

Of mice and MAPUS

Suggested for mature readers

As another article in this week's *X-Press* explains in more detail, the Mature and Part-time University Students (MAPUS) organization has attracted some criticism with a newsletter they recently released to their members. The letter questions the funding of the UPEI Student Union (SU) by mature full-time students, inferring that the SU is not representative of mature students and that there are other funding outlets (presumably via MAPUS) that might better serve the needs of mature and part-time students at UPEI. For example, they cite the *X-Press* as an SU expenditure that might be replaced by, they suggest, an improved student medical plan (a patently ridiculous proposal in that the student fees allotted to the *X-Press* annually would not even come close to funding such a plan- to say nothing of the fact that our present medical plan is provided through the CFS, and our CFS membership is paid for through SU). While MAPUS has acted rashly in publicizing an uninformed opinion on other campus groups, their error in this regard is symptomatic of a larger problem of many universities- how misinformation and confrontationalism accomplish nothing constructive among the organizations within a given institution.

This incident is a textbook case of the confusion and animosity that can result from a lack of communication or respect between groups in a given community. Some SU members were understandably upset with the MAPUS action since it was taken without any consultation of the group it discussed- the Student Union. MAPUS has not raised their concerns in recent Student Council meetings, nor have they attended Senate meetings for some time. Though they have two seats on Council, one of them with voting rights, MAPUS complains of being "powerless" within the Council. Despite this, no attempt was made to discuss these concerns with SU, or the *X-Press* for that matter. This being the case, MAPUS is in no position to criticize, since they have not brought their grievances to light through any of the forums made available for these purposes; nor are they, despite their claims, any less well-represented than any other group within the student population (though MAPUS is admittedly a large subgroup, making up 38% of the student body by their own estimate). The newsletter seemed to be both unexpected and unwarranted, a hit-and-run tactic. The actual executive of MAPUS, at first reluctant to comment at all, were soon careful to downplay the implications of the incident in subsequent talks with SU officials and *X-Press* reporters. Some MAPUS reps tried to distance themselves from the matter altogether, though in the end MAPUS president Gail MacDonald stood by the newsletter while trying to minimize the significance of the contentious material therein.

However indirect or unintentional the inferred criticism of the SU or the *X-Press* was, MAPUS is in a bit of a glass house itself, and thus hardly in a good position to cast the first stone. Members have questioned the organization's value for some time, and the *X-Press* fielded several calls from MAPUS members last year complaining about the unaccountability of the executive and suggesting an investigation of the group's finances and budgeting. Comparatively few MAPUS members are active in the organization, and MacDonald herself said a chief goal of the newsletter was to try and involve the "silent majority" of MAPUS members by getting their input. Many of the group's members seem uncertain about MAPUS- its mandate, its budgeting, its goals, its executive, and what- if anything -it is accomplishing for its members. Complaints about the organization persist to the present, including a letter from a MAPUS member printed in this issue. While MAPUS has as much right to exist as any other student organization, it is, in light of its own questionable viability, in a very poor position to question the value of other groups. If any organization's value can be called into question at present, it is their

own- some of their own members have said so.

This is not to say that the SU or related groups like the *X-Press* are above scrutiny- far from it. The finances of the Student Union, which support organizations like the *X-Press* and CIMN Radio, are subject to approval by Student Council and the SU executive, who are elected by the student body, including mature full-time students. The current SU president, Todd King, is a mature student himself, and most of his predecessors over the past several years have been mature students. To say that the Council, the SU, or suborganizations like the *X-Press* are any less representative of mature students than they are of the rest of the student body is ludicrous. If mature full-time students are poorly represented in the SU it is because they have not taken a sufficiently active role in it. They have every opportunity afforded "traditional" students within the organization and then some.

Beyond the purportedly dubious value of MAPUS as an organization and its largely unfounded grievances, there is a larger issue herein- the questionable wisdom of dividing the student body into special interest groups with varying priorities and agendas. Groups like MAPUS have a great potential value in representing the interests of their members, but there is no reason that this should be pursued in competition with other campus organizations, particularly one such as the Student Union, which counts all full-time students as members. It is both unnecessary and unproductive to promote a special interest group over a group seeking to represent the interests of the majority of the student populace. It is also small-minded and sadly deluded for any group such as MAPUS to try to question a student institution such as the *X-Press* on the grounds of the subjective priorities of a single minority group- and just as wrong to assume all members of that group share these priorities. Many mature students read the *X-Press*, and many have expressed satisfaction with the publication. For a handful of MAPUS execs to suggest, however casually or hypothetically, that the *X-Press* is less worthy of support than other programs, is monstrosly presumptuous on their part, and wholly without substantiation. At least one MAPUS member involved in the newsletter said, in an unofficial statement, that the *X-Press* contained no relevant or informative features (along with somewhat more insulting and even more wildly inaccurate comments unworthy of addressing in print). Whatever their tastes, any attentive and thorough readers of our publication would find it impossible to prove this, and the comment betrays the ignorance of the newsletter's author(s). The extent of their careful examination of our publication is perhaps reflected by their misspelling of the paper's name in the newsletter ("*Express*")- amply indicative of the careful scrutiny that must have gone into their judgement.

As stated, MAPUS has a right to pursue its own agenda and the interests of its members. To do this in competition or conflict with other student organizations, though, is both unnecessary and unproductive. Beyond the fact that MAPUS may not have its own affairs in order, it should pursue positive self-advancement on its own merits rather than the negative tactic of seeking gain at another organization's expense. Moreover, MAPUS should perhaps spend less time criticizing the student government and more time trying to work within it and the rest of the university community. Both the student government and the student media (*X-Press*, CIMN) are available to them if they wish to voice their concerns or participate to a greater degree in the effort to represent their interests. If not, they have no one to blame for their supposed powerlessness but themselves.

Sean McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief