

THE GATEWAY

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Health committee examines Avian Flu threat



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: MIKE OTTO

WHICH ONE GOES DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE Vaccinations would most likely be used instead of pills to treat Avian Flu.

Pre-emptive emergency response planning outlines procedures to be taken in the event of a pandemic endangering U of A students and staff

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

A mass questionnaire sent out over e-mail to gauge student opinion on the event of a possible pandemic is being explained as a simple premeditative step and not a cause for alarm.

The University of Alberta Public Health Response Committee—which was created last year to draft out how the University would deal with any sort of major health crisis happening on campus and is currently focused on a potential global Avian Flu pandemic—sent out the survey in an attempt to research, not to frighten, committee member Vice-President (Student Life) Omer Yusuf explained.

“They want to survey the student opinion of how important is a pandemic [and] how is it in the minds of students in terms of a pressing and urgent matter,” Yusuf said.

The Committee meets every two weeks, to draft out potential emergency situation decisions, and consists of 27 members, including the SU, most departments on campus, libraries, Academic Information and Communication Technologies (AICT), the Registrar’s Office, Campus Security Services, the University Health Centre and Capital Health.

“If there ever is an emergency, the ability to make snap decision is a luxury that the University might not be able to afford,” Yusuf said.

University VP (Academic) Olive Yonge, who chairs the Public Health Response Committee, said Capital Health is currently tracking all confirmed international cases of the Avian Flu—which the Committee links to their website—and the

World Health Organization is listing the global threat of the Avian Flu at varying levels of danger.

Yusuf stressed that, although its repercussions are being discussed, reports released from the World Health Organization show the Avian Flu has yet to become a global health threat.

“Although the Avian Flu is in existence right now, it’s not in a stable form where it can be transmitted to humans. Right now there’s [been] animal-to-human contact but no stable human-to-human contacts,” Yusuf said.

But while a vaccination against the Avian Flu hasn’t yet been developed, on 24 and 25 October, a mass vaccination for the normal flu virus will be held in the Butterdome at a subsidized cost for students. According to Yusuf, research suggests that protection against the normal flu virus may help you deal with a mutating virus or help prevent an unstable virus from getting inside your system.

And while the survey also touched on willingness to volunteer in the event of a pandemic, Yusuf explained it was not yet clear what that role would entail.

“Naturally there is a liability to getting students to volunteer for something that may or may not endanger their lives,” he said. “There’s no doubt in my mind that there would be people interested in volunteering I just don’t know in what sort of capacity and neither does the University.”

According to Yusuf, the University is still fine-tuning their emergency plan to handle a pandemic and has yet to determine at what point it would be put into effect.

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ALSO READ **PALMER** ON PAGE 9

SU interest in student loan changes

SCOTT LILWALL
Deputy News Editor

A new political policy to be presented to Students’ Council next week aims at easing the financial woes of students, by advocating changes to the student loans system.

If passed, the policy designed by Vice-President (External) Dave Cournoyer would make it an objective of Council to lobby for change to the current loan process. He hopes that the changes would make it easier for students to secure financial assistance, and to make loans easier to repay. The political policy would call for the SU to lobby for end to

exemptions regarding loans, such as those that provide students who work part-time, or who have a spouse that works, with less money. As well, Cournoyer would like to see more assistance given out in the form of non-repayable loans.

“Overall, we want to see a lower level of public student debt,” Cournoyer said. “We’re looking at making sure that there’s accessibility for student finances, so students can actually get at it. We’re also trying to advocate to get the government not only to recognize tuition, but the true cost of an education.”

He explained that students face a number of costs aside from tuition—

such as transportation, food and rent—and that he feels the current student loan structure isn’t doing enough to address these other areas.

“The cost of living has gone up, enormously, in the province with the boom. We’re really seeing a detriment in that effect with students,” he said. “It’s a pretty huge issue. We hear about it every year, but it seems to be getting more and more critical.”

The student loan policy was to be discussed during last night’s Council meeting, but other business was attended to, and Council didn’t get to time to vote on the policy. It will be moved to the next meeting, Tuesday, 3 October.



JOSH NAULT

IF IT WAS UP TO ME Dave Cournoyer wants a better deal for U of A students.

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Reelin' in the goods

The Edmonton International Film Festival is returning once again, and it's bringing along some big names.

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... the tough get going!

It wasn't over when the Germans bombed Pearl Harbor—but how do campus sororities defend their pride?

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