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"The whole thing sucks." Students attack cuts

by Alex Shetsen Interviews by Randal Smathers and Alex Shetsen

And so, the Government of Alberta has announced a 3 percent cutback in education funding for this year. Because of the cutback, there will likely be rollbacks in university programs and an increase in tuition. But what do the students themselves, the ones most affected after all by funding decreases, think?

The Gateway spoke with students before and after the education wake held by the Anti-Cutbacks Team Monday. In a rather surprising departure from the usual level of on-campus apathy, many expressed strong concern about the possible consequences of the government's action. Some of the students' comments follow:

"A lot of people are working right now to save money to come back to school. And now it's just that much tougher, and they're not going to be there next year."

"A couple of years ago, when UBC got all these cutbacks, a lot of its profs left, and it's losing its reputation as far as quality goes.

"Classes will double and the quality of education will go down like you wouldn't believe."

"Isn't there more areas to cut down than the quality of education... like photocopying services? I think they could cut down an awful lot of luxuries around the university." "I think that's a drag — but that's life... I can feel for the students who need financing, but as for me personally, I'm sure I'll come up with it (the tuition)."

When questioned, students stated that they were prepared for a maximum tuition increase of 5-20%.

"In France, the student demonstrations did some good."

(Gateway: Yeah, but they had to get violent first.) "Hopefully that won't have to happen here."

"I don't know. The whole thing

sucks."

"The quality of education has little to do with funding: that depends on your prof. Funding affects tuition and equipment — and that's what I'm worried about."

Student reaction to the wake itself, however, was rather mixed. Some supported it wholeheartedly; but others found it quite strange.

"ACT is quite good; but the wake is kind of ridiculous."

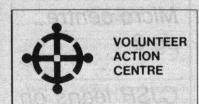
"The wake was too dramatic; they didn't need to play on the emotions quite so much."

"I'm glad I came... I like what they're doing for all of us (Albertans), especially for the (ones not yet in university)."

"It had major overtones of the sixties... It's good to see people get involved in the protest movement."

In the end, though, the final word belongs to the volunteer at the ACT desk in SUB. His words, more than anything else, sum up the feelings of the students:

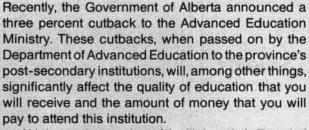
"There's been a really good response in the level of signatures: more than I've ever seen anyone signing petitions in HUB."



The Volunteer Action Centre (Phone 482-6431), a United Way agency, has urgent requests for the following volunteer assignments that are of special interest to students:

Tutors: Tutors needed for adult non-readers, immigrant children at a downtown school and two youngsters who need one-to-one help. Handicapped Children: A west Edmonton Centre for severely handicapped children needs volunteers to help with noon feeding, regular programs, field trips, special events and a pool program. WIN House: Volunteers needed to help women who have had to leave home because of physical abuse by assisting with general maintenance, meal preparation, socializing and child care.

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As President of the Students' Union and a member of the University's Board of Governors and the General Faculties Council Planning and Priorities Committee, I act on your behalf to represent the views of the majority of students on a number of issues, including cutbacks and tuition fees. However, without your input, I cannot accurately represent what you, the students, feel about the level of tuition fees that you will be expected to pay.

At this time, I think we have three possible positions that we as the Students' Union can take with respect to tuition fees. Very briefly, the positions are summed up as:

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Thursday, January 15, 1987

(1) Accept no tuition increase, regardless of the level that the University's budget is reduced or the amount proposed for a tuition increase.

(2) Accept a small tuition increase so long as the provincial government shows its commitment to education by offering a slight increase to the University's operating budget for this next year.

(3) The third position is to accept a small tuition increase to show our commitment to our educational system and ask the government to respond in kind.

I ask you now to respond and tell me what you think is the reasonable position that the Students' Union should take. Written responses can be sent to me directly:

David Oginski, President The Students' Union 259-E Students' Union Building University of Alberta

These can be sent through the campus mail system — just drop them off at the post office in the North Power Plant or at your department office (the staff should be able to assist you if necessary).

If you have any other questions or concerns regarding tuition fees, the effects of funding cutbacks, or any other issue, please feel free to come up and talk to me or another member of the Students' Union Executive. That's what we — the Executive members of the Students' Union — were elected for.