

# Ontario students face skyrocketing tuition fees

## Graduate and profession students charged more under controversial news deregulation policy

BY RACHEL FUREY

TORONTO(CUP)- Although he was trying to get through law school without taking out any more student loans, Vilko Zbogar is coming to terms with the fact that that isn't going to happen.

"I'll have to borrow," says Zbogar, a second-year law student at the University of Toronto, whose tuition bill, including incidental fees for the upcoming academic year, totals \$5316.

When he becomes a lawyer, Zbogar plans to work in public interest advocacy. His career choice means he will likely earn less income than many of his peers, and it will take him longer to pay back his loans.

But Zbogar is one of the lucky ones. He's a member of the last of a group of students who began studying law at the U of T before deregulation. This year's new batch of law students will pay almost \$1000 more

than Zbogar and their tuition fees will increase by 127 per cent in the next three years.

Zbogar is concerned that potential law students with ambitions similar to his own will be deterred by the high price tag. "The law school culture at the U of T promotes wholeheartedly going to Bay street," he says. "Already that's the type of person the law school tends to attract. [The deregulation of tuition fees] makes it more and more difficult for those who want to do something different with their lives to come to U of T law."

First-year law student Rima Ramchandani agrees. "It scares me how much I'll owe when I graduate," she says. "I'm going to have to get a very well-paying job."

"It's a huge problem for the profession. Many

people will be motivated by financial concerns. I will be personally. It's quite possible that I'll end up in the corporate culture for awhile because of my debt. A lot of [law students] are in this situation," adds Ramchandani, who is entering the U of T's law school this fall.

The rising tuition fees faced by Ramchandani and other students entering professional or graduate university programs this fall are the product of deregulation- the process whereby the provincial government has completely removed itself from its role as tuition fee regulator.

In other words, it no longer places a cap on the amount universities can charge students in programs like law and medicine. Instead, fees for such programs are decided solely by the governing bodies at Ontario's universities and colleges.

The result is tuition fee invoices totalling \$7800 for first-year U of T medical students, \$5808 for Queen's University first-year law students and \$8000 for students studying computer animation at Sheridan College.

Student leaders are outraged by the decision by Mike Harris' Progressive Conservative government to deregulate fees, a decision which was released in May.

"It's discrimination," says Joel Harden, Ontario chairman for the Canadian Federation of Students. "The government says students are 'borrowing against their future incomes,' but there's no way some students will be able to pay those amounts off."

If the government

wants to make high-income graduates pay more for their education, it should be done through the income tax system, Harden says.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, which is not opposed to tuition fee deregulation, also says the government has made the wrong move.

"The whole process of setting tuition fees depends on it still being socially progressive," says Andrew Boggs, executive director of the group.

"It's possible to have an idea of deregulation that is socially progressive but I don't think this is it."

Deregulation is the latest move by the provincial Tories to hike fees and cut funding to post-secondary education.

The party slashed more than \$400 million from the budgets of universities and colleges when it came to office three years ago and since then, administrators have been lobbying for the right to make up that shortfall by dipping into students' pockets and setting fees as they see fit.

Tuition fee levels across the board have increased 30 per cent since 1995.

"We're extremely pleased that the government has allowed us to do this," says David Scott, a spokesman for the Council of Ontario Universities. "Our position has consistently been one of letting Ontario universities make choices [about tuition fee levels] at the local level."

And that's just what the government has done for all university graduate programs and undergraduate professional programs such as den-

tistry, law and medicine.

But all indications are that it won't stop there.

Once universities can provide proof to the government that they will be able to double enrollment numbers in their undergraduate engineering and computer science programs in the next four years, fees will be hiked for those programs as well.

The government says it's responding to demand. "The reality is the demand for [computer science and engineering programs] is very high," says David Trick, an official with the Ministry of Education. "We need to increase the number of spaces to respond to the needs of industry and the demands of students."

That's good news for universities that have chosen to take advantage of the government's new policy.

"Our position is one of total deregulation," says Derek McCammond, U of T vice-provost. But he says deregulation doesn't mean increased fees for all programs.

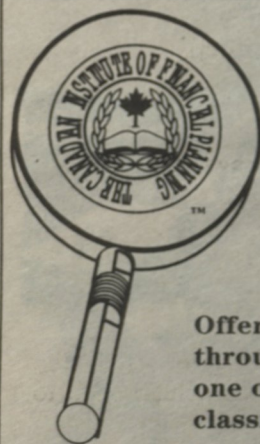
Graduate student fees for many U of T programs only increased by 10 percent this year even though they were deregulated, he points out.

Still, the large fee discrepancies lead student leaders like Chris Ramsaroop to accuse backers of the new policy of devaluing more traditional university programs.

"The humanities and social science are suffering and will continue to suffer," says Ramsaroop, president of the U of T student council.

The possibility that more

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