Exchange Chapter. Participate in a core Meal Exchange event at your school (i.e. Skip A Meal, Trick or Eat, Clear the Shelves!).
2. If your school does not have a chapter, establish your own! Visit www.mealexchange.com, complete a short box with your contact information, and a Campus Advisor will contact you with more information.
3. Become a mentor through the Change-Makers Program for Alumni and Young Professionals and foster the personal and professional growth of an undergraduate leader.
4. Donate to Meal Exchange
5. Volunteer with Meal Exchange's head office

For more information on Meal Exchange and how to get involved, visit your campus homepage at www.mealexchange.com. If your post-secondary institution is not listed, look for more information on starting your own chapter. ■



It is with great pleasure that I bring to you, our members, partners, and esteemed stakeholders in the post-secondary sector, this brief review of OUSA activities over the past year. Having only been the Executive Director at OUSA for 6 months now half of this report will be activities that were undertaken under the stewardship of Scott Courtice, my predecessor in the position, and his staff. Scott has been a willing mentor to me and has made my transition into the role of ED and into the organization as a whole a smooth and valuable one.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my staff here at OUSA Home Office; Howie Bender (Director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations) and Petra Bosma (Director of Research and Policy Analysis). Their dedication and enthusiasm has translated into real results for students and their leadership will continue to guide OUSA into the future.

It has been a fantastic year so far and with the intelligence, humour and devotion of the steering committee and staff here at OUSA the outlook for the future is very bright.

Chris Locke
Executive Director
chris@ousa.on.ca

OUSA: STEERING COMMITTEE



Brock University Students' Union (BUSU)
Damien O'Brien, VP-University Affairs
vpua@busu.net

Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union (WLUSU)
Lauren McNiven, VP-University Affairs
lmcniven@wlu.ca



Waterloo Federation of Students (FEDS)
Jonah Levine, VP-Education
vped@feds.uwaterloo.ca

McMaster Students Union (MSU)
Arati Sharma, VP-Education
vped@msu.mcmaster.ca



University of Windsor Students' Alliance (UWSA)
Zach Cranny, VP-University Affairs
vpua.uwsa@uwindsor.ca

University Students' Council (USC)
David Simmonds, VP-Education
usc.education@uwo.ca



Queen's Alma Mater Society (AMS)
Julia Mitchell, VP-University Affairs
vpua@ams.queensu.ca

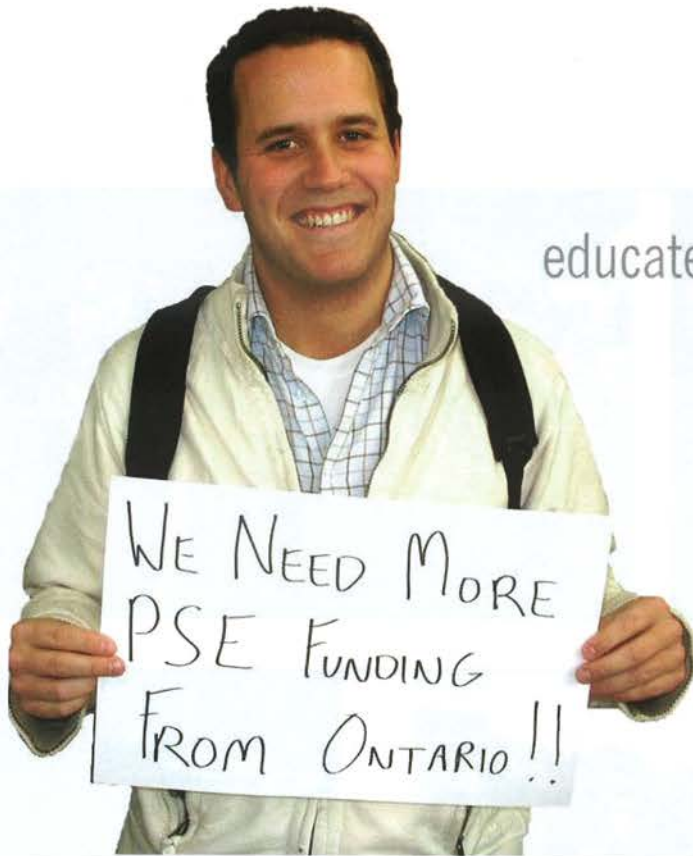
OUSA: BY THE NUMBERS

- Met with 44 Members of Provincial Parliament
- Received over 500,000 hits on the main OUSA website
- Met with 36 high-ranking media, and PSE stakeholder groups
- Delivered 4 presentations or submissions to government bodies
- Organized a major media campaign and hosted a Partners in Higher Education Dinner
- Developed various policy and response papers

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