



## Millions for needy grads

by Peter Michalyszyn

What do you think about getting in on a \$42 million jackpot?

You'll have to wait until you're in graduate studies or until you're up for a Ph.D., or even until after that, because this \$42 million isn't available to undergraduates. But, to be sure, there are people out there, like U of A political science associate professor Jim Lightbody, who are just dying to give away that money.

Lightbody is the Alberta representative on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

He and 21 others from across Canada donate their time to the federal crown corporation so that academics in this great nation of ours have money with which to study the venerable bead and publish the work of Erasmus, among other worthy things.

It is usually not a big problem disposing of the \$42 million if only because the SSHRC is one of the only research granting bodies in Canada and a lot of people with a lot of good ideas flock to it for support. The Council is concerned, Lightbody says, that still more

people out there have ideas, and that everybody should have a chance to cash in.

It obviously is not that simple. The biggest percentage of grants goes toward independent research.

"So, for example, if archeologists want support for archeology, summers in Greece, and the like," Lightbody says, there is money available. But first the application is screened vigorously by various painstaking methods which determine "academic merit."

Money is also given directly to call Canadian universities for general research via a formula (which works out to about \$55,000 for the U of A) and the universities use the money as it likes; abuse of that privilege is uncommon, Lightbody says.

The much-maligned sabbatical leave is also partially financed by the SSHRC. Last year it awarded 409 leave fellowships worth about \$4 million. As well, the Council spent some \$9 million on doctoral fellowships - over 1100 of the graduate students qualifying for doctoral grants represented only 20 per cent of

eligible applicants.

Other major areas include grants to support "learned journals" such as the *Canadian Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, and to sponsor conferences across Canada. Some funds are available for international research grants, and some money goes back into long-term projects such as the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and others.

Then there are the Strategic Grants. For the academic community that cherishes its autonomy, the Council may be seen as here an intruder. But Lightbody explains:

"We cannot count on individual academics in the field initiating sufficient research..." he says, into one of the strategic fields of 'population aging.'

Other strategic focuses are Canadian Studies, the Family and Socialization of Children, the Human Context of Science and Technology. There are special programs funded here too, such as one for small, isolated universities that cannot support research libraries or visiting scholars.

Lightbody supports the idea of the academic community being accountable and responsive to public needs.

"The Council at this point is probably too biased toward the academic community. It is supposed to reflect the various kinds of interests in the country - business, labor... In a sense the Council is to be a politically sensitive balance to the academic requests we get."

Is it political? Well, Lightbody points to legislation creating the Council; it says strategic grants should "encourage research in areas of national concern." The Council defines those areas of interest.

"We don't just go off on benders," Lightbody says. "Moving into new strategic research areas we start off with workshops, then we invite proposals and we check these with an Academic Advisory Panel (a body of academics across Canada) and their committees. It takes a long time before anything becomes operational. You're spending public money and you are accountable for it."

Still, the strategic grant portion of the SSHRC budget amounts only to about two million dollars.

Next: the Council's bold new plan to print academic journals in microform and intransigence in the academic community. Coming soon in the Gateway.

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photo Ray Giguere

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