

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Volume 15 Issue 46

December 7, 2007



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THE VOICE MAGAZINE

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Stuff It

'Tis the season for goodwill, time with family and friends—and stuff.

Yes, stuff. The stuff that the unceasing efforts of retailers, advertisers, and corporations convince us that we need. We must join the sweaty, frazzled hordes on the road and at the mall, seeking out just the right sweater-cellphone-cookware-printer-camera to wrap up and place under the tree. After all, it isn't really Christmas without stuff, is it?

This isn't a diatribe against giving. Far from it. In this mishmash of religion, custom, and commercialism that the 21st-century Christmas has come to be, the one thing that's remained relatively intact is that at the holiday's core is a spirit of giving (although I don't think the original message had much to do with the retail kind).

Instead, this is a criticism of the mindless giving of *stuff*—that particular brand of madness that has us dashing out each December and piling debt onto our credit cards just so that we can be seen to meet some sort of commercially imposed quota of packages. (Did you get the same number of gifts for everyone? Is one child's pile of presents bigger than the other's?)

Other holidays have succumbed to the same commercial-driven pressure—Easter, Valentine's Day—but the modern Christmas seems to be the epitome of giving gone wrong. As the faces of harried shoppers behind every wobbly wheeled shopping cart in every chain store reveal, they might not know *what* to buy, but they've got to buy some *thing*.

So as our planet (and basements and attics and U-Store-Its) stagger under the weight of accumulated stuff, here's a thought: make this a stuff-free Christmas.

By all means, give. Take the time to find something thoughtful for friends and family. (In a perfect world, we'd all give the gift of time and attention, but the topic of hectic modern lifestyles can wait for another day.) Instead, make it a point to give gifts that can only be kept as a warm feeling or happy reminiscence in the receiver's memory.

You can spend as much or as little as you want, and it doesn't take any more time than shopping for regular "stuff" would: the only condition is that, when the recipient has finished enjoying your gift, there's nothing physical left.

That doesn't mean you have to fall back on the old standby of a gift certificate at the mall. In fact, that kind of defeats the whole purpose. There are enormous (and fun) possibilities. A wonderful meal in a favourite (or new) restaurant. A massage, or even an entire day at the spa. An introductory lesson for a sport or hobby someone has always wanted to try; if it's in your budget, give them a set of lessons. Bath accessories; gourmet cooking ingredients. All consumable, all enjoyable.

Buy someone tickets to a play, or a rock concert, or the Indy 500. Give a couple with young kids the night off: pay for an evening's time of their favourite babysitter and a couple of tickets to a movie. Or, in the true spirit of giving, make a donation in the recipient's name to a charity you know they support.

This year, fill your holiday with good times, good food, and wonderful memories. Just don't stuff it.



Putting It Off

Well, December has arrived and my well-laid plans to have all three courses finished by the end of this month are on wobbly ground right now. The joys of being able to study in my jammies, curl up on the couch with a good novel and call it “studying,” and not finish the assignment this week if I don’t feel like it are, at this moment in time, being overshadowed by that other joy of distance education—procrastination.

I studied by correspondence while taking my accounting designation. Living on a Gulf island, correspondence and distance education make sense. It relieves one of the pain of getting in the ferry lineup, going over to the Big Island (Vancouver Island) and driving up to the local university college.

That whole experience could take at least seven hours from start to finish, counting the three hours in class if you took just one course that day. This is mainly because you can’t rely on the ferry being on time, hence the necessity to take a ferry earlier than you actually need and, depending on the time of day you need to go in, not always getting on the ferry you want. So studying part-time at a bricks and mortar school is a huge time waster.

The difference between taking my accounting designation and my Athabasca studies is that, being accountants, we’re rather anal retentive, and the accounting association insisted that I submit assignments weekly. And I could only take one course at a time. And I could only register three times a year. And I had to take the exam on a specified date in a specified place. And on and on the requirements went. So, all this newfound freedom of registering when I want, for what I want, and sending in assignments in my own sweet time, while picking a favourite day on the calendar for an exam, is rather giddy.

Naturally, like everybody else, I can justify procrastination. Well, I’m busy aren’t I? I have contract work to complete. I volunteer. There’s the house to take care of. A demanding husband. The cat needs feeding. And it’s snowing.

It all started to fall apart when my husband noted that the only thing he demands of me is that I manage to get myself to the table to eat the meals he cooks; that he feeds the cat; that a woman comes by every second week to clean the house; and that, yes, it’s snowing outside but I’m not going anywhere am I? I confess. It’s all true.

So why am I only on assignment 2 of my French course when I carefully planned I’d be finished all five assignments and both essays by this date? Why am I still struggling with the contemplative essay for English, when the final research paper should be in progress? (Why I’m still on project 1 for COMP 200 is easier to answer: I have no idea what I’m doing!)

If you Google the word “procrastination,” the search returns 819,000 entries. Most of these entries tell us *why* we procrastinate: we find more enjoyable things to do. What PhD figured that one out, I wonder?

One entry suggests that as soon as I receive a big assignment, I should plan to spend ten to 15 minutes a day working on it and then, golly, by the end of a week I will have spent an hour on it. It neglects to tell me by the end of *which* week.

My favourite professional development course put on by our accounting association is Time Management. I've been to so many that I can sleep through it. I know all about making lists. I'm familiar with the A, B, C rule: prioritize all your tasks using A, B, and C. The C tasks get done if you have time; the A tasks need to be done now.

The problem I've always found is that the C tasks tend to be more fun and/or easier to accomplish. So, my personal list always has me searching the Internet for the next kayak trip (a dubious C task) before designing a relational database (a recognized A task).

I like the idea that I procrastinate because I'm a perfectionist, as one Internet source suggests. It's not true, but I like the idea. I'm particularly partial to the blogger who says I shouldn't fight procrastination; I should just procrastinate well. I'm not quite sure what procrastinating well entails, but I'm sure I'm up to the task.

What I do know is that I have managed to spend a Sunday afternoon writing this article as opposed to finishing the essay and preparing for a French oral assignment that I should have done two weeks ago.

Never mind; there's always tomorrow.

[CLICK ON THIS - Kullers](#)

Lonita Fraser

It's the time of year when many of us turn our thoughts to the bright, the cheery, the warm, the colourful. So, simply put, this is a celebration of colour and colourful things.

The Colors of Your College Degree

Someday we're all going to be standing under that candy-striped red-and-white tent wearing something off this list.

Colorblind Homepage

There are, sadly, people who cannot appreciate some colours in all the ways that most of us take for granted.

Flags by Colours

"Each sector of these pie charts is proportional to the area of the colour on the respective flag."

11 Great Color Legends

Funny—green M&Ms never did that for me. They just made me want more chocolate.

White (and red, and blue, and yellow, and green, and pink, and black . . . so far)

A series of short films each focusing on a colour, what can be inspired by a colour, or related to a colour and how each of them might make you feel or act. A little abstract, but still very interesting. Also, if you'll notice, each film is hosted on its own domain, the domain named by the hex code corresponding to the colour being examined.

Jacob Dahlgren

And what better way to end a celebration of colour than with some colourful—and slightly odd—art? I'm impressed.

AUSU THIS MONTH



AUSU Job Posting Chief Returning Officer

The Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) represents AU students and their interests. The Union strives for a fair and accessible election process for members to the Students' Council. To this end, AUSU is seeking a student to fulfill the role of Chief Returning Officer (CRO) for the 2008 AUSU General Elections.

Position Duties and Responsibilities

The CRO's responsibilities, as outlined in AUSU policy, are collecting nominations, verifying the eligibility of nominees, informing candidates of campaign policy, enforcing campaign policy, collecting votes, confirming voter eligibility, counting ballots on March 13, 2008,—and as needed for any recounts—and reporting election results to council. The election will be open from March 9 through March 12 and the CRO will be required to be reachable by phone during that time. Throughout January and February, a commitment of 1 hour a week (via email or phone) may be required.

The CRO reports to the Executive Director of AUSU and AUSU Students' Council.

Selection Criteria

- Applicants must have strong organizational abilities.
- Applicants must be comfortable with Excel and email, including attachments.
- Applicants must be able to analyze and apply policy to ensure a fair election process.
- Candidates in the 2008 AUSU General Election are ineligible for this competition.
- Candidates must be able to operate out of the AUSU head office located in Edmonton, AB.

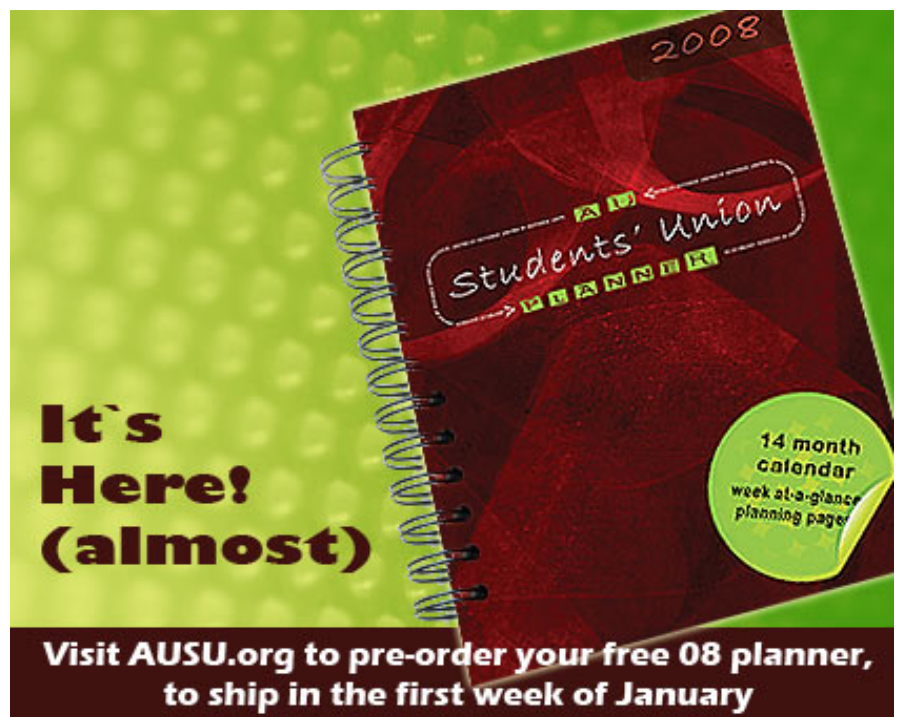
Apply to:

Please submit a resume and cover letter to executivedirector@ausu.org

Application will remain open until a suitable candidate is hired.

Remuneration

\$500 stipend, payable upon completion of the election process.



In Its Wake



Release date: November 6, 2007

Label: Independent release

Tracks: 7

Rating: 5

This is the debut, self-titled album from four-piece Ontario band In Its Wake, a group whose front man describes their music as "alternative soul rock."

I agree wholeheartedly with this self-labelling. Unfortunately, I don't feel that alternative, soul, and rock music can be properly blended while still retaining any aspects of musical interest and appeal.

Often it is difficult enough for a purely soul band, or a purely rock band, to avoid generic pitfalls and to come through with a unique and compelling sound. In Its Wake have sold themselves short in terms of songwriting because I think this band could offer a lot more than has been pressed on *In Its Wake*.

The seven-track album is not what I would call inspiring, at least four out of seven times; there are three redeeming songs that give a glimpse into another possible reality for the band.

"Beneath the Waves" and "Faces" are two songs that would fit easily into the alternative section; the difference between these tracks and the rest of the record is that they don't simply melt into the background.

While most songs on this record are generally pleasant they are largely forgettable; "Beneath the Waves" and "Faces" have a little more to offer in the way of composition and basic appeal. The hard-rock guitar intro on "Faces" and the riff played in "Beneath the Waves" draw you in where the other songs just let your mind wander.

The greatest track on this record is "Give my Regards," not only because it breaks free of the rock/alternative/soul mould in favour of reggae but because the musicians are great at playing this type of music.

This song was a very pleasant surprise on an otherwise rather bland record; it made me want to sit back, light up a smoke, and enjoy myself. I think this one track is indicative of what In Its Wake could accomplish with their music if they let loose and gave up their tendencies toward the composition of songs that might be overheard in a laid-back jazz bar where the music is secondary to the company and the food.

Without the breakout track, *In Its Wake* is sadly unimpressive despite the obvious musical talents of the band members and their desire to create something that can't be described in terms of one genre. A few songs are worth remembering, but the rest of them really have no hope of sticking in your memory.



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

CD: Jimmy LaFave, *Cimarron Manifesto*

Release date: 2007

Label: Red House Records, Inc.

"Perhaps all music, even the newest, is not so much something discovered as something that re-emerges from where it lay buried in the memory, inaudible as a melody cut in a disc of

flesh. A composer lets me hear a song that has always been shut up silent within me" - Jean Genet

The following is a list of the motley crew of performers who didn't set me on fire when first I heard them but who now rank among my most frequently played iTunes tracks: Gordon Lightfoot, Robbie Robertson, Diana Krall, Washboard Hank, Billie Holiday, Stephan Eicher, Jacques Brel, Holly Cole, and now, Jimmy LaFave.

Cimarron Manifesto was my introduction to Jimmy LaFave, who apparently has had quite a following since 1990. On the first and second hearings there was nothing that stood out—no new vistas, no experiments, no rare insights. It was Van Morrison meets Bob Dylan meets that sweet balm of Gilead, the Austin sound.

But the musicianship, the tight and luscious sound production, and especially LaFave's voice drew me in, and as I went on listening I discovered in the lyrics the most original expressions of love, compassion, mourning, and ecstasy, as touching as anything the creator might sing, had the creator decided to come to earth a singer-songwriter.

Jimmy LaFave has been wounded by beauty. The wound is in his voice and the songs he writes, songs about highways and love and loss and redemption. These songs harbour an aching nostalgia for a time when America's triumph-of-the-lonesome-cowpoke mythology transfixed the world from movie screens and radios, when America could pride itself on being, at least in the eyes of foreigners, newcomers, and the hopelessly naive, a land of milk and honey, of opportunity and tolerance and wholesome family values.

LaFave's songs also grip the bitter grief of ordinary Americans betrayed by a power-



hungry elite that still pretends to represent them in their longings for universal justice and freedom. At the same time his songs let the grief go, admitting that despite all the pangs of woe it is still a beautiful world with marvellous creatures in it.

But let's talk about singing for a moment. A bad singer can sing neither the tune nor the words. A good singer sings the tune. A great singer sings the words. That isn't to say that a great singer doesn't sing the tune; just that the tune takes a back seat, being driven by the meaning hidden in the lyrics.

The great singer sings each word as if he or she *means* it, has lived it, has felt it down deep. The great singer knows which words to draw out and ornament and which to simply glance off or even leave out. The great singer is not all about trills and runs and range, but won't hesitate to use them if they help reveal the significance of the words.

Jimmy LaFave is a *great* singer; he makes you hear new things in old and oft-repeated songs, pulling out a significance that even the songwriter couldn't unveil in the original cut. The Genet quote above is as true of singers as it is of composers; look no further than LaFave's interpretation of Dylan's "Not Dark Yet" for a stunning embodiment of such revelatory singing. And his cover of Donovan Leitch's "Catch the Wind" is the most beautiful hymn to an unattainable love since "Layla," something we somehow missed when Donovan's version was first released back in 1965.

In the end, there is some divine mystery behind LaFave which he does not claim to understand but which nonetheless he welcomes with open arms:

*I saw a light shine through my window
The universe called out my name
I woke up on a lonesome highway
That turned into a shady lane
Just what happened here
Don't ask me.*

The Bard could use some help scouting out new material. If you discover any books, compact disks, or movies which came out in the last twelve months and which you think fit the Bard's criteria, please drop a line to bard@voicemagazine.org. If I agree with your recommendation, I'll thank you online.

THE VOICE WANTS YOU

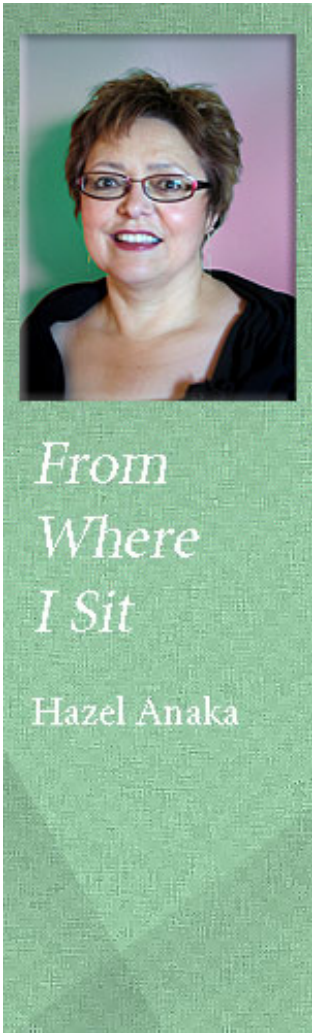


The Education Beat

Do the latest developments in education interest, intrigue, or even infuriate you? Do you follow the ups and downs of college and university life and the federal and provincial decisions that affect students?

If this sounds like you, here's a chance to make your opinions pay. *The Voice* is looking for a writer with a keen interest in the politics (and peculiarities) of Canada's post-secondary system.

To find out more about becoming a regular education contributor for *The Voice*, just email voice@ausu.org.



Delete

This morning I spent too long cleaning up my email. There were 14 messages to read. Well, not messages exactly; more like forwarded jokes, video clips, and links to YouTube or other sites. There weren't any real pieces of genuine communication. You know, the whole reason email was supposed to exist: to offer a cheap, effective, efficient way to stay in touch with loved ones far away; the reason for the demise of stationery, postage, and legible handwriting.

There was the anti-spam folder full of crap to discard. There were some folders of saved and sorted emails to delete. Emails that I had once believed deserved some of my precious hard-drive (and mind) space—emails I believed I'd go back and re-read. There were hundreds of deleted items to put into trash. Normally this is quite an annoying, mindless, time-consuming exercise. Not to mention a welcome delaying tactic when I don't want to tackle a more pressing job.

Except this time was different. This time I noticed some disturbing stuff.

Oh sure, I'm still disgusted by the emails selling penis-enlarging products and angry they keep finding their way into my inbox. That's nothing new. I'm still ticked off by the ads selling online pharmaceuticals, and know the counterfeit ones sometimes claim lives. I'm still angry that phishing emails exist to trick and victimize the less savvy. Nothing to see here, folks . . . keep moving.

This time was different because I finally acknowledged something insidious going on. You know how you feel in a social setting or maybe even the office when someone tells an off-colour or other equally offensive joke? Or circulates a cartoon degrading someone or something? Or maybe it's a serious debate or water-cooler conversation about something in the news.

In your heart of hearts you're offended, embarrassed, ashamed, or pissed off but lack the moral courage to speak up. I know I've been guilty of nervous laughter, a dirty look in the direction of the offender, or silence. Gotta make nice, you know. Keep the peace. Bite your tongue. Poppycock.

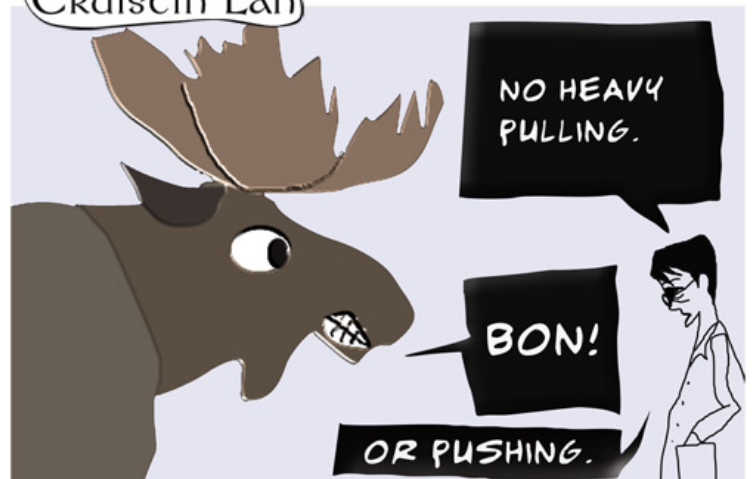
A lot of emails I receive have an agenda. Sometimes it's noble and right-minded, like promoting gratitude for the troops. Other times it's off the wall and wrong-headed. Right now a lot of people have their knickers in a knot over the increased pressure to be politically correct by saying Happy Holidays instead of Merry Christmas. They see a conspiracy theory. A them-versus-us. Who the hell is them? Or even us, for that matter?

The fact Canada is made up of many people of many cultures is a good thing and not a reason for panic. Not everyone is a Christian. Not every Christian is practicing the tenets of his beliefs. Isn't tolerance supposed to be the name of the game? I don't get the fear about turbans, Kwanza, women getting the vote, Hanukkah, Alberta drivers, hijabs, Saskatchewan's success, or whatever the perceived offence of the day is.

Show me a people who haven't been tormented for their beliefs, for their very being-ness. At some level, at some point in our ethnic or gender history, we all understand persecution, intolerance, hatred. Why on earth would we be party to it now at someone else's expense? How about taking the time to figure out what the appropriate greeting is for a particular person? It may be Kristos Razdayetsya for me. Or the Feliz Navidad I said to the Spanish cashier at Winners. It may even be Merry Christmas. All I can say is thank God for delete, from where I sit.

The Chronicles of Cruiscin Lan

by
Wanda
Waterman
St. Louis





At Home: Albertans poised to spend more than any other province this Christmas *Mandy Gardner*

A survey conducted by Statistics Canada shows that holiday shopping last year followed the established trend, with Albertans spending considerably more than residents of other provinces and territories across the country.

The survey results estimate that in 2006 the average Albertan spent \$1,113 in retail stores for Christmas; this compares logically with the per capita budget of \$955 for Albertans in 2003.

Given that Alberta is technically the richest province with the highest income per capita, this holiday trend is not surprising; in 2003, however, the Maritime provinces budgeted the second-highest amount and in 2006 Alberta spenders were followed most closely by residents of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, who spent an estimated \$1,000 each.

Ontario and Quebec spent below the national average of \$874, at \$855 and \$791 respectively. Quebec shoppers spent the least of any other province or territory in Canada.

The 2003 Ipsos-Reid survey conducted for Moneris revealed that 58% of Canadians did not set a holiday budget and simply bought as they saw fit; 38% of Canadians admitted to being last-minute shoppers while 47% of men gave themselves this label. 69% of Albertans claimed to shop without a budget, making this the most "compulsive" province in terms of holiday spending.

Given the strong loonie these past months, holiday spending is poised to be higher for all Canadians than it was last year; Canadians are travelling to the U.S. to take advantage of lower prices and Wal-Mart is cited as the favourite retail location for shoppers whether they are north or south of the border.

In Foreign News: American housing crisis continues, marks global economic crisis

American President George W. Bush has changed his mind about the previous decision to leave U.S. interest rates as they are, and recently spoke up about his plans to alleviate the housing crisis in his country.

Several months ago, when Bush was confronted with the rising credit crisis in his country, his reaction was to drag his heels about lowering interest rates; now, however, it seems that another cut in interest is required in light of the continuing credit problems in America.

The president confessed that he sympathised with his citizens, who were not only facing extreme credit issues and the inability to make repayments on their housing loans and mortgages, but who were also meant to deal with these financial strains with the holidays looming directly ahead. He called on all Americans struggling to make mortgage repayments to call 1-800-995-HOPE to "keep our economy healthy and the American dream alive."

America is not the only country dealing with credit issues and interest rates: today the Bank of England announced its first interest rate cut in two years. The cut (a quarter of one point) takes the interest rate to 5.5% and is expected, like in the United States, to alleviate homeowner debt and help Britons retain their

homes. The timing of both personal credit crises has financial advisors and economists around the world predicting a slowdown of the global economy.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warns that interest rate cuts in the U.K. and interventionist measures in the U.S. will likely mean a drop in house prices and lower returns for citizens who have been making savings over the past several years.

While lowered house prices will get more people in to buy where recently they haven't been able to afford housing, it also means that investors will lose the money they have put into the housing market. Overall, as leaders in the global market, economic slowdowns in the U.S. and the U.K. will lead the rest of the world into a period of slowed economic growth.

Despite this dreary forecast, the OECD maintains that after a six-month period of slowed growth in 2008, "strong company profits and high employment should moderate the effects of the slowdown [in the latter half of 2008]."

EDUCATION NEWS

Frank Appleyard



Post-secondary drop-out rate alarming

OTTAWA (CUP) -- One in seven Canadian students drops out of their post-secondary studies.

According to the Youth in Transition survey, released by Statistics Canada on Nov. 20, approximately 15 per cent of students who start post-secondary education never finish.

The survey began tracking a sample group of students aged 18 - 20 in 1999 and followed up every two years to see how the group progressed. The study found that roughly 143,000 of the 963,000 students in the sample dropped out.

But while drop-out rates were higher than expected, so were overall participation rates.

According to the survey, by Sept. 2005, 79 per cent of the sample group had participated in some sort of post-secondary education, and university accounted for half of that.

This represents a significant jump from the 1999 post-secondary participation rate of just 54 per cent among the group.

NDP MP Denise Savoie, the party's post-secondary education critic, had mixed feelings about the report.

"When you look at it quickly, it says that four out of five young people go to post-secondary education. That sounds really good and encouraging, and it has to be at some level. But I saw some things in [the survey] that concern me," she said, pointing to the 17-per-cent lower participation rate among rural students than their urban counterparts.

Savoie also said that the financial burden of an education is likely a big reason for the drop-out rate.

"It really comes back to what I've proposed, which is the need for a needs-based grant system," she said, pointing to finances as one of the major stumbling blocks in post-secondary education for rural students.

"Even existing grants that were put in place, like the Canada Access Grant, are insufficient. It's only for first-year students, so the [prospect] of these huge debt loads are really problematic in many cases."

Joel Westheimer, a Canada Research Chair in democracy and education at the University of Ottawa, pointed to post-secondary funding as a major factor in student participation.

"Decreasing federal and provincial funding for post-secondary education has obviously made it harder for most, if not all, to remain in school," he said.

"That decrease in funding puts university administration in a difficult position where, in order to continue to give students the support they need, they have to base university increasingly on a business model instead of an educational model."

This emerging business model of university education is bad for student culture, he said.

"Administrators are pushed more and more to treat university as training grounds and service centres modelled on business, where students are customers," he said.

"As [education] shifts to providing a service for a fee, you lose the essence of what makes education meaningful for a lot of students. As soon as they're not getting something that they need in terms of a training model, they drop out."

Westheimer felt that the onus is increasingly on faculty members to push for a return to traditional educational values.

"I think that educators really need to push back at the corporatization of [the] university and make it clear to the public and legislators that education is a necessary public good," he said, indicating that the university experience should be as important as the degree.

Savoie echoed Westheimer's calls for a change in the way education is promoted in Canada.

"We have done nothing to create and nurture a culture of lifelong learning," she said. "If we think education is just about manufacturing student widgets that we can mould to fit in the economy, then we're doing a disservice to what education should be. The federal government needs to develop a pan-Canadian strategy around lifelong learning."

classifieds

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THE VOICE

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