

Fee hike opposed at OC

Student union is gathering signatures from students opposed to a 2 per cent hike

By SCOTT TRUDEAU
Pentiction Herald

Arally by Okanagan College students is taking aim at those voting on a proposal to increase tuition fees for the 2008-09 year.

The Okanagan College Students' Union plans to be in attendance at each of the college's board of governors' tuition consultation meetings Jan. 14-16 at the college campuses in Kelowna, Pentiction and Salmon Arm.

Andrew Bates, Pentiction Campus Council chair and Okanagan College Students' Union external co-ordinator, has been gathering signatures from students to protest the board's vote to increase tuition fees by two per cent.

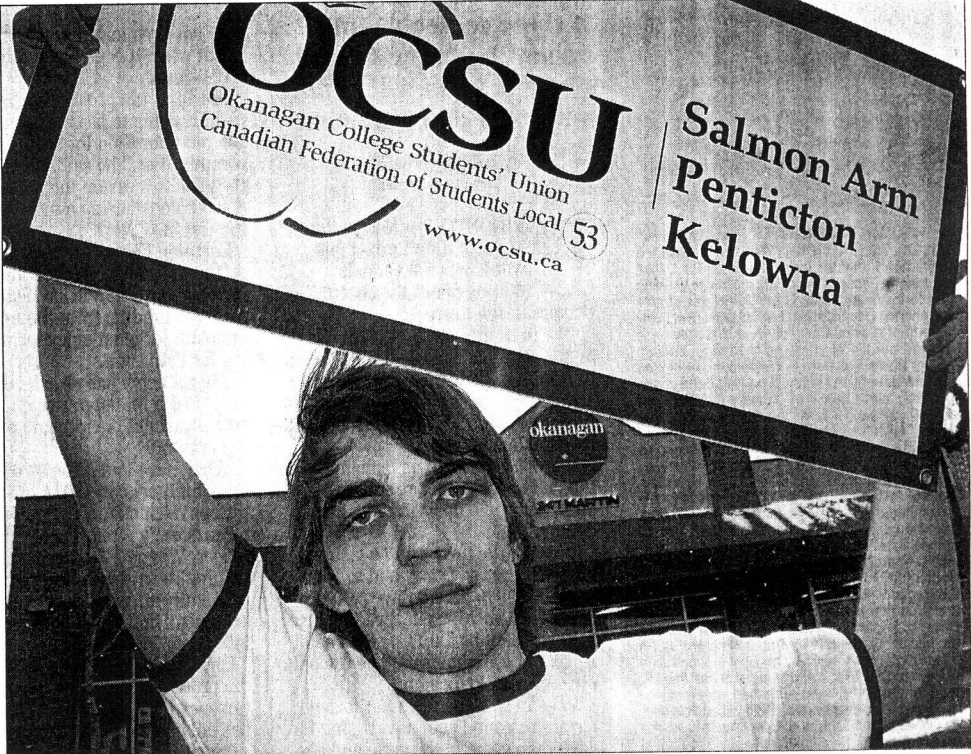
Bates said each year the finance committee presents a recommendation to the board of governors relating to tuition fees.

"This year, the finance committee has suggested a two per cent increase in tuition, without having any other numbers on the budget," said Bates. "This is why Okanagan College has the second highest tuition fees in the province among small colleges."

According to information in a release from the students' union, OK College is second only to Capilano College, which is currently seeking to obtain university status. If this happens, OK College would have the highest tuition fees in the province and exceed the provincial average by more than \$700 per year for full-time students.

Bates said the consultation meetings are usually held one to two months later once the finance committee has set out a budget and can include tuition fees in its numbers.

"Right now, there is nothing," said Bates. "This money hasn't been earmarked. They're basically building the budget rather than using the increase to fund something,



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Andrew Bates, Pentiction Campus Council chair and Okanagan College Students' Union external co-ordinator, stands in front of the Martin Street campus. Bates is trying to rally students to attend the college's board of governors tuition consultation meeting in Pentiction Tuesday to protest the board's vote to increase tuition fees by two per cent.

they've planned for."

The students' union hasn't received any indication as to why the increase is on the table or how the money would be allocated.

"The explanation given on the (OK College) website as to why they're doing it is that they haven't raised tuition fees for two years — which they call a tuition freeze — and that this increase will be an increase for the consumer price index," he said. "However, what really is happening is that two years ago they increased it to the maximum allowable amount that the ministry allowed them to charge for tuition fees, and this is going to be an increase to the maximum, again."

According to information from the college website, the B.C. government has not set the maximum allowable increase for inflation for the upcoming academic year, but for the past two years it has been two per cent.

A Statistics Canada report indicated that consumer prices were up 2.4 per cent in October 2007 over the same month of the previous year. A two per cent increase in a year's arts tuition would add about \$60 per year to tuition fees.

"When fees are already second highest in the province, the question is, squeezing that extra \$60 a person — is that necessary?" said Bates, noting one of the core beliefs

of the college is that a quality post-secondary education should be accessible for British Columbians.

Students at all campuses who are concerned about rising tuition fees should attend the consultation meeting happening Tuesday at the Pentiction campus in Room 216 from noon to 1:30 p.m.

The union will be presenting its petition to the Board of Governors when it meets to vote on the tuition increase in Kelowna Jan. 29.

Anyone with an opinion regarding tuition fees can make an online submission by visiting www.okanagan.bc.ca/site15.aspx then click the "tuition consultation 2008" and "online submission" links.