

Students for Literacy Organization starting at UPEI

By Sandra Williams

The beginning of 1998 may forever be remembered for this event - the initiation of a literacy organization on campus.

Finally the University of Prince Edward Island will join other institutions from British Columbia to Newfoundland in the Students For Literacy (SFL) effort.

SFL is a program started by Frontier College, a Canada-wide, volunteer-based literacy organization. Back in 1899, Alfred Fitzpatrick, a Maritimer, decided to help improve the lives and prospects of hard working but minimally educated Canadians. His solution came in the form of Frontier College and soon drew national acclaim through its Labourer-Teacher initiative.

This concept sent volunteers into the workforce to toil next to labourers during the day, and to assist them with their literacy goals at night. The tradition continues now among railway extra-gangs and migrant farm workers. Noted participants include former Premier Joe Ghiz and Vancouver MP Svend Robinson.

Since then, the university effort has moved to return to the community with the one treasure we cash-strapped students have: the gift of knowledge. In the end, of course, it is the students of UPEI that will be receiving a gift, knowing that they have enriched another's life, and miraculously, their own.

Because literacy in our society has become such an essential tool for personal growth, it is currently more important than ever to help

others acquire it.

As Cynthia Brown elucidates, "Learning to read is a political act. In a literate society being able to read is a necessary step towards making decisions and sharing power. A non-literate person may be very powerful within a non-literate sub-culture, but within the dominant culture a nonreader is marginal. Learning to read gives access to information, protecting against fraud, and participation as a citizen".

A national survey of adult literacy in Canada reveals that illiteracy increases as one progresses from west to east. There is still need for literacy work here in the maritimes. One of the most exciting notions of beginning a Student For Literacy chapter at UPEI, it that volunteers have the opportunity to shape the program to fit our community's needs. It will be this first group of volunteers which decides whether it wishes to help children read, reach out to the elderly, or assist prison inmates in furthering their skills.

There will be an information night held on Wednesday, January 28th, to inform you of current literacy concerns and progress that is being made across Canada.

The aim is to be inclusive. Students, faculty members, and the community at large are all encouraged to take part. Bring a friend to what promises to be an eye-opening evening for all involved. It will take many hands to build SFL at UPEI. Watch for flyers announcing specifics, or call Sandra at 569-3025

CFS to sponsor nation-wide protest

By Peter Gillis
with files from Rachel Furey
(Toronto, CUP)

On January 28, CFS will organize a nation-wide protest against rising student debt. Students across Canada will participate marches and rallies to increase public awareness of the debilitating costs of higher education.

The protest is an important step in CFS's long-term strategy to develop a system of national grants for post-secondary students. Currently, Canada is only one of two industrialized nations which does not have a national system of student grants. By comparison, a \$3.5 billion increase in education funding was recently announced in the United States, with individual student grants increasing by \$300.

"We want to send a strong message to the government leading up to the federal budget that students will no longer tolerate government inaction on the issue of a publicly-

funded system of post-secondary education," Brad Lavigne, national chair of the federation, said.

The average Canadian student's debt load currently sits at \$25,000. And student bankruptcies have almost tripled since 1993, rising to 12,000 in 1996 from 4,500. Lavigne says he hopes the Day of Action will lend credibility to the federation's previous lobbying efforts.

"Meetings with governments and our research has limited impact unless the governments believe our message has widespread support. National Days of Action help illustrate that widespread support," he said.

Though CFS will mainly target the federal government, university and college students in every province are also targeting their provincial counterparts.

At several schools student leaders are planning to tabulate the total amount of debt shared by their entire stu-

dent body and use these amounts to send a signal to governments and administrators about the "walls of debt" students will face upon graduation.

At Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, students are planning a teach-in on January 24 to raise awareness about globalization and the growing corporate presence in post-secondary education. Another teach-in is slated for January 21 in Winnipeg.

In Saskatchewan, students will be focussing their protests against the Royal Bank, which has a monopoly on student loans in that province. And at Memorial University in Newfoundland, students are organizing an indoor rally-style "Cuts Carnival" featuring speakers, games, theatre and other activities centering around student debt issues.

Students at UPEI will also be taking part in the event.



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