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Incoming students at Eastern Mennonite Seminary were unpleasantly surprised shortly after their arrival this semester when they learned that EMS was going to offer them virtually none of their expected financial aid. Speaking anonymously, several seminary students told Weather Vane that they felt EMS had been far too optimistic in portraying their chances of receiving aid, though all said that the seminary had warned them that the aid they might not fit in this year’s budget. 

EMS’s website describes several generous assistance plans, including the Ministry Leadership Award, a "grant for full tuition plus a stipend for living expenses" offered to "up to three new M.Div [Masters of Divinity] students," and "need-based grants...up to full tuition less non-repayable aid.”

"Seminarians do not get the same kind of federal financial aid that undergrads do...
Some of our graduates walk away with $50,000 in educational debt" 

Seminarians generally agreed that the awards they had been promised played a large role in their selection of EMS for ministerial training. The problem arose out of a mix of circumstances: the increased cost per student of graduate education as opposed to undergraduate tuition, the financial difficulty in which the university finds itself during a nationwide economic downturn, and the recent end of income from the Lilly Grant awarded to the seminary in 1998. The actual cost of operating Eastern Mennonite University is thousands of dollars more per student than students pay in tuition, creating a need for the university to raise funds through other sources such as private donations. The seminary has often perceived itself as operating in a different way from the undergraduate university regarding student financial aid. For instance, because of smaller class sizes and requirements that professors have in mind, the kinds of salaries ahead that professionals in other graduate programs across campus foresee. Some of our graduates walk away with $50,000 in educational debt.

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