

Millennium Scholarship: Are its days numbered?

The CMSF is set to lose its funding after 2009, leaving post-secondary students with a lack of financial assistance

by Ed Bowes

The organization that contributes \$350M a year to Canadian university students is in need of help. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF) is set to lose its funding after 2009, leaving Canadian post-secondary student with a massive deficit in financial assistance.

The CMSF was established in 1998 by the Government of Canada as an independent organization, with the directive of improving access to post-secondary education. The Foundation was endowed with \$2.5B to be disbursed, along with interest earned over a ten year period to university students across the country.

Each year since 2000, the Foundation has allocated \$350M in non-repayable grants to Canadian students. To date, the Foundation

has delivered more than half a million bursaries and scholarships worth more than \$2.2B to post-secondary students across Canada.

The CMSF divides its bursaries into two groups; 95% of the scholarships that the Foundation provides are allotted based on need, while 5% are based on merit. In total, the Foundation provides nearly 30% of all non-repayable grants awarded in Canada.

The Foundation currently awards up to 34,000 Millennium Access Bursaries each year.

These bursaries are valued between \$1,000 and \$5,000 each and support groups that are traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education, such as students from low-income families, rural students, Aboriginal students, and adult learners. These bursaries are for first-year students entering post-secondary studies (though in some jurisdictions second year students may be eligible). Students can receive Access Bursaries regardless of whether they are entering college, professional college, or undergraduate studies, so long as the program leads to a degree, certificate or diploma that has a study period of at least two years in length.

The Millennium Bursary program is the Foundation's main grant program. These

Bursaries help to ensure that high-need students are able to access and continue their post-secondary studies. Awards are valued at an average of \$3,000, and over 90,000 high-need Canadian students' ben-

efit from this program each year. The Millennium Bursaries are not income-based and are available to any student based on their assessed financial need.

Duncan Gallant, the CASA Policy Committee Chair and St. Thomas VP Education, describes the importance of the Foundation and their commitment to students.

"The CMSF is not simply giving

**"...IT HELPS
A LOT OF
STUDENTS,
AND THAT IF
IT DISAPPEARS,
THEN
STUDENTS WILL
BE A LOT WORSE
OFF BECAUSE
OF IT."**

- JUSTIN WEIS

money to students that would be able to afford post secondary education otherwise, or students who have funding available. The grants are specifically allocated to high debt, high need, students as well as groups that are statistically under represented in the system," he said. "They are targeted grants that go to student that need it the most; versus a tuition freeze or roll back.

This is the most cost-effective way to increase accessibly to post-secondary education."

Each year, the Foundation distributes approximately 1,000 merit-based Millennium

Excellence Awards to students enrolling in post-secondary studies. The awards are valued between \$4,000 and \$20,000 each. Other merit-based scholarships, known as National In-Course Awards, are available for high-achieving students who have already begun their college or university studies. Students are generally eligible to receive an In-Course Award if they are in at least their first or second year at a post-secondary institution, have at least a B+ average, and have contributed significantly to their communities.

UNB Law student and Millennium In-Course Award recipient, Justin Weis, sees the work of the CMSF and such awards as the In-Course bursaries as a way to further one's education beyond a first degree and develop highly skilled individuals better prepared to enter the workforce.

"The bursary got rid of the pressure to get a part-time job to help finance my post-secondary education, allowing me to put a greater emphasis on my studies. By helping tremendously with the cost of an undergrad, the bursary made it possible to further my education by pursuing a master's," he said.

With the looming expiration of the CMSF and all funds being exhausted by 2009, it is now imperative that

students take on the fight to save this important funding program. Soon, provincial finance ministers will need to begin planning for their student financial assistance programs for 2009. The expiration of the Foundation will leave a massive \$350M shortfall in student financial aid with no one to front the loss.

"If the government thinks they can get away with cutting money in a certain place without having any political repercussion they will do it. We need the Government of Canada to recognize that people care about this program, that it helps a lot of students, and that if it disappears, then students will be a lot worse off because of it," he said. "It's \$350M per year, and if the program itself disappears there will be a huge gap in financial aid, that will either have to be met by the provincial government programs or something else. Frankly, there is no other body or grant distribution system that is as efficient and well researched as the CMSF."

Most provinces rely on the Foundation to fund a significant portion of the non-repayable

assistance programs they provide to students. If the Foundation's funding disappears, it is very likely that provinces will be forced to replace grants with loans, which increases student debt burdens. Eliminating the grants could potentially cause an increase in the net price of post-secondary education, and could act as a deterrent for many students from applying in the first place. Addition-

ally, students finding themselves with rising debt levels may be unable to complete their post-secondary studies simply because they cannot afford to continue.

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is an alliance of student

organizations and student unions from across Canada. Through this network of student

governments, CASA represents and defends the interests of post-secondary students to

federal and provincial levels of government. CASA is asking the federal government to renew the foundation and provide an additional endowment of at least \$2.5B in 2009 to continue the important work of the CMSF. Through their Grants Reloaded program, CASA is asking students to "Stand up for your foundation," and support the renewal of the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Students can go online, sign onto the campaign, and give their own personal opinion of why the work of the Foundation should be continued. Each message will be sent to the federal government to show the level of support in the student community.

If you wish to get more information on the grants reloaded program, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, or if you wish to sign on and show your support you can visit www.grantsreloaded.com.

Health plan concerns

from GSA page 1

When the health plan was implemented, the student association had to sign a five-year contract that forces them to go through that one provider, whereas most health plans and other providers only have one-year contracts, said Curry.

"It is unfair to have one group of students decide something like that, and no other student is able to change it," said Curry.

It's a five year contract, so there's not a whole lot of room for the GSA to maneuver until the contract is up. The problem is they are unable to get out of it. If the contract is violated, then they will either need a new provider right away or be forced to pay the rest of the cost.

"We are trying to improve things as we go along," said Curry. "It is important for the grad students to bring their problems with the plan to the GSA."

To make matters worse, students who have had to pay for their own prescriptions until now have not yet been reimbursed.

"...those of us with chronic conditions have had to cover all of our medications on our own. The worst part of this is that even the reimbursement program hasn't been working because

they don't even know who they should be reimbursing," said Dewis her e-mail to The Brunswickian.

Dewis has contacted those responsible for running the plan and was told "it will work soon, just be patient." The problem is that most grad students are not in the financial situation to be patient, unless they want to pay interest on their credit cards.

One pharmacist at Sobeys, Connie Gillis, says they are doing their best to make sure everyone is covered.

"We are trying to make sure that everyone who was supposed to be on it is," said Connie. "Most of the new grad students are already on the plan."

To correct the problem, they hired Ginger Beach, an administrative for the GSA to analyze the paperwork and forward it to the right people. The insurance company that they go through is Great West Life.

Dewis has already submitted her receipts to the insurance company but has heard nothing back. She is a funded graduate student, although most are not. How long could they go without adequate coverage and a reimbursement program?

"It is required that if we don't have outside insurance that we be on the school's policy, but why am I paying a fee if my name isn't even in the system yet?" she wondered.

PSAC vs. AUNBT Myths and Facts

Some things that stipend and sessional instructors should know about these two organizations:

MYTH: The PSAC represents "blue collar" workers and does not have the ability represent a professional teaching staff.

MYTH: The PSAC is an outside organization only interested in collecting dues.

MYTH: Stipend and sessional instructors would be part of the tenured faculty's bargaining unit if they join AUNBT.

MYTH: AUNBT has always been concerned about the plight of stipend and sessional instructors.

FACT: PSAC has represented academic instructors since the 1960s. In the last ten years 10,000 teaching and research staff at Canadian universities have chosen the PSAC.

FACT: The PSAC is a national union of 165,000 members, present at UNB at the invitation of stipend and sessional instructors.

FACT: Stipend and sessional instructors would be members of a separate bargaining unit from faculty, have a separate collective agreement, and be subordinate to the full-time, faculty-dominated AUNBT.

FACT: For over 30 years AUNBT has failed to recognize the second-class status of stipend and sessional instructors within UNB's two-tiered academic structure. AUNBT only began signing sessional and stipend instructors after PSAC began organizing on what AUNBT regards as its turf.

No SECOND-CLASS STATUS - YES PSAC

Dr. Richard E. Lee Optometrist

406A Regent St. 458-1580
(2 buildings past Harvey's Hamburgers)
New Patients Welcome

The Adult Learners, Part Time Students Organization
Is Holding Their Annual Family Christmas Party.

Where: Kingswood Centre, Hanwell Road

When: December 01, 2007 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm

- Santa
- Bowling
- Ice Skating
- Play climber (Kids under 8yr)
- Refreshments

Bring your family to enjoy a free fun afternoon!

For more details or to RSVP: 453-3596/www.unbf.ca/alps