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College Days, College Nights' producer Terence McKeown (left) and director John Zaritsky.

University student life, one of the focuses of former premier Bob Rae's recent review of higher education in Ontario and the subject of American novelist Tom Wolfe's latest best-seller, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, now receives some intense and intimate scrutiny in a new documentary directed by award-winning Canadian filmmaker John Zaritsky.

College Days, College Nights, which airs as a three-part series on The Documentary Channel on consecutive nights starting tomorrow at 8 p.m., combines self-footage (students were given video cameras to record their personal diaries) with film crew footage shot mostly by eight University of British Columbia (UBC) film school interns who followed the lives, both on and off campus, of 16 UBC undergraduates over a 10-month period during the 2003-04 school year.

One of the interns, Melody Chan, now 22 and a graduate of UBC's Film Production program who is working on independent feature films in and around Vancouver, says the intimate nature of filming fellow students was both the most difficult and most fascinating aspect of the project. Her assignments included filming the captain of the women's basketball team overcoming a serious injury and a fraternity member trying to juggle social events with doing well enough academically to be accepted into medical school.

"Working on the documentary had a big impact on my life. I found documentary filmmaking to be just as important and worthwhile as making a feature film. I'd do it again in a second," says Chan.

Zaritsky says what impresses him about the documentary is "how video diaries lent a confessional-type quality to the students' stories, and a candor and honesty to the film that might not otherwise have been achieved."

Zaritsky, like Rae, is a member of the baby boom generation who attended university during the activist, but also more carefree, period of the late 1960s, says filming *College Days, College Nights* showed him how much university has changed.

"Students today are involved in a more competitive environment that seems to leave less time for the fun and frivolity that I remember. They are more serious because they have to be. There seems to be fewer spots for more people in everything from academic placements to part-time jobs. They are a product of their times," Zaritsky comments.

However, if this documentary is to be considered representative of university student life in Canada, then the present generation is not the sex-crazed, job-obsessed lot you might think. As Chan notes, much of what she recorded had to do with how people cope with life's adversities.

Michael Burns, director of programming for The Documentary Channel, claims that,

with 25 cameras used over the 10 months of filming, the three-part documentary produced for the specialty channel is "the most exhaustive study of university life ever attempted in Canada."

The Documentary Channel is a partnership of Corus Entertainment, the CBC, the National Film Board and four independent film producers.

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