

# THE GATEWAY

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LAUREN STIEGLITZ

**POLL POSITIONS** It's that time of year again, so go out and pick next year's SU Executive. To find out how other universities get students to vote, see page 5.

## Federal gov't funds new grant program

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA  
Senior News Editor

A replacement for the Millennium Scholarship Foundation (MSF) became a reality after the Conservative government secured parliamentary backing of their 2008 federal budget Tuesday night.

The MSF was established under the Chrétien Liberals in 1998 as a \$2.5-billion fund and, since 2000, it has distributed more than a half million dollars in bursaries and scholarships to postsecondary students across Canada. Now, the MSF will be replaced with a new Canada Student Grants Program, which will begin at \$350 million—the same funding level as Millennium in 2009/10—before rising to \$430 million over the subsequent four years.

**“There’s, in all honesty, more questions on the details than there are answers. But overall the numbers look very very good.”**

DR CARL AMRHEIN  
U OF A PROVOST AND VP (ACADEMIC)

Reaction to the replacement has been met with mixed feelings in Alberta, where postsecondary stakeholders are happy to see funding continue but remain uncertain as to whether this new program will prove to be as effective as its predecessor.

“There’s, in all honesty, more questions on the details than there are answers. But overall the numbers look very very good,” said Carl Amrhein, University of Alberta Provost and Vice-President (Academic) said.

Unlike the MSF, which was limited to ten years, the CSGP is a permanent fixture in the federal budget. Furthermore, while under MSF students qualified to receive \$1000–\$4500 in annual bursaries, the new program gives students the opportunity to receive up to \$2000 per year, paid out in monthly installments of \$100–\$250 depending on income levels.

But, U of A Students' Union Vice-President (Student Life) Chris Le said he was concerned by the fact that the new program gives money to a higher number of students instead of a higher amount of money to students who may need it the most.

PLEASE SEE **GRANTS** ♦ PAGE 4  
ALSO READ **KMECH** ON PAGE 9

## IT industry faces unprecedented shortage of women

Possible solutions, such as scientists-in-residence and better media exposure, suggested to change trend

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA  
Senior News Editor

A national shortage of IT graduates has the industry scrambling to find employees, but an even more drastic exodus of women from the field is overshadowing the overall drop in enrollment.

“20 years ago, more like 30–40 per cent [of students] were women,” said Gail Powley, University of Alberta Women in Scholarship Engineering, Science and Technology (WISEST) Vice-Chair. Today, she said, those numbers have been cut in half.

Powley explained that nationally, computer science programs face some of the lowest numbers of gender parity. According to the University of Alberta's Department of Computing Science, during the 2007/08 academic year, only 37 out of 247 total undergraduate students were female.

Two correlated phenomena are currently happening in North America, explained Professor Eleni Stroulia from the Department of Computer Science. First, she said, there's a general drop in undergraduate enrolments.

“So in a gender-neutral discussion, the numbers are dropping,” Stroulia said. “[But, secondly,] the numbers of females are dropping even faster. So we have fewer students, and the gender

gap is widening.”

The growing gender disparity is unfortunate, Stroulia explained, because “you need a multi-perspective team to make good decisions,” adding that as women leave the IT industry, the field becomes “more and more uniform.”

**“We do meet with people and work in teams and talk with people. We're not sitting in front of a computer all the time, hiding from the world.”**

ELENI STROULIA  
COMP SCI PROFESSOR

Nobody knows exactly why computer science programs are failing to attract more females, she said, but ability isn't an issue, as women are known to have good grades.

“So it's not that they can't do it—[and] we don't see a similar phenomenon in math—so it's not that math phobia is a problem.”

One of the possible reasons being

put forth, Stroulia said, is that IT is perceived as a geeky subject with little social interaction. The problem, she explained, is that women are thought to want to have an impact in society, and are deterred from the idea of sitting in front of a computer all day.

But, Stroulia stressed that despite the perception, there are “plenty of opportunities” to marry interests in other areas of life with computing science.

“We do meet with people and work in teams and talk with people. We're not sitting in front of a computer all the time, hiding from the world,” she said.

Programs such as the Canadian Information Processing Society have sponsored Women in IT Day, which aims at engaging young female students in IT-related activities in order to communicate to them what a career in the industry might look like.

However, Stroulia said that “in some cases it seems that this does not even enter the choices of women, so they haven't seen anybody that would emulate or illustrate this career for us.”

But Stroulia said that another idea that ought to be explored is having more women involved in technology featured in the media. She noted that criminology programs saw great boosts when the *CSI* series became popular and said that with good role models, more

women may consider the benefits of IT-related careers.

“Media has been recognized as one of the key problematic issues where people who join IT aren't thought of as being fashionable or friendly or anything—quite the opposite,” Powley agreed. “The geek, the outcast—it's really bad marketing, if you will.”

Powley explained that the idea of having scientists-in-residence has been floating around as one way to allow students to come in contact with role models currently in the industry.

“These individuals would be young, dynamic professionals working in local companies so that young people can see that these people are cool, they're fun, and there are jobs,” Powley said, adding that another concern that discourages potential students is that jobs are being outsourced to India and other Asian countries. However, she stressed that while some jobs are leaving Canada, there remains a large shortage domestically for IT graduates.

Powley, who's a chemical engineer, added that there are immense future career benefits of putting a focus on computers.

“Really, it's a wonderful profession,” Powley said. “It's high-tech, it's current, you have the latest and greatest in toys, if you will, [and] there's a very dynamic environment.”

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### In defense of good poster taste

**“You just hollow out a Pomeranian, you put a leather strap on it, and you just fill that with your lipstick and gum. Men, women, everyone will have a purse. You'll see Doberman backpacks.”**

THE POSTER SLAM, PAGES 12–15

### EXTRA! EXTRA!

No, seriously. The *Gateway* will have a special edition out tomorrow to give you all the results from the Students' Union executive election. You can also get your coverage tomorrow night at [www.thegatewayonline.ca/elections](http://www.thegatewayonline.ca/elections) as results come in. Democracy plus Internet equals timely democracy—read all about it starting tonight.