

Do Something Now Campaign

November 26, 2007

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Lakehead University recently launched the “Do Something Now Campaign” in an attempt to promote student activism, and to help motivate students to take action in support of contemporary global issues they feel strongly about.

In a recent web bulletin, issued by the Office of Communications, Lakehead University spokespersons had this to say:

As part of its mission, Lakehead University is committed to educating students to become good leaders and independent critical thinkers and to develop an awareness of their social and environmental responsibilities. Because of the urgency posed by environmental and socio-economic issues, Lakehead University is increasing its efforts to draw attention to relevant academic programs, and courses that have been in the University curriculum as well as many relevant research and other initiatives in collaboration with community partners.

On the “Do Something Now” homepage, it reads:

The challenges we face as Canadians and as citizens of the world are many. Among them Climate Change, War, Poverty, and Pollution are at the forefront. They are far reaching, complex and, at times, overwhelming. But no matter how daunting, they demand our attention. Like you, we at Lakehead University don’t know all the answers. But we do know we offer a place that encourages the exploration of the issues and recognizes the importance of dialogue. We believe that solutions can be found in taking action.

The site, divided into four main sections, which each contain a small blurb concerning each of the issues listed above, and links to additional websites which enterprising students can turn to for further information, is intended to be an informative and user friendly interface. With “Ask an Expert”, “Take a Quiz” and “Did you know” sections, the website provides small sound bites of information concerning each of these issues.

The section, “How can Lakehead help me Do Something?” links perspective students to the **myLakehead** section of the University’s website, and provides students with a breakdown of all the University’s programs, which the administration feel encourage students to “become good leaders and independent critical thinkers and to develop an awareness of their social and environmental responsibilities” (Lakehead University, n.d.).

As a current, multidisciplinary student, studying courses from a wide range of programs including Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism, Anthropology, Biology and Philosophy, I found the links to each of the above disciplines uninformed, and lacking in detail.

While each section gave an overview of the program, they were so glossed over, and sugar coated, they failed to actually explain how a degree in any of those programs, with the possible exception of Philosophy, would actually help a perspective student “Do Something”. Missing from these program overviews, was a description of key courses - like OUTD 2210 – Theory and Practice of Leadership, which deals specifically with issues such as critical pedagogy, service leadership, and experiential education intended at building strong cross cultural community ties, or OUTD 3230 -Ecological Literacy which examines the implications of ecological literacy for developing sustainable outdoor recreation, parks and tourism practices, and through fieldwork encourages students to participate in a hands-on study of the Lakehead University, and Thunder Bay bioregion, including cultural dimension, ecological processes and indicators of bioregion health all while placing an emphasis on place-based awareness - could help educate students about practical ways they can effect change.

Furthermore, the section which dealt with the Anthropology department, failed to mention the various courses such as ANTH 3811 - Issues in National and International Health, which discusses the implication of poverty and health care access of remote communities, or ANTH 3811- Culture, Identity and Canadian Multiculturalism which deals with issues including national identity, and community building. The Philosophy section was devoid of any emphasis on the Critical Thinking, Environmental Philosophy, Professional Ethics and Business Ethics courses, all of which help to instill in students an ability to critical evaluate and examine modern issues and case studies, and formulate and defend their own perspectives on them.

Further to this lack of planning and poor website design, the Climate Change section, lists responses to students’ “Ask an Expert” inquiries, however these responses are simply poorly thought out blanket responses, and are thus completely inappropriate. One concerned individual writes “I am in grade 8 at Victoria School, and I am worried about global warming. I want to make a big difference - how?” The response from Lakehead faculty is that the student should ride their bike to school, buy energy efficient appliances and light bulbs, and that “down the road” they should become political.

This response is inappropriate largely because no grade eight student is going to find themselves in a position to be driving themselves to school, nor are they likely to be the one buying major appliances for their home. Furthermore, it implies that the student has to **wait** to make a difference, and can only do that later on and by becoming political.

A more appropriate response would be to suggest that they talk to their parents about “greening” their home, remind them that turning off electronics - like their computer or gaming consoles - when they are done can make a big difference, or that they start a recycling or rain barrel program at their school, volunteer to teach younger

students about global warming, or write to their MP's. An even better suggestion would be to encourage the student to attend Lakehead University's Eco-literacy summer camp, where they can learn more about their bioregion, and about practical ways they can limit or reduce their carbon footprint.

In the "LU Contests Enter to Win" section, web browsers can enter two contests, one designed for High school student groups, the other for individuals, in which they have a chance to win a mini-library of "Do Something" books (valued at approximately \$1000), if the University chooses to recognize their activism project.

Of greater value, to students actively engaged in learning about how modern issues affect the global community, would be possible funding to extend the breadth of the impact of their activism projects. Instead of a series of books in which they can read about other people who have, or are, making a difference, this money would enable them to continue to make a difference themselves. The mini-library of books would make a more appropriate second-place prize.

Criticism of the campaign's poorly designed website aside, the very fact that the University is encouraging student activism, and critical thinking, is completely hypocritical. The University administration has a consistent record of not paying attention to the desires and demands of an actively involved student body. Of specific note, are the recent issues and student protests concerning the closure of the C.J. Saunder's Fieldhouse swimming pool, the Land Swap proposals and building the Overpass across campus, between the ATAC and the Bora Laskin buildings, all of which have to date been ignored or trivialized by the University administration, despite its claims that the University is a place "that encourages the exploration of the issues and recognizes the importance of dialogue" (Lakehead University, n.d.).

These issues are ones in our own backyard, and ones that the student body has consistently voiced their objections about, all of which have fallen on the deaf ears of the University administration. They continue to push for a pool closure, despite the value it adds to Canada's #1 "Value Added University", they continue to broker land swap deals which will decrease the aesthetic value of our campus – marketed as being surrounded by nature, pushing these deals forward like they did with the attempted townhall hearing last reading week, in which students were invited to respond to the proposal to trade University land to the bordering Golf Course when they were all away for Spring Break, or the actual building of the unsightly, and shadily motivated overpass between the ATAC and Bora Laskin buildings which attempts to increase student safety by elevating drunk drivers 30 feet above students so they can no longer just run them over, they can fall on them as well, and which will conveniently help facilitate access to the new Hockey Arena, Dr. Gilbert hopes to build on campus when the Thunderwolves contract is finished with the Fort William Gardens.

If the University wants to encourage critical thinking, service leadership, and student activism, it should not be restricted to those issues the University deems appropriate. Furthermore, the University should be providing prospective students, and

inquiring web browsers, with information about specific courses (within each discipline) that will enable them to gain the *education for change* they desire, as well as on the ways they can **actually** effect change in their daily lives.

References

Office of Communications, Lakehead University. (n.d.) Communications Office Website. Retrieved November 20th, 2007, from <http://communications.lakeheadu.ca/?display=page&pageid=118>

Lakehead University (n.d.) *Do Something Campaign Website*. Retrieved, November 18th, 2007 from <http://dosomethingnow.ca/>