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Students on Income Assistance Band Together

by ROBIN GENEAU

This week, a new committee was formed on campus in response to a decision by the Department of Income Assistance. The committee is called UNB/STU Break and is made up of students who are receiving social assistance, many of whom are single mothers.

On September 1, a new policy was implemented by the Department of Income Assistance. According to the Department, this new policy will not be detrimental to those students who are affected but the formation of UNB/STU Break suggests that some student clients are concerned that this is not the case.

The new policy states that Canada Student Loans and New Brunswick Bursaries are now considered resources for the purpose of assessing student clients. Last year, this was only so for bursaries. The Department has a formula which it uses to come up with a net student loan, which consists of deducting certain allowable expenses from the gross loan, such as tuition, required textbooks, and transportation, as well as \$1000.00 per team in "liquid assets".

The resulting net student loan is then pro-rated over the first school term, and deducted from clients' monthly social assistance cheques. The same process is used for the New Brunswick Bursaries in the second term. The immediate concern of UNB/STU Break is what will constitute allowable expenses, and whether these will be applied universally.

At the committee's first general meeting last Sunday night, student clients discussed their own assessments and those people they know. Some

of these students estimate that they will lose benefits, in some cases up to two hundred dollars per month. One married student stated that he and his wife will have \$500.00 per month deducted from their social assistance cheques. However, one student stated that her benefits will actually increase.

In order to clear up some of the confusion over assessments, the regional Department of Income Assistance has sent information officers to both Fredericton campuses this week, to meet individually with clients. This action is attributed in part to the efforts of Sue Wiesner, of UNB's Financial Aid Office, who has been meeting with both students and government officials to facilitate communication and understanding. Other groups and individuals have also expressed concern over this matter, including the Youth Council, the UNB/STU Student Women's Committee, the Student Alliance, Elizabeth Weir, leader of the Provincial NDP, and Premier Frank McKenna.

The concern over this policy is not limited to individual assessments. UNB/STU Break, along with others, is also concerned about the fact that student loans, normally considered a liability, are being counted as a resource. Many of the affected students feel that they are paying back their student loans twice, once through deductions and again after they complete their education.

Another criticism of the new policy has been related to its implementation. It occurred immediately before classes began, and affected students were not formally notified by the Department. Many of those who attended the Sunday night meeting said they had

heard about this change in policy from other students. A couple of the students stated that the notification problem is the result of the Department having trouble indentifying those who are affected, who, according to department estimates, number 295

throughout the province.

Another issue brought up at UNB/STU Break's Sunday meeting was why the policy was implemented. It has been suggested by some government officials that the impetus came from the federal government

Epp, Minister of National Health and Welfare, in response to a question in the House of Commons, the provinces have the sole responsibility for determining what should be used to calculate social assistance benefits.

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Extravaganza Bombs

By STEPHANE COMEAU

Poor attendance at the Shinerama Extravaganza has cast doubt on whether any of the money paid at the door will actually go towards fighting Cystic Fibrosis.

The event was organized by Campus Entertainment and featured four bands playing on three floors of the Student Union Building. According to Marc Braithwaite, who handled the promoting and organizing of the event along with V.P. Carl Burgess, only 650 people attended. This figure is nowhere near the 1200 person capacity of the event and as a result the event incurred a loss of approximately \$1800.

Braithwaite had projected attendance for the event to be about 1000 people. He felt that this number was "pessimistic" when compared to attendance to Extravaganza's of past years.

Promotions for the event had claimed that \$2 from every ticket would go to Shinerama while the remaining \$8 of the admission price would pay for the event. If this is done, the Student Union will lose a further \$1300.00, for a total of \$3100.00, on the Extravaganza.

Both Marc Braithwaite and Shinerama Director Rachel In-

gram concur that the initial agreement, albeit a verbal one, was that profits would go to Shinerama after Campus Entertainment broke even. The "two dollar donation to Shinerama" was included on the poster by Campus Entertainment to make the event more attractive.

Ingram feels that "students were taken advantage of" by the ad. Braithwaite agrees that "the advertisement was misleading, but that is how it would have gone had we gotten the projected 1000 person attendance." He also pointed out that if the event would have been attended by more than 1000 people the per per-

son donation would have been greater than \$2 and that in this case the Orientation Executive would have been quite happy with the initial agreement.

Whether or not the \$1300.00 is actually given to Shinerama will be up to Student Council, but Shinerama director Rachel Ingram "Understands the position Council is in...I don't expect to get it (the money)".

As to why attendance was so low, Braithwaite is uncertain: "I don't know what people expect...we get the same entertainment as McGill, Carleton, Western and other Atlantic schools...their events do well. This is a very hard school to please."

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