

Typo Screws Up Student's Loan

By Michael Connors

ST. JOHN'S, Nfld. (CUP) -- A summer-long ordeal based on one clerical error has left a Memorial University student frustrated with Student Aid.

Steven Bailey, a first-year student, applied for his first student loan last January.

As far as he knew there were no problems until June 17, when he received a letter from Memorial University saying he still owed them \$1,450 in tuition fees, the exact amount of his loan.

Two months of letter-writing and phone calls later, the matter was still not resolved and Bailey was in danger of not being allowed to register for the fall semester.

The problems were the result of an incorrect date on Bailey's loan form. According to Bailey, someone at Student Aid filled in the year 1998 instead of 1996.

As a result, he never received the Canada Student Loan he needed to cover tuition for the winter.

"I got another letter July 6, and at that point I was phoning [the bank] and Student Aid, and I didn't get in contact with [Student Aid operations manager] Karen Tucker until mid-July," said Bailey. "She said she was talking to someone at [my bank] and that it had been cleared up."

But Bailey received another letter from the university saying he still owed tuition fees for January, and under university policy, students can't register for courses until all outstanding fees have been paid.

At that point Bailey approached student council vice-president Zaki Saleemi to take up the matter on his behalf.

"So far I've received three formal complaints [about Student Aid]," said Saleemi. "This is another one of those areas of Student Aid that needs reform. In the larger picture there are other issues as well, but this is definitely a concern."

On top of his registration problems, Bailey was also charged the late registration fee by the university.

"I was charged . . . \$30.29 in late charges, a finance charge it was called, back

in August," said Bailey.

Bailey did in fact get the late charge reversed, and the university allowed him to register, but the matter of the misdated student loan has still not been cleared up.

"The loan is tied up in Ontario," said Bailey. "[Student Aid has] to write a letter saying that they made a mistake."

"I asked them to cancel [the loan] and issue me a new one, but they can't do it because it has already been signed

and turned over to the bank. It's been sitting on somebody's desk for five months."

"It's just nonsense. This has been floating in the back of my head all summer. I've had to appeal -- I still might not get my full loan."

Haywood Harris, director of Student Aid, said the matter of the loan "was still outstanding," but that he didn't want to discuss the specifics of a case involving an individual student.

Human Resources Minister Wants to Decentralize Power

By Samer Muscati

OTTAWA (CUP)-- The federal government will push to transfer more power over social programs to the provinces, says the new Human Resources Minister Pierre Pettigrew.

He will meet with his provincial counterparts to discuss how the federal government will off-load responsibility on programs such as education, student employment and loans, said Pettigrew after a cabinet shuffle appointed him to the post on Friday, October 4.

"I intend to give it my all to ensure that the [government] reform that has been on-going since the Chretien government came to power . . . continues and achieves the appropriate results," he said.

Pettigrew says that there needs to be a "redefinition of Canadian federalism" and that transferring responsibility to the provinces is in the best interest of Canada, since it is a key issue for the government

of Quebec.

But David Robinson, research director for the Council of Canadians, a national public interest group, says that further decentralization will erode national standards and create a patchwork of programs across the country.

"It's a recipe for disaster in the long-run," said Robinson. "The government is off-loading these programs on to the provinces but are not giving them any money."

Robinson says that it makes no difference who the new Human Resource Minister is, since the position holds no power. He says that the balance of power is held in the portfolio of Finance since that department ultimately determines which programs and services are cut. The Cabinet shuffle did not affect the Finance ministry as multi-millionaire Paul Martin kept his job as minister.

"It's clear from day one of this government that the Finance ministry dictates social policy and everything else,"

said Robinson. "They talk about decentralization but in their own government the power is becoming incredibly centralized within one portfolio."

Bloc opposition leader Michel Gauthier is not impressed with the new appointment and had harsh criticism for Pettigrew.

"Here is a minister who has done nothing and said nothing," said Gauthier. "[The position] is a big challenge for a minister without a lot of experience."

The 45-year-old rookie Liberal MP was only sworn in last April and assumed the Minister for International Cooperation post.

Previously, he was an executive assistant to Quebec Liberal leader Claude Ryan during the 1980 referendum, and foreign-affairs advisor for Prime Minister Trudeau from 1981-84. He ran unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in the 1984 general election.

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The **Panther Prints** is the official newspaper of the students of UPEI.

It is published 10 times per semester. 2500 copies are distributed on and off campus on Tuesdays. Deadlines for advertisements and submissions are Thursdays at 4pm, without exception.

The **Panther Prints** is a member of the Canadian University Press (CUP), a cooperative of 50 Canadian University and College newspapers.

The opinions expressed within the **Panther Prints** do not necessarily represent the views of UPEI or UPEI Student Union Inc.

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