

Beyond Tuition: Student Capital Campaigns are a Time-Honoured, Controversial Tradition

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SACKVILLE, N.B. (CUP) -- Universities across Canada have been asking students to contribute to capital campaigns for more than a decade. While the amounts vary from a mere \$16 million at the University of Western Ontario to an incredible \$230 million at Queen's University, universities take a variety of steps to admit, or restrict, student input on fee increases. But regardless of how it's done, universities are increasingly looking to students to help fund major capital projects.

Major fundraising campaigns at Queen's University, The University of Western Ontario, the University of Alberta, The University of Regina, the University of New Brunswick and several others have collectively engaged in hundreds of millions of dollars worth of fundraising activity in the past two decades. But rather than approaching the students directly for funds, these universities have used the students' unions as a go-between in order to assess student reaction to the fees. Student reaction has been mixed. The University of Toronto's student union sent their students to a referendum in the spring of 2002 asking all

students to approve a \$25 per student fee. That fee, however, would nearly triple after most of those students had graduated, rising to \$70 three years later. That referendum was soundly defeated with 78 per cent of undergraduate students voting not to accept the increased fee.

Queen's University followed the pattern three years later in the spring of 2005. In an attempt to help fund a massive \$230 million student life and athletic center, dubbed the Queen's Center, students were asked to provide \$71 per year for the first five years. After five years had passed, the fee would be increased to \$141 for an undetermined time frame until a total of \$25 million had been collected.

The fee at Queen's University was approved by approximately two thirds. Exact numbers are not available because no specific votes were actually counted. Rather than hold a referendum on campus to measure student reaction, the student union made the motion part of their Annual General Meeting which was held in a room able to hold a maximum of 800 students. Queen's University's student population is approximately 15,000. While the vote was constitutional as per the regulations of the union, it sparked protest and letters to the edi-

tor of the university's student newspaper, The Journal, arguing that since the meeting was held at the same time as some evening classes, some students were unable to attend and vote. The University of Western Ontario, however, is the only school to hold a capital campaign referendum which resulted in a lawsuit. Over five years between 1991-96, students contributed approximately \$16 million toward a new Student Life Center.

This amount represented approximately 98 per cent of the total construction costs. The Students' Union then launched a lawsuit against the university, arguing that since students had provided the vast majority of the funds to build the center, they should have the right to administer it and reap revenues from it.

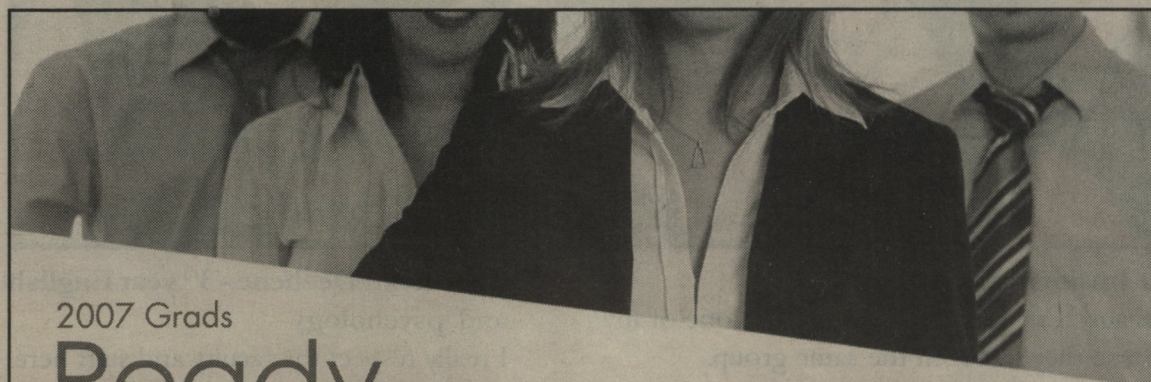
The lawsuit was successful, but students at Western now contribute approximately \$13 per year in order to help pay for the mortgage the university had to take on in order to pay the remainder of the construction costs. In Atlantic Canada the University of New Brunswick is the latest to have announced a facilities-oriented fee for its students. In the spring of 2005 that university approached the students' union with a proposal to add a \$175 deferred maintenance fee to the stu-

dents of both the Fredericton and Saint John campuses, totaling approximately 12,000 students.

The union agreed to the fee without referendum or forum but did not elicit any negative reaction from the student body. The incoming union in the fall of 2005 expressed their disappointment that no action was taken to bring the issue to the students, but no further action has been taken.

Mount Allison University will hold its referendum at nearly the same time as the University of Regina. Mt. A's referendum will take place on March 30 and 31 while the U of R's will take place on March 28, 29 and 30. The University of Regina is putting forward a referendum to accept \$30 per year from students to a total of \$3.3 million which will go toward a new double hockey arena facility.

Mt. A's referendum question is currently unclear. Originally scheduled for March 23 and 24 to vote on the approval of a \$100 levy (\$15 of which would go to the library and \$85 to the new student centre) it was postponed following negative student reaction. Instead, a survey on what students are willing to pay and to what cause will be held on those dates and the actual referendum on March 30 and 31.



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