

## IN BRIEF

Financial  
controversy  
swirls for

## Scarborough SU

In the midst of a recession, it seems that even student unions aren't exempt from financial disasters.

This Monday the Scarborough Campus Students' Union at the University of Toronto announced the Feb. 6 closure of the campus restaurant Bluff's due to "severe financial difficulties".

Anti-gay activist  
kicked off U of  
Regina campus,  
again

Self-styled Christian activist Bill Whatcott returned to another cold reception at the University of Regina on Jan. 22.

Whatcott, who had been on campus tacking up and handing out flyers entitled "Sodomites and University Academia," was found by campus security at roughly 11:45 a.m. and escorted off the grounds by city police.

"We've gotten concerns from our students, faculty, and staff about materials that they find objectionable," said Barb Pollock, the U of R's vice president of external relations. campus."

*With files from the  
Canadian University Press*

## Online voting boosts turnout in student elections

By Danielle Webb  
CUP Atlantic Bureau Chief

ANTIGONISH (CUP) – The Student Federation of the University of Ottawa's Elections Bureau is hoping the introduction of online voting will help increase voter turnout in this year's student union election.

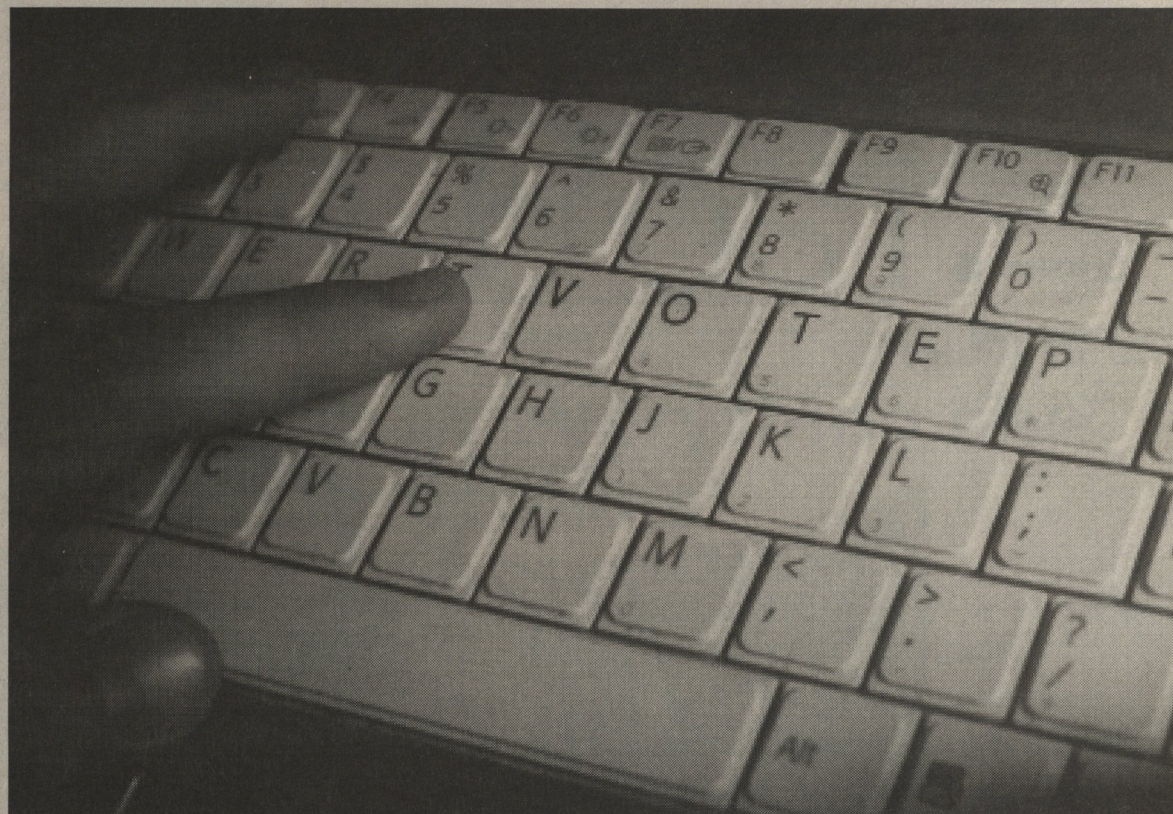
"Following a dismal three per cent voter turnout in a by-election last year, [the Elections Bureau] felt we needed to experiment with new ideas," said Wassim Garzouzi.

"It is a very engaged campus, yet fewer students have been voting in student elections. The CFS referendum was able to get a 22 per cent turnout and protests easily attract a few thousand students, yet when it comes to SFUO elections, there was simply no connection with the students," he continued.

But students at many Atlantic universities are already voting online, slowly increasing voter turnout at universities like Dalhousie in Halifax, N.S., Acadia in Wolfville, N.S. and most notably, St. Francis Xavier in Antigonish, N.S., who saw 50.4 per cent voter turnout in their 2008 election.

Acadia Students' Union president Kyle Steele believes the convenience of being able to vote online is definitely playing a role in their turnout increases over the past four years.

"The accessibility [of online voting] is much more practical than the paper ballot. When people can vote from their beds, you would



More and more students' unions are making the switch to online voting. Catherine Fancy/the Xaverian Weekly

figure voter turnout would be higher," said Steele.

Online voting in Atlantic Canada took off in 2004 with the launch of iVoteOnline by Dalhousie graduate Mike Smit.

Dalhousie has also seen voter turnout increase since adopting Smit's program.

"Before online voting, Dalhousie had a voter turnout of between three and five per cent. Over the years, we have seen turnout range from 12 per cent in our first year and reach up to 21 per cent," said Dalhousie Student Union's chief returning officer Sarah Amyotte.

Online voting has also been instrumental in enabling Dalhousie to reach new demographics of the student body as well, said Amyotte.

"Dalhousie is an institution not limited to our three campuses. We have co-op students all over the world

and even a nursing program in Yarmouth, N.S. With online voting . . . students everywhere, those who only have class one day a week to those who are working for their engineering co-op in Alberta, to those studying in a castle in Glasgow, Scotland, are able to log in and vote," said Amyotte.

The St. FX Students' Union has been using Smit's program since 2005.

"When it works, it's much easier for the voter; they can hop on any computer in the world and vote. It's certainly much easier to increase your actual votes when communication is driving [students] to an online poll, rather than making them walk or drive to a polling station," said Neil Stephen, former VP communications for the St. FX Students' Union.

Stephen's efforts to increase awareness around the elec-

tion and rallying his fellow executives in engaging the student body led to St. FX's 50.4 per cent voter turnout in 2008.

But, Stephen will admit there are problems with the system.

"It's not totally secure, it doesn't look very good, it takes away the one-on-one connection with a polling station — that visible connection is lost," he said.

Despite any negatives, Stephen does believe online voting is here to stay.

"Like it or hate it, [online voting is] not going anywhere. The positives far outweigh the negatives."

The University of Ottawa will be testing their new system from Feb. 10-12.

Garzouzi and his colleagues are aiming for a 30 per cent turnout, which would more than double last year's turnout.