

Fewer jobs, bigger bills for students

BY JILL WINDSOR
TORONTO (CUP) — As students return to campus after a four month hiatus, stories from across the country are telling a tale of bleak summer job opportunities compounded by rising tuition fees.

"It was harder to get a job this summer even though I have more resources than I've had before," said Zora Moosa, a second year University of Toronto student.

After looking diligently for a month — which included regular visits to the campus career centre, mail-outs of her resume and cold calls to different

environmental companies — she finally landed three part-time jobs, two of which were completely unrelated to her field.

Although figures released in early September by Statistics Canada show a slight drop in youth unemployment — August was 16 per cent, compared with 19.4 a month earlier — the average summer unemployment for returning students aged 15 to 24 was almost 20 per cent.

This means one in five students could not find work this summer.

"Students are going to face incredibly difficult choices about whether or not to return to school this fall, or if they can afford to begin a college or university program at all," said Jennifer Story, national deputy chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students.

She added that the statistics show that more than 50 per cent of those who did find jobs, as in the case of Moosa, could only find part-time work.

She says that poor job prospects, coupled with tuition fees that have doubled over the last 10 years, a rate of almost three times the cost of living, are leaving students saddled with unprecedented debt loads.

"The two together are a dangerous mix and making post-secondary education less and less accessible."

Gwendolyn Winchester, who is entering her fourth year at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), is one of those students

who is both heavily indebted — she expects her debt will be around \$35,000 at the end of this year — and has real difficulty finding work.

"You won't see help wanted signs out in Nova Scotia," she said in a province where tuition fees are the highest in the country.

Initially hoping to find work in

her field — alternative magazines — she found herself without work between January and June of 1995, finally finding part-time work at a gallery which pays minimum wage.

"I'll flip hamburgers if I have to," she said.

The number of full-time jobs held by young people that have disappeared in Canada in the 1990s has reached 500,000.

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These smiling grads have all just gotten jobs at McDonalds.

Kyath Battie, a fourth-year arts student at Emily Carr in Vancouver who already has a \$24,000 student debt load, didn't end up earning a wage at all this summer. Volunteering for three months in the hopes of getting her foot in the door, Battie was eventually forced to leave before the summer ended.

"Working conditions were unpleasant and unethical. Any concerns that I had were brushed off," she said.

She said the anxiety level among students in Vancouver is made even greater because of the high cost of living in that city.

According to a report issued by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released last spring, volunteering — or cheap labour — has become common practice in this economy, where employers benefit from labour market conditions they say are worse than at any time since the Great Depression.

This year, the federal government allocated \$90 million

for summer job programs to create 60,000 jobs — 60 per cent of what was spent over a decade ago on summer youth employment initiatives.

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