

# Swimmers vow to stop rookie initiations

By DOUGLAS QUAN

VANCOUVER (CUP) – The University of British Columbia's men's swim team has vowed to put a stop to rookie initiation activities after a team member complained that the practical joking had gone too far.

The decision by the T-Birds, who won their second consecutive CIAU national championships last month, ends a tradition that has gone on for years despite the fact UBC Athletics condemns initiation activities.

The move comes about a month after head swim coach Tom Johnson called a team meeting to discuss a complaint lodged by a rookie teammate.

The teammate, who asked to remain anonymous, told the Ubysey that last January, veteran swimmers gathered the rookies to tell them that they had ejaculated into a spaghetti dinner eaten by the freshmen during their 'rookie day' last fall.

"[The vets said], 'Do any of you remember the pot where the spaghetti dinner was made was in the bathroom?'" the teammate said.

"When I found out, I was like, 'Oh my god, that's pretty disgusting.' That really flipped me out. It had an effect on my social environment. I went quiet. I was kind of mad. And I couldn't say anything."

But veteran swimmers insisted last week the incident never actually happened and that they were only joking when they told the rookies the tall tale.

They added that as soon as they heard from the coach that there had been a complaint, they went straight to the rookies to tell them it was just a joke and apologize.

"It was a practical joke

we didn't think through," said team captain Greg Hamm.

The team then decided to abolish all its initiation rituals, including its unofficial rookie day.

While no members of the team contacted last week would say exactly what goes on during rookie day, they acknowledged "it was a day of drinking and running around," and a day "to let the rookies know that they're rookies – a weird shaming."

But they also insisted that the events, aimed at bringing the team together, were always controlled.

Still, for coach Johnson, one complaint was one too many.

"I think the opportunity presented itself for me to be able to say, 'Guys, as much as you think you are getting this, you still don't really get this. This is not right.'"

Johnson added that since the incident he's been trying to find an expert who can come in and give the team sensitivity training.

Team members agreed they had gone too far and it was time to put an end to rookie day.

"Going into it, I was kind of bitter about giving up something that was a good tradition," said team member Jeremy Jaud. "But the more I reasoned with it, [the more I realized] humiliation was not one of the tools we needed [to build a strong team]."

University athletics officials said the swim team's practical joke violated the school's Athlete's Code of Conduct, which prohibits behaviour that could be considered harassment, including comments that are degrading, hurtful or otherwise offensive, or which create an un-

comfortable environment.

But they added they're satisfied with the way the team dealt with the matter, and don't plan on penalizing it.

"It was handled properly, correctly," said Kim Gordon, UBC's co-ordinator of inter-university athletics.

Athletics director Bob Philip said he doesn't want to see behaviour similar to the practical joke played by the swim team. But he said it's

difficult to deal with rookie initiation-type activities because of differing interpretations of the word hazing.

"We don't have a policy to ban them. The coaches don't want that, they don't want it going underground, they want it above ground as much as possible so they can control it," added Philip.

University of Calgary sociology professor Kevin Young, who has spent the last

four years investigating socialization and identity in sport, says while teams will often deny any involvement in hazing, in reality, it still goes on.

"It continues to shock me that people involved in athletics comfortably rationalize this away as though it's acceptable and legitimate in the name of fun," he said. "It's clearly not."

## Students launch legal challenge of federal bankruptcy legislation

By ALEX BUSTOS

OTTAWA (CUP) – A recent university graduate and a national student lobby group will ask the courts to strike down recent changes to the federal Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act on the grounds they discriminate against college and university students.

Annick Chenier and the Canadian Federation of Students argue the changes, introduced last year, violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by preventing graduates from discharging their student loans in the event of personal bankruptcy until 10 years after leaving school.

In contrast, someone with a commercial loan can be discharged of their bankruptcy after only nine months.

Chenier, who graduated with a master's degree in pastoral counseling in 1997 from St. Paul's University, is saddled with \$52,000

in debt incurred over nine years of study. She says her high loan repayment rate of \$631 a month, or roughly 34 per cent of her monthly income, prompted her to declare bankruptcy.

"The federal government is forcing me into a state of poverty for the next 10 years," Chenier, 29, said at a news conference Tuesday.

In nine months, Chenier will ask bankruptcy court to discharge her of her bankruptcy and student debt, said Todd Burke, the lawyer representing Chenier and the CFS.

Burke argues the changes to the act have created an artificial distinction between student and commercial debt.

"This section of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act on its face discriminates against students as a class of individuals," said Burke. "(We) will argue that there is

no reasonable justification for such discrimination, and that student debt should be treated in the same manner as any other form of debt."

Burke said he plans to argue that treating student debt and commercial debt differently violates the equality provisions in the Charter.

Elizabeth Carlyle, CFS national chairperson, said the case should be seen as an attempt to tackle the problem of student debt.

"The question is not: How can we make loan repayment easier?" said Carlyle. "The question should be: How can we make loan repayment avoidable? And how can we make a system so people do not have to incur huge debt loads?"

The average student debt load for a four-year undergraduate degree in Canada is \$25,000. In the 1996-1997 fiscal year, 10,000 students declared bankruptcy.