

Open letter to students:

As we returned to classes on Monday, many of us were broadsided by the news of a possible faculty strike here at UPEI. With our futures so heavily intermingled with the events which may play out over the coming months, many students are understandably concerned. I share the same worries as everyone else - in-fact I have only three more courses until graduation and no one is going to stand between me and my degree.

Two months ago, elected student councilors began speaking about the real possibility of a faculty strike. At the time, we were not facing the obvious anxiety many of us now feel. Yet, we prepared and are now well aware of the implications a possible strike may have on our members - the students of UPEI. As always, we will be following every development very closely over the remainder of the term.

On January 2nd, two weeks after conciliation broke, the Faculty Association entered into a legal strike position. To be fair, I fail to mention that the option of a lockout was equally afforded to the University Board of Governors; however, the University President, Wade MacLauchlan has publically stated that the university would never initiate a lockout - so for that reason I will only speak of a Faculty Association strike.

Strike an option, media frenzy

So the question on campus is now - will there be a strike? To be frank, no one really knows. At any time, the Faculty Association could meet and vote on the issue, but for now there are no imminent plans of that nature. So what's next? Business as usual, as we encourage and hope that both parties return to the table and work towards an agreement. I sincerely aspire that both parties understand the real implications their decisions will have on everyone registered as a student here at UPEI.

Understandably, now that the breakdown in conciliation has gone public, both sides are actively marketing their respective positions. At such times, public support can be crucial in tipping the scale towards either party. We may have already seen marketing efforts from both sides and I hope that everyone appreciates that both may carry some rather biased information. As a suggestion, remember whose side is presenting the information, then perhaps see what the other side may offer on the same issue. Presumably, we are all fairly well educated, so I hope everyone looks at the wide array of information both at arm's length and with an open mind, while balancing the facts from both parties.

Amongst the initial exchanges of information between both the University and the Faculty Association, we at the Student Union

have two pressing concerns. To begin, many of our professors have discussed the present situation within the classroom. We understand that most are simply offering information to students at request; however, we honestly feel as though it may be inappropriate as one could presume that such actions may promote a specific position. Is it not a conflict of interest, or even an abuse of trust? At times in my university career a professor could have likely convinced me that pigs can fly because they have been quite impressionable on me. We all trust our professors and respect their intelligence and opinions, and on that note one could easily be swayed towards supporting them and their association. The issue of support is not the problem, rather it's the issue of using their very respected and sometimes feared status to promote their positions within the classroom. Professors may in fact be abusing our trust, likely without intending to do so. To avoid the confusion, how about we leave it out of the classroom.

Secondly, much discussion has circulated around what would happen in the event of a strike, would the term be cancelled? The answer is not likely. Never has a Canadian university professors' strike led to the cancellation of a term. In most cases the term has simply been extended. But it seems

as though both parties are presuming that this fact eliminates problems for students.

To that point, I can assure everyone involved that it most certainly does not. What do we tell those students who have international education visas, students with leases which expire in May or who live in our dorms? What do we tell those with jobs waiting for them, co-op terms, deadlines for acceptance to grad schools, or research studies coming due? How about students in nursing or AVC with rotations planned for May, or those education students who are scheduled for their practicums. What do you tell the class of 2004? To be sure, they would find a strike unacceptable.

In the end, a faculty strike at UPEI would hurt us all - students, faculty and administration. Many would be disadvantaged, reputations would be tarnished and our closeness as a small institution forever damaged. We are lucky to enjoy this great small university and are honoured with the quality of teaching which we receive. As a union of students who would be dearly effected in the event of a strike, we hope all sides show a renewed commitment towards returning to the table. It is not merely dollars being discussed - but also all of our futures.

Sincerely,
Brandon MacKenzie
President, UPEISU

**Comment on what you read:
Letters to the Editor: tlloyd@upeil.ca**