

Laptops may be mandatory at Calgary college

BY DAVE LORIA

CALGARY (CUP) — Mandatory laptop computers may become a reality at Mount Royal College in Calgary.

The proposal is being brought forward as a solution to

the problem of graduates moving into the workforce without proper computer skills.

Earlier this month, College President Tom Wood said he was concerned about the technology skills that graduates in Applied Communications, Business and

Interior Design were bringing to the workforce.

Wood said a mandatory laptop program for students in these programs would solve this problem.

But at an estimated cost ranging from \$700-\$900 a

semester, Jeff Hayes, Students' Association vice-president (academic), says asking students to absorb another mandatory fee to already high tuition is something he cannot support.

"When we calculated how much that would add to the average debt it came out to about \$7,000 for a four-year program," he said. "That would have a huge impact on students' debts. It's like having a \$7,000 technology tax added to the pre-existing cost of your education."

"I think the reason why the college wants to implement this is understandable, but they should be looking at ways to incorporate a solution through pre-existing programs in the institution."

But not every College administrator believes they are sending graduates into the workforce unprepared.

Hillary Elliot, director of Applied Communications, feels graduates from the programs in question are leaving with sufficient computer skills.

"[Mandatory laptops are] certainly not at the top of my priority list in terms of improvements," she said. "I don't have the feedback from employers or advisory community members that says this is an area we really need to develop our strength in."

If Mount Royal were to implement the mandatory use of laptops for students it wouldn't be the first of its kind in Canada. Acadia University in Nova Scotia introduced the Acadia Advantage program in the 1996-1997 school year.

The program — which has students paying a mandatory \$1,200 for an eight month laptop rental — requires all students on campus to rent a laptop from the university.

Of the \$1,200 fee, \$1,000 goes renting the laptop and the extra \$200 goes to the building and upkeep of a computer infrastructure.

The computer system had to be made to allow students to access power outlets and Internet connections at plug in terminals in all of the classrooms and all of resident housing.

The raise in the cost of education and the abrupt decision to mandate Acadia Advantage is not sitting well with the majority of the university's population.

"Our tuition fee is almost \$5,600 now," said Acadia Student Union Vice-President Leah Levac. "There are some disgruntled students and staff."

Levac says some students do find it valuable though and find that most their professors have been able to incorporate the computers into their courses very well.

Although implementing a program like Acadia Advantage at Mount Royal is speculation for now, this is not the first time this issue has been suggested by the College.

"The College wanted to do this two years ago and I think that they want to implement this in the next couple of years," said Hayes. "There was no specific indication as to when they will do it though."

Are Canadians really overtaxed?

BY GENE SENIOR

WINNIPEG (CUP) — The Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) believes most Canadians are not overtaxed.

Fiscal Conservatives regularly say taxes are too high in Canada. This conclusion is based on an analysis that averages taxes among the general population.

But according to the CCPA, averaging taxes can distort data to suggest Canadians spend more money on personal income tax than on any other expense.

The Center points out that only high-earning Canadians spend a great deal of their income towards taxes.

In contrast, for 40 percent of Canadian households income tax represents the smallest share of expenditures when compared with shelter, transportation and food.

Therefore, the Center argues, over-taxation is not as big a problem in Canada as it is often portrayed.

"When critics use averages to describe taxes paid by Canadians," reads a recent CCPA study, "it produces skewed results that ascribe tax rates to the average

person that are in fact paid only by taxpayers at considerably higher income levels."

According to Murray Dobbin, social activist and author of *Ten Tax Myths*, the focus of debate in Canada needs to shift from over-taxation to under-funded social programs.

"The debate over tax cuts versus reinvesting in our social programs promises to be the next big political fight in this country," he said.

Last week, Federal Finance Minister Paul Martin released his yearly budget update — a glimpse at the upcoming federal budget.

At the same time the CCPA and CHOICES, a coalition for social justice in Winnipeg, have prepared their own "alternative" budget update.

According to Jim Stanford — an economist and chair with the Macro and Fiscal Policy Committee and author of the alternative budget update — over the next five years the federal surplus could accumulate to a whopping \$117 billion.

This could occur in the absence of any tax changes or major new programs.

In Canada, the taxation

system is intended to work on the principle of progressive taxation - working to even out incomes over time by taxing high incomes at a relatively higher rate.

However, according to a report by the Manitoba branch of the CCPA, when all taxes are taken into account Canada has a nearly flat taxation system with everyone paying a similar percentage of their income in taxes.

"This unbalanced system has made the rich richer and the poor poorer - and the gap keeps growing," claims the report.

The alternative budget update, prepared using an economic simulation model similar to the federal government's, considers the various effects of economic growth, inflation and interest rates on components of the federal budget.

The CCPA's simulation confirms Ottawa should be able to announce and fund new investments in human services and public infrastructure in its coming budget without significant tax increases.

It is expected Martin will try to implement both tax cuts and increase spending in his upcoming February budget.

Is your landlord a jerk?

BY KEVIN MASTERSON

LONDON, ON (CUP) — Are you being evicted from your apartment for no good reason? Is your heat on? Has the broken dishwasher been looked at over the last two months? These are just some of the problems student renters face.

"I've been the Housing Mediation Officer at Fanshawe [College] for the past 10 years," said Glenn Matthews. "At this time of year students frequently have problems with roommates or apartment maintenance. After Christmas the questions are generally about housing for next year, how to get out of a lease or how to sublet your apartment."

But contrary to recent student rumblings, Matthews says renters — at least in the London, Ontario area — are basically pleased with their landlords.

He pointed to a recent University of Western Ontario survey that found 96 percent of students were happy with their landlords.

"We are in the process of doing another survey this year to find out if that is still the case," he said. "It will be interesting to see if the numbers change."

Nevertheless, Matthews recommends a few things that student renters can do to avoid flare-ups with their landlords.

If you're planning a party,

he says, let your neighbors and landlord know in advance.

"People are far less likely to call the police if simple communication takes place," he said. "The biggest problems students face in this area is the fear of the unknown. Your neighbors or landlord will worry about how long the party will last and how often the student will host a party."

Students can also have problems with their lease.

"It's a big issue," said Matthews. "Students have to understand that if they sign a lease with their roommates they are accountable for their roommates actions."

This is usually not a prob-

lem if you are good friends and trust your roommates, he says.

Problems are more likely, however, when you are living with strangers.

"I never recommend signing a contract with strangers," said Matthews. "You wouldn't do it in any other situation, but with housing it does happen."

Matthews also warns students not to let their lease run out either.

"Students don't understand that they have to give written notice they will be moving at the end of their contract," he pointed out. "If students don't do this, they can be liable to pay for two months rent."

we deliver!

425-MIKE

mikey's

PITAWRAPS & JUICESMTHIES

HEADS WILL ROLL

Sleepy Hollow

JOHNNY DEPP CHRISTINA RICCI

www.sleepyhollowmovie.com

IN THEATRES FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19