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Women lag behind in earning doctoral degrees: StatsCan

TANNARA YELLAND
CUP Prairies & Northern Bureau Chief

SASKATOON (CUP) — A recent study reaffirmed the perception that more women are graduating from high school and undergraduate programs, but the gender divide increases at higher levels of academia.

Despite the fact that women account for 58 per cent of Canadian undergraduate enrolments and 56 per cent of graduate enrolments, according to Statistics Canada, women still account for only 47 per cent of doctoral enrolments.

"We have to recognize that there are still a lot of general and internalized stereotypes that as a society we impose, which we are slowly overcoming," said University of Manitoba graduate students' association president Meaghan Labine.

"At this point I don't believe there is any intention for there to be less women in PhD programs, but rather that women as a whole are learning to see themselves in professions that only a short time ago were unobtainable."

Labine said that as more women enter certain professions and disciplines, that will likely encourage more women to follow suit.

Labine's assertion is backed up by a study conducted by the University of California Davis, where researchers examined female and male students at the U.S. Air Force Academy. The study found that a teacher's gender had little to no effect on male students, but that "it has a powerful effect on female students' performance in math and science classes, their likelihood of taking future math and science courses, and their likelihood of graduating with a [science, technology, engineering, or math] degree."

At the U of M, women already outnumber men in doctoral programs in several disciplines, from arts and education to medicine, where there are 67 women and 49 men enrolled.



SUPPLIED

The lone architecture doctoral student is also a woman.

But in the areas where women most often make the poorest showing, they are still far behind. There are only 26 women working alongside 150 men to achieve doctorates in engineering, and in the hard sciences, the ratio is 44 women to 82 men.

"We have to recognize that there are still a lot of general and internalized stereotypes that as a society we impose, which we are slowly overcoming"

MEAGHAN LABINE
PRESIDENT, U OF M GRADUATE
STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

According to StatsCan, of all the doctorate recipients in Canada in 2007-08, 55 per cent planned to work. Half of the women who

intended to work after receiving their degree, wanted to work in universities and colleges.

These women will be teaching more young men and women, and the mere fact of their presence if they are standing at the front of a science or math class may encourage their female students to continue on in their fields.

The good news — at least for disciplines that already boast a healthy percentage of women at the upper educational levels — comes in the UC Davis study. Having women teaching encourages the women who are studying from them. Their confidence in their abilities is higher and they are more likely to obtain degrees.

The problem now seems to be encouraging more women to continue from a masters program to a doctorate, especially in sciences and engineering.

"One method to address gender imbalance is by promoting gender equality and balance within the administration and faculty," Labine said. She felt this would be more effective than simply "trying to get more female students through the door."

Students okay with tuition increases, budget cuts: study

TANNARA YELLAND
CUP Prairies & Northern Bureau Chief

SASKATOON (CUP) — When students know their university is facing a budget crisis they are willing to accept both tuition increases and budget cuts, according to a new study.

Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA), a research and strategy group for higher education clients, found that when asked to consider a university's situation in dealing with a budget crisis, most students are willing to see their tuition increase.

Only one student in six said they wanted tuition frozen at any cost and more than one-third of students would accept a five per cent tuition increase if it were coupled with budget cuts of 7.5 per cent. Another third said a tuition increase of 10 per cent and budget cuts of five per cent would be acceptable.

University of Alberta Students' Union Vice President (Academic) James Eastham disagrees with the

assertion that negative reactions to tuition have to do with a lack of awareness over an institution's financial situation. He says that the U of A does communicate with students, but that doesn't mean tuition increases will be well-received.

"I would say that the current situation that we have [at the U of A] with all of the consultation that we get is very good at helping us to understand why the university is in the positions that they are," he said.

"But I don't necessarily think that it will make us happy that tuition is going up or that budgets are being cut."

University of Manitoba Students' Union President Heather Laube said in a recent email that despite being involved in planning the U of M's budget each year, students "unfortunately are often a minority voice on the [budget advisory] committee," especially when asking for lower tuition.

Laube said she finds the main

benefit to sitting on the committee is not in directing policy and funding, but in "obtaining advance information on what the next year's university budget will look like."

The study found that "while [students] think it might be appropriate for a university to ask students to pay more to close a budget gap, they also want to see the pain shared," but as Laube explained, students often feel they have little say in how funds are actually allocated.

Associate Vice President (Risk Management Services) Phillip Stack at the U of A said that students are involved in budget planning and continued by saying that "it's critical that students actively participate in the process."

At the U of A, the presidents of the undergraduate and graduate students' unions sit on several committees that see the budget, as well as the university's board of governors, who approves the budget. There is also a student-at-large position on the board.