

New Student Union president elected; students mostly unaware of election.

By Sarah Murphy
NEWS EDITOR

Few students seemed aware of this fall's by-election, and even fewer voted.

After last spring's twenty five per cent voter turn-out, UPEI Student Union surely would have hoped for the same level of enthusiasm in last month's by-election. But only eight percent of the student population stepped up to the ballot box to cast their vote.

John Desrosiers, newly elected Student Union President does not seem surprised.

"I was kind of disappointed in the turn out, being just eight percent, but at the same time I think that is to expected when it is a by-election," says Desrosiers. "The turnout justifies the time of year."

Desrosiers believes the cause of the low voter turnout may be the fact that the majority of UPEI students did not know that Andrew Peppin, former President had

stepped down. Also, coming in as a replacement, Desrosiers realized having a preset agenda would take a lot of the excitement out of the campaign.

"There was a week and a half of campaigning. But when you are coming in as a replacement there is an agenda set for you, and you really can't say 'this is what I plan on doing...' There has been six months of work done, since the former president had been sworn in in May. So he [Peppin] had all summer to set an agenda, all summer to get used to the system. When there is a by-election in October, your platform as such cannot be as genuine and precise as if you were running in last April's election."

Stephen Lewis, VP Finance and acting Chief Returning Officer in this past election thinks turnout might also have been affected by the positions available for students.

"It was mostly councillor positions and there was the President's position. I

am not saying that one is more important than another, but some people may feel that way."

Lewis realises

unaware of the election. Allan McAlduff, a former councillor believes the Union should have advertised better.

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-John Desrosiers
Newly elected student
union president

that the election may have been a little unexpected for some students. Few students think an election would be necessary only a few weeks into the fall semester.

UPEI students have been known for their lack of participation in Student Union elections and to Lewis, this year's turnout was not a great surprise or disappointment.

"Even on this campus, eight per cent, is a high voter turnout for some elections."

Several students were disgruntled at the fact that they were

"I had no idea there was an election until I saw campaign material."

Other students believed that election results were unsatisfactory and that therefore the results should not be approved.

"Once they [students] saw that everything was done by the book they really didn't have any problems with it," says Lewis. "I don't know if they had an actual complaint or they were just trying to be difficult. They didn't actually say anything about the election, but

they were concerned that there were not enough councillors this year.

Lewis admits that there are fewer councillors than usual on this year's council but that little action can be taken to solve this problem. The positions are likely to remain vacant until the next election, scheduled in the spring of 2000.

"They [councillor positions] were advertised twice, people had a chance to run for them. If they don't do it, we can't go out and actively seek people to do the job, because they are elected positions.

The VP finance insists that students are well represented despite the small number of councillors, with representatives on the Senate, Board of Governors, and in various faculties.

Desrosiers is optimistic about this year and is ready to get down to work.

"I think my first agenda is to get accustomed to all the committees [and suborganizations] that

are already in place. Right now I am in a transition period," says Desrosiers. "My main objective this year is to get people more aware of the student union."

Like many, Desrosiers hears the complaints of students who feel they do not have a voice, but who refuse to participate in student union activities and committees. His first goal for this term is to show these students that the union can give them a voice.

"It [Student Union] is a friendly environment, and it is an advantage to the student to be more aware [of its operations], explains Desrosiers. "I think my second goal is to show to the students who are drive through students, who come here do their fifty minutes or two classes a day, that there is more to this university than actually just parking your car in a parking lot and complaining about the spot."

According to the Union, the new Student Centre will likely play a big role in this. END