

Students respond to House of Commons Report

Graduate Students in Prince Edward Island hope the Federal Government will put its money where its mouth is, literally.

In a recently released report, "Moving Forward: Balancing Priorities and Making Changes for the Economy of the Twenty-First Century," the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance supported the call from students to provide a realistic approach to post-secondary education issues. Student Organizations have been pressing the government to create a dedicated federal transfer payment for post-secondary education and research. This past week the committee answered by calling on the government to "... split the Canada Social Transfer into a Canada education transfer and a Canadian social assistance and services transfer."

The report also included support for students' call to expand the low income grant program from the Conservative Party of Canada, as well as a call from the New Democratic Party (NDP) to implement a tuition fee reduction strategy in conjunction with increased federal transfer payments to the provinces. The NDP also recommended the phasing out of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation in order to fund a national system of needs-based grants.

"It's good to see increasing funding and a comprehensive grant system finally on the agenda of the Federal Government," said UPEI GSA President Fortune Sithole. "Students across this country have been denied the fair and equitable education they deserve for far too long."

The Graduate Student Association hopes the changes, if implemented in this next budget will translate into a more accessible post-secondary education system.

"We feel that these recommendations will work well together, to ensure that university administrations no longer look to high tuition fees to solve their burdening financial problems." Sithole said.

The Canadian Government has had a steady decline in post-secondary education spending in the past 20 years and remains one of only two member nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) without a nations system of needs based grants.

"Canada has some of the highest tuition fees in the world." Sithole said. "I can only hope that increased funding will work to reduce those fees and provide more opportunities to those seeking higher education."

The University of Prince Edward Island Graduate Students' Association (UPEI GSA) urges support for Glendon College students.

As the Glendon College Students' Union (GCEU) launches a \$2.7 million dollar lawsuit against the York University Administration, the UPEI GSA urges students' groups to take action.

"The actions of the York University Administration are not simply undemocratic, but fly in the face of the basic rights of students," says UPEI GSA Executive Vice President Joy Elliott, "Student governments should be treated with respect by University Administrations, these actions are part of a very dangerous trend."

These comments come after the Glendon College Students' Union was forced to turn to litigation to regain control of assets seized by the University in December of 2004. The actions by the University, which included changing the locks on the

student unions' office, suspending the student representatives and freezing and then redirecting the association's funds, has brought the activities of the students' union to a screeching halt.

On behalf of their students GCSU is seeking \$2.7 million in damages, including \$200,000 for breach of contract, \$1 million for breach of fiduciary duty and \$1 million in punitive and exemplary damages.

"We want to send a message to York and other universities that they can't treat students this way," said GCSU legal counsel Xavier Navarrete. "York has followed different procedures when dealing with student governments and breached their contract with the students."

The UPEI GSA couldn't agree more. In the past year York University has not only seized the accounts of two other campus students' unions, but was also reprimanded by the courts for expelling a student activist without due process. The Association is urging students' organizations across the province to join students across the country in pledging their support to GCSU.

UPEI GSA executive members will be taking action this week by personally writing to York President Lorna Marsden condemning the actions she has chosen.

"Glendon College Students' Union has fully complied with university regulations and is an autonomous students' union," Elliott says, "These actions can not be tolerated."

The University of Prince Edward Island Graduate Students' Association is a member of the Canadian Federation of Students and represents Graduate Students at the University of Prince Edward Island.

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