

Students choose poverty: report

OTTAWA (CUP) — A federal government committee wants to change the definition of poverty to exclude students.

A report from the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women released over the summer recommends full-time students without dependents should not be included in new benchmarks evaluating poverty and "income equality."

The committee also says families headed by full-time students should answer questionnaires to establish their level of economic hardship.

"We're just trying to see who's really poor," says the committee chair, Progressive Conservative MP Barbara Greene.

"[The report] is just another measure of poverty, an accurate one."

But Francois Dumaine, acting director for the National Anti-Poverty Organization, says the report is not accurate at all.

"They [the committee members]

are trying to sidetrack from poverty," says Dumaine.

He says his organization withdrew from the committee last year because it felt Barbara Greene was pushing an agenda to "redefine poverty rather than fight it."

Dumaine says the exemption of students from poverty statistics show how insensitive the committee is to poverty.

"It marginalizes the reality of many Canadians," he says.

In fact, Dumaine says, student poverty is on the rise.

"We've seen a very big increase in the number of food banks on university campuses across the country," he says.

But the report says poverty is a student's choice. "Post-secondary students make their choices voluntarily. Most students do not suffer from a low standard of living in the same way as do truly poor persons."

Jocelyn Charron, communications officer for the Canadian Federation of Students, says students do suffer from

low incomes and are suffering even more from government cutbacks.

"It may be true [that students] choose to go to school, but they don't choose the conditions where grants are cut, aid is cut and tuition is raised," he says.

Under the heading "The Case of Students," the report says students "choose to forego current income in exchange for expectations of higher future income and in exchange for the intangible benefits associated with greater learning."

But Charron says the report reveals the government's misunderstanding of the conditions faced by students and the supposed benefits obtained from a post secondary education. "They look on student poverty as a given," he says. "That mentality really shows their [the committee members'] age."

The report's recommendations are now being reviewed by various government committees and won't be adopted until after the next election, providing the Tories are re-elected, says Greene.

Dean backs new grant policy

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about 20%, she says, and 22% represents far over a 20% success rate."

Some Dalhousie graduate students had suggested that there be student representation on the Selection Committee, according to Fingard, who notes she wasn't opposed to this. However, the idea was vetoed in Ottawa. "This is not peer review," she says. "This is faculty judging students."

"One other implication this might have," she adds, "is that after two or three years we may start discouraging departments from supporting students who clearly aren't going anywhere [because of inadequate marks]." This

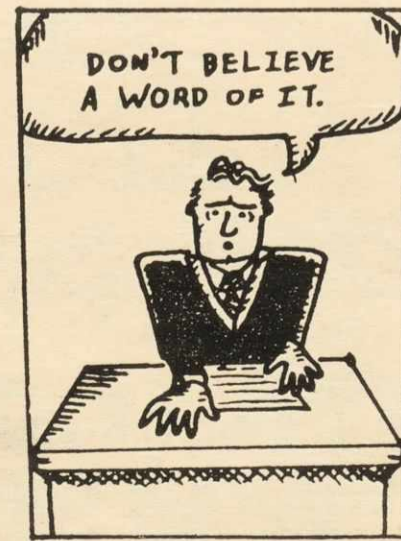
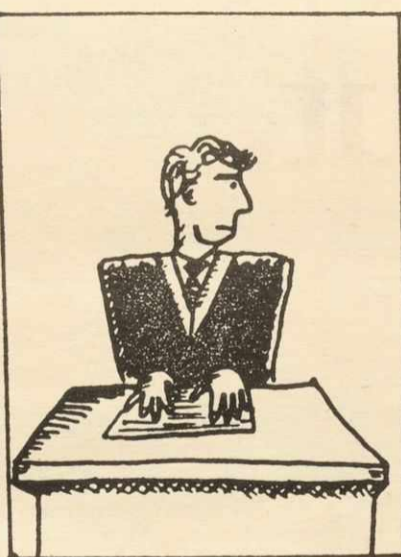
will simply mean that students receive their negative response from the Dalhousie level rather than from Ottawa, she says.

No Dalhousie graduate students would agree to go on the record for the *Gazette* with their concerns about the new SSHRC structure.

A process like that adopted for SSHRC is not unfamiliar to Dalhousie professors and students, says Fingard. "Unlike some universities," she notes, "we're used to interdisciplinary committees deciding things." Dalhousie's Killam Scholarships have been awarded by groups of professors in different fields.

As well, a similar structure has long been in place for Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) applications. NSERC is SSHRC's equivalent body for the sciences. "Really, all they [SSHRC] have done is adopted the NSERC model," says Fingard.

A representative of the Doctoral Fellowship Division of SSHRC, Mr. Maynard Collins, will visit Dalhousie on September 30. Fingard said students may meet with him after 2:00 p.m. on that day to ask questions about applying for SSHRC funding. She invited interested students to make appointments with her office at 494-6722.



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