

Students need to face student issues

the brunswickan

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We are an autonomous student newspaper owned and operated by Brunswickan Publishing Inc., a non-profit, independent body.

We are a founding member of the Canadian University Press, and love it so. We are also members of U-Wire, a media exchange of university media throughout North America.

We publish weekly during the academic year with a circulation of 10,000.

Letters
Must be submitted by e-mail including your name, letters with pseudonyms will not be printed. Letters must be 400 words maximum. Deadline for letters is Friday at 5 p.m. before each issue.

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21 Pacey Drive, SUB Suite 35
Fredericton, NB, E3B 5A3
main office • (506) 447-3388
advertising • (506) 452-6099
fax • (506) 453-5073
email • editor@thebruns.ca
www.thebruns.ca



BRING IT ON HOME

Josh O'Kane

I'm sick of my student loan.

I haven't even started paying it yet, but for the last four years, it's been on my mind – sitting, waiting, preparing to collect unnecessary amounts of interest as I scrape by at an entry-level salary somewhere when I graduate.

On some computer in Ottawa, there's a file telling the government I owe them \$11,084. I don't like owing money, and certainly not that much.

I've worked countless jobs in the summertime, worked one or more jobs each school year, and applied for numerous scholarships just to scrape by – and I still have debt that will take me years to pay off.

Education has become unnecessarily expensive. On top of that, of course, is the problem that the federal and provincial governments are actually capitalizing on the universal right to education with bulky interest rates on their student loans. It's one thing for a private bank to charge interest on a loan, but how logical is it for a nation's governing body to capitalize on its youths' attempt to become productive members of society?

New Brunswick politicians have been heard praising their Action Plan for post-secondary education in the province for over four months, but when it comes to student financial aid, they just keep talking their way around the stagnant programs they already have in place.

The only way get their attention, it appears, is to fight this issue with grassroots action. Policy change is necessary to make education more affordable, and who better to fight for that than students themselves?

It can take a long time to implement policy change – but luckily, on our New Brunswick



Doug Estey / The Brunswickan

The UNB Student Union, shown at council, is hosting a Day of Action on Nov. 13 to raise awareness for the unnecessary amount of debt acquired by students while getting an education.

post-secondary campuses, we have thousands of educated students who would be willing to work out a plan that both the provincial government and students can agree upon.

Today, Nov. 13, 2008, has been declared a Day of Action for universities across the province with the New Brunswick Student Alliance. Student Unions at St. Thomas, Université de Moncton, Mt. Allison and UNB Fredericton are each hosting events to show that students are more than just a statistic in student loan databases.

Let's hope it works. As it stands, so far the provincial government has instituted a tuition freeze to complement its \$2,000 grant for first year students and it's \$10,000 tax rebate for graduates working in New Brunswick. That freeze is reported to cost the

provincial government \$5 to \$6 million each year that it's in place. In the meantime, \$7 million of annual grants from the Canada Millennium Scholarship program for high-needs are no more.

Tuition freezes hurt taxpayers, and thus students – and are an ignorant band-aid fix when it's evident that the money could be reallocated into a similar program to the Millennium scholarships. The replacement for the federal Millennium program, the Canada Student Grant, will offer assistance to low- and middle-income students, but it doesn't address other high-needs categories of students.

High-needs students don't always stand out. One example would be students whose parents aren't in a bad financial situation but still can't afford to send their child to university. These students are

armed with only summer and part-time jobs to somehow pay for their post-secondary education.

Funds from the first-year grant and the tax rebate could be rededicated to programs directed towards high-needs students as well.

This is just one potential set of solutions to the province's student financial aid woes. Perhaps the Day of Action will bring more students and more ideas to the forefront.

In the meantime, the provincial government is sitting on its hands while more action could be taken. Financial aid policy change promises have been made for Fall 2009, but little action has been seen. There may be a ray of light, though – a Presidents' Council of university presidents and college principals has been stricken to address student financial aid. This group hasn't sat

yet, but it will likely consist of exact same members that facilitated the province's Working Group on post-secondary education. That group, prior to the province's Action Plan in June, recommended sweeping changes to financial aid programs. Let's hope they do it again.

The UNB Fredericton Student Union will be handing out postcards today, asking you to declare how much debt you've accrued to declare to the provincial government. They'll also be announcing, with a slew of speakers, how much debt UNB Fredericton students have.

You can sit around and let your debt climb, or you can show up and be more than a statistic. I know what I'll be doing.

Josh O'Kane is Editor-in-Chief of the Brunswickan. He can be reached at editor@thebruns.ca.

\$ 100,000

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FINBIF
INNOVATION

Obamamania sets in



MUGWUMP

Tony von Richter

Yes we can.

Three little words, words that are said an innumerable amount of times each day. Words that, thanks to Barack Obama, have become a rallying cry, a statement that change is possible.

Three words that following Obama's election last Tuesday meant that change was not only possible, but that it was coming soon. I think that change came even sooner than we thought possible.

Within a few hours of Obama's victory the political atmosphere around the world seemed to change and people were excited. It now seems like everyone believes that finally the world is going to get off of this self-destructive path we seem to have been on.

Yes, there are still wars being waged, and yes, there is still a

financial crisis, but as late as last week there was a feeling of uncertainty and doom, and no one was quite sure how things were going to turn out.

Following Tuesday night we are no closer to finding out those solutions. But whereas last week people wondered if we would find solutions, on Wednesday it seemed like it was just a matter of time before we figured everything out.

Does that mean that everything will get figured out though? That once Obama takes office on January 20 the world will suddenly become a wonderful and magical place where no one wants for anything and everyone gets along?

Of course not, there are still great challenges facing the world, and changing the course of the past few years will not be easy, but I think we've found the catalyzing figure that we needed.

Obviously Obama won't change the world on his own and he'll need help from the world's other leaders, but as we saw on election night Obama's popularity isn't limited to the United States, but stretches across the planet.

That is the greatest benefit of an Obama presidency, because whether

we like it or not the United States is the most influential country on Earth and its policies and actions affect everyone on the planet. Under George W. Bush, that meant that most countries had to distance themselves from the U.S. and the Bush administration's unpopular policies, instead of working together to try and improve the world.

With Obama's popularity hopefully the rifts that have formed between the United States and the rest of the world will start to heal and world leaders can start to work together again, without fear of their own populations rejecting any partnership with the U.S.

Like I said above, Obama's victory doesn't mean that he will succeed, and that things will really change. I don't think this will be the case though.

At this point millions seem to be behind Obama and the change that he's promising.

So can we do it? If millions around the world embrace change can we make the world a better place?

Yes we can. Tony von Richter is Managing Editor of the Brunswickan. Feel free to contact him at managing@thebruns.ca.

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anyone can write or shoot for the bruns.
drop us a line at 447.3388, editor@thebruns.ca or come to our weekly story and photo meetings in SUB room 35, wednesdays at 12:30.