

The

Link

Wednesday, June 19, 2002

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The Link

is the student newspaper of the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Published bi-weekly by the BCIT Student Association, *The Link* circulates 3,500 copies to over 16,000 students and staff.

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LINK LETTERS POLICY

The Link welcomes letters. Letters should be typed, double spaced, under 300 words and can be dropped off at *The Link* or SA offices and sent through campus or regular mail. Your name, affiliation with BCIT and a telephone number to contact you (which will not be published) must be included. Anonymity may be granted at the discretion of staff. Letters on disk, as a txt file, with a hard copy would be greatly appreciated. *The Link* reserves the right to edit for clarity and brevity.

BCIT Foundation launches credit card for Alumni

There's a new way to show your pride in BCIT and help current BCIT students at the same time.

The BCIT Alumni Association has signed an agreement with the Bank of Montreal resulting in the BCIT MasterCard. The card features an attractive photo of part of the Burnaby Campus.

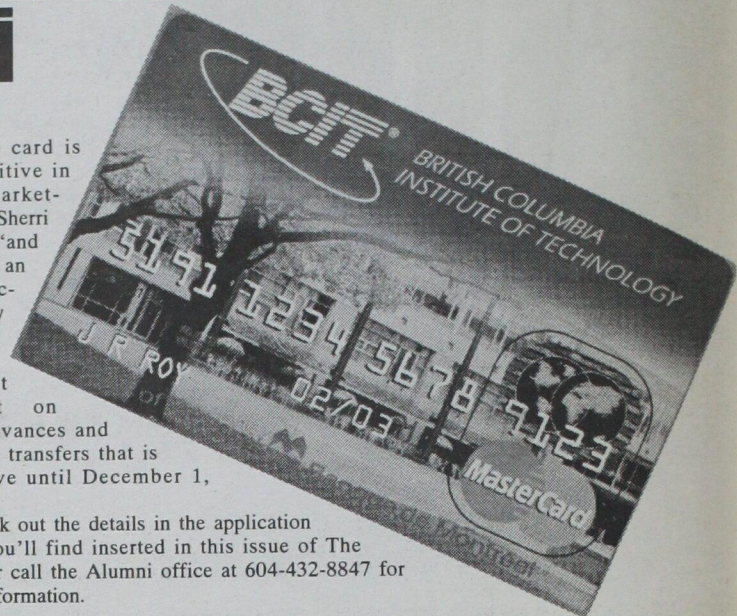
Through this agreement alumni, employees, students and supporters who get a BCIT MasterCard will be generating income for the Alumni Association everytime they use their card.

"The income will support alumni programming and student scholarships," said Alumni Association Manger Sherri Magsen. For example, the Alumni Association recently pledged \$15,000 to match funds raised during the BCIT Foundation's annual alumni appeal. The matching was made possible by MasterCard income.

Users can choose whether they want a low interest rate card, a card that accrues Air Miles Reward Miles, or a combination of rate and reward options.

"The card is competitive in the marketplace," Sherri added, "and there is an introductory offer of 5.9 percent interest on cash advances and balance transfers that is effective until December 1, 2002."

Check out the details in the application form you'll find inserted in this issue of *The Link*, or call the Alumni office at 604-432-8847 for more information.



MP calls for tax changes to benefit students

MARK GREENAN
Ottawa Bureau Chief
Canadian University Press

OTTAWA
A Progressive Conservative MP recently presented two motions in the House of Commons that would reduce the tax burden on students.

The two motions, presented by New Brunswick MP John Herron, call on the federal government to make scholarships tax exempt and to introduce a tax credit on student loan repayment. Currently, only the first \$3,500 in scholarships are not subject to tax.

Herron said the motions, culled directly from the PC Party's 2000 election platform, were important in mitigating the effect of high student debt, which he cited as "the largest deterrent" to participation in post-secondary education.

"Too many of our best and brightest are choosing not to seek higher learning," he said.

"We've indentured an entire generation, where those individuals upon graduation, because they owe over \$20,000, will not have the capacity to contribute to the econo-

my."

However, Herron noted that his proposal for tax credits on student loan repayment would only apply to people living in Canada, which could help stem the "brain drain".

Noting that several public opinion polls have shown that Canadians consider post-secondary education to be important, Herron said that the federal government has to come up with a new strategy to support students.

"The federal government really has to step up to the plate and ensure that we develop a toll kit so that students can pursue a higher education and we can maintain a competitive economy," he said, adding that Ottawa should also increase transfer payments to the provinces.

As yet, it has not been determined if Herron's motion will be debated in the House. A House committee will meet in the coming weeks to determine if the motion will be deemed worthy of a vote.

Liberal MP Reg Alcock, a member of the government caucus on post-secondary education, said that he supports the principle of both motions but would need to

understand the costs involved before endorsing them.

"We [the government PSE caucus] continue to look for creative ways to promote accessibility ... these things are consistent with that," said the Winnipeg MP, adding that he prefers direct funding to universities to keep the costs of tuition down.

Alcock noted that the proposal would see student loans treated in the same way as business investments, which are often tax-deductible.

Student groups applauded Herron's motions, but said that other measures are needed to improve student loan programs.

"We feel this is tackling a lot of student issues," said Liam Arbuckle, national director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), adding that any reforms must be made within the context of the current system.

"They're not going to scrap the system, that's a reality."

Arbuckle said that CASA has endorsed Herron's proposal, but added that his organization is pro-

moting several other changes the Canada Student Loans program.

CASA is calling on the federal government to increase the amount that loan recipients can earn before having their loan amounts clawed back, increase the amount allocated for living expenses, reconsider the expected amount of parental contributions and improve the debt remission program.

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) said that students would be better served by policies that did not take advantage of the tax system.

"If the money's going to be spent it's much better spent on front-end measures like grants," said CFS national chair Ian Boyko. "Back-end measures have absolutely nothing to do with front-end accessibility."

Boyko added that the CFS is calling for a relaxation of the requirements for the federal debt-remission program and for the government to pay the interest on part-time student's loans, as they currently do for full-time students.

Campus Events

This Calendar column is open for notices of events on all BCIT campuses. Submissions can be faxed to 431-7619, sent by campus mail or dropped off at *The Link* office in the SA Campus Centre (down the corridor between the video arcade and the SA copy centre)

June 19 - 21	Monday, July 1	Friday, July 26	Monday, August 5
Spring Convocation Ceremonies.	Canada Day. BCIT closed.	Technology Entry: Last day of classes.	BC Day. BCIT closed.
Wednesday, June 19	Friday, July 5	July 29 - August 2	Monday, September 2
Spring Awards Ceremonies.	Level 1, 5 & 7 (full time programs only) fee deadline for Fall Term.	Technology Entry: Examinations.	Labour Day. BCIT closed.

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CFS BC Chair Summer McFadyen (left) and BCGEU President George Heyman at the BCGEU Convention.

Building coalitions to effect change

BCGEU recognizes student organization for their leadership

PAUL DAYSON
Link Managing Editor

Members of the British Columbia Government Employees Union took time to honour the contribution of students and youth to struggles for social justice at their convention earlier this month.

The BCGEU's Spirit of Leadership Award was given to the Canadian Federation of Students and accepted by CFS's BC Chair Summer McFadyen.

McFadyen said, "The GEU was interested in acknowledging the work that youth does" and that CFS was chosen because of its participation in numerous coalitions working on issues similar to those of the union such as the Coalition for Public Education which involves the BCGEU, Canadian Union of Public Employees and the College Educators Association among other organizations.

Speaking to the convention, McFadyen attacked the government for the ending of the tuition freeze which has led to fee increases all across the province.

McFadyen said, the government claimed to be "restoring autonomy to post-secondary institutions when it passed Bill 28 and replaced Board of Governors. Eight days later in its budget,

however, she said it cut the work study program — funding for 10,000 student jobs on campuses — and first year student grant programs.

Instructors have also lost the right to negotiate class size when the government 'tore up' agreements with faculty and staff.

"Students," she said, "are now paying more for less" with most of the impact being felt at the college level — traditionally been a cheaper option.

Building coalitions was a major focus of the BCGEU's convention which featured a panel on the subject with McFadyen, Rudy Lawrence of the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations (COSCO), John McInnis of the BC Environmental Network and Fay Blaney of the Aboriginal Women's Action Network.

Most of the discussion was about the recent cuts, fee increases and labour code changes enacted by Gordon Campbell's government to services.

COSCO's Lawrence said, cuts to pharmacare are having a huge impact on BC's seniors 30 per cent of whom live on less than \$1,000 per month.

Blaney said, she expects to see a large impact on urban aboriginals, most of whom are women,

as the government cuts take hold.

She said that the greatest tool available to activists and coalitions is educating the public.

"Don't let your friends, neighbours and relatives be fooled by what is in the paper and on the TV," she said, urging GEU members to share information they have about the cuts.

Lawrence said coalitions provide a broader base of knowledge and increased resources. "We've got to have numbers."

"With this government there has been no trouble finding common ground," he said.

At the convention, the BCGEU passed a motion increasing union dues to two percent of gross pay. This additional money will be used to defend members and provide resources for fighting the government cutbacks.

"Campbell's actions are a huge personal threat to our members and communities. They are a threat to the very idea of public services, public interest and civil society," said a BCGEU message to members about the dues increase released after the convention.

Quebec replaces BC as leader in commitment to higher education: report

MARK GREENAN
Ottawa Bureau Chief
Canadian University Press

OTTAWA

A recent report ranking provincial governments' commitment to post-secondary education has awarded high marks to Quebec, taking first place from British Columbia, and suggests Ontario and New Brunswick are falling behind the rest of the class.

The report, released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a left-wing think tank, ranks all 10 provinces in four areas: accessibility, equity, accountability and quality. This is the third year the organization has released the rankings, based on publicly available statistics, as a part of its publication *Missing Pieces III: An alternative guide to post-secondary education*.

Erika Shaker, one of the reports' authors, said the rankings are meant to show the context in which universities are in and can complement the well-known Maclean's rankings of individual universities.

"We compare the record of provincial governments based on their commitment to post-secondary education," she said. "You can't ignore the context that universities function in and to which they're responding."

"Obviously, we're looking at this in the context of federal funding cuts, but within that context we've seen provinces with very different priorities."

Shaker said all four areas are given equal weight in determining the final ranking.

"All four of these indicators have to work together to achieve the kind of post-secondary education system we want," she said.

Quebec earned the top spot, up from second place last year, based on top rankings in the quality, accountability and accessibility categories. British Columbia was ranked second, down from first last year. The authors warn, however, that with recent actions by B.C.'s Gordon Campbell government, including the deregulation of tuition fees, the province will likely fall further in years to come.

A spokesperson for the Quebec government said its commitment to a tuition freeze and a generous loans and grants program was validated by the report.

"We are very proud of Quebec's performance compared to the rest of Canada," said Francois Lefebvre, communications officer for the provincial Ministry of Education, adding

that the province intends to continue its tuition-fee freeze.

However, Shaker said Quebec, or any other province, should not rest on their laurels.

"All provinces really need to improve in terms of their commitment to post-secondary education," she said.

Shaker added that Quebec needs to reevaluate the role the private sector plays on campuses, noting that the province ranks second in terms of percentage of university operating funds coming from private sources, a key component of the accountability ranking.

"Students and faculty are increasingly concerned about the role corporations are playing in research on campus," she said, referring to recent cases involving David Healy and Nancy Olivier.

Ontario ranked last in the overall ranking for the second consecutive year and in the quality and accountability categories. New Brunswick fell sharply to ninth in the rankings, from sixth place the year previous.

However, the Ontario government said the report does not reflect the quality of education in the province, noting that Ontario universities have consistently placed near the top in the Maclean's rankings.

"We feel that the study has a very narrow focus and really doesn't show the support that universities in Ontario have," said Bruce Skeaff, spokesperson for Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Skeaff noted that Ontario universities rank third in the country in terms of total operating income per student, but cautioned that financial resources do not necessarily mean quality. Also, he said that while the government feels tuition fees are "manageable," the province has limited the amount that universities can raise tuition by for the five years in most programs.

Shaker said the rankings appear to show that political will is the largest determinant of a province's success in supporting post-secondary education, noting that the country's most populous province is at the bottom, while many smaller provinces, such as Newfoundland, which recently introduced a tuition rollback for university students, have moved up in the rankings.

"The rankings have nothing to do with the relative wealth of a province, but with a recognition that post-secondary education is important," she said.

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Taking culture off the table

Canadian initiative promotes cultural diversity in spite of globalization

JUSTIN OLYNYK
The Manitoban
Canadian University Press

Winnipeg
Discussions about the effects of globalization tend to focus on economics, human rights or the environment. It's a norm that's beginning to change because of a Canadian-led initiative by the International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD), which calls for rules for arts and culture in a global econo-

my.
"If you're going to write rules for investment, intellectual property, capital flow and investor's rights, you must add rules and parameters for other vitalities of life, including culture," says Toronto actor and INCD member R.H. Thomson.

The effect of globalization on the arts and individual artists is a relatively new issue on the international scene. It was first discussed at a conference hosted by the United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Stockholm in 1998.

This led to the formation of two organizations — the International Network for Cultural Policy (INCP) in 1998, which creates dialogue between cultural ministers from various governments, and the INCD in 2000, a non-governmental organization based in Ottawa. The INCD has over 400 members (various arts organizations and individual artists) from 52 coun-

tries.

Many countries are worried that if trade in cultural products were unrestricted, countries that already make mass market cultural products would gain a large share of these new markets. This would hurt local artists and ultimately local cultures and could eventually lead to these cultures dying. The INCD is committed to countering the homogenizing effects that globalization can have on local cultures. They hope to develop a framework that would give individual nations the ability to protect the diversity of their culture.

"This is a treaty or instrument that says: here's the realm of culture that is vital to every people and every different cultural group in the world. We will pursue whatever policies we need to promote the riches of the world's culture and the [World Trade Organization] can't impinge on this set of agreements of culture," says Thomson.

Although Thomson acknowledges that Canada is currently the second largest exporter of English language TV in the world (behind the United States), he still believes Canada's cultural industries would be hurt by unrestricted trade of cultural products.

"Some sectors have benefited from free trade, but culture will absolutely lose. Canada doesn't have the economies of scale in this country to make TV, film, broadcasting or recording work, so governments have put in place structural adjustments like CanCon and tax credits — all the things the Americans hate."

Because of Canada's proximity to the United States, the Canadian government has long been concerned about loss of cultural identity, especially since World War II. Even with subsidies to artists, restrictions on foreign ownership and Canadian content regulations, American content continues to dominate sales of music and movies in Canada.

In the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), there is a weak exemption for culture. This exemption has been challenged several times by the United States, including a 1997 WTO ruling about split-run American magazines being sold in Canada.

The WTO ruled that "measures to protect cultural identity [is] not an issue in the present case." But now, countries like the United States, Brazil and India, which produce large numbers of movies and television programs, want the audio/visual sector — the most lucrative cultural industry — to be on the negotiation table.

Even though the Canadian government has long supported the arts in Canada, INCD administrator Alexis Andrew has recently had some doubts about the Canadian government's commitment to the arts. She fears that the arts could be used as a trade off issue in WTO negotiations.

"In [the 1999 WTO conference in] Seattle, Canada argued for cultural diversity in the ministerial notes. In [the 2001 WTO conference in] Qatar, Canada didn't mention arts," says Andrew.

Because of this concern, Andrew believes that culture must be negotiated separately from other trade agreements. "Artistic expression can't be on the table with tradable commodities. There have to be rules that guide the international exchange of artistic content," she argues.

However, in spite of the obstacles, Thomson remains optimistic. "If we pull this off, it will be an enormous accomplishment because it will be a template for what other parts of human life can do not to be ground under rules from the WTO," says Thomson.

For more information on the International Network for Cultural Diversity, visit www.incd.net



Attend one of our
Information Sessions on
Wednesday, June 26, 2002
at ITI Vancouver. Join us
at 12:30 p.m. or at 6 p.m.
Register at the door or by
calling 1.866.374.8062.

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