

Loan application numbers increase as unemployment plagues students

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Deputy News Editor

For students, back to school means a trip to the bookstore and the fee payment office, but at an increasing rate, a detour for student loans processing is also on the itinerary.

According to Alberta's Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, the number of provincial student loan applications have increased from about 17,000 to just over 21,000 compared to the same time last year.

"We're only in through the first four months of our fiscal year and we've already seen a 17 per cent increase," said Kevin Donnan, a spokesperson for the Ministry.

This summer saw a record high for unemployment across the country, with Statistics Canada reporting a 20.9 per cent joblessness rate in July — the highest since records began in 1977.

As a result of these tough economic times, some students may find themselves in an unfamiliar position, and will have to look for options to remedy their financial woes.

"Coming into this year, students are at a definite financial detriment, so of course they're going to be looking for alternative funding if they can't find a summer income," said Students' Union President Kory Mathewson.

That alternative will likely be loans, and Donnan explained his department is prepared for the jump.

"[It's the] policy of this department that no student who is in need will be turned away," he said. "Our focus is on providing students with the help and assistance they need so they can manage their day-to-day lives, while at the same time pursuing their

educational opportunities."

Even with the maximum loan of \$13,300, some students may be forced into making tough decisions during the year. Jane Lee, manager of the Student Financial Aid Information Centre (SFAIC), stresses that there are resources available to ensure no one gets to that point.

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KEVIN DONNAN
SPOKESPERSON, MINISTRY OF ADVANCED EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

"If you need help financially, just come [to the SFAIC]," Lee emphasized. "The staff are trained [so you can just] tell them your situation and they'll find a way to help. We don't expect students to figure that out all on their own."

Among the assistance available is the SU's Access Fund, which offers non-repayable bursaries for students that demonstrate financial need.

The fund is paid for through undergraduate Students' Union fees.

"We take part-time students, full-time students, international or

Canadian students, anyone can apply for it. It's open for everyone, as long as they're a University of Alberta student," Lee explained.

With the high unemployment and loan application numbers, SFAIC is anticipating a possible increase in demand for its services.

"We are expecting more people to apply, whether they'll be an increase of people actually receiving the fund is hard to say. It depends completely on how many people know about it," Lee said.

In addition to the Access Fund is the U of A administration's bursaries and emergency funding, which is also allocated through the SFAIC and the Dean of Students' office.

"What it provides is short-term interest free loans for students to cover their living or emergency expenses [that] they are expected to start paying back after three months," Lee said.

While students are feeling the effects of the global economic downturn, the means available to help them have also taken a hit.

"There's definitely a lot of stress on the system because of the demand for additional student financial aid," Mathewson said. "At a certain sense we're lucky to be at the same level as last year, given the hit the [U of A] endowment took."

Donnan stood by the Ministry's commitment to students in despite added belt-tightening in the provincial budget as well.

"Budgets are fluid documents [...] We want to make sure we're meeting the needs of students, but at the same time, it's a shared investment," he said. "We're in an interesting time, and like I say, we're monitoring the situation very closely."

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FILE PHOTO: LAUREN STIGLITZ

BRINGING US TOGETHER The new LRT line to South Campus was one of the developments at the U of A this summer.

SUMMER IN REVIEW

Compiled by Sean Steels and Jon Taves

U OF A EMPLOYEES TEST NEW ETS PAYMENT METHOD

July 9 — The Edmonton Transit System (ETS) tried out a new payment system with a group of U of A employees.

The system, called ETS Blue, consists of a tap-and-go chip-embedded card system that users load with their pre-paid transit fares. The technology was integrated with their staff ONEcards.

ETS Blue is in preliminary trial stages, but is already set up in the city's LRT stations. The eventual plan is to equip all ETS busses with the option as well.

When the idea is implemented full-scale, an estimated two years away, ETS plans to use data collected to alter routes and payment rates quickly and effectively.

LOST UNIVERSIADE BID ALTERS PLANS FOR SOUTH CAMPUS

June 4 — The long-awaited decision on the city of Edmonton's bid for the 2015 Universiade games ended in disappointment earlier this summer. The U of A was heavily involved in the bid, and lost \$465 million in funding for South Campus development when Gwangju, South Korea was awarded the event instead.

Despite the loss, South Campus additions will go forward as planned, save for some delays to residences on the site.

New health and wellness facilities, are also planned for both the main and South Campus.

"This is a trend that students are interested in. Our goal is still trying to meet student demand for these kinds of facilities," said Mike Mahon, Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.

The city has refocused its bidding efforts in its campaign for 2017's Expo 17, also known as the World's Fair. A successful Expo bid could largely

make-up for the lost funds of the Universiade.

LRT SERVICES EXPAND

May 7 — The Edmonton Transit System (ETS) opened two new Light Rail Transit (LRT) stations on 25 April, connecting the University of Alberta's South and North Campuses.

The extension will eventually connect Clareview, in Edmonton's northeast, to the developing Century Park area, in the south end of the city on 23 Avenue.

As a result of the change, a new express route has also been opened from The Grange station, which lies west of Anthony Henday Trail, to South Campus, and ETS officials anticipate another express route will also be added from West Edmonton Mall in September.

Most bus routes operating along 114 Street have now been altered to detour to South Campus, allowing the LRT to complete the trip to North Campus for students.