

Power and company have nothing on these tools

Tales of SU scandals from afar make politics on our campus seem pretty tame



ROSS PRUSAKOWSKI

For all of their bouts of ineffectiveness, navel-gazing and sheer uselessness, the University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU) and Students' Council have some how managed to avoid becoming mired in scandal despite being in office for almost seven months. Aside from some glaring mistakes while creating the terms of the universal bus pass referendum question, supporting the Administration's opting out of the *Maclean's* magazine university rankings and negotiating to extend the exclusivity contract with Coca-Cola, the SU executive and councillors have conducted themselves adequately.

This responsibility and relatively high level of professionalism is good for U of A students that want their SU to be decently efficient and effective at providing services and not wasting the \$33.75 per term in fees every full-time student pays. But for myself, the UASU's dealings and processes have become the political equivalent of watching paint dry when compared to some

of their political student colleagues at other institutions in Canada.

In Hamilton, the University of McMaster Students' Union fired the editor-in-chief of its student newspaper the *Silhouette* without cause, allegedly because he was working on a story critical of the SU executive.

A little further north, the Students'

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Administrative Council at the University of Toronto discovered that it owed \$1 million to the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) in unpaid fees.

Even the sleepy University of Saskatchewan Students' Union has seen its share of intrigue this year. Their president resigned in June, and they had an SU referendum on joining CFS last year overturned by the courts.

However damaging and brainless these cases are for the SUs involved, they pale in comparison to the debacles going on this year in British

Columbia. At Simon Fraser University, the Simon Fraser Student Society has gone from being a government to a soap opera of epic proportions in just six months. Starting with an allegedly illegal firing of a staff member, the drama had become a fiasco where seven executive and governing directors of the SFSS may have been impeached, depending on whose lawyers you believe. The University is refusing to transfer the collected fees to the SFSS and the courts have frozen the society's accounts.

At nearby Douglas College in New Westminster, the DCSU board is on the verge of being impeached after more than 1200 students signed a petition to remove them. All this is the result of a forensic audit of the SU's books that uncovered spending irregularities, including a loan of \$20 000 of DCSU money allegedly made by a financial services officer to his girlfriend for a down payment on a house.

Although these may not be cases of high political treason with far-reaching global consequences, they are certainly more interesting than any UASU event in recent memory. At least students at the U of A can take solace in the fact that their money and SU is, for the most part, being wisely managed and serving students well—even if it bores political junkies like myself to tears.

Gov't should invest in postsecondary



CHRISTOPHER VIARD

"Many of us remember Ralph Klein's pledge to make postsecondary education in Alberta the most affordable in the country. This from the same government that has been giving the oil companies 'royalty holidays' on our collective oil for years, despite record energy prices."

Many people rightly believe that postsecondary education in Canada, and specifically within oil-rich Alberta, is under-funded. Many wonder why postsecondary education isn't paid for in full, as both the provincial and federal coffers are bursting at the seams.

The signs are evident that students are being shortchanged, as the portion of education for which the student pays directly has increased dramatically since the days of government cutbacks in the '90s and recession of the '80s. What has changed over the last decade or so is the fiscal position of governments, especially here in Alberta, where there's no longer any excuse to under-fund such a cherished and invaluable resource. Students from all walks of life have been told of the value of postsecondary education, while at the same time have increasingly paid for a much larger percentage of it. This, despite the record-shattering resource revenue that has been fuelling our overheated economy for the last several years.

Much of this shortfall has been made up for by the national student loans program—one which certainly has merit in terms of securing some modicum of equal opportunity. Students for the most part appreciate the funding, which allows them an opportunity to complete their sometimes tiresome school year with some very basic financial security. Additionally, students appreciate the bursaries

that are made available thanks to the Canadian Millennium Scholarship program, which was set up by former prime minister Jean Chrétien.

Having said that, what students ought not to appreciate is the high interest rates that accompany these loans. The current rate is around eight per cent, payable to none other than the Government of Canada. Gone are the days where groups such as students were accorded priority within the government's fiscal framework; it now seems they are content to act as loan sharks, taking their pound of flesh like everyone else.

Since both provincial and federal governments are responsible for funding postsecondary education, both should share the responsibility of making it economically feasible and sustainable. Come election time, politicians all want to tell you that they're doing their best to make "insert your cause here" a priority in their agendas. After the election, years pass where virtually nothing is done. Likewise, postsecondary funding is something for which there have been many promises made, yet few demonstrable results.

Many of us remember Ralph Klein's pledge to make postsecondary education in Alberta the most affordable in the country. This from the same government that has been giving the oil companies "royalty holidays" on our collective oil for years, despite record energy prices. This leaves students

and many other Albertans to wonder, "Where's my holiday?"

Years of cutbacks and sleazy corporate welfare in this oil-baron province have certainly made corporations richer, but have made students, and many others, poorer. The responsibility for education is done on a cost-shared model, yet the costs on the students' end has increased dramatically while the government's portion has done exactly the opposite.

It's time to take a hard look at a sustainable postsecondary funding arrangement, one which will not impart with it a burden too cumbersome for students. An excellent place to begin would be for the government to get out of the business of making money on the loans they are granting. Since education expenses are a matter of general revenue, these loans amount to money the government is holding as its own. In other words, it's not as if they're borrowing money for the purposes of these loans and thus paying no interest on it themselves.

Given this, the fact that governments are gouging students at borrowing rates similar to that of a used-car loan is simply disgusting. So to all the politicians wondering about what to do with postsecondary education: remember that sometimes the simplest answer is the best one. Quit profiteering on those least able to afford it.



VOLUNTEER JOB POSTING

POSITION:

Students' Union Representative, U of A Senate

APPLICATION DEADLINE:

4pm, Friday November 24, 2006.

To apply, submit a cover letter and resume to David Cournoyer, VP External at vp.external@su.ualberta.ca, or to 2-900 SUB.

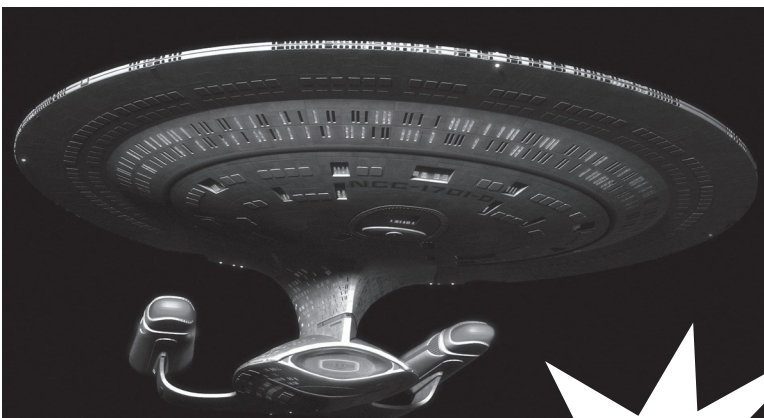
>> For more information, email David Cournoyer at vp.external@su.ualberta.ca.

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The Enterprise was meant "... to boldly go where no man has gone before."

ONLY TWO OPINION MEETINGS LEFT BEFORE SEMESTER'S END!

However, that sentence is both grammatically and politically incorrect, and should read, "... to go boldly where no person has gone before" so as to appeal to a broader audience and minimize potential criticism.

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GATEWAY OPINION
Boldly splitting infinitives since 1910