

# This year's student union: A year for improvement

BY TODD MACLEAN

Recently, criticism has been directed at the UPEI Student Union for being an "invisible" and "useless" institution.

The SU Notice Board, a service available to students via their e-mail accounts, was the showcase for a lot of such complaints and remarks last week, and the main point that was addressed was the lack of "good" entertainment at the Barn this year.

"How come there wasn't all that much in the way of bands coming here?" UPEI student Ryan Pollard posted to the Notice Board.

"This is PEI," responded Tim Willis, VP Operations. "If you want to see cutting edge alternative bands, go to Toronto." Willis added that most Island bar patrons want to do is "listen to the same kind of music while they drink their same kind of beer."

Many have criticized the entertainment at the barn because of the contrast between last year's lineup of popular bands that came to the Barn (including Sloan, 54-40 and I Mother Earth) compared with those that have come this year.

"The kind of bands that came this year have been good bands, but not well known," said Dan James, another student contributor to the Notice Board, and member of a local original band.

"If they want it to be, they [the Barn] could remain a force in the Island music scene," James wrote. "But at the same time, you can't crap on them unless you know the details behind why they're not doing what they did before."

According to Tim Willis, the reason behind the absence of off-Island talent has been

the lack of funds.

"The VPO's from years before have lost a lot of money," explained Willis. "In comparison to years past, I'm a little more conservative in spending."

Last year, the total revenue generated from the Barn's activities was \$32,946.66, with a total cost of \$58,176.96 -- similar to the figures of previous years. But this year's budget is roughly \$24,300 in income and \$36,500 in expenses.

"I came to this job not knowing what to expect," Willis said. "By the time I got comfortable with it, the budget was running out."

Willis added that a financial strain has also been felt by students.

"Students just don't have the money this year."

It is also difficult for the VP Operations to establish rapport with agents that promote high profile bands on tour, largely due to the position's consistent, yearly turnover. This problem will soon be rectified, though, as a full-time, non-student Operations Manager will soon be implemented.

"The new Operations Manager will be in charge of the Panther Lounge, and the entertainment," explained Steven Ramsay, UPEI SU VP Finance. "Then the VP Operations will just focus on student societies and suborgs, which was the original purpose for that position anyway."

This new position will not exist for yet another couple of years -- most likely not until the new SU Building is constructed. In the meantime, the VP Operations will just have to keep things going the way

they are.

"The candidate for next year is a third year business student," said Willis, who himself is a Science major. "I have high hopes for him, with his fundamental concepts of money management, and he'll also have a little more room to work with."

"He [Willis] did a good job this year," commented Janice Broderick, SU President. "We can't survive and support the idea of testing out bands that haven't become familiar here yet. He realized that at the first of the year, and then found that happy medium."

In regards to the SU Notice Board being a medium for Student Union criticizing, Broderick said, "It's good that we have it for information, but it becomes a problem when it gets into personal slights."

Broderick is not only referring to the accusation against Willis, but also to the comment that described the SU as being "useless."

"I wonder if that person has any conception of what the SU is, and what our goals for the year are."

Pollard explained that he doesn't think that UPEI's Student Union gets their message out well enough.

"They are an invisible entity," Pollard said. "I'm in the dark as to what they do, and I think a lot of people are. You'd think that the Student Union Notice Board would be a place to hear about things that are going on. It seems like a misused and under-used resource."

"I can see where someone could get the misconception that we weren't doing

something," said Ramsay. "This year, we concentrated a lot on fixing internal problems, mainly with re-organizing the relationship between suborgs and throughout the office. If it wasn't looked at now, it was going to be a problem forever."

"We tried to be as open

as possible with the info we thought we could get out," said Broderick. "People are probably looking for a big thing that we did, like the CIMN situation a couple of years ago. Productivity has been internal this year. It's definitely been a year for improvement."

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