



ALBERTA GRADUATE  
COUNCIL

# AGC AWARENESS

September 2009

**The Alberta Graduate Council represents over 12,000 graduate students at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge. It represents and promotes the interests of graduate students in Alberta to the provincial government and other interested stakeholders.**

To accomplish this, the AGC seeks to:

- Communicate the concerns of its graduate student membership to the Alberta provincial government, and in particular to the Ministry of Advanced Education of the province of Alberta;
- Act as the primary point of contact for graduate students with the Alberta provincial government, and other provincial agencies and organizations;
- Provide a forum for the discussion of issues of specific interest to Alberta graduate students;
- Provide a medium of communication among its graduate student membership;
- Conduct research of relevance to its membership;
- Promote the interests and communicate the value of graduate students in Alberta in their varied roles as students, researchers, and teachers.

## Welcome Back Graduate Students and Post Secondary Stakeholders

As Chair of the Alberta Graduate Council it is my pleasure to introduce to you the second addition of AGC Awareness, the official newsletter of the Alberta Graduate Council. To those of you who are new to us this year, the AGC represents over 12,000 graduate students in the province of Alberta, and is the official representative of graduate students to the Government of Alberta.

Currently the viability of research in the province of Alberta and the rest of Canada is being threatened by the fallout of the global financial crisis. Research funding at both the federal and provincial levels are in danger of being cut. To help prevent this from happening the AGC is dedicated to advocate for research funding to be maintained during the current fiscal situation, and for it to be eventually increased once the crisis passes. Along with advocating for issues directly facing graduate students, the AGC is pushing for provincial operating grants to ensure there are future positions available for graduate students in the province of Alberta.

In this issue of AGC Awareness we report on the activities of the AGC over this past summer as well as bringing you another graduate student profile, this time from the University of Lethbridge. In addition, the AGC is proud to be releasing a detailed article describing our recent lobbying efforts with the Minister of Health and Wellness, the Honorable Ron Liepert, regarding provincially funded operating grants. We hope you enjoy this issue of AGC Awareness and our separate article as we provide further updates on issues that are important to you. I would personally like to wish everyone all the best this year and thank you for your interest in graduate studies and research.

Have a fantastic year!

Christopher, AGC Chair

## More Information

For more information about the AGC, contact our chair at [chair@albertagrads.ca](mailto:chair@albertagrads.ca).

To contact local representatives about any concerns or issues you wish to bring forward to the AGC, please contact:

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## AGC Attends the Alberta Government's Student Leader Orientation Session

On June 29th, 4 AGC members attended the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology's annual student leader government orientation session. The daylong event took place at Government House in Edmonton, and was attended by members of all three provincial student groups, The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), The Alberta Student Executive Council (ASEC), and the AGC.

The event featured information sessions on various topics including provincial legislation, key adult learning trends and issues, student financial assistance, scholarships, and research and innovation. In addition to question and answer sessions with ministry officials, the day included one on one discussions between students and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Ministry's various advisory and review boards (the Student Finance Board (SFB), the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfers (ACAT), the Alberta Industry and Training Board (AITB), the Access Advisory Council (AAC), and the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC).

The highlight of the day was a two hour-long question and answer session with Minister Doug Horner, Deputy Minister Dr. Annette Trimbee, and Assistant Deputy Minister Connie Harrison. During this session Minister Horner updated the students on the provinces fiscal situation and its impact on advanced education, and warned that post-secondary institutions should not expect any increase to their base operating budgets in the coming year. Despite

the negative impact the current financial crisis has on endowment revenues at the various post-secondary institutions, Minister Horner expressed his desire to maintain the current provincial tuition cap despite increased pressure from post-secondary institutions. Currently the tuition cap prevents post secondary institutions in Alberta from raising the cost of tuition by more than the consumer price index (CPI) in a given year. When questioned about the safety of current provincial graduate scholarships, the Minister explained that the majority of scholarships come from a restricted endowment fund that could only be accessed to fund scholarships. As for the remaining scholarships the Minister reassured all the student groups that the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology would try to avoid cutting funding scholarship funding unless the ministry found itself under extreme circumstances. Minister Horner reassured students that the Government of Alberta will continue to invest in advanced education and research, but that funding will be tight until the fiscal crisis passes.

“ **...Minister Horner expressed his desire to maintain the current provincial tuition cap despite increased pressure from post-secondary institutions.** ”



from left to right: Chris Skappak (AGC President), Jenn Prosser (U of A GSA President), Dr. Annette Trimbee (Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Technology), Chris Carter (U of A's GSA Council), the Honourable Doug Horner (Minister of Advanced Education and Technology), Richard Querrel (U of L GSA President), and Kristy Kutanzi (AGC Members Relations).

# Profiling Alberta's Graduate Students

## Life Long Learning

### Debra Gazeley

Ontario born, Debra Gazeley embraces life long learning and the challenges that come with it. For her, it's been a carefully balanced juggling act - raising two children, working on the side, and attending four post-secondary institutes from across the country. A woman of many trades, Debra has been formally trained as a Health Care Aid, Child and Youth Worker, and as an RCMP officer. She also completed a combined undergraduate degree in Anthropology and Psychology at the University of Lethbridge. "I moved to Alberta, and Lethbridge in particular, because it met all my needs as a student and as a family unit relocating to another province. Lethbridge has all the amenities of a larger center and easy access to the university."

Debra has chosen to continue furthering her education in a Masters of Science at the University of Lethbridge. With her diverse background, it's clear Debra has drawn upon the reflections of her life experiences to shape her research interest, "As a young single mom and working woman, I became acutely aware of issues of discrimination and power imbalances in my various careers. I noticed that sexual abuse, physical violence and emotional trauma were intimately connected with self-esteem, the degree of social support, learned behaviours in the home and these factors combined affected both mental and physical health. .. My interests have changed from personal interest to public awareness."

Her Masters thesis, entitled "First Nations Women, Gender and the Embodiment of Social Suffering", will hopefully raise awareness for women's health and well-being, especially considering that "their [Aboriginal women's] voices are virtually non-existent in the historical record."

When asked which strengths of the graduate program drew her to the University of Lethbridge, she replied, "The University offered incentives such as scholarships and [entrance] awards for students choosing to continue their education at the graduate level. The University of Lethbridge allowed me to tailor my degree to my area of interest in Medical Anthropology."



Debra Gazeley, M.Sc, University of Lethbridge

However, like most students, Debra relies on external funding to cover research costs, including equipment and travel expenses. As a recipient of the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, Debra is grateful for the financial contributions from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Unfortunately for Debra, she will have to look elsewhere for her upcoming PhD since the University of Lethbridge does not currently offer philosophy degrees in her area of research. Once again, financial incentives such as scholarships and entrance awards will influence her decision.

With an increasing number of life long learners, like Debra, the need for further financial contributions from local and provincial sources will prove to be essential for attracting bright minds to Alberta.

# September's Feature Article

## Affordability Framework

### *a Work in Progress*

The Government of Alberta introduced the Affordability Framework in November, 2006, to provide policy directions regarding all of the expenses students face, as well as the financial resources available to ensure post-secondary education costs in Alberta remain affordable. The vision was to promote access to further education, while recognizing individual needs, and rewarding excellence.

Since the implementation of this framework, there have been a number of important advances, such as:

- a 2.5 percent interest rate reduction on student loans with variable rates, and a 3 percent cut on fixed rates
- removal of restrictions on scholarship earnings
- doubled monthly part-time earning exemptions from \$400 to \$800 per month
- increased scholarships by an additional \$11.6 million, including expanding the Rutherford Scholarships
- increased annual loan limits to \$13,300
- increased living allowances by a total of 19%
- significant decreases to parental contributions, which are in-line with the federal Canada Student Loan Program and other provinces
- removal of restrictions on vehicles
- extended lifetime loan limits for returning students
- extended interest-free status for students on parental leave or completing medical residency requirements

The Affordability Framework is a comprehensive package that not only provides cost-savings for an estimated 62,000 graduate students, but also seeks to ensure that student financial assistance is simplified and flexible to suit the diverse needs of Alberta's students. This is important, as graduate students, despite having to contribute less than 30% of tuition costs, are faced with an average debt load of \$32,682 six months after completion of their program.

To offset this financial burden, scholarships and bursaries have become an important resource to fund those students with financial need, as well as to reward students for their excellence. Although the Government of Alberta's scholarship budget has more than doubled in the last six years, many students are still struggling to make post-secondary financially feasible. Moreover, non-Albertan residents, especially international students, who may have valuable skill-sets that would be worth investing in, are often ineligible for Alberta student loans and scholarships. Attracting high quality graduate students, regardless of nationality or origin, should be considered crucial for building a strong economic foundation for Alberta's future.

Clearly, the Affordability Framework is a work in progress. Although graduate students will greatly benefit from the changes already implemented, there is still a long way to go to ensure affordability of post-secondary education for all students.

*For additional information on the facts and figures provided in reference to Alberta's Affordability Framework and the 2008 publication of "Advanced Education and Technology: Facts & Figures", visit the Advanced Education and Technology website at: [www.advancededandtech.alberta.ca](http://www.advancededandtech.alberta.ca)*