

Tuition tension

Okanagan College board wants to boost fees by 2%, but students tell officials they can't afford to take a hike

By J.P. SQUIRE
The Daily Courier

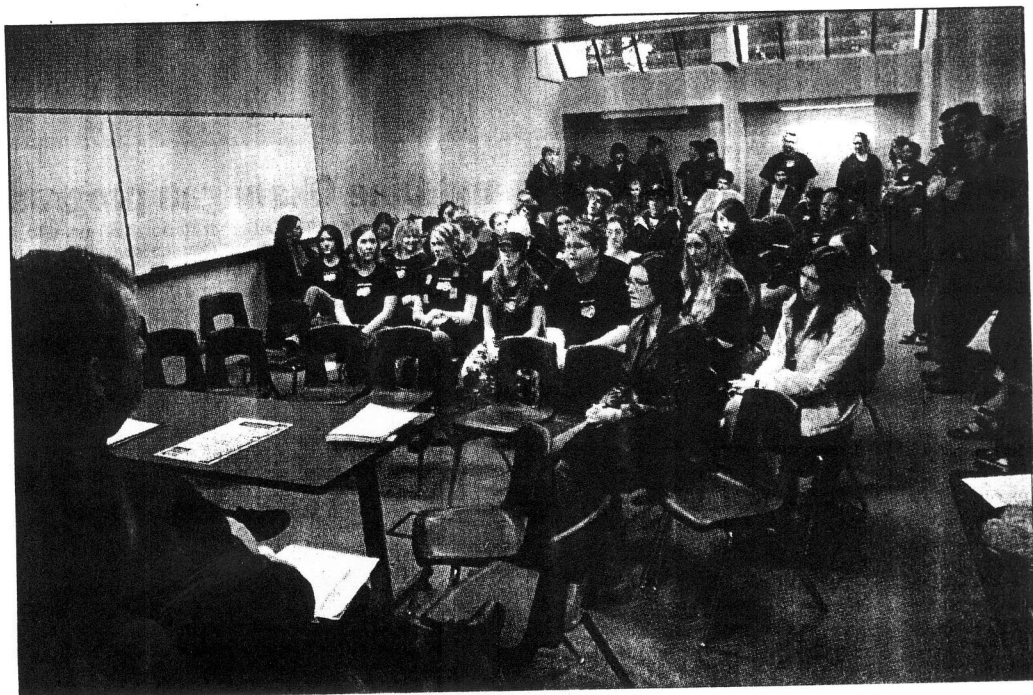
A possible increase in Okanagan College tuition produced tears, anger, numerous stories of student hardship and a rude T-shirt Wednesday in Kelowna. It was the last of four sessions to receive student input before the college board considers a recommendation on Jan. 29 to increase tuition next September. The province will allow an increase up to the rate of inflation, about two per cent.

One married student started to cry as she described trying to attend college while her husband is working as a tradesman and completing an apprenticeship.

"We need an education, but it's hard," she said, her voice choked. "A lot of us think that the college is great and that the tuition is not low, but we can afford it with a part-time or a full-time job. But I believe if it did go up, most of us would feel 'Could I afford an education or should I just work?'" said a female student.

At one point, consultation chairman Bob Eby, the college's vice-president of finance, stated the board invests all of the tuition and other funds it receives into programs and services.

Yet, he also admitted the college



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More than 60 students squeezed into a small meeting room Wednesday to oppose an increase in tuition fees at Okanagan College next September. The college board will debate it on Jan. 29 at the KLO campus.

currently has a \$2-million surplus (a contingency fund), and that the tuition increase would produce only an additional \$330,000 a year.

Students questioned what programs and/or services could be cut if tuition wasn't increased, but Eby said that will be up to the board to decide. That prompted accusations students weren't being provided with the information they want or need.

About 20 of the 60-plus students who packed the small meeting room wore

black T-shirts distributed free by the Okanagan College Students' Union.

The back stated: "Oh my God, the tuition fees killed Kenny. You bastards."

Many students spoke of having one or two part-time jobs to pay for their education and the difficulty in trying to do homework and study in-between work, classes and sleep.

One female student noted: "It's great that the library is now open until 10 p.m., but so is the Wendy's

drive-thru, and I'll be there. I can't go to the library because I have to work."

When students asked what services Okanagan College offers that other institutions with lower tuition don't, Eby responded: student success centres, computer labs and wireless capability.

"If we can afford a laptop (with wireless)," responded one student.

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An older student suggested many college classes aren't at capacity, so the board should lower tuition fees, which would fill classes and produce more tuition income.

Another student said the process of filling classes would take several years and asked rhetorically if students are willing to accept fewer programs and services in the meantime.

Many noted Kelowna's high cost of living, with a Guatemalan student stating she plans to leave Kelowna for Victoria after two years of college since tuition and the cost of living are less there.

Although one student said a friend attending UBC Okanagan is paying only \$200 more a year than college students, Allan Coyle, the college's director of public affairs, said an arts program costs \$3,018 a year at the college and \$4,174 at UBCO.

The two per cent increase proposed by the college board's finance committee would result in an arts student paying \$60 more a year.