

# FAS in the saddle with new tack

by Dave Cox

The Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) held their Fall Conference here over the weekend, and by all accounts it was a thorough success.

The Federation laid plans for its fall/winter information campaign, trimmed about \$20,000 from its budget, and dropped its long-term policy of free tuition. A number of workshops were also held on services and pertinent issues like accessibility and the role of education in society.

Delegates were pleased with the progress FAS is making. Rick Fercho, SU vp external of the University of Calgary, said, "We're moving in the right direction here. The whole direction FAS is taking because of views like those of the U of C is in line with those of the province's students."

"If we don't take this line, we're fooling ourselves about the wishes of students," said Fercho, cautiously praising the organization's new tack. "We're not expecting changes overnight, but basically we're satisfied with what's happening."

The U of A caucus was also satisfied; SU external commissioner Tony Brouwer said, "This conference has made me realize how FAS requires the support of all the students of the U of A at this difficult time." Wes Sawatzky, SU vp academic, added, "I think it went very well. We got a lot of good discussion."

U of A delegates pointed out the special concern shown for issues related to colleges. Brouwer commented, "I think this conference has proven that FAS can effectively address the concerns of both colleges and universities," and students councillor Bev Therrien said, "Perhaps the colleges will perceive that FAS is open to them, that it's not just for the universities."

The main aspect of the upcoming information campaign is a series of forums to be held by member associations with the new Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower. FAS encourages all its members to invite the minister to their campuses within a two week period in late January and early February.

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President of FAS Don Millar said, "We're anxious to meet the minister ourselves, and also to have students meet with him or her." "In January," Millar said, "the big issue will be the renegotiations of the Established Programs Financing Act (EPF), but we'd like to put this in the broader context of education issues."

The federation did a lot of budgetary housecleaning at the conference as well. Although the organization was running right on budget, the budget represented revenues and expenditures inaccurately. To correct this situation, the plenary passed a "worst-case scenario" budget.

"I think it will tide us over," said Millar. "The budget passed in March was not realistic."

Mount Royal College in Calgary is in kind of questionable legal status, is not paying its fees, and that amounts to \$15,000. We'll be making our summer staff layoffs earlier this year to save money, and the executive is giving up *per diem* daily expense vouchers. The exec is leading the way here."

Perhaps the most fundamental change established was that FAS dropped its tuition policies. Delegates referred the matter to a workshop at the next conference to set a new position.

University of Calgary delegates strongly supported the move. They pointed out that this stand had alienated potential FAS supporters in past. They hoped that the new, more moderate attitude would meet with approval at U of C, where FAS faces a fee referendum December 2.

The referendum is crucial to the future of the federation. Without the revenue from Calgary, the organization would be in serious financial difficulty, and U of C students are a critical body of FAS membership.

But some of the major previous concerns of the U of C have been dealt with. Concerned about the represen-

tation system, and seeking a form of proportional representation, they managed to work out a compromise at the Special General Meeting last month.

"The representation system is better than what we had previously," said Rick Fercho. "I don't think we

role of education in society and what governments are doing to it were discussed.

"People who were at the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada conference are talking in very real terms about wanting to shut down whole institutions or faculties," said

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can always expect to get exactly what we want, but that's something we can live with." A majority of institutions, composed of at least fifty percent each of colleges and universities, is required to pass all significant motions.

"The main change this year is that the membership is giving the direction," Fercho said. "We're taking direction from the students and working with that."

Useful workshops on student issues took place at the conference. one major concern was the apparent change in the philosophy of the governments toward education. The

Don Millar, citing the recent closing of a Nova Scotia college. "It's important that students be prepared to deal with these problems."

FAS also criticized the federal government's National Training Act (NTA) in very vigorous terms.

"People realized that all our policies— on the NTA, on EPF, or private sector funding—are linked. Governments are cutting all areas back even more," said Millar. "Students have got to think about these and come up with coherent policies."

"Students have been coming up

with slogans for too long, but in the long run we've got to come up with rational arguments as to why education is valuable," Millar said.

The plenary criticized the provincial government's "Patterns of Participation" study, where the education minister named two of the three students who took part. Fercho summed up the main weakness of the study: "It offers primarily a description of the problem, rather than a prescription for its solution."

On the issue of accessibility, the federation pointed out particular problems of college students. FAS will be preparing technical papers in March showing how student aid programs not administered by the Students' Finance Board work, including the Vocational Rehabilitation

Training Program. "At Lethbridge Community College, students are waiting for cheques they were supposed to receive three months ago," said Millar.

The U of A's students' union vp external Teresa Gonzalez was elected Alberta representative to the Central Committee of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). Dawn Noyes was elected rep to the CFS-Services Board of Directors. Jim Stanford was reinstated as editor of the FAS *Student Voice*.

The federation reaffirmed its commitment to the goal of high-quality, accessible education. The conference ended Sunday afternoon, and the delegates, pleased but fatigued, headed off to Greyhounds bound for home.

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