



**National Educational Association  
of Disabled Students**

Association nationale des étudiant(e)s  
handicapé(e)s au niveau postsecondaire

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## President's Message

What a year for NEADS! As many of you know, we celebrated our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in style with the 2006 National Conference in Ottawa. In 2007, we held four more successful Job Search Strategies Forums (Winnipeg, St. John's, Thunder Bay and London), awarded the first six NEADS Equity Through Education Scholarships—funded by BMO Capital Markets—to outstanding college, university undergraduate and graduate students nationwide, and continued to grow and develop our existing initiatives.

2008 promises to be just as exciting a year, as we prepare for our 2008 National Conference: "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow". As you can see from the conference announcement in this newsletter, our Conference Chair, Agnes Tomkow (Alberta Representative) and the Conference Planning Committee have many great things in store at the conference. I look forward to meeting you all at the Ottawa Delta Hotel & Suites in November for this exciting capstone to a tremendous two years. I urge you to consider submitting a proposal to present in one of our four conference workshops, or to run for a position on the Board of Directors. Or, if you're not already a member, join NEADS (students, student groups and professionals are all currently eligible to join).

During this calendar year, we will hold four more Job Search Strategies Forums in Vancouver, Fredericton, Saskatoon and the conference forum in Ottawa. The JSS Committee and Jennifer Dillon, Project Consultant are hard at work on this initiative. To be innovative and to take advantage of technology, we have begun broadcasting the forums online to reach a wider audience. But our regional events – a staple of NEADS' projects and activities since 2000 – are most successful when students come out and engage in the discussions and learning at the forums.

The 2007-2008 Equity Through Education Student Awards competition deadline has passed, and I am pleased to report that this year's competition saw increases in the number of applications across all categories. Julia Munk, our project consultant, has ably administered this program for the past two years, and she and our Awards Selection Committees are well into the selection process for this year's award recipients.

As you will see in this newsletter, NEADS is pleased to announce its new project, funded by the Imperial Oil Foundation, "Enhancing Opportunities for Students with Disabilities and Recent Graduates in Science and Technology-Related Fields." This two year initiative, commencing in April



Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai, PhD  
*NEADS President*

2008, will produce a guide book on success strategies for students with disabilities, their educators, employers and service providers, and will highlight the success stories of students with disabilities in science and technology. You will see a conference workshop built around this theme in November. We hope that you'll be as excited to participate as we are in developing this project. It promises to be an innovative and unique tool for students with disabilities.

I am also especially pleased to announce NEADS' new and innovative partnership with the Centre for the Study of Students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. Together with the CSS, NEADS is embarking on a project—funded by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario—to understand more fully the financial issues faced by students with disabilities in post-secondary education. This project will consist of an online survey and focus groups, as well as one-on-one interviews with students; we hope that, at the appropriate time, you will all take this opportunity to tell us your stories and participate in the project.

Your board is also hard at work on an internal organizational review and a renewal/visioning exercise. At the conference, we hope to unveil to you some exciting new ideas for NEADS' direction over the next 10-15 years. In the near future, we will also be coming to you to seek your input on how you would like NEADS to best serve you, our members, in the years ahead.

What a year ahead! We hope you enjoy all the diverse articles in this issue of the newsletter, and that you take advantage of all the opportunities out there to participate in NEADS' ongoing work. We look forward to seeing you at the conference in November.

Best wishes,

Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai, PhD  
*NEADS President*

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## A Day that can Make a Difference for Job Seekers and Employers

By Jennifer Dillon

Have you heard of the Job Search Strategies Forums Project? The transition from school to work is vitally important for Canadian post-secondary students with disabilities. The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is providing opportunities to bring together employers, job seekers with disabilities and service providers.

The Job Search Strategies project began in August 2005 and will run until March 2009. The project provides forums throughout Canada with the purpose of offering practical employment search techniques that can help post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities to move from academic success to challenging and rewarding careers. The project is made possible through the support of BMO Capital Markets, Equity Through Education Program.

Over a period of four academic years, 16 forums will be held throughout Canada. Each forum is an interactive day with guest speakers, round table discussions, exhibitors and resume consultations. The forums bring together employers, job

seekers and service providers to participate in an exciting day of learning and networking. Examples of topics include: conducting an effective job search, preparing for an interview, employment accommodations, considerations for disclosing a disability, promoting yourself and first-hand employment experiences. Each forum has guest speakers from the following perspectives: employers, career counsellors, employees with disabilities and students with disabilities.

Each forum has representation from a variety of sectors, including technology, sciences, media, social work, finance, law, manufacturing, retail, health care, tourism, business and power generation. The exhibit areas at the forums provide excellent opportunities to network with employers and local employment agencies. Each forum also offers resume consultations where students and graduates can obtain feedback and tips.

The forums have a cross disability focus and accommodations are arranged for participants who request them in advance. At each forum three travel and hotel

subsidies are available to help make it possible for students living outside the local area to attend the forum.

The 2008 forum dates are February 2 in Vancouver, March 28 in Fredericton, Saskatoon in October, and November 15 in Ottawa. Forums have already been held in Toronto, Edmonton, Victoria, Montreal, Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, St John's, Thunder Bay and London. In the winter of 2009 two final forums will be held, one in Quebec City and one in a location to be determined.

The evaluations from the forums have indicated that participants value the experiences and learning opportunities provided. Employers and professionals who have attended the forums have also expressed that the Job Search Strategies forums are beneficial for them as well. Please check out the [www.neads.ca](http://www.neads.ca) website for reports on events that have been held to date and more information about the upcoming Job Search Strategies forum in your area.

Jennifer Dillon is a Consultant working for NEADS on the Job Search Strategies Forums Project.

### National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)

Winner of the grant portion of the 1997 Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award

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**NEADS**

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handicapé(e)s au niveau postsecondaire

## What Happens After Graduation From Junior/Community College?

By Maria Barile, Catherine S. Fichten, Shirley Jorgensen, Alice Havel, & Jennison V. Asuncion  
Adaptech Research Network, Dawson College

A major recent policy document notes that, “Young people with difficulties ask that we not only show concern for them but also help them achieve success. This is an obligation from which no one can be exempted” (Ministère de l’éducation du Québec, 1999). Why should we be committed to the success of students with disabilities? Why should we support the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education? You may have heard that “70% of people with disabilities are unemployed” (e.g., Center for an Accessible Society, undated). Although this statement is not really accurate (cf. Houtenville, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001a), nevertheless, you may be wondering if the investment of resources and energy is worthwhile. Will an education just leave people with disabilities highly educated, unemployed individuals? Does the investment in time, energy, effort and money produce results?

The Adaptech Research Network’s findings provide some answers. In 2005, we conducted a survey of graduates from three of Quebec’s largest junior/community colleges (Cegeps) about 10 months after they obtained their diplomas (see Fichten et al., 2006 for additional details). We asked graduates what they were doing now, and if they were employed, how closely their job was linked to their program of studies.

About 1/3 of the graduates, 1486 individuals, from both career/technical and pre-university

programs completed the survey. Twelve percent (182) of the respondents self-identified as having a disability. Of these, 24 (13%) had registered with their college’s disability service provider while the remaining 158 (87%) did not. Approximately 60% of the graduates who answered the questionnaire both with and without disabilities had been enrolled in a two year pre-university program while the remaining 40% were enrolled in three year career/technical programs, such as nursing, mechanical technology, and graphic design.

### What do the results tell us?

Our findings show that over 80% of “pre-university” graduates, both with and without disabilities, continued their studies following graduation. Table 1 provides more detailed information.

The findings on career/technical program graduates again show few differences between graduates with and without disabilities. Approximately half of both groups were working full-time, whether they had a disability or not. An additional fourteen to fifteen percent were working part-time, and almost a third of both groups were continuing their studies.

Of the career/technical program graduates who were employed, over 80% of both groups indicated that their job was at least somewhat related to their studies. The only notable difference we found was that graduates with

disabilities from career/technical programs were less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have obtained employment in a field “closely” related to the field of study

### Summary and conclusions.

Our findings regarding the employment and post-graduation outcomes of individuals with disabilities paint a very positive picture. The majority of junior/community college graduates in “pre-university” programs continue their studies. About half of the graduates of college career/technical programs are working full-time and an additional 14%-15% are working part-time. In addition, approximately 1/3 are continuing their studies. These outcomes are consistent with our findings on graduates without disabilities.

Are our findings unusual in some way? We have all heard the, “70% of individuals with disabilities are unemployed” story. Canadian statistics for the year 2001 also show little difference in the employment rates of adults with and without disabilities (e.g., Statistics Canada 2001b, 2003: 89% vs. 93%, respectively). There is an important caveat, however, because the overall statistics for Canada show a huge difference between the proportions of people with and without disabilities who are not in the labour force (i.e., 51% vs. 21%, respectively). This was not found for our sample of college graduates, as the proportions of graduates with and without

Table 1. Post Graduation Activities – Pre University Graduates

| Pre-University Program Graduates | Sample Size | Working Full Time | Working Part Time | Looking for Work | Studying | Unavailable For Work | Total |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| With A Disability                | 90          | 10%               | 4%                | 1%               | 83%      | 1%                   | 100%  |
| Registered                       | 12          | 0%                | 0%                | 0%               | 92%      | 8%                   | 100%  |
| Not registered                   | 78          | 12%               | 5%                | 1%               | 82%      | 0%                   | 100%  |
| No Disability                    | 752         | 8%                | 5%                | 2%               | 84%      | 2%                   | 100%  |

Table 2. Post Graduation Activities – Career/Technical Program Graduates

| Career / Technical Program Graduates | Sample Size | Working Full Time | Working Part Time | Looking for Work | Studying | Unavailable For Work | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| With A Disability                    | 86          | 51%               | 15%               | 1%               | 30%      | 2%                   | 100%  |
| Registered                           | 11          | 36%               | 9%                | 0%               | 55%      | 0%                   | 100%  |
| Not registered                       | 75          | 53%               | 16%               | 1%               | 27%      | 3%                   | 100%  |
| No Disability                        | 540         | 49%               | 14%               | 3%               | 31%      | 3%                   | 100%  |

disabilities who were studying, or who were unavailable for work for other reasons, were very similar. Moreover, our findings resemble recent data for university graduates furnished by AQICEBS (2006). This study showed that of 2/3 of university graduates with disabilities who had registered to receive disability related services were employed, with many of the rest pursuing graduate studies such as Master's and doctoral degrees.

The answers to the original questions asked, "Why should we support the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education? Do these investments produce results?" are pretty a clear cut, "Yes!" Because it is the right thing to do for the students and their parents, because it is the right thing to do for our society, and because it is a truly profitable investment in the future.

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## Calling all writers...

NEADS encourages all interested individuals and organizations to submit articles on students with disabilities in post-secondary education for the newsletter. Announcements of conferences and activities of local disabled students' associations are most welcome. Also, send in cartoons and drawings. The next issue will be published in the winter of 2008/09.

## 10/20 Challenge

By Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters

### 10 Percent of New Hires are Persons With Disabilities by the Year 2020

We heard what you said during the 10/20 consultation.

- We must take the initiative to change our image of our industry and attract a wide pool of candidates for the careers available to young people.
- We need to develop workforce strategies that are proactive and innovative and resolve the issues of skill shortages.
- We need to strengthen collaborative relations between a wide variety of groups.
- We need to implement innovative solutions in the workplace and continually upgrade skills and competencies.

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters has issued a challenge to all of you that 10 per cent of new hires be persons with disabilities.

- CME will be here to support you in this new initiative.
- CME will assist you with putting policies in place to achieve this goal.
- CME will link you to stakeholders in the community that markets skilled workers who happen to have a disability.
- CME will link you with stakeholders that have the knowledge, expertise and support to educate your human resource personnel, supervisors and staff.
- CME will link you with stakeholders to provide your workers, managers and supervisors on accommodating new personnel.
- CME will have access to qualified skilled persons with disabilities to place in your firm.

Enhancing productivity and attracting and retaining skilled workers requires new action. Putting key policies in place that lets you access a large untapped market of eager, trained, technologically innovative individuals will add value and enhance your bottom line.

Get on board, for the future is today. For more information, please contact Jo Walks, Project Manager, Business Takes Action Project, CME at [jo.walks@cme-mec.ca](mailto:jo.walks@cme-mec.ca).

[www.ten20action.ca](http://www.ten20action.ca)

The small, medium and large corporations with the most hires will be recognized at an end of the year awards ceremony!

Do you want to be recognized as a leader? Take the 10/20 challenge!

Building our vision for the future

## Planning Your Job Search

By Jennifer Dillon

Whether you are a post-secondary student in school or a recent graduate, planning your job search is often daunting. There are a number of things that you can do to increase the effectiveness of your employment search. Jennifer Dillon, NEADS Job Search Strategies Consultant, and Margaret Shalma, NEADS Ontario Representative / Vice-President External, had the opportunity to share their advice with students from George Brown College in Toronto on February 26, 2008.

Jennifer and Margaret summarized the key points from the NEADS Job Search Strategies Forums and also shared tips from their own personal experiences. They compared planning your job search to planning a journey. It was explained that choosing your employment goals is like determining your destination for a trip. Similarly, they presented that planning strategies and resources for your job search is comparable to putting together a roadmap for your trip. They described acquiring support for your search as a way you can stop and ask for directions along your way. Finally, the big question of what to pack for your trip was addressed by describing the tools that you should prepare for your career search. This analogy they explained is intended to help you understand that an effective job search plan requires goals, strategies and resources, supports and tools.

Determining your destinations or identifying your employment search goals is not easy for many people. Jennifer explained that

sometimes it is helpful to use a process of elimination and that determining what you do not want may help you identify what it is that you do want. Questions such as where do you want to get to, what do you want to obtain, and what are some stops you would like to make along the way, may help you identify some goals to get started. It is common to change your goals or to set new ones along the way. The key is to have a goal for your job search, because without one, your search becomes confusing and will be less effective. Also, employers typically are much more interested in candidates who have specific goals. If you are not sure how to identify a goal, start broad and narrow it down. Exploring, networking and experimenting are vital to developing goals.

Creating roadmaps for your job search journey is the process of planning strategies and resources. Once you have a goal you can then research how, and where, you will search for work. Put together a plan so that you know what websites you want to check out, which career centres are best suited for you, which magazines, professional associations and other groups you should regularly check out. Determine how often you should check these resources. Find out who, and what, can help you. You may decide that you would benefit from attending workshops or conferences related to your goals. You may find that a particular career centre has resources for you to read through. You may also decide to include informational interviews

as a strategy in your job search plan. Another important strategy is to gain experience and transferable skills. This may be achievable through volunteering, internships, job shadowing etc. In planning your roadmap, obtain tips for interviews, resumes and cover letters.

Creating your roadmap should also include planning for employment accommodations, if that is applicable to you. Reflect on what type of job accommodations you may require in order to perform well in the positions you are seeking. Equally important is determining how those accommodations can be acquired and from where. It is good to have a list of potential funding sources and suppliers. You will want to have all this information ready so that you can quickly get your accommodations in place when you obtain an offer. At the NEADS Job Search Strategies Forums employers have stated that every employee requires some type of accommodations and that arranging accommodations is commonly done for everybody. If you are worried about job accommodations, obtaining information and resources will help you. Remind yourself that accommodations are common in the work place and that they are simply the arrangements you require to complete the job duties well. Accommodation examples include adjustments to the working environment, adjustments to the work processes, modifications or additions to the equipment/tools required to perform the job, etc.

Depending on your situation, job accommodation and disclosure

may or may not be closely linked. In preparing your career search roadmap, it is also important to determine if, and how, you want to disclose your disability to an employer. Reading articles on disclosure, talking to career counsellors who work with people with disabilities, and researching the companies and employers you are interested in, may help you determine how you want to approach disclosure.

Now it is time to plan how you will get directions for your journey, in other words how you can acquire support. Jennifer explained to students that job searching is not always easy and that getting support is one of the most important things you can do. She encouraged job seekers to research relevant programs and services that can help them in their search. One of the employers from the NEADS Job Search Strategies Forums highly recommends putting together a success team. This is a group of 3 or 4 people that can help you with your resume, cover letters, practicing disclosure, helping you choose your interview outfits and who will give you honest feedback on your personal appearance and body language. You want people on your success team who can be honest with you and who you respect, for example a career counsellor, teacher, student peer, previous supervisor etc. It is important that you take the time to practice interviews and to get feedback; most career centres can help you with this.

In putting together your supports for your job search, Jennifer and Margaret emphasized that it is important to “Network! Network! Network!” They suggested attending workshops on networking so you can learn how to do it. Jennifer mentioned that she finds it



NEADS' Vancouver Job Search Strategies Forum (left to right: Ellen Su, Pam Anderson, Cliff Yeo)

helpful to network with people in your chosen field at conferences and related events. Margaret explained that she has been using Facebook to network with people and organizations that she is interested in. She also mentioned that becoming a board member for organizations that interest you is a great way to network and gain contacts. Researching mentorship programs can be another great way to find supports for your job search and to do some networking. Another important piece in putting together your supports, is determining who you should use for job references.

Choosing what to pack for your job search journey is a matter of putting together your search tools so that you are ready to go. Jennifer indicated that it is essential to develop systems for tracking information. She explained that you will need a method to keep track of which job postings you have applied to, so that when you get called for an interview you can quickly locate that posting to refresh your memory. She also said that it is really helpful to collect sample postings of the types of jobs that you would like. Jennifer explained that these job postings can help you identify the skills and experience you need to gain, in order to obtain your desired jobs. In addition, these postings

can provide you with useful language and wording that you can incorporate into your resume and cover letters.

Your job search tools must include polished versions of your resume, cover letters and a list of references. Stay in touch with your references and let them know when you are giving their names to potential employers so they are ready for the call. Your job search tools should include a list of resources that can help you, interview outfits and a preparation checklist for interviews. An interview checklist will help prevent you from forgetting any important things that you need to do to prepare for an interview.

You are ready for your job search journey when you have your destinations in mind, your roadmaps prepared, your supports in place, and your tools ready to go. Before you get started it is also important to remind yourself to keep an open mind. Opportunities can sometimes arise from where we least expect it. It is also essential to develop ways to manage stress. Job searching can be very frustrating and it really helps to have hobbies or activities that can help you relax. And finally, have fun and enjoy the journey.

**National Conference 2008:**  
**"Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow"**

## Call for Speakers

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is pleased to announce our 2008 National Conference, "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow." It will take place at the Delta Ottawa Hotel and Suites from November 14-16, 2008.

We are seeking speaker proposals to address our four workshop themes:

1. Job Search Strategies:  
Competing in the Job Market
2. Enhancing Opportunities  
in Science and Technology  
Related Fields
3. Solutions to Library/Print  
Material Access
4. Key Issues on Campus:  
Perspectives from Students  
with Disabilities

This conference will focus on solutions in order to drive change. We are seeking proposals that will, wherever possible, not only identify key issues or challenges, but also bring forward solutions.

We encourage speakers representing a diverse range of opinions and experiences, including:

- high school, college and university students with disabilities;
- educators at the high school and post-secondary levels;
- service providers, librarians and other post-secondary professionals; and
- employees with disabilities and employers.

Deadline for submissions is June 5, 2008. For further information on workshop themes and submission instructions go to [www.neads.ca/conference2008](http://www.neads.ca/conference2008)

## Board of Directors' Election — Conference 2008

At November's national conference in Ottawa, the Association's regular members will elect a new Board of Directors to work with NEADS for the next two years. All persons interested in a position on the board must be regular members in good standing. Positions on the Board must be filled by "regular members" of NEADS (currently having student status or having graduated within two years of application).

The positions available for election are ten provincial representatives (e.g. British Columbia Rep., Ontario Rep., Nova Scotia Rep. etc.), one territorial representative and an 'open' representative. Candidates for the positions of provincial/territorial representatives must be students or recent graduates with disabilities residing in the area and/or attending a post-secondary institution in the geographic location they seek to represent.

If you would like to become a member of the NEADS Board, please complete and sign the "Nomination Form" as specified and, if possible, submit it to the office by October 9th, 2008. This will enable us to prepare the forms in both official languages and alternative formats in time for the conference elections. We ask that you include a profile/platform of 250 words or less with the completed nomination form.

Voting for a new Board of Directors will take place at the Delta Ottawa Hotel and Suites (361 Queen Street) on Sunday, November 16th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Nomination forms for board positions will be received until 5 p.m. on Saturday, November 11th.

The election will be conducted by representatives from Elections Canada. All regular members are entitled to vote in the election. If you are unable to attend the election in person you can identify another member in good standing to act as a proxy and vote on your behalf.

Further details and nomination forms are available on the conference website: [www.neads.ca/conference2008](http://www.neads.ca/conference2008) Please contact the office with any questions regarding the Board of Directors election.

by telephone: (613) 526-8008 (Voice and TTY)

by fax: (613) 520-3704

(Attention Frank Smith, National Coordinator)

by mail: NEADS, Rm. 426 Unicentre, Carleton University,  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6, Canada.

## NEADS Receives Funding for Science and Technology Project

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is proud to announce a new two-year initiative, developed through a funding partnership with the Imperial Oil Foundation. Enhancing Opportunities for Post-Secondary Students and Graduates with Disabilities in Science and Technology Related Fields will launch in April, 2008 and conclude in March, 2010. NEADS will receive \$120,000 from the Foundation for the project.

While research has been conducted on factors affecting the inclusion of the general student population in science and technology-related programs, very little work has been done to highlight the issues and challenges faced by students and employees with disabilities within this sector. Furthermore, the identification of role models or success stories in science and technology is not encouraged; every student and educator, or every employer and employee, facing these issues may well believe that they are the first, ever, to do so.

NEADS is in a unique position to remove these barriers, and address issues specific to persons with disabilities in science and technology, by leveraging our extensive network of college and university service providers, and students and recent graduates with disabilities. It is not our goal to re-invent the wheel and revisit research that has already been conducted. Instead, with a specific focus on students and employees

with disabilities in the science and technology sector, and with the establishment of partnerships including organizations who are already conducting science and technology outreach, we hope to contribute in a novel and unique way to the inclusion of students with disabilities in science and technology-related programs and employment.

### **There are four aspects to the project:**

1. The development of a guidebook, Promoting Careers in Canada's Science and Technology Sectors to Students and Recent Graduates with Disabilities: Success Stories, Best Practices and Resources;
2. The hosting of a national conference workshop on Education and Employment in Science and Technology for People with Disabilities" at the 2008 NEADS National Conference in Ottawa;
3. Research and development of the concept of a national science and technology fair for students with disabilities as an outreach tool to encourage participation and visibility of students with disabilities in the science and technology sector;
4. The establishment of a network of stakeholders and existing organizations to examine the research findings in the guidebook and develop strategies for communication, dissemination and implementation of strategies

to counter barriers faced by students with disabilities in the science and technology fields.

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is a consumer-controlled, registered charitable organization with a mandate to encourage the self-empowerment of post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities in Canada. NEADS advocates for increased accessibility at all levels so that students with disabilities may gain equal access to a college or university education, which is the right of everyone. The Association also supports the successful transition of students and graduates with disabilities into employment within their chosen field.

Imperial Oil Limited has been contributing to communities across Canada for the past 126 years. Imperial Oil contributed more than \$12 million to enhance the well-being of communities across Canada in 2006, building on a tradition of corporate giving that began with the company's inception in 1880. Supporting organizations where we live and work, the company emphasizes investment in education of math and sciences, environment, and civic and community programs where we have employees or business operations.



## National Conference 2008: “Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow”

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) is pleased to announce our 2008 national conference, “Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow.” It will take place at the Delta Ottawa Hotel and Suites from November 14-16, 2008. The conference will focus on solutions to drive change.

This year’s event will be an exciting opportunity for students, consumer advocates, service providers, employers and all others interested in exploring key issues of equal access to post-secondary education and employment for students and graduates with disabilities. We welcome delegates from across Canada and around the world. The 2008 conference is being organized by a Conference Planning Committee, comprised of NEADS board members and chaired by Agnes Tomkow, NEADS Alberta Representative.

The four workshop themes are:

1. Job Search Strategies:  
Competing in the Job Market
2. Enhancing Opportunities  
in Science and Technology  
Related Fields
3. Solutions to Library/Print  
Material Access
4. Key Issues on Campus:  
Perspectives from Students  
with Disabilities

NEADS wishes to acknowledge, with thanks, generous donations from BMO Capital Markets and its Equity Through Education

Program. The Equity Through Education Program is supporting the Job Search Strategies: Competing in the Job Market workshop - which is one in a series of forums being held across the country from 2005 to 2009.

The workshop Enhancing Opportunities in Science and Technology Related Fields has been made possible thanks to funding from the Imperial Oil Foundation. The Imperial Oil Foundation is funding a two-year NEADS project on persons with disabilities in science and technology fields.

In addition to a Saturday evening banquet, we will hold our Annual General Meeting and elections for our 2008 – 2010 Board of Directors on Sunday.

Those who register on or before October 10 can take advantage of an early registration fee of \$70 CDN for students and \$130 CDN for all others. After October 10, the registration fee is \$90 CDN for student delegates and \$170 CDN for all others. Optional tickets for our Saturday evening Banquet will also be available for a nominal fee of \$10 CDN.

Guest rooms are available at the Delta Ottawa Hotel and Suites (361 Queen Street) at the conference rate of \$122 CDN per night plus tax, single or double occupancy. Rooms are also available across the street at the Radisson Hotel (402 Queen Street)

at a rate of \$110 CDN plus tax per night, single or double occupancy.

Delegates can book and pay for their accommodations at the Delta Ottawa Hotel and Suites by contacting toll-free 1(800) 268-1133 or direct at (613) 238-6000, or e-mail the Reservations Manager, Carolyn Campeau: [ccampeau@deltahotels.com](mailto:ccampeau@deltahotels.com) When booking at the Delta, mention the reservation file code (GGNEA3) to get the conference rate. To book and pay for a room at the Radisson Hotel Ottawa Parliament Hill, contact the hotel toll-free at (877) 557-5565 or direct at (613) 236-1133. When booking, mention the group block “NEADS” to get the conference rate. Accessible rooms are available at both hotels upon request.

Our Call for Speakers, conference registration form, and information/nomination form for those interested in running for a position on the NEADS Board of Directors, are available on our web site at

[www.neads.ca/conference2008](http://www.neads.ca/conference2008)

## Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA)

### **Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is pleased to announce the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA).**

The mandate of IELA is to create the conditions for sustainable and equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities. LAC has been asked to develop and cost a strategy for implementing nation-wide partnerships, activities and services to meet the long-term library and information access needs of Canadians with print disabilities.

More than three million Canadians (10 percent) have a print disability and require information in multiple formats. However, less than 5 percent of published Canadian material is available in multiple formats.

### **How Does LAC Define Print Disability?**

Print disabilities prevent people from reading standard print. They can be due to a visual, perceptual or physical disability which may be the result of vision impairment, a learning disability or a disability that prevents the physical holding of a book. Canadians with print disabilities require publications in multiple formats, such as braille, audio, large print and electronic text. They may also require assistive technology to meet their information needs.

### **Developing the Strategy**

The strategy IELA develops will identify ways of improving access to information and materials in multiple formats and will include options associated with promoting, sponsoring, producing and disseminating public library-type materials in multiple formats.

It will also present detailed options and scalable costs for the provision of equitable library access and will explore the extent to which other levels of government or external partners should be involved in supporting sustained access.

The strategy will be developed, informed and refined by broad-based consultations with:

- § People with print disabilities and/or groups representing them to ensure services meet their needs.
- § The library community to develop service standards.
- § Publishers and producers of materials in multiple formats to raise awareness and strengthen the linkages between them.

These consultations will explore issues related to access to published information for people with print disabilities.

## Key Activities

### **Internet Portal**

A fully accessible Internet portal that will serve as a gateway for information and resources for and about the provision of access to information for people with print disabilities will be developed. The portal will direct users to all library-type holdings available in multiple formats.

### **Library Service Standards and Training**

A set of service models, standards and training materials for the provision of equitable library access for use by libraries across Canada will be developed. The standards will be formulated in consultation with the library

community. They will then be disseminated through an internet portal, training sessions and assistive technology demonstrations provided to library staff. IELA will also provide libraries with information on costing issues related to the provision of equitable library access.

### **Electronic Clearinghouse**

An Electronic Clearinghouse for multiple format production will continue to be enhanced to enable publishers to make their electronic files available quickly and securely to producers of multiple formats. This will reduce delays in issuing materials in multiple formats and increase their availability. IELA will also consider issues where domestic and foreign copyright restrictions impede access to information for people with print disabilities.

### **Contact Us For More Information**

The IELA team is now in place, consisting of Mary Frances Laughton (Manager), Trisha Lucy and Chanel Blanchard.

The report from the Kick-Off Meeting and a work plan can be found on the IELA website. The website will be updated frequently to chart our progress, so visit often.

### **Initiative for Equitable Library Access**

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## Council of Canadians with Disabilities Update

### Victory at CTA

On January 10, 2008, the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) released a landmark decision concerning the right of individuals with disabilities to travel by air without having to pay for a second seat, for an attendant or other use, to accommodate their disability. In a historic decision in the "One Person, One Fare" case, the agency has recognized the right of these individuals to have access to a second seat when traveling by air in Canada without having to pay a second fare. The CTA decision acknowledged the importance of a number of established human rights principles underlying the arguments of the complainants in the case, noting that these principles dictate that persons with disabilities have the same rights as others to full participation in all aspects of society and that equal access to transportation is critical to their exercise of that right. The decision was many years in coming—the late Eric Norman, Joanne Neubauer, and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) filed the original complaint with the CTA in 2002, seeking to establish a situation of equality for passengers with disabilities who travel with attendants. For many years, Canadians with disabilities traveling by train, bus or marine service have been permitted to use a second seat without cost when one was required. But airlines such as Air Canada, Westjet, and Jazz have not been bound to obey this policy,

meaning that many Canadians with disabilities have been forced to effectively pay double what others pay to fly. Now that all seems set to change. There is the possibility that the airlines will appeal this decision. If this does happen, CCD's Transportation and Human Rights Committees will develop recommendations for consideration by CCD Council.

### Supreme Court Grants Oral Arguments to CCD

Once again, the Supreme Court of Canada will be hearing from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. The CCD Human Rights Committee developed CCD's intervention in the *Honda v. Keays* case, and Frances Kelly and Gwen Brodsky are legal counsel for this intervention. CCD is before the Court to make clear what formal and de facto access to justice is for people with disabilities. CCD's objective is that the Justices keep in mind the social and economic realities of people with disabilities as they continue the process of integrating human rights norms into the common law. We are reminding the Court not to forget about the consequences of poverty and disability.

### Research on Poverty

CCD is rolling out a unique research alliance: Disabling Poverty and Enabling Citizenship. For the next five years, Yvonne Peters, CCD, and Dr. Michael J. Prince, University of Victoria, Principal Investigators for this strategic initiative, will lead a

team of disability community and academic researchers dedicated to bringing forward recommendations and plans for alleviating the disproportionate poverty of Canadians with disabilities.

The CCD led team submitted its research proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Community University Research Alliance (CURA) competition, where the application was reviewed by a panel of Canadian researchers and judged on its merits. SSHRC allocated a million dollars to this project over the next five years. "Typically, SSHRC projects are awarded to academic institutions, but this project was awarded to CCD, vesting control and direction of the project with a disability community organization," states Yvonne Peters. "For our community, self-determination of the research process is a fundamental component of our wider disability rights work, which addresses the economic, social, political and cultural domains." Of the 92 CURA grants awarded over the years, only ten are community led; CCD's project is one of the ten.

The foundation of a CURA initiative is a collaborative partnership between community and university researchers. In addition to CCD, the community organizations in the research alliance are: the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), National Network for Mental Health (NNMH), People First of Canada (PFC), National

Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), and the Caledon Institute on Social Policy. With a goal of strengthening the capacity of disability organizations to undertake research and engage in policy debates, the alliance has included on-going opportunities for knowledge sharing. The participating universities are: University of Victoria, University of Toronto, University of New Brunswick, University of Manitoba, Université du Québec à Montréal.

In summary, the research will:

- Provide a demographic profile of poverty and exclusion from the perspective of Canadians with disabilities;
- Delineate how public and private income programs and disability support services interact in specific jurisdictions;
- Outline existing legal protections and identify needed protections for persons with disabilities living in poverty;
- Analyze the major poverty alleviation reforms proposed over the past 30 years;
- Present reform options that will substantively improve the material living conditions and life chances of people with disabilities and their families;
- Incorporate a gender analysis in all aspects of the research.

"A consensus exists that the issues of poverty and disability must be addressed. However, to date advancement has been very incremental and there has been no clear understanding or consensus on staged policy reforms that would more substantively address the long-term problem," states Dr. Michael J. Prince, Landsdowne Professor of Social Policy at the University of Victoria. "The Research Alliance will work to build greater knowledge and awareness of the need for reform and present specific policy recommendations that could be implemented to reduce the disproportionate poverty experienced by Canadians with disabilities."

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# NOWS

NEADS Online Work System

## MuchMusic and MuchMoreMusic Encourage Diversity in Broadcasting with Annual Scholarships



**Adam William Bishop**

Saskatchewan's Cheyenne Redman Gervais and British Columbia's Adam William Bishop are the respective winners of the 2007 MuchMusic Aboriginal Youth Scholarship and the 2007 MuchMoreMusic AccessAbility Scholarship. Both awards go to applicants training for a future in the broadcast industry who best demonstrate skill, talent, excellence and enthusiasm. Since 2004, MuchMusic and MuchMoreMusic have awarded \$31,000 to aid broadcast students from traditionally under-represented groups.

"MuchMusic and MuchMoreMusic are proud to offer these scholarships, which promote diversity in broadcasting," says David Kines, Senior Vice-President, Music and Youth Services, CTV Inc. "Cheyenne and Adam have bright futures ahead of them and we are thrilled to help prepare them for promising careers."

Cheyenne Redman Gervais studies Media Arts Production at Saskatchewan's Institute of Applied Science and Technology. Established in 2004, the MuchMusic Aboriginal Youth Scholarship is presented in partnership with the Aboriginal Youth Network, and awards \$5,000 to the winning Aboriginal student.

"I hope that my involvement in broadcasting gives me the opportunity to broaden the public's perception of First

Nation's individuals," said Gervais. "By showcasing unique citizens, broadcasters can challenge traditional stereotypes, whatever they may be."

Gervais' goal is to work as an Audio Producer and Video Director and represent his First Nations as community minded, urban-thinking individuals. His short film *My Status Card* has screened at several Aboriginal film festivals, including *ImagineNATIVE*.

Adam William Bishop is a broadcast journalism student at British Columbia Institute of Technology. Now in its third year, the MuchMoreMusic AccessAbility Scholarship, presented in partnership with The National Educational Association of Disabled Students awards \$5,000 to a broadcast student with a permanent disability.

"The broadcast industry recognizes that 'the person should be seen first, the disability second.' Although someone has a disability they can still work at the highest level," said Bishop in his application. "It is my hope that once I have graduated from this program I can continue to be an example and advocate for people with disabilities through the media."

Bishop keeps busy by staying active in his community. He has also led an anti-violence group in his high school.

Applications for the 2008 MuchMusic Aboriginal Youth Scholarship are available now at [www.muchmusic.com/mays](http://www.muchmusic.com/mays), and will be accepted until November 30, 2008.

Applications for the 2008 MuchMoreMusic AccessAbility Scholarship are available now at [www.muchmoremusic.com/scholarship](http://www.muchmoremusic.com/scholarship), and will be accepted until November 1, 2008.

### About Much Charity:

MuchMusic is an integral part of today's pop culture landscape, engaging and interacting like no other since August 31, 1984.

In 2007 alone, MuchMusic donated over \$2.8 million in airtime for PSAs, and over \$1.7 million in cash donations and in-kind support to youth-relevant charitable initiatives through scholarships, sponsorships, and other forms of assistance. Additionally, MuchMusic's on-air personalities make countless public appearances in aid of not-for-profit organizations.

MuchMusic produces media education programming that explores media messages and addresses social issues from a youth perspective. As the media partner for FLICK OFF and broadcast partner for Live Earth, MuchMusic plays a lead role in raising awareness about the environment among youth. Other recent examples of social issues programming include MuchTalks: AIDS, Much Talks: Body Image, and Musicians in the War Zone (in association with War Child Canada).

MuchMusic, a division of CTV Limited, was recognized by Strategy magazine as 2005's 'Brand of the Year'.

## Spotlight: The MuchMoreMusic AccessAbility Scholarship

By Ileana Brito

Five years ago, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters recognized a need for the broadcasting industry to take action to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in the industry. MuchMoreMusic, and its parent company at the time, CHUM, have always made diversity a huge part of their operation. So, it came as no surprise that MuchMoreMusic quickly answered the CAB's call to action with their AccessAbility Scholarship in an effort to encourage more students with disabilities to pursue a career in broadcasting. Partnering with the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), MuchMoreMusic's AccessAbility Scholarship awards the individual who best demonstrates skills, talent, excellence and enthusiasm in pursuing a future in the broadcast industry, \$5000 toward their tuition.

Andre Garber was the 2006 recipient of the coveted award. Demonstrating an incredible talent in broadcasting and a passion for helping others, Garber was just the kind of candidate the team at MuchMoreMusic and NEADS were looking for. Just before he entered Grade 9, when most other kids were busy fretting over starting in a new school, Garber and his brother were busy founding their own charity—Youth for Youth Literacy, an organization that works to improve literacy amongst disadvantaged children.

Garber has also traveled to Calcutta to volunteer. And, coupling his passion for broadcasting with his passion for social causes, Garber utilized his audio production skills to assist Free the Children and OneChild.

The team at Much was so impressed with Garber, they brought him on board as an intern at the station.

With a first-class internship under his belt, and \$5000 toward his tuition in the bank, Andre Garber is preparing to make his mark in the broadcasting industry.

**jobpostings** magazine spoke with Andre about winning the scholarship, landing his dream internship, and his future in broadcasting.

**jp:** Can you tell us a bit about your studies?

**AG:** I'm going into my third year of Radio and Television Arts at Ryerson. Next year I'll be focusing on television studio production and media law. I used the first two years to navigate my way through the program and to gain an understanding of where it could take me, and now I'm focusing in on the areas of studio production and law.

**jp:** When did you decide to go into broadcasting?

**AG:** I always knew that I wanted to go to school for radio and television. In grade 11 and 12, I prepared myself to get into

the school by starting to do the activities I needed to do to get into the program. I started volunteering and I did a co-op placement at a recording studio. I ran a small production company that ran events for bands in high school and I used that money to finance building my own recording studio.

**jp:** How did you find out about the scholarship?

**AG:** I found out about the scholarship through the website. I knew I had to apply.

**jp:** You were offered an internship at Much as well. Can you tell us how that came about? What has it been like?

**AG:** The people at MuchMoreMusic gained an understanding of who I was as a person, so when I applied for the internship that really helped. It gave me the opportunity to really get in the door.

The internship has enabled me to really see how everything works. As much as we can learn in school, an internship is so valuable because it really makes you understand that this is actually what happens. It's been great.

Working the MuchMusic Video Awards, I was one of the Green Room Coordinators and I was working with four other movers to manage 25 rooms so it got pretty crazy. I didn't leave until 3:15 and it was so exciting. It was something special and to know that I had a part in it was really nice.

**jp:** What has the best thing about your internship experience been?

**AG:** The fact that I gained real world work experience in such an amazing place. A lot of people,

## PACT: for prevention and resolution of accommodation disputes

By Barbara Roberts, Coordinator, PACT

Wondering about accessibility and academic accommodations? PACT is a new pilot project for students, parents, faculty and staff to call on when accommodation of disability is in question. The Post-secondary Accessibility Consulting Team (PACT) is a project of the Regional Assessment and Resource Centre, housed at Queen's University and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, to explore the prevention and resolution of disability-related disputes in post-secondary education, and to develop resources and materials to assist in a better understanding of the accommodation process, and related rights and responsibilities.

PACT is available to consult on accommodations, review documentation, and facilitate dispute resolution where agreement on disability accommodation poses a challenge. Resources, experts, and informal, interest-based mediation are available free of charge during this first year of the project.

If you have a question or concern regarding how post-secondary education is made accessible through accommodation strategies, feel free to contact PACT. Visit our Mission, Frequently Asked Questions and Resource pages. The web address is [www.queensu-hcds.org/rarc/pact](http://www.queensu-hcds.org/rarc/pact) The service can be reached by phone at 613-533-6000, ext. 74225. Video-phone appointments are welcome. To email PACT, send a note to [pact@queensu.ca](mailto:pact@queensu.ca) We look forward to hearing from YOU!

especially in my program, would do anything to have the opportunity to intern at Much. Having something like this on my resume is unbelievably special. I have learned a lot about how to use editing software, media logger, but I have also really learned how shows are produced from pitching the show to supervising it to editing it. It's been such a valuable experience.

**jp:** What are your career aspirations?

**AG:** Five years ago I knew that I had to get into Radio and Television and I worked really hard to make sure I did. Hopefully

in five years I will be on my way to pursuing a graduate degree. I've been saving up for graduate school since my first year. I'd like to be working doing entertainment law for a TV station—either that or sales.

(This article first appeared in *Jobpostings* magazine, Fall 2007)

## Indebted to Higher Education

**Canada's mishmash of student aid programs is working up to a point, but has failed to close the gap in university participation rates between the rich and poor**

By Rosanna Tamburri

The university career of Ottawa native Sarah MacKinnon has been both a blessing and a curse. The years she spent enrolled in the international development studies program at Trent University brought her some of the best experiences of her life, including an eight-month stay in Ecuador, part of the time living and volunteering in a small village high in the Andes Mountains.

But those experiences came at a steep price. During the course of her studies, MacKinnon accumulated a debt of \$27,000 in federal and provincial government loans. She racked up an additional \$13,000 on her credit card to pay for her time spent abroad. Then, in her final year, her academic performance faltered due to family troubles, and she finished the year one course shy of a degree. Unwilling to take on any more debt, she returned to Ottawa and has worked in various government departments, mainly at entry-level jobs obtained through a temporary placement agency. Now 30 years old, MacKinnon still owes \$25,000 in student loans which she figures will take her another 10 years to pay off. While her friends are settling down, buying new cars and homes, she continues to share an apartment with two roommates.

"It's quite a burden," she says. "You don't do all the things you would like to do." But coming from a family of modest means that couldn't afford to pay for her education, she had no alternative but to foot the bill herself.

The federal government had students like Sarah MacKinnon in mind when it launched the Canada Student Loans Program in 1964, a program designed to make postsecondary education more affordable for young people from lower-income families. Since then the student financial aid system has grown into a mishmash of programs delivered—some jointly, others not—by various departments of the federal and provincial governments.

The CSLP remains at the core of the student financial aid system, distributing some \$2 billion a year in loans and grants. Then there's the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, an independent agency established in 1998 to dole out \$2.5 billion in scholarships and grants over 10 years. In addition, most provincial governments run their own financial aid programs. All told, federal and provincial governments spend a combined \$6 billion a year on student loans, grants, scholarships and tax credits, all aimed at easing the cost burden of higher education.

Lately though, there's a sense that things aren't working as well as they should, and the calls to reform the system have been growing louder. The federal government launched a review of the CSLP last year, and announced funding in its 2008 budget to "streamline and modernize" the program. It also announced the replacement of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, whose mandate is set

to expire in 2009, with the Canada Student Grant Program.

Sylvain Ségard, director general, program policy and planning, with the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, says the government is considering measures that "span the full life-cycle of the student-aid experience," from the time a young person considers attending a postsecondary institution to when he applies for a loan to when he starts repaying it. The measures could include improvements to the way the program supports those who are having difficulty repaying loans, he says, but he wouldn't comment on specific measures under review.

Provinces, too, are considering reforms. A commission on postsecondary education in New Brunswick recommended substantial changes to the province's student aid system, including placing a cap on individual student debts, among the highest in the country. Nova Scotia just announced a review of student financial aid and recently adopted measures that allow eligible borrowers to have their loan payments reduced if their debt-to-income ratio is too high.

As Shelley Clayton sees it, there is much about the system that works well. The director of financial aid at the University of New Brunswick and president of the Canadian Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, Clayton knows that without the system, thousands of students wouldn't be

able to finance a postsecondary education. And, she says, governments are making improvements to the system year by year. "But does it need to be fixed? Yes, this is also true," she says.

Critics point to a number of areas where the system falls short. For one thing, it leaves some borrowers—like MacKinnon—struggling with very high debt loads. A number of analysts are also concerned about a shift in funding policy in recent years that has funneled most new government spending into tax credits, which mainly benefit the upper and middle classes. Finally, observers point out that despite years of tinkering and adjustments, the system has failed to attract in substantial numbers those groups that are under-represented in the postsecondary system, particularly in universities: low-income Canadians, Aboriginal students, first-generation learners (students whose parents don't have postsecondary education), students with disabilities and, in some provinces, rural students.

One of the most vocal critics of the student financial aid system to emerge recently is the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness, a fledgling group which claims to represent the interests of one million student-loan borrowers. Julian Benedict, the group's co-founder, says that unless the system is substantially changed, "we are going to end up with a legacy of students who are educated but in too much debt to be able to start their lives."

After nearly doubling in the 1990s, average debt levels have remained stable since 2000. Still, debt burden remains a concern. Among students who borrow, the average amount owed is about \$24,000. And there are some indications that the proportion of students

who borrow may be increasing, notes the Millennium Foundation.

"The government tells us all the time that this is a knowledge economy and you have to make lifelong learning your commitment to be successful, and yet the program actually deters people from moving forward with their lives," argues Benedict.

So are students being sold a false bill of goods? Yes and no, answers Saul Schwartz, a professor in the school of public policy and administration at Carleton University. Study after study has shown that students with postsecondary education earn more over the long run than those without a diploma or degree and, by and large, that's true, says Schwartz. What students aren't told is that this isn't true for everyone, he adds. Not every student who starts a degree will graduate, and not all those who graduate will find lucrative work. Investments in postsecondary education are risky, he says. "You are investing your money and it's not certain that you will succeed."

Schwartz says it's up to society to ensure that students who don't succeed aren't unduly punished for their efforts. In this respect, he says, the financial aid system is too onerous and punitive. He and other policy analysts have long advocated replacing the current "mortgage-style" loan system with one based on income-contingent loans, similar to those in place in New Zealand, Australia and England. Under those systems, loan repayments are set as a percentage of income, and if income falls below a certain threshold, borrowers aren't required to make any payments.

A comprehensive and well-designed student financial aid system should also include

a generous loan-forgiveness program, low interest rates and enhanced loan remission and repayment assistance programs, adds Schwartz. The federal government does offer assistance to students who are unable to meet their loan payments, by way of interest relief and debt reduction. But in order to qualify for these programs, borrowers must not be in default—a major stumbling block. What's more, a government study found that more than half of eligible borrowers don't take advantage of the government's interest-relief program because they're unaware of it. Schwartz says Canada's bankruptcy laws compound the problem, by not allowing borrowers to discharge their student loans by declaring bankruptcy unless they've been out of school for 10 years.

Some studies suggest that students may be taking on too much debt without regard to future earnings, even though it may seem like common sense that some degrees hold more economic potential than others. Everyone agrees that education has an intrinsic value beyond a future economic payoff. Still, students should be warned of the pitfalls, says Connie Gibbs, acting coordinator, client operations, at the British Columbia Institute of Technology and a participant at the Millennium Foundation's fall conference on student aid. Why, asks Gibbs, are students offered "zero debt counseling" when they apply for student loans? The current program functions like a social program at the application stage, she says, but when it comes time for repayment, it hits borrowers "like a ton of bricks."

Universities, too, must do a more effective job of helping students develop financial plans and man-

age debt, says David Turpin, president of the University of Victoria. "Many young people come to university and have never received any sort of guidance on what it means to acquire debt," he says.

The student financial aid system has also come under sharp criticism for the amount of money governments have poured into non-refundable tax credits. Over the past decade or more, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have introduced new tax credits for students and families. Provincial tax spending on student aid also increased during this time, and some provinces have now started to offer post-graduation tax rebates as a means of enticing skilled workers to remain in the province. By some

estimates, tax expenditures have quadrupled since 1993 and are now almost double the amount that governments spend on grants. Critics argue this shift has made the student aid system less effective, since it funnels a substantial portion of aid dollars to students from middle- and high-income families.

"These aren't benefits that are trickling down to the people that need it the most," says Sean Junor, former manager of knowledge mobilization at the Educational Policy Institute, a research group. Tax credits weren't cause for concern when governments spent substantially more on grants and other measures aimed at low-income students, he adds. But over the last decade or so, the situation has reversed.

Many voices have called for governments to repeal tax measures in favour of grants and other forms of need-based aid. But governments have shown little proclivity for doing so, mainly because of the political appeal of tax credits, some suggest. "It's being done in a politically opportune way," says Denise Savoie, the New Democratic Party's postsecondary education critic. "What will get votes with middle-class parents?"

But for most critics and policy analysts, the biggest failure of the student financial aid system has been its inability to close the gap in access to postsecondary education for low-income youth. "The student loan program is part of a program that is supposed to make access to university more



# NEADS

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like access to physician and hospital care, and I don't think anybody would argue that we are there," says Richard Shillington, senior associate at Infometrica Ltd., an economic research firm.

University participation rates have increased for all social classes in the last decade, but the gap between the rich and poor hasn't narrowed: young people from high-income families are still twice as likely to pursue university studies as those from low-income families. The Millennium Foundation reports that in some years it has difficulty allotting the full value of its bursaries to low-income students because there aren't enough of them in the system.

As Shillington sees it, no financial aid system can undo all the injustice and inequality in society. But he suggests that governments could focus more resources on primary school students, to try to eliminate social inequalities at a younger age, as much as possible. And governments could lower tuition fees, a move that he believes would go a long way to reducing the "sticker shock" that many low-income families experience when they look at the cost of a postsecondary education. Others argue that reducing tuition fees across the board unduly benefits the well-off, and the key to making higher education more affordable is up-front grants.

Ian Boyko, government relations coordinator of the Canadian Federation of Students, sees a place for both. "We'd like to see something comprehensive that overhauls the entire loans-based approach to financial assistance... to one that is primarily based on grants," he says. The CFS is calling on the federal government to reallocate what it spends on tax credits to grants, to work with

provinces to lower tuition fees and to create a federal department of postsecondary education. The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations and several other student groups are urging the government to renew the mandate of the Millennium Foundation.

Some observers point to recent studies that suggest it's not just lack of money that's holding back low-income students. Other factors at play include academic performance, parents' education level and a general belief that the benefits of higher education don't outweigh its cost, says Ross Finnie, a professor in the graduate school of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa. While financial aid may play a role in improving access to postsecondary education, Finnie says it isn't the whole answer.

It's just recently that researchers have turned their attention to this question. The Millennium Foundation is funding several pilot projects in the hopes of finding some answer. It's clear that any comprehensive reform of the student aid system must be part of a broader effort to improve access, says Andrew Parkin, associate executive director of the foundation. "We know that there are groups of students that are facing significant barriers and we cannot just sit back and assume that one day they will show up in postsecondary education."

Students like Sarah MacKinnon's younger brother—who, after watching her struggle with her debt load, has opted for a secure job at Sears instead of pursuing postsecondary studies, at least for the time being.

As for Sarah MacKinnon, she doesn't regret investing the time or money in her university education. But she sometimes

wonders if she ought to have done it differently, perhaps working longer before enrolling or completing her studies part-time. Despite her setbacks, she hasn't given up hope of getting her degree. Since leaving Trent, she has transferred her credits to Carleton University and is now working towards finishing her degree part-time. And she just landed a permanent job with the federal government. "My confidence has waned over the years but now I think I'm on an upswing," she says. "I'm hopeful."

## Student aid facts and figures

Outstanding debt held under CSLP: \$8.2 billion

Number of CSLP debtors: 990,000

Annual support by Ottawa and the provinces to student financial aid: \$6 billion

All government (federal and provincial) aid spent on tax credits: \$2 billion

All government aid spent on loans: \$2.7 billion

All government aid spent on grants and remission payments: \$1.2 billion

Percentage of university undergraduates who graduate with debt: 59

Average debt among students who borrowed: \$24,047

Average annual tuition fees for a full-time university undergrad: \$4,524

Average total annual costs for a full-time university student: \$16,000

Sources: *The Price of Knowledge* (Third edition, 2007), Statistics Canada and the Report of the Auditor General of Canada (2007)

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National Educational Association  
of Disabled Students  
Association nationale des étudiant(e)s  
handicapé(e)s au niveau postsecondaire

## Membership Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the disability group to which you belong:

Hearing Impaired: ☐ Learning Disabled: ☐

Mobility Impaired: ☐ Visually Impaired: ☐

Other: ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the membership category to which you belong:

Regular Membership (i.e. student): ☐

Associate Membership (i.e. professional): ☐

Institutional Membership (i.e. business): ☐

Is this membership application: new ☐ renewal ☐

Preferred format for materials:

print ☐ CD ☐ audio-cassette ☐ large print ☐

Regular & Associate Membership fee: \$10.00

Institutional Membership fee: \$20.00

I, \_\_\_\_\_, would like to be a member of NEADS and I am enclosing a cheque in the amount of (\$10.00/\$20.00), which represents my annual membership fee.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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