

THE GATEWAY

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ZHENDONG LI

FRESH FISH! First-year students, Orientation volunteers, and members of the Students' Union gather Tuesday evening at Hawrelak Park to listen to the President's address. Full coverage on page 4.

Housing woes affect aboriginal students

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Alberta's housing crunch has been well publicized, but for aboriginal students hoping to pursue postsecondary studies in the province, the challenge of finding an affordable place to live is in no way old news.

Last month, attempts to improve the housing situation were signified when Strathcona MLA Rob Loughheed presented a \$550 000 cheque to the University of Alberta's Aboriginal Student Services Centre for the refurbishment of residences allocated specifically for aboriginal students.

"There are a lot of barriers for aboriginal students who come to school. I think there should be some incentive to keep aboriginal students on campus," Aboriginal Student Council (ASC) President Derek Thunder said of the need for aboriginal-specific housing.

The funding went towards the refurbishment of the Belcourt-Brosseau House (B&B House), a six-person unit that opened in 1999 as a Metis house but which has since become equally accessible to First Nations students. In addition, the \$550 000 fuelled renovations at a four-person house in East Campus Village, as well as to two row houses in the Michener Park Complex. These two residences, which were previously open to all U of A students, will be now reserved for aboriginal

students only.

"We could probably do about 30 times that, if not more," Aboriginal Student Services coordinator Melissa Gillis said of the number of housing spaces now set aside for aboriginal students.

"There are a lot of barriers for aboriginal students who come to school. I think there should be some incentive to keep aboriginal students on campus."

DEREK THUNDER
ASC PRESIDENT

But Loughheed said that the money was only a small part of \$250 million coming from the federal government over three years time for aboriginal housing initiatives across the country. He explained that the renovations were only a small component of project the aboriginal housing money will be funding.

He added that as more of the funding becomes available, the possibility to build new units for aboriginal students may open up.

PLEASE SEE HOUSING ♦ PAGE 5

PSE aid misses the mark—report

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Tuition freezes and tax credits aren't to be praised, according to a new study by the Educational Policy Institute (EPI).

The study, entitled "The End of Need-Based Student Financial Aid in Canada," takes aim at a general trend away from need-based aid funding in favour of universal programs. The report shows that based on funding patterns across Canada over the past 15 years, less and less money is going to students in dire need of financial assistance.

"EPI, they've kind of painted the picture that everybody knew was happening, but they didn't really acknowledge the investment that our government has made into the loan program, and there has been some investment there," University of Alberta Students' Union Vice-President (External) Steven Dollansky said.

The study points to the fact that, in Alberta, the past four years in particular have been marked by numerous tuition and student aid programs. The study calculates that although a two-year tuition freeze, reforms to provincial student loans, tax credits, and other initiatives have been hailed as important steps towards addressing student concerns in the province, they have also prioritized non-need-based assistance.

The study states that over the last four years, the Government of Alberta

has spent roughly \$183 million on access-related policies. It calculated that only 21 per cent of all new assistance was need-based, while the remaining 79 per cent was non-need-based assistance.

"In Alberta it's common knowledge that universal aid has far outpaced need-based aid."

STEVEN DOLLANSKY
SU VP (EXTERNAL)

U of A Provost and Vice-President (Academic) Carl Amrhein compared the phenomenon of universal aid to a situation wherein every student receives \$100 relief on tuition. In such a scenario, whether that funding means anything to them or not will depend on their ability to pay tuition in the first place. On the other hand, the same amount of funding could be put towards giving \$500 only to students who can demonstrate financial need.

"I think the big question for me is not so much the amount of money that is advertised in the University's calendar, but actually how much money a student has to pay versus their ability to pay," Amrhein said.

Dollansky also noted that one of the largest contributors to need-

based aid in Canada, the Millennium Scholarship, will run out at the end of next year. The fund contributes approximately \$9 million every year to U of A students.

Maurice Tougas, Alberta Liberal Shadow Minister for Postsecondary Education, said via email that so far he is unaware of any plans from the provincial government to replace the Millennium Scholarship's funding if it is allowed to run out.

"[W]e've heard concerns from student groups that there was, and is, no real plan for dealing with this shortfall in funding—and more specifically, targeted funding," Tougas wrote.

Dollansky said he hopes the funding won't falter at the federal level, and that the provincial government won't have to step in to replace it. He added that ideally, more would be done to streamline postsecondary funding policies between federal and provincial levels.

"In Alberta it's common knowledge that universal aid has far outpaced need-based aid, and it's something that we advocate for because often it's those groups that slip through the cracks," Dollansky said.

Student Financial Aid Information Centre (SFAIC) centre director Jane Lee works with students to help guide them through the student loan systems from application to repayment, and she said EPI's report shows how complex student financial aid is in Canada.

PLEASE SEE EPI REPORT ♦ PAGE 3

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Political who's who

From Legislative Losers to Governance Greenhorns, we'll show you the strange, sexy world of U of A politics.

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'Plant retrospective

Ryan Heise looks at the triumphs and turmoil that peppers the Powerplant's 88-year existence.

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