

Of Politics... Democracy 101

by Marnie Wolf

As the end of the year approaches, it is time once again to look back and evaluate 1995/96. In particular, let us take a look at our Student Council. Each year we pay student fees into the Student Union, but do you know where your money goes? The obvious answer would be found by looking around at the numerous services that the Student Union provides for us fellow students. First, of course, we have the *Panther Prints*. Our student fees allow for production of this fine publication. Let us not forget to remember the wonderful staff at the *Panther Prints* who allow students to express their views on things like politics, smoking and sex. Next, let us take a look at the Yearbook. The Student Union fees allow for production of a yearbook for UPEI students, however, if you're not a senior, you still have to pay for one, so... remind me again why we have to pay for these books? Aren't the fees enough?

Now let us move on to CIMN. CIMN has been in operation for years, and currently boasts the largest volunteer base of all three Student Union "sub-organizations". In addition, CIMN was supposed to be going FM this year, enabling them to service a greater number of students on the airwaves. Finally, we have the Student Council. What does the Student Council do for us? Well, they represent us, and our views, and...well, what else do they do? I guess they do political stuff for us...or something.

Let us now take a look back upon the year and try to remember all that our Student Council has done for us. Hmmmm. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is that whole CFS thing. What was that all about anyway? From what I understand, or at least what our Student Council representatives told us, CFS was an evil, bad, money-sucking organization. We students were being ripped off by CFS, and were only getting a measly Student Saver card in return (incidentally, the card really sucks). So, what else has the Student Union done for us? Well I haven't heard anything about tuition rates going down, so I'm going out on a limb here to suggest that perhaps the Student Union hasn't gotten our decrease in tuition. According to last week's *Panther Prints*,

and almost every other media source in town, our Student Union has cut funding to CIMN, our only radio station on campus. I wonder why? Have they done something evil that we are, as of yet, unaware of? Did someone say something naughty on air? According to our "President Elect", Chris Burns, those kids at CIMN need a lesson in Democracy 101, and according to a report I've heard on CBC Radio, they also need a kick in the butt. Maybe that's why the Student Union pulled the plug, so to speak.

Now correct me if I'm wrong folks, but I thought that because we elect the Student Council that they have to be accountable to us, the students. It certainly doesn't seem to me that this was the case in the CIMN issue. I wasn't informed that CIMN was going to have its funding cut. Some friends of mine said they heard that CIMN was costing the Student Union too much money. Really? I didn't know that...maybe if the Student Union had informed me, I would have known. After reading the *Panther Prints* I must say that I certainly don't have a very positive view of the Student Council. Our VP External, Fidel Murphy, says (about voting on the issue of CIMN) "It's not about representing constituents, it's about making the decision." Excuse me??? As a constituent who votes, I say that you do represent me, so what's the big idea, buddy? Our President, Amber Allin, says that CIMN's proposal for going FM "just didn't do it for me." Okay. Whatever. Well, I'm afraid that the decision to cut CIMN's funding just doesn't do it for me, folks. As far as I'm concerned, this was a major decision. A decision that had to do with our student fees. We had a referendum because of CFS, so why didn't we have one to deal with CIMN? Or, at the very least, why didn't our councilors spread the news and get some feedback on the issue?

All in all, I find myself questioning the worth of a Student Union. I've tried to recall what the Student Union has done in the past year and I only came up with two things the CFS Referendum, and cutting funding to CIMN (Do they have something against organizations whose names begin with the letter "C"?). Before we all start exams, I would like

to leave you all with this pop quiz: (1) Can you name all of your student union executive members? (2) Can you name your council representative? (3) How many times has your representative given you a report on what he or she is doing? (4) Could you answer any of these questions with anything other than a "no" or a zero?

Student Advocacy 101

by Colleen Easter

An ombudsman is a person who facilitates discussion between parties where there has been a conflict. At UPEI the ombudsman is a position set up to help students. When students have problems on campus it is often difficult to know what to do. These problems can come in many forms: a difference of opinion on your grades with a professor, a newspaper article which misrepresents you, a professor who is making racist jokes in class, discrimination against you by the Student Union hiring board, or harassment or threats by another member of the university community.

The university structure is filled with many layers of bureaucracy compounded by the involvement of the Student Union. For every complaint and problem a student has, there is, no doubt, a committee or official waiting to hear it. The problem is finding that person within the confusing structure of the university or student union. This is where the ombudsman takes a role.

When a student takes a problem to the ombudsman, the ombudsman becomes an advocate for the student. He or she becomes directly involved with the student. The ombudsman helps him or her present complaints to the powers that be. The ombudsman intercedes on behalf of the student, making sure they are treated properly and help arbitrate a resolution between the parties. The ombudsman represents the student's interests.

It is very important that the ombudsman is an impartial, non-biased position. In order for it to be effective, all students must believe that they can go to the ombudsman with any complaint. If the ombudsman is associated with any power of the university, such as the

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Student Union, it becomes impossible for the student body to believe that the ombudsman would fairly represent them in any situation. Even a perception of bias detracts from the position.

It is this necessity for impartiality which causes the UPEI Student Union constitution to state the ombudsman may assume no other position on campus while ombudsman.

The ombudsman this year has failed these requirements dreadfully. At the Student Union council meeting of March 24, Chris Burns forsook his role of ombudsman, and donned the role of President Elect. While no one denies him the right to run for President, it is dishonourable for him to assume this position while he still had a duty to the students of UPEI as ombudsman. Burns did not just take the role of President Elect for egocentric reasons, but so he could speak emphatically on a subject before council.

At this meeting, Burns appeared to be in the back pocket of some members of the executive. He spoke at great length supporting the position of two members of executive. Any one who saw this transformation from mild mannered ombudsman to Student Union mouth-piece would have to question his lack of bias.

Chris Burns was in a conflict of interest situation. Students with complaints against the Student Union would no longer be able to rely on him as an unbiased student advocate. He took sides. To me that is a bias. Just the appearance of him being Student Union's lapdog kills the effectiveness of the ombudsman position, and he should have resigned the position before he became the political entity of Mr. President Elect.