

# Groundhogs and underdogs: Students after Access 2000

By Leo Cheverie

Contributing Editor

The Student Union and the Canadian Federation of Students should be congratulated for hosting the forum on post-secondary education at UPEI. As many of you know, student tuition has risen at least 89 percent in the past 10 years at UPEI while student debt burdens have risen astronomically. It is clear that the Millennium Scholarship program and new research monies are not benefiting small universities like UPEI. 85 percent of new federal dollars for research are going to the ten richest universities in Canada while 300 of the 400 PEI students who benefit from the Millennium Scholarship Fund are studying elsewhere. The Chretien government's move to the CHST and cuts of \$7 billion in post secondary funding have hurt universities in Canada, particularly those in poorer provinces like PEI. Despite a commitment to maintain quality programs and services, some UPEI services

and programs have become increasingly strained, especially when attempting to meet the needs of a larger body of students with a shrinking pot of money.

In the last provincial election, Conservative leader Pat Binns came to campus to promise that he would meet a concern of UPEI's by promising a three-year forecast of the province's commitment to UPEI. However, after the election, he revealed that he meant a cut of six percent and four percent in the university's funding followed by a freeze of zero percent in 1999. Meanwhile, the federal government loosened its purse strings on both equalization and CHST, thereby netting the PEI government additional revenue of \$100 million. At last year's budget speech, I waited, in vain, to hear that some of the additional money would be allocated for post-secondary education at UPEI. What did UPEI get? A measly one time only grant of \$200,000, while over \$23 million were stored away in what

Robert Maddix, opposition education critic, called "slush funds."

So what did we hear about at the debate? The importance of education for the future, the need for research dollars, the crushing burdens of student debt, the advent of a food bank on campus for students the privatization of public education, the need for national standards, and the fact that accessibility for students in the future will be compromised. As John Desrosiers stated of his fellow students, "We are the future." Meanwhile, Minister Gillan concentrated on his role on the Council of Ministers of Education for Canada rather than his role as Minister of Education for the Province of Prince Edward Island where he oversaw cutbacks and rollbacks to UPEI's funding (even a zero percent freeze entails cutbacks as inflation eats away at what money UPEI has at its disposal). Is he ineffectual at the cabinet table when it comes to protecting the interests of UPEI? Without a healthy

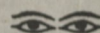
university PEI, as a whole, will suffer in the long run as more people join the "brain drain." Do his fellow caucus members like Jamie Ballem have more say? Well, with a provincial election on the horizon (I say it might be April 10!) Is it too much to request that the province devote at least \$1.5 million at a bare minimum and certainly more to ensure that students at UPEI are guaranteed an affordable and quality education? Can we settle for anything less, especially when the Conservatives are saving their "slush funds" for an election year. Students, with the support of others, have to demand that UPEI's quality is maintained and enhanced, rather than settle for a two-tiered post-secondary education system and huge debts to banks. Otherwise, the Groundhog Day debate will leave us all underground, now, and also for future generations of students.

## Call For Submissions

Students, staff, and faculty of UPEI are invited to submit art work, photographs, and/or poetry to be considered for inclusion in the "Body Thoughts: It's All About Perception" visual arts event to be held on campus March 18, 2000. The purpose of the event is to celebrate bodies of all kinds, challenge the narrow range of body representations throughout popular culture, and explore contradictions, ambivalences and instabilities around bodies and identities.

Deadline for submissions: **March 8, 2000**

Submissions may be dropped off at UPEI Women's Centre



For further information, please contact:  
Ruth at 628-4332 or Ann at 628-4312

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