

Grantham Report catches flack

by Alison Thomson

Last January, the provincial government's Grantham Task Force released its long-awaited findings regarding students' contributions to the cost of post-secondary education.

The report recommended:

- There should be tuition fees at post-secondary institutions.
- All programs within a given institution should have the same tuition fee.

- There should be three levels of tuition fees based on the following positions:

- university tuition fees should be the highest.

- college and technical fees should be the same.

- the difference between college and technical fees and university fees should be less than at present.

- Alberta Vocational Centre tuition fees should be the lowest.

- A standing committee on student costs should be established to make future recommendations on fees and costs.

The report also suggested reform of the student loan program to grant students independence for loan purposes at age 18 and the establishment of a "student assistance trust fund."

The report release created a storm of controversy among its members, and the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) lashed out at the report.

"The Report is based more upon opinion than fact," said Blair Redlin, then-president of FAS. "... the taxpayers of Alberta deserved more for their \$75,000."

This summer both the Students' Union at the U of A and FAS submitted detailed responses to the provincial

government. Their responses fall into two general categories.

Tuition fees

The first recommendation of the task force is that there should be tuition fees.

The SU expresses support for the abolishment of tuition fees. However, if they exist, the SU says, they should not be allowed to rise to a level where they represent an impossible financial barrier to students.

FAS disagrees with this position. After a lengthy and thorough attack on the rationale for tuition fees, FAS says that a program must be established for the abolition of tuition fees.

The second and third recommendations of the Grantham report refer to the level of tuition fees in post-secondary institutions. The Students' Union suggests that the levels which the task force recommend seem arbitrary. The SU brief also is ambivalent on the notion that all programs should cost the same, stating that this would "eradicate certain inequities and create others."

FAS points out that the suggestion that all programs should cost the same is an implicit recognition on the part of the task force that fees do affect accessibility. It further points out that these recommendations will have the effect of raising all tuition fees to the previous highest levels, and reiterates its commitment to no increases and the eventual abolishment of fees.

The next recommendation of the task force — the establishment of a standing committee to consider the effects of revisions — also drew criticism from both organizations.

The SU responds to this by stating that this ought to be the responsibilities of the Board of Governors. FAS,

however, considers that the Student Finance Board is the proper body for this task.

The task force lists a number of factors which should be taken into consideration when setting tuition fees. FAS notes that this recommendation demonstrates that the task force felt itself incapable of making these recommendations and can only pass along directions to someone else regarding these decisions.

The task force recommends the government should set future tuition fees. Both the SU and FAS argue that this substantially erodes institutional autonomy. Also, FAS says that a much more effective way of ensuring public input would be to make Boards of Governors more representative of the public.

The task force states it is unable to recommend a policy on differential fees for foreign students. Both FAS and the SU state their opposition to these fees.

Some further recommendations suggest greater involvement of the public in development of post-secondary institutions. Since these recommendations are vague, neither the SU or FAS responded with more than support of the concept in general. FAS also stresses the importance of continuing the education of those already in the work force.

Student Assistance

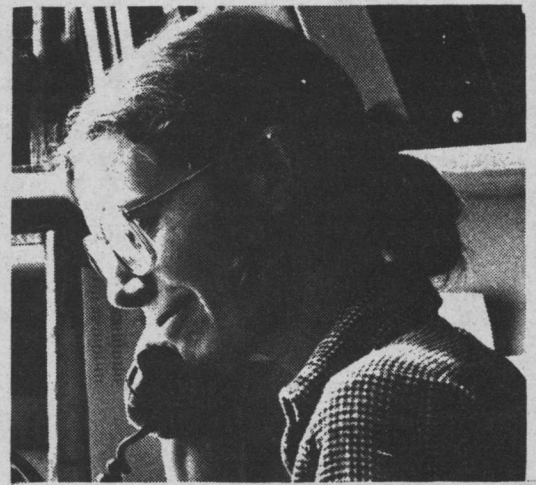
The major recommendation of the Grantham Task force refers to the establishment of a student assistance trust fund (SATF) to be repayed by a surcharge on income tax at low rates over an extended period.

Both FAS and the SU object to this proposal for a variety of reasons. One of their criticisms is that students will be unwilling to accept such large long-term debts at this stage in their careers. Also, this student aid plan provides for the possibility of greatly increased tuition fees. The philosophy of this plan appears to be moving towards a user-pay concept, and FAS opposes this as very destructive to the principle of equal access.

On the positive side, the task force recommends that all students be regarded as independent at age 18. FAS and the Students' Union emphatically support this recommendation.

Other Issues

The task force discusses student housing, and recommends increased subsidised student housing through additional residences. Both FAS and the SU support this fully. However, the task force also suggests the private



FAS's Lake Sagaris: the taxpayers deserve more.

sector be encouraged to invest in student housing. FAS is cynical about the willingness of the private sector to invest in anything that will not prove to be lucrative.

The task force further recommends that there should be daycare spaces available for anyone who wants to use them. These recommendations are endorsed by both FAS and the Students' Union.

In addition to comments about specific recommendations of the task force, FAS begins its submission with a criticism of its make-up. The members were unrepresentative of the general public, says FAS, because three of five of the public members were professionals, a much higher proportion than occurs in the general public.

The federation also suggests the high-income background of all the public members made their ability to research student costs questionable.

An objection to the government's method of choosing student "representatives" appears in the FAS submission. The impartiality of student "spokesmen" selected by the government is questioned by the federation. FAS also criticises the methodology of the task force. In soliciting submissions to the group, the members sent approximately 1,000 letters. Of these, 19% were sent to business associations, 30% were sent to business-associated clubs and social groups, and 0.4% were sent to trade unions. This does not constitute a random sampling, according to the FAS brief.

The Students' Union brief concludes with a discussion of accessibility.

"Entry to university should be based on the ability of students to do the work needed to satisfy academic requirements, rather than on their earning power."



Students' Union executive: abolishment of tuition fees. Left to right, Chanchal Bhattacharya, Sharon Bell, Tema Frank, Dean Olmstead.

Operation lifeline from page 1

however. Murray McLauchlan was the entertainment highlight of the evening according to Ms. Brown and his performance was especially well-received by the fifty Vietnamese people who composed part of the audience.

The Edmonton show raised \$1,156, well short of the organizers' target of \$5,000. The entertainers featured in the program, as well as the organizers and helpers all worked on a volunteer basis, so the entire amount of money collected will go towards helping the refugees.

The CBC project met with some opposition on Friday afternoon, when about 12 anti-boat people Edmontonians picketed CBC headquarters. Led by the outspoken Jack Pickett, the demonstrators denounced CBC for its support of increased refugee immigration to Canada. According to CBC newsman Bill Laing, the picketers marched in front of the station's offices for about fifteen minutes, then left without incident.



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FEES DUE

By October 1

The last day for payment of fees is October 1st. If a student is paying by instalments (terms), the amount of the first instalment is the First Term assessment and the last day for payment is October 1st; the amount of the second instalment is the Second Term assessment plus a \$5.00 instalment charge and the last day for payment is January 15th.

A penalty of \$15.00 will be charged on any payment received after these dates. If payment has not been made by October 15 for First Term fees and by January 31st for Second Term fees, registration will be subject to cancellation and the student to exclusion from classes.

If fees are to be paid from some form of student assistance, please refer to Section F of the Registration Procedures booklet or the calendar entitled "University Regulations and Information for Students".

Students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research are reminded that their fees are to be paid by the date indicated on their fee assessment notice which is to be mailed to them.