

MacLean's on UPEI

Truth or Dare Part I

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The best rankings listed are the best UPEI did. The worst rankings, well, are very indicative of the overall average.

Two sections are very important in the rankings: a) percentage of total operating expenditures, and b) faculty. You would think our reputation nationwide would be important, and it is, but it's a wholly different matter which won't improve unless everything else improves.

A) Where is our money going? UPEI has an operating budget of 7,958\$ per weighted full-time-equivalent student. UPEI spends 3.6% of that on student services, and barely 2% on scholarships, at a time when tuition is increasing and loans are harder to obtain. 40% goes to updating library services, which is great, but only 5% is devoted to maintaining those services. Where does the rest go, and is it used wisely? Who knows!

B) Are we, as students, getting the education we need? UPEI ranked second-to-last in first-year classes taught by tenured or tenure-track professors, and no faculty members have won any national awards. We pay big bucks for courses, but do we get what we need in return? I'm not saying all the professors aren't doing their jobs, but what about those that aren't? What are we to think about a university who is trying to force good professors into early retirement, just to save some money at the expense of our education?

A few major questions arise out of all this:

-What can we do about improving the rankings, or just the university?

-Is anybody listening to our teacher evaluations?

-What are we getting by way of teaching?

-Are we satisfied with the handling of our respective faculties?

-Do tuition increases mean better education?

A plan has been proposed. Starting approximately a week from time you read this article, there will be a booth in the Breezeway of Robertson Library. There you will have the chance to fill out a survey on how you think the university can or should improve, where it needs immediate help, what you think of your professors and your faculty, and suggestions from you. The results of the survey will then be taken to the Student Union and to the President. This is an independent student survey, and all comments will be kept confidential. No names required.

If anybody is interested in forming a committee to help me with this, please email me at cmichaud@upei.ca. This is not to make UPEI look bad, it's to help clean up our reputation.

Stay tuned for Part II, the results of the student survey, and student comments.

Alternatives to CFS

by Kent Driscoll

On January 23 and 24, the students of UPEI will mark their ballot for or against continued membership in the Canadian Federation of Students, an organisation which the UPEI Student Union was involved in founding. CFS acts as a national voice for its members, and one of the main questions of this referendum is what national voice will the students of UPEI have if they do decide to leave.

According to Joe Byrne, the Atlantic region field worker for CFS, there is no other choice for national representation. In a recent interview, Byrne stated, "I don't see an option on the national level for UPEI without CFS at this point."

On the flip side of the argument, Student Union Vice President External Fidel Murphy (and member of the No committee) retorts, "We don't need a national voice which is going to hurt us. We need a national voice that represents our needs. While we agree with CFS's stated goals in tuition lobbying, we don't believe our national body should be taking a stand on issues like abortion."

The obvious alternative for UPEI seems to be the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), which has recently been rocked with by allegations of embezzlement by its former chair. CASA has dealt with these allegations in a swift and open manner, opening their books publicly, but the question of their creditability remains. A problem on this scale has numerous implications for the still infant CASA. CASA devotes itself only to lobbying of government and other tuition issues, while staying clear of the social issues CFS is so fond of.

The Student Union states that they are not actively seeking membership in CASA, but the Student Union has been actively stating a number of things in this debate that do not seem in accordance with their actions. While stating that the Student Union is not officially running the No campaign in this CFS referendum, the No committee includes two of the five executive members of the UPEISU. Of the remaining eleven members of the, most of them are voting members of the Student Council.

Also, while actively stating that the Student Union is not seeking membership in CASA, the person they have approached to represent the No side in the

debate -- which occurred on January 22 in the Pit -- is Kelly Lamrock. Lamrock is the former national chair of CFS, as well as being the president of the UNB Student Union, who are high profile members of CASA. Furthermore, a majority of Student Unions who leave CFS end up joining CASA. Despite all this evidence, VP Fidel Murphy states, "We are not seeking membership in CASA, we will carefully consider our alternatives after the referendum is complete."

Murphy cites other options for the students aside from continued membership in CFS, or a membership in CASA, that would provide a national voice for the students of UPEI. There is a proposed organisation named COAST, which would be an alliance of Atlantic universities, which Murphy believes would be very effective lobbying mechanism, especially in light of the changing nature of university funding. With the provinces having an increased role in deciding where federal money is going, Murphy believes that a more regional voice may be effective.

As for the social issues that CFS endorses, Murphy believes that the students are well represented in WUSC, an organisation of international scope that deals with many of the social issues that CFS deals with. This allows a voice for the students on an international level, as well of freeing them from CFS. The UPEI Student Union are currently members of WUSC.

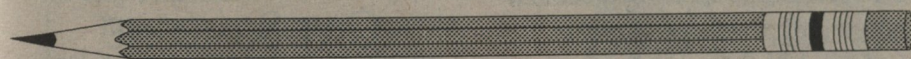
A further option available to the UPEISU, if the students choose to leave, is using the money (6 dollars a year per student) to fund their own lobbyist. This would allow for an increased voice for students on the provincial level where the majority of decision making is made. In the words of Murphy, "We would be better off using the money ourselves."

While these options are available to students if they choose to leave CFS, Murphy is quick to state, "The issue of this referendum is not to join another lobbying group, it is whether or not we want to belong to CFS. It is up to the students to decide. I hope students will listen carefully to both sides, and make their wishes known at the ballot box. Any discussion of other organisations is speculation."

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