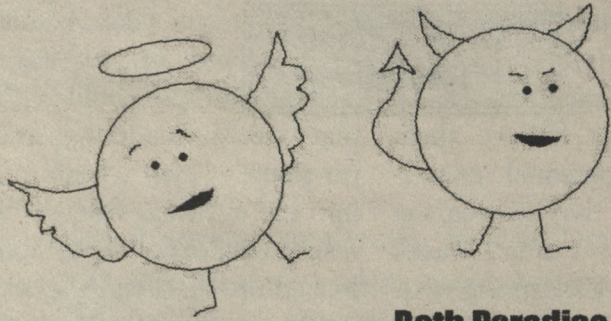


By Jon Smith
Reporter



Both Paradise... cont.

itself, "The Wave" still seems cold and uninspired. It has about as much personality as pubs found in airports, despite the energetic and friendly people that run, work, and maintain it. Despite its undeserving popularity and advertisements, "Myron's" is not the be-all end-all of evening entertainment, and in actuality a good number of students avoid the place. Other bars, lounges, and few-and-far-between cultural centres attempt to fill the gap, and to some extent succeed, but for the most part Charlottetown comes off as little more than a traditional, conservative little community where drinking, though a lot of fun with the right people, is really the only activity around. For students such as myself, whose idea of entertainment doesn't always involve being drunk, and for new students who are getting their first impression of university life in Charlottetown, this can be both extremely boring and irritating.

I do realize that non-students live here too, and with that I must admit there's much to like about Charlottetown. City Cinema and Baba's Lounge for example, or Reading Well bookstore, or the fact that I can walk or drive the streets at 3 AM and not really fear either being struck down or running over drunk pedestrians. Bigger cities may be much more interesting student centres than Charlottetown, and it's likely that I'll end up wandering their streets eventually, but luckily what art and culture is around here seems largely tied into university connections through both students and citizens who are active in both university and community life. That means that being a student at UPEI allows for some of the greatest opportunities to be exposed to it. Though Charlottetown could do more to promote other aspects of itself, perhaps more students could voice their opinions and interests, and what they'd like to do or see. Until this happens, all the advertising in the world won't hide the fact that the Charlottetown is far from a student paradise.

In a decision made by the UPEI Board of Governors as part of an attempt to save money and amend fees, there have been changes proposed to the Centennial Scholarship Program as part of the budget presented in April of 2004. Currently the program in place allows for free classes for anyone over the age of 60, and allows for a maximum of three courses per semester to be taken. The proposed changes would limit such students to one course per semester. Some have voiced opposition to the change, including the student organization MAPUS (Mature and Part-time University Students Association).

At the Senate meeting last spring in which the budget with the proposed change was discussed, Dr. Clive Keen, the director of the Centre for Life-Long Learning, expressed some concern over issues such as "communications, [and] how such change would be received". MAPUS's Senate Representative, Margaret Doyle, was also present at the unveiling of the budget and noticed the proposed amendment. Initially MAPUS was concerned that the changes would be made along with all other fee changes on July 1st, 2004 without any incoming or current centennial scholarship students being notified.

Under the old rules, many mature full-time students could begin their degrees by taking out regular student loans to pay for courses. At the age of sixty they would automatically qualify for the scholarship program mid-degree, and provided they maintained the full-time status of three courses per semester, they were not obligated to pay back the loans until after their degree was completed. The concern that MAPUS has expressed is that if they are limited to one course per semester, they will become obligated to pay back their student loans with the loss of full-time status. Another concern is the time it would take to complete a degree. If a student has started under the regular rules and then is restricted to one per semester, in many cases or more it would take more than a decade to complete the degree.

According to Margaret Doyle, the biggest problem with the whole situation is in regards to contacting students. Due to privacy laws, no official list can be obtained from the Registrar's Office indicating how to get in contact with students whom the new rule would directly affect.

The best MAPUS can do is go through a mature students list and try and deduce the number of actual students from birth dates. Unfortunately, most of the older students do not have home access to e-mail, and can only check their accounts sporadically from the campus. Liz Senter, president of MAPUS, feels that the organization should have access to the needed information.

"I understand that Student Union is able to obtain a list, and we're a sub-organization of the Student Union because we are funded and we're non-profit. I don't understand why we are not able to obtain a list of our students."

MAPUS understands the difficulty of producing such a list, and that keeping track of all applicable students is difficult. Dr. Keen noted that he had been informed that the motion was a late addition to the budget, and that any suggestions of a conspiracy of any sort are completely unfounded. With this MAPUS agrees, but the organization does note that they're disappointed the administration, despite having a number of weeks notice, did not appear to make any formal attempt to alert students to the changes. It's felt that had it not been caught, the change would have quietly gone into effect, leaving many students in a bind come registration time.

For the time being, the change to Centennial Scholarship rules has been postponed until further debate can be had. The real problem seems to be that both sides of the issue have dealt with many assumptions and incomplete information, making things difficult for both MAPUS and the Administration. Dr. Keen suggested that perhaps the issue gives cause for the whole scholarship program to be reevaluated, perhaps "grand-fathering" or adjusting the rules for special cases, such as students who have half their degree completed when they turn sixty. He also suggests that the whole idea needs to be looked at, as the current system seems unfair to many students both young and mature. For the time being, MAPUS simply hopes that their students get word of the possible change, and are given a chance to be fully informed so that the university can continue to smoothly deal with students of all ages.