

Natives on the education system

Ottawa (CUP) - Would you enrol in an education system that taught you your culture was extinct?

Most native students don't. "The Canadian school system is seen as a tool of assimilation," says Martin Dunn, of the Native Council of Canada.

The history, philosophy and even the value system taught in the Canadian education system all focus on French and British influences, though French and British-Canadians are a minority in Canada, he says.

"the curriculum is irrelevant to my experience and understanding of Canada," says Melodie Johnnie, a fourth year student at the University of Winnipeg.

Johnnie, a commissioner for the Canadian Federation of Students' Aboriginal Students Constituency Group, says the material being taught at Canadian high schools, colleges and universities is racist and ethnocentric.

And other students say that while professors are often supportive, what little they do know of aboriginal cultures is usually gleaned from books written by non-natives.

"you're constantly on a pedestal, trying to educate people about who we are. It's tough - racism is tough," says Wendy Hull, a Micmac in her fourth year of political science at Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Before giving presentation in class, Hull always smudges the room with sweetgrass, a ceremonial plant. The ritual gives her strength and helps keep her mind focused. But her Contemporary Native Studies professor told her the sweetgrass ceremony isn't traditional to the Micmac people.

"I had to pull myself together - it was difficult," says

Hull. "how can anyone be an expert on an oral culture they tried to destroy?"

Dunn says that in order to retain their culture, natives who go on to college or university must fight assimilation.

"Only those who are very strong within themselves will survive the white education system," he says.

But to reach university with their spirit intact, aboriginal students must first face a treacherous obstacle course.

Past experiences with the Canadian education system - residential schools, for example - often deter them from continuing on to higher education, says Eric Hill, a second year public administration student at Carleton University.

The church-run residential schools take native children from their homes and taught them non-native philosophy and language. The students were forbidden to speak their native language or follow their traditional beliefs.

"The older people who went to residential schools pass down stories to their children about their experience, and that stops some people from going to college or university," Hill says.

Because most non-native teachers at the primary and secondary level know little about aboriginal culture, they often judge students by their own standards - as shy, disinterested or stupid. As a result, many students are "streamed" into general or vocational programs, rather than the course required for university.

"It's a struggle even to finish high school," says Melodie Johnnie.

And Martin Dunn points out that poor economic situations force many would-be students to get jobs as soon as they are

old enough to work.

"They get jobs purely because it's an economic necessity," he says.

Johnnie echoes that statement. And she adds that besides high unemployment, a lot of native teens end up having children before they finish high school.

"when babies are having babies, they aren't going to have time to go to university," she says.

If they do have time and live on a reserve, then they have a big decision to make.

"There are no post secondary institutions on reserves. For many students, then, going to

university or college means moving away from home," says Sylvia Sioufi, a researcher for the Canadian Federation of Students.

"It's very expensive, and that discourages a lot of people."

Moving away also means forsaking the emotional and spiritual support of their community for the solitude of the ivory tower. For many of those who do attend, the struggle to maintain their identity has just begun.

Dunn says that some native students look at a university education as a way to learn skills that they can take back to their community.

"But the reality is that there isn't much use in their community for the skills they've learned," he says.

"People in the aboriginal community can't pay high salaries, and so the native university graduates will leave the community to work elsewhere."

The Canadian school system teaches that there's no socio-economic future for natives as natives, he says.

"They're training natives for a white man's world."

Feminist posters defaced

by Maya Bashour

Montreal (CUP) - Campaign posters of a feminist slate running in Concordia University's student council elections were defaced with violent messages earlier this month.

Co-presidential candidates Eleanor Brown and Charlene Nero had their "Feminism Works" posters defaced with the message "Would you join a fraternity that didn't let you rape your date?"

The slogan was taken from a campus fraternity poster currently posted around campus.

Nero said the incident was terrifying.

"They're immature and irresponsible and don't belong in university," Nero said.

"It's terrifying to think that people react to something they

disagree with, or are frightened of - of the word feminist - lashing out against women in general."

Nero and Brown won the election, which took place Feb. 5-7.

Nero said she was even more outraged because of the attack's timing, pointing out that it happened four days before sexual assault awareness week.

"this is very demoralizing," Nero said. "A lot of people have worked hard to make people aware of the sexual assault on campuses and in frats."

Nero said that poster reminded her of the September 1988 McGill fraternity, when three Zeta Psi frat members allegedly raped a 19-year old woman during a rugby players' initiation party.

She blamed the campaign incident on the Tau Kappa

Epsilon (TKE) fraternity for producing the original poster, which included the offending message.

"Even if the poster is meant to be anti-rape, and give the message that the fraternity administration want to reform, poster itself was irresponsible in its presentation, it simply doesn't work," Nero said.

Anna Katsafouros, president of the Inter-Fraternity Council, said the TKE poster was part of a campaign trying to change the common stereotypes associated with frats.

She said the poster was meant to be "eye-catching" and if someone stopped to read the words "Why join a fraternity that won't let you rape your date?" then they would see the equally-large print underneath reading "Because ALL fraternities oppose date rape!"

Katsafouros said whoever altered the posters is immature and stupid. "It's unfair that they have chosen to use the poster that was meant to help and they have distorted it."

But she added that the original anti-date campaign posters have been taken down and will be rewritten.

Pro-Palestinian display board torched

OTTAWA (CUP) Vandals have torched the Pro-Palestinian Students' Associations' display board at Carleton University.

The board was slightly burned in January and early in February the board's plastic casing was torched and posters inside burned, said Hussein Said, a member of the association.

The charred posters were updates on the conditions on the west Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as a plea for gas masks for Palestinians living in the areas.

One of the posters in question features children's drawings saying, "As a child in Palestine I learned that there is...occupation...deportation...t ear gas...and peace."

Said said his locker was also broken into earlier this month. He believes the break in is related to the burnings and that it "all has something to do with the Gulf war and is about a long-time hatred between the two peoples."

Miranda Lawrence, and exec-

utive of Carleton's student council, said she was approached recently by members of the Jewish Students' Union who said they found some of the posters displayed on the Palestinian board offensive. But, she added, this does not mean there is a connection between those students and the burning.

Lawrence said she is organizing a meeting with Palestinian and Jewish students to discuss problems with the posters.

"The first step is to start talking," Lawrence said. "It's just the same as the UN, and it's the only way to get solutions."

Lawrence stressed the need for dialogue: "They need to develop understanding and tolerance of each other."

Mel Gilbey, head of security, said posters have been set on fire before, but vandals are very hard to catch.

No one has been caught in connection with this burning, but Gilbey said security will "keep their eyes open."

\$9 million for Challenge '91

Press Release

Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Gerald Merrithew, Minister of Veteran Affairs, on behalf of Marcel Danis, Minister of State for Youth, Fitness and Amateur Sport, today announced a New Brunswick funding allocation of \$9 million for two major options under Challenge '91, the federal government's summer employment program for students.

These options are the Summer Employment/Experience Development component, known as SEED, and World Orientation Workshops, known as WOW. This allocation represents an increase of \$162,000 over last year's level. Nationally, Challenge '91 will receive \$143 million, an increase of \$3 million over last year.

"Students have to work during the summer not only for economic reasons, but also because they need to acquire practical experience for jobs later on," said Merrithew. "The federal government recognizes the importance of training students, both at school and in the workplace, to ensure that Canada has a qualified workforce in the years to come."

Valcourt indicated that the Challenge component known as SEED will receive \$6.8 million for 1991 in New Brunswick. In 1990, more than 5,000 student summer jobs were created in New Brunswick under SEED. The option provides wage subsidies to employers interested in creating jobs which will help prepare young people for the job market. The deadline for SEED applications is March 15, 1991.

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