

Life in a foreign land—the un

Differential fees show a “neanderthal . . . prehistoric mentality”, said Barry Tonge, Director of the International Student Centre. “It’s a shortsightedness in a lot of ways on Canada’s part”, Tonge said.

Differential fees are the additional fees charged to visa students which, at the U of A, amounts to 50% of the regular instruction fee.

The University’s Board of Governors [B of G] defines a visa student as a person who has been authorized by the Government of Canada and who holds a subsisting student visa or other authority (by whatever name) issued or granted by the Government of Canada, permitting that person to enter and remain in Canada for the purpose of studying at a university or other educational institution.

“In May 1977, the B of G recommended to the Minister of Advanced Education and Manpower an increase of \$300 in the tuition fees of visa students entering the U of A effective September 1977”, said Paul Robson of the B of G.

This differential fee was increased to one half of the regular instruction fee on September 1, 1982.

“This differential fee is actually a concept of the provincial government. The University has never been enthusiastic about it”, said Brian Silzer, the Registrar.

All Canadian provinces charge differential fees with the exceptions of Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Saskatchewan, ranging from one half to 13 times the Canadian student fee.

For example, for the 1985-86 academic year, the foreign students studying in Canada were charged fees ranging from \$1,500 to \$1,900 in Alberta and BC and up to \$3,400 in the Maritimes. Quebec charges between \$4,350 and \$5,800. In Ontario, the range is between \$4,200 and \$10,200.

Only those students who are here as part of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, are exempt from the fees.

“Is differential fee fair? Fair to who?” asked Scott Richardson, SU’s VP (Internal Affairs.)

“They’ (foreign students) are using our facilities and the Canadian taxpayers are paying for part of their education costs,” said Richardson.

Many people believe that foreign students contribute nothing in return for their education costs which are partly financed by Canadian taxpayers.

However the belief that “foreign students taking more than giving is not credible”, said Tonge.

His view is supported by Wilfred Allan, Director of International Student Affairs.

“Differential fees are totally counterproductive. They make no sense whatsoever.

“Canadian students need the significant presence of foreign students. It is to our benefit. Putting up barriers like differential fees are terribly shortsighted”, said Allan.

“If this University has no foreign students the brightest Canadian students would leave to study in other countries. What kind of institution will it be as the result?” asked Allan.

“How can it broaden the horizon and enrich the life of our students if it is only by and for Canadians or Albertans?” Allan questioned.

“To quote Dr. Meekison (V.P. Academic) . . . if we are indeed a world class University we have to be internationally involved and we have to have an open door to students, faculty, and staff from all over the world”, said Allan.

In 1984/85, there were 58,026 foreign students in Canada according to the statistics released by Employment and Immigration Canada. Hong Kong tops the list with 16,084 students, followed by the U.S.A. with 6,306 students.

As of December 4, 1985, there were 1,591 foreign students from 98 countries in this university. Hong Kong again tops the list with 531 students.

“The benefits and money generated by the international students outreach a few meagre dollars from the differential fees”, said Tonge.

“Foreign students certainly are bringing money in, but how much? Using the Student Finance Board’s estimate, one student spends around \$600 per month which comes to \$7,200 per year and the foreign student education costs around \$9,000, so . . .” said Richardson.

In 1982, a Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce (ITC) Taskforce on Trade in Services said that each foreign student con-

tributes \$10,000 annually to the Canadian economy on the average.

Based on a 1981/82 enrolment figures, the revenue generated by international student expenditures might amount to \$400 million per annum.

The Ontario Federation of Students, in another report, states that excluding tuition fees (\$200 million or more), foreign students in Canada spend from \$363 million to \$454 million yearly.

The Canadian Bureau for International Education Survey finds that depending on the province and institution of study, on average foreign students spend (excluding tuition) \$5,000 to \$12,000 in living costs for an eight-month academic year.

Some costs are also higher for foreign students, for instance, some provincial health insurance schemes require special premium from foreign students or do not cover them at all.

In addition, students coming from tropical areas have to buy a new wardrobe in preparation for the chill of Canada’s winter.

Foreign students’ families, relatives or friends also help to pump money into the Canadian economy when they visit Canada.

“A country like India which is culturally and educationally rich but not economically has around 100,000 foreign students, yet they do not have any differential fees. I would think that we in Alberta should be embarrassed”, Allan said.

“Differential fee is not fair at all”, said Claus Otto, a West German student who is finishing his doctorate program in geology. Otto is also president of the International Student Organization.

“Generally, European students don’t have difficulties with the fees, but it is sometimes discriminating to Asian and African students”, Otto said.

“We now seem to prefer dealing with wealthier countries regarding education”, said Tonge.

“The provincial government should abolish the fees, otherwise the percentage of foreign students will drop and it will also affect the opinion of their home countries on Canada. Reputation of Canada will go down”, said Otto.

In January 1986, a proposal to have an International Student Policy in this university has been drafted. One of the objectives in the policy is to work towards the abolition of differential fees and the removal of barriers to students and their spouses seeking temporary employment while in Canada.

“Contrary to popular opinion, many European countries do not have differential fees”, said Otto.

In France and Germany, the tuition fee is almost zero although other restrictions do exist.

Britain, however, charges full-cost fee.

This policy, implemented in 1979, prompted hostile reactions from several countries, as well as a critical response from parts of the British business community.

As the result of this full-cost fee, foreign student enrolment in Britain declined notably.

In 1983, the Thatcher government modified some provisions of the full-cost policy in order to attract more foreign students to study in Britain. These modifications were largely due to the recognition of the role of

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Graphic by Andy Phillpotts

foreign students in promoting future sales of British goods and services.

Canada’s experience is not very different although less dramatic. Between 1982-84, at the university level, foreign students enrolment fell by almost 12% in the 7 provinces with differential fees as opposed to a 38% increase in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland.

Last year, the U of A’s foreign students enrolment decreased from 1,656 to 1,591.

Richardson questioned if differential fee is the primary reason for the decrease in enrolment of foreign students in Canada.

“Statistics can be very misleading”,

Richardson noted.

“There are all sorts of barriers and differential fee is one of them”, said Allan.

According to many foreign students, differential fee is one of the major barriers preventing them to study abroad.

“I have no qualms about the structure of the differential fees in the U of A, but I’d like to see it reduced to around 25% to 30% of the regular fee”, said Busari Okoro, a graduate student from Nigeria.

Bobby Chan, a fourth year engineering student from Hong Kong said: “It is fair in the U of A. In Texas you have to pay up to 300% of the regular fee”.