Statistical Statement on Student Loans Shoddy

OTTAWA (CUP) -- The department of the secretary of state has just released a study which concludes that finances have little effect on accessibility to post-secondary education.

However, the report, entitled "Some Characteristics of Post-Secondary Students in Canada," admits that the data on which this conclusion is based is the least reliable, due to low rate of response.

The report also noted that as the survey is based on the responses of those who are already post-secondary students, finances may have had "a direct effect on the educational plans of students who did not proceed to post-secondary education."

The survey, carried out between 1974 and 75, by Statistics Canada, found that of the 60,000 students questioned "nearly forty per cent of full-time undergraduates reported fathers' incomes of $15,000 or more," while only 20 per cent of married Canadian males earn upwards of $15,000 yearly.

A "considerable" number of students used student loans to finance their education, but the majority did not, and most of these people said they had little need of student aid, the report states. Finding that those who did borrow relied on student loans as "an important source of income," the report concludes that "there seems to be little evidence that students were reluctant to borrow to finance their education."

The report also echoed Secretary of State, John Roberts' remarks at the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education, (CMEC) meeting Jan. 13 and 14 that there are "wide inequalities" in student financial assistance in different parts of the country.

Families with university backgrounds tend to be self-perpetuating the report concludes in noting that it found "students whose fathers had some university education formed a much higher proportion of all students in universities than in community colleges."

The report also stated that women comprise 50 per cent of the student population but tended to enrol more in community colleges than in universities.

Student leaders in Ottawa will not make an official response to the report until consultation with provincial student organizations and individual campus students unions, said the National Union of Students in a statement released Jan. 20.

In a statement NUS Executive-Secretary, Dan O'Connor said the survey results on students' income "and its relationship to educational opportunity seem highly unreliable."

He questioned the report's conclusion that finances have little to do with determining who goes to school since no survey was done of people who had not gone on to a post-secondary education, saying "the central argument seems to be that since people in school have relatively few money worries, people who don't attend school do so for reasons other than money."

The concluding section of the report states that a detailed analysis was not included because the department wished to get the report out quickly so "the data still would be up-to-date when released".

As such, the release of the report follows by a week the announcement of the CMEC, representing the provincial education and higher education ministers, that the organization, which makes recommendations to the secretary of state about changes to the federal student financial aid program, had begun to study student aid policies, O'Connor noted.

The fact that post-secondary education, particularly at the university level, is generally limited to those of higher financial backgrounds, is the reason student organizations are fighting for greater accessibility to post-secondary education, O'Connor said.

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HAL SAYS "HI!"

SAN DIEGO (ZNS-CUP) -- If you thought Hal, the talking computer in 2001: A Space Odyssey, was just a movie pipe dream think again.

Two papers delivered by scientists at the recent Acoustical Society of America conference detail the latest in computers that understand human speech. One computer hooked up by the U.S. Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency reportedly gave correct answers to 95 per cent of the questions put to it, including queries like, "How many articles on chess are there?"

One hitch in talking with computers, the scientists report is that the machines have trouble dealing with subtle differences in language; for instance the computers could not differentiate between "I scream" and "Ice cream".



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