

CAMPUS

Students protest rising tuition fees

Teresa Wright-Constable

Wright-Constable is a journalism student at Holland College

Island students hoping to force rising tuition costs as an election issue rallied in front of province house March 15.

A group of about 30 students took part in the demonstration organized by the UPEI student union. Armed with signs and noisemakers, they loudly denounced a projected 12 per cent tuition hike at UPEI by 2009.

Student union president Ryan Gallant said he feels education has been largely ignored by the provincial government.

"This year we had the highest tuition hike in all of Canada, and we're just saying that's not acceptable."

Tuition rates at UPEI were raised by 6.5 per cent this year, making it the largest tuition increase in Canada, according to a Statistics Canada report in September 2006.

With more increases expected over the next two years, Island students at the demonstration wanted government officials to know how rising tuition costs will affect their future in education.

UPEI philosophy and religious studies student Daniel McRae said he's had to work full-time jobs while attending UPEI in order to keep his student debt to a minimum.

"Being a student's a full-time job pretty much, and then trying to work a full-time job while being a full-time student



Island students protesting the projected tuition hikes at UPEI. - Wright-Constable photo

just doesn't work out very well, so I think we need to do something."

McRae was forced to take only two courses this semester as a result of the rise in tuition and having to work while studying.

"So maybe I could only take one or two next year. It takes a lot longer for me to have to graduate."

A number of politicians attended the rally as well, and each gave a speech detailing how they'd like to see student

debt alleviated.

Island New Democrats Leader Dean Constable spoke first, saying tuition fees in the province should be capped.

"This government is actually discouraging people from seeking an education."

Liberal Leader Robert Ghiz said education should not be a privilege to the select few who can afford it.

"It's my dedication that post-secondary education is affordable to each and every

Islander."

Provincial treasurer Mitch Murphy made the final presentation. He used a series of figures to show how the province has already dedicated significant funds to post-secondary education on the Island and that provincial funding has increased annually since 2000.

He promised more of the same in the next provincial budget.

"We are anticipating some welcome news in the upcoming budget... you will see that it is a priority."

Gallant said he hopes students will have more of a voice and more potential for change since this is an election year.

"We want the people who hope to form the next government to know that education has to be a priority and that we feel very deeply about it, and that it's in the best interests of the province as a whole."

McRae agreed, saying government officials should look very seriously at students' issues when thinking about the future of P.E.I.

"We are the people who are voting now and we're going to be some of the policy makers and decision-makers in the future. And if they want there to be quality decisions and policies made later on to help the Island grow, then the people who are in (school) are going to have to have no debt or little debt and a quality education so they are able to make the right decisions."

Attention grads: plant your trees!

Beth Lassaline

Reporter

The Student Climate Change Coalition wants your attention.

Founding members, Justin Douglas, Michael Willcock, Stephen Middleton and Matt Campbell are urging all students to get involved and to begin taking action to reverse the effects of climate change.

Middleton, a student at Mount Allison, says that this group is not about supporting a specific political agenda, but rather a group where individuals can come together to discuss ideas and pool resources.

"When it comes the environment and climate change, I've never really understood the division that would seem to exist between people."

Douglas reflected Middleton's views at the group's meeting, last Tuesday.

"We want all sides of the political spectrum to come together to fight this

global battle." Douglas adds, "I want people to know that we are also not all Al Gore or Dion supporters."

SCCC member, Adam MacIsaac says political agenda doesn't matter when so much is at risk.

"It doesn't matter what political party you belong to when the world is ruined."

The SCCC wants their group to be an open forum to discuss climate change.

"If students have an idea, we will find a way to make it work," says Douglas.

Willcock wants to encourage all students to come out to the SCCC meetings.

"We're just a new group and we're essentially focused on getting students involved." Douglas is equally eager to get the group's message heard.

"We really want to get people working towards climate change. I have faith in people that they will get involved."

Willcock is also optimistic about the group's success.

"This is a centre of education; if we can get some people together we can come up with some really great ideas."

He believes that the students at UPEI should be especially concerned about the fate of the Island.

"There's a report that recently came out that basically says that P.E.I. is screwed. Coastal erosion is a real problem."

Currently, P.E.I. is vulnerable to the rising sea waters and will be especially vulnerable to future storm surges.

"If we have another hurricane Juan, Charlottetown could experience 4.3 meters of flooding," Willcock said.

Members of the group estimate that the damage from a storm surge could cost the province close to \$300 million in damage.

The SCCC has already begun several initiatives that aim to raise awareness and create change. Their most ambitious project, Leaving a Legacy, has already

been positively received by graduates from UPEI as well as Colonel Gray. The idea of the Leaving a Legacy campaign is that for every graduate, a tree will be planted in his or her honour. "What's going to last longer? A tree or a year-book? This way you're actually going to leave a legacy," Douglas said.

It is expected that 744 students will graduate from UPEI this year. Both Douglas and Willcock want the graduates to come out and plant their own trees.

"We'll plant trees wherever needed," Douglas said. Currently, the SCCC is planning fundraisers for the project. "The expected cost for this program is under \$200," says Douglas, "our main funding will be coming from our April 20th pub-crawl."

The group is encouraging as many students come out and will be posting more information in the near future.