

NEWS

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Contributor

Personal safety while at the bar a concern for all

Throughout the fall, there have been persistent rumours going about campus regarding incidents that occurred in the campus residences that may or may not have involved sexual assault and/or the use of date-rape drugs. Given that they are two very separate issues, but are both ultimately connected with awareness and safety on the campus, I went on a hunt for factual information. I was given the opportunity to speak with Marc Braithwaite of the Residence Services Office on the subject. Stating that first of all the issue was far from black and white, he said that there has been "behaviour" in the residences that has drawn a lot of attention, though he couldn't comment directly on how severe it was because anything of a truly serious nature would have been handed over to the city police. The Residence Services "were not privy to any investigation", and were actually asked to "stand aside" when any report came up so that clean access to the facts could be obtained. However, Braithwaite noted, the majority of students behave themselves very well.

When I contacted Vianne Timmons, the Vice-President of Academic Development, she said that on every campus across Canada, there is always a concern over these issues. However, there is nothing specific about UPEI that sets it apart from other institutions. Education, she noted, is very important. She also said that the UPEI Administration was very concerned about the issues, and that students should in no way feel any concern for their personal safety.

When I asked him about the use of Date Rape Drug Test Cards on campus, he mentioned that originally the cards were sold at the bookstore, but "unfortunately, it didn't seem that a lot of students wanted to purchase the

testers". Therefore, the Residence office has decided to begin a residence campaign that will encourage education on date-rape drugs and any other issue that may come up for students while enjoying themselves where drinks are served and the campus they frequent. Though the issue of doing a broader, campus campaign was brought up, Braithwaite spoke of how the Student Union, and more specifically "The Wave" management, "were not comfortable distributing the coasters in 'The Wave' as a service to their pa-

trons". In an effort to ensure that this information was correct and to find out why, a visit to the Student Union was in order to get their side of the story. Student Union President Clare Henderson said that although the Student Union more than encourages education and personal safety, it doesn't feel that testers are necessary in "The Wave".

"We don't want students to have to be afraid," Henderson said.

After asking around, I determined that such a policy is not unique to the campus bar, as other establishments around town have similar policies and concerns.

However, there are other opinions.

"We don't think distributing [testing] cards, or any type of campaign, is to throw up the alarm bells that it's unsafe," remarked Braithwaite, "It's to promote awareness of the issues."

He was quick to mention that the residences are quite safe, but that sometimes "patrons" on campus, in

residences, or any downtown bar "don't always have the most honest intentions". He said that the issue goes way beyond the campus itself. In light of date-rape drug stories appearing on CBC and in "The Globe and Mail", I spoke with Corporal Mike Quinn of the Charlottetown Police, who reported to

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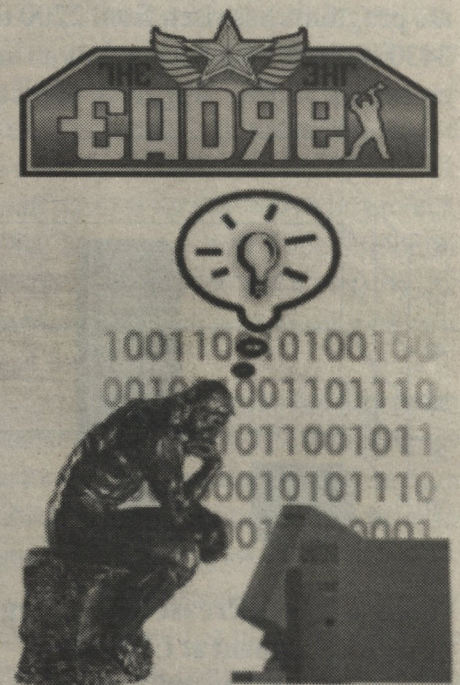
me that there had been nine cases reported in all of Charlottetown as of my speaking with him, but that none had been confirmed due to the difficulty in proving the use of the drugs.

Braithwaite feels that the most effective programs would be student, peer-driven programs that utilize the resources available to them. The big question for him is why UPEI is the only Maritime university that doesn't have a student-driven group(s) that are run independently and work with any Services campaigns. Braithwaite said that although Residence Services is undertaking awareness campaigns, it would be even more effective "if the Student Union, and any organizations affiliated with the Student Union, should do everything they can do reach out national networks that are also resources". An example is the "No Means No" campaign, with materials purchased from the Canadian Federation of Students.

"The most important thing is that it gets students talking about the issues, and if we can get students discussing these issues and how they're interlinked, the University couldn't ask for more than having students talking to each other about issues that affect them directly rather than Administrators

preaching to them".

Braithwaite poses the question why "issues or events, with the details that we don't particularly know" get the Administration talking, but not the students talking as well. The students "are affecting each other", and therefore it should be more than just Administration discussing the issues. Though only a few people engage in such behaviour, "it's good that the majority gets talking". As for his comments on any student apathy on such issues, he simply asked "Where's the outrage?"



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