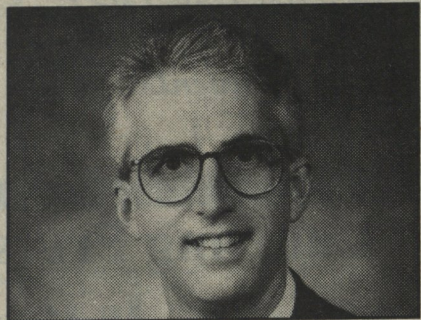


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Centennial Scholars: No More Free Ride?

by Marko Peric

The next time you go to class, take a moment and notice the ages of the people around you. Mostly, there will probably be people aged 18-24, and a few mature students. However, the mature students might not be the oldest people present, because UPEI has a considerable number of students who are over the age of sixty. For years UPEI has accepted these student as Centennial Scholars, and has not charged them any tuition fees. That is about to change.

It is currently in the works to discontinue the free tuition policy for Centennial Scholars. Students over the age of sixty will get a discounted fee schedule, but a discount is a far cry from free. If this new policy is put in place, UPEI will be making a huge mistake.

In this era of downsizing and fiscal restraint, it can be argued that no one should be getting a free ride. After all, everybody else has to compete for a very limited number of scholarships or pay their own way, so seniors should get the same treatment. But that argument doesn't hold water.

Most people go to university to prepare themselves for life. After finishing, they hope ideally to go to grad school, have careers, get married and settle down, live long and full lives, etc. But seniors are at the other end of life. Centennial Scholars don't want degrees so they can compete on the job market, and few

are interested in graduate studies. They take courses to enrich their lives, to enlighten themselves, or perhaps because they never had the time or money when they were younger. They aren't competing with the rest of us.

The university is not losing money because of Centennial Scholars. Free tuition or not, they still have to buy books, so the university does make some money from them. In this age of tight funds, can UPEI afford to do without that extra cash? Needless to say, paying students are not bumped from class lists to make room for seniors -- in fact, the opposite is more likely to happen. If there are empty seats in a classroom, why shouldn't older folks be allowed to sit in them for free? This writer cannot think of a single reason.

What will happen when the free tuition ends? In all likelihood, many of the Centennial Scholars will disappear. Even at a discount, tuition fees are high, and not many of those over sixty have an abundance of disposable income. The seniors will leave, and they probably won't be back. The enthusiasm that so many of them bring to the classroom will be lost.

In the course of their lives, seniors have made vast contributions to the community. Allowing them to attend classes for free is one small way of repaying them. Taking that away will amount to an undeserved slap in the face.

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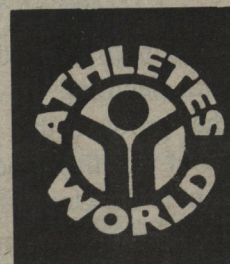
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