

Nova Scotia students denied loans due to parental debts

By Sophia Hussain
(CUP)

NOVA SCOTIA UNIVERSITY AND college students are now being turned down for government assistance if their parents are credit risks. A student in Nova Scotia was told last month she would be unable to appeal her student loan refusal because of parental debt.

Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) chairperson Guy Caron finds this outrageous. "Having your loan denied for something you're not responsible for, like your parents' debt, is simply unfair," Caron said.

Across Canada, student loans are based on an assessment of student financial need. Prior to this year, they were calculated from the income of a

student's family, with exemptions granted if the family was deeply in debt.

Under the new policy, passed by the government this summer, debts are no longer considered evidence of financial hardship.

Students who are denied a loan because their parents' income is too high will still be able to appeal the decision.

By next year, most provinces are expected to implement this new policy, including British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

But it will make it even harder for students to fund their post-secondary education, according to Caron.

"Parental contribution has always

affected students, but it is such a subjective criteria that it cannot be directly applied in assessing loans," Caron said.

"But if they [governments] insist on keeping that criteria, they should do it properly and make sure that parents are really able to contribute to their children's education."

Last year, hundreds of Nova Scotia students were turned down for provincial student aid because they were judged to be bad credit risks. After protests, the provincial government stepped in and guaranteed their loans.

- additional reporting by
Tanya Talaga, *The Varsity*,
and Dionne Stephens, *Excalibur*



Press news feature

Literacy and feminism -- reading between the lines

By Eugenia Xenos
(CUP)

MINISTS HAVE SPENT DECADES fighting inequality, poverty, bias and male authority. In recent years, they've been gathering and organizing to fight a new enemy -- illiteracy.

Is there a connection between literacy and feminism? When up to 95 per cent of literacy workers -- learners, teachers, administrators and researchers -- are women, when virtually no one has studied who literacy workers are, or what work they perform, when this type of work is underpaid and undervalued, when woman learners are often mothers who had to drop out of school to care for their children, the answer is self-evident.

"One of the reasons that marginalized people stay marginalized is because of education. Many marginalized people tend to not have access to the services and other institutions that the rest of the population has, and so literacy becomes very much a feminist issue," says Helen Thunder-

cloud, a Winnipeg cross-cultural consultant who attended the first feminist literacy conference at the University of British Columbia.

The 1992 conference brought together 80 women involved in the adult literacy field from across Canada and was the birthplace of the Feminist Literacy Workers Network (FLWN). With anglophone and francophone branches, the Network aims to be a national voice for women's literacy. It also wants to support woman learners, promote feminist literacy research on topics such as women's ways of learning, violence against women, and feminism across cultures and classes, and look into forming a union.

SEEING THE CONNECTIONS

A booklet describing the need for FLWN says: "Many women feel silenced in literacy programs when they suggest program changes or attempt to put woman-positive programs and events

into place. They are often afraid to identify themselves as feminists, and experience negative feedback from colleagues, administrators, students and volunteers."

Mary Breen, who is involved with the FLWN and works out of Toronto, says there is a reason why the women explicitly chose to use the often-loaded word, "feminist," in the title of the new network.

"We are feminists because a lot of us who are doing literacy work of one kind or another see the connection between literacy issues and other issues -- and so does feminism."

Breen explains: "A lot of the issues that feminism has addressed over the years, like women's isolation, women in poverty, and access to education are the same things that we have to deal with every day in literacy work. Trying to train women to be literate can't be done without first addressing all those other issues. It can't be done in isolation."

She says there was much debate over whether to use the word, and many women worried that it would alienate people. However, they decided that "feminist" best represented who they were and what they were trying to do.

"But we're not just interested in how we can apply feminist practice, and certainly not about how we can make converts. A big part of what we're doing is trying to support each other as feminist literacy workers." So far, there are about 120 women on the network.

Helene Blais, the FLWN francophone representative in Montreal, says the difference between a feminist literacy worker and the "average" literacy worker is that "there is a sensitivity towards problems that are particular to women. When you have that feminist dimension, it makes you take different action than if you were in a milieu where there was not a distinction made for helping women."

Although Blais is a literacy worker
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