

University's hiring practices called into question

BY MEG MURPHY

TORONTO (CUP) — The University of Toronto (U of T) is too busy defending its reputation to respond to burgeoning community concern about alleged systemic racism in its law faculty.

This is the latest criticism being lobbed at the university amidst growing tensions between administrators and community members about the university's employment equity record.

"This is an open invitation for them to look at their system — it is up to them to take the opportunity or not. It is a call for those in power

to look at the system and recognize there is a real problem and that they are contravening the law of the land," said black lawyer April Burey.

After discovering a white lawyer had been hired for a post in race and gender issues, Burey wrote an open letter to the Dean of Law alleging systemic racism within the faculty.

"Obviously there is a systemic problem if they can't find a woman of colour anywhere in Canada to qualify for a post about the intersection of race and gender," she said. "It is ridiculous."

In her letter, Burey used herself

as an example of one of the qualified black women who should have been interviewed for the job.

Burey holds a Masters degree in law from Harvard University and recently argued the first racially-based case before the Supreme Court of Canada.

"It is not really about me. It was a race position. It wasn't a general position for which they can always find an excuse."

Last week, U of T president Robert Prichard told university governors and national media that, after a preliminary review, he saw no evidence Burey has been

discriminated against.

Dean Ronald Daniels defended the appointment committee's decision.

"We put forward the candidate in whom we had the greatest confidence," he said.

Daniels also defended the faculty's efforts at altering their primarily white composition.

"We are working on it," he said.

He added that a great deal of time has been devoted to recruitment of faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds.

"We will, of course, think of other ways we can increase our

profile in the black community and beyond," he said.

Currently, only one full-time faculty of law member is black.

The Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, the Jamaican Canadian Association and the African Canadian Legal Clinic have all taken an interest in the issues raised by Burey.

"This cries out for some kind of explanation at the very least," said Roger Rowe, executive member of the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers.

"It is broader than just Ms. Burey's case — it is a systemic issue. We are certainly concerned."

Transcript error may have cost student scholarship

BY ANDERS KNUDSEN AND KEVIN WOODLEY

VICTORIA (CUP) — A clerical error made within the University of Victoria's Faculty of Law may have cost a student \$33,000 dollars in scholarships.

The mistake occurred when a B- grade was included on Bircham's transcripts from her first-year studies in Law. And while many students wouldn't consider a B- the end of the world, in Bircham's situation it couldn't have been worse. The B- significantly affects her GPA, and she sent out transcripts to three separate scholarship committees in January 1996, only to realize the error in March.

"I didn't work my ass off for four years to have this mistake cost me my future," Bircham said.

David Cohen, Dean of Law, admitted to the transcript error, but said the faculty responded promptly and sent a letter of correction to the scholarship boards 24 hours after an official met with Bircham.

"It was a clerical error," said Cohen. "But to my knowledge it had no impact [on] decisions made regarding Ms. Bircham."

And this is where the dispute

currently lies between Bircham and the university. Did the scholarship boards reject Bircham because of the error in her transcripts, or was she rejected for other reasons?

Bircham said the incorrect transcripts played a role — pointing to a scholarship she won after the error was corrected. Above all, she maintains that the grade caused her to lose a step in the tight competition for scholarships.

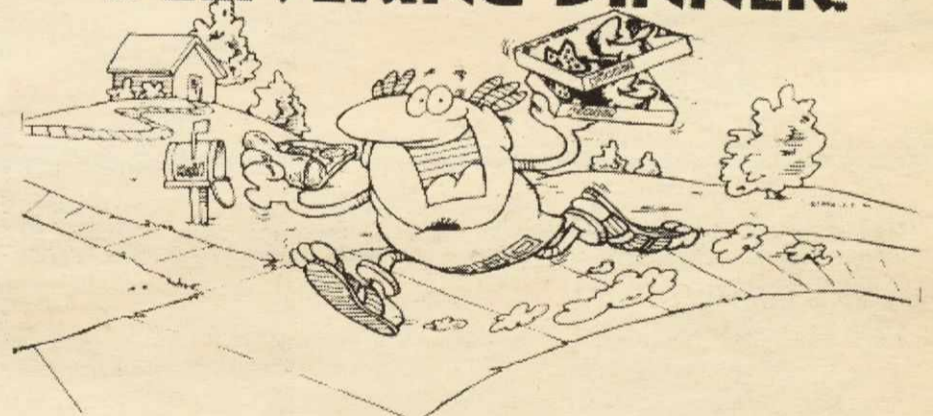
"The fact that after I got the error removed... I got a \$13,000 scholarship, tells me that something went wrong in the middle," said Bircham. "And maybe I wouldn't have gotten the scholarships, but this way I'll never know."

She no longer plans to continue her law studies, citing a hostile relationship with the law school and a lack of funds to complete a three-year law degree.

"I feel [the university is] responsible for my not being able to continue in law," said Bircham. "I follow all their rules and jump through all their hoops and they make a huge mistake and are totally unaccountable."



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