

U-Pass in service with Yes vote

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Student representatives don't often celebrate increasing fees; however, the final approval of a Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass) for University of Alberta undergraduates is an exception.

Last week 84 per cent of students voted in favour of implementing a U-Pass program, set to start September 2007 at a cost of \$75 per student, per semester. The U-Pass will provide students with unlimited access to regular transit services in Edmonton, St Albert and Strathcona County.

"I was really overwhelmed with the amount of support that students gave for this program—84 per cent. It really was overwhelming considering that a number of years ago for \$60 we saw approval that was lower than this," said Students' Union Vice-President (External) Dave Cournoyer, referring to the 2003 U-Pass referendum wherein 63 per cent of student voters approved having a U-Pass at a maximum fee of \$60 per student per semester.

At the time of the 2003 referendum, the Edmonton Transit System (ETS) said that it would need a minimum of \$120 per student, per semester in order to break even on the U-Pass. Unable to meet the \$60 price mandated by students, the referendum expired—leaving the SU to try and negotiate a way to fill the funding gap over the next four years.

"I've never thought that it would come down as low as it has—to \$75. And I've never ever thought that it would pass with an 84 per cent approval rating. It's unbelievable to me," said Chris Samuel, 2003/04 VP (External).

Samuel explained that, despite yearly Executive turnover, the U-Pass had always remained a high priority for the SU's advocacy department. In fall 2007, a \$15 per student per semester funding commitment from the University, along with \$30 per student, per semester funding commitments from the three municipalities, made the U-Pass a concretely feasible plan.

"I'm really proud of what student executives have done over the years and it's my honour to just [be here to] put it over the edge," SU President Sam Power said.

Cournoyer, who had organized

the Yes side of the U-Pass referendum, explained its costs will increase according to the Alberta Consumer Price Index and that it would have to go back for student approval in another referendum if it needs to be increased beyond that.

And while the SU is known as a zealous opponent of student fee increases, Power stressed that the U-Pass fees provide a service students wanted.

"Ultimately, this was a student decision," Power said. "We would never put a fee in front of students unless it's gone through proper procedures and they've said they agree to it."

"I don't think students are unequivocally opposed to fee increases. I think that students are opposed to fee increases when they don't see a responding benefit. And I don't think the U-Pass falls under that category," Samuel agreed.

Cost of other U-Passes (Highest to Lowest, 2005/06 rates)

Institution	\$/term	Increased ridership in first year
SFU	98	-
UBC	88	60 per cent
U of Calgary	62	30 per cent
Brock (St Catherine's)	60	-
St. Mary's (Halifax)	57.50	-
Western (London)	57.21	50 per cent
U of Victoria	56	28 per cent
Guelph	55.19	-
McMaster (Hamilton)	33.75	-
Queen's (Kingston)	20.21	-

Figures based on SU statistics

Money matters dominate Coke vote

CHLOÉ FEDIO
Managing Editor

Even though 57 per cent of students voted in favour of the University of Alberta's exclusive beverage agreement with Coca-Cola—put to vote 7-8 March in the annual Students' Union election—some students pledge to continue lobbying against the contract.

The non-binding plebiscite question asked undergraduate students if they would support the extension of the 1998 agreement, which gives Coca-Cola a cold-beverage monopoly on campus in exchange for more than \$500 000 annually in scholarships, bursaries and student services provided by the corporation.

Denise Ogonoski, manager of the No campaign, felt that the plebiscite question was skewed toward the Yes side. The question mentioned the \$524 377 that the Coke agreement provides to the University and student annually; however, Ogonoski argued that only \$50 000 is given directly to the SU for student services.

"It seems as though students' votes are basically being bought by Coca-Cola," Ogonoski said.

The plebiscite was presented to Students' Council by a group opposing the contract, who argued that Coca-Cola engages in environmental and human rights abuses. Ogonoski pointed to alleged unethical labour practices in countries such as Sudan, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia and India.

But Brock Richardson, manager of the Coke Yes campaign, argued that the issue really boiled down to finances; while the whole \$500 000 may not go directly to the SU, it ultimately benefits students. The vote in favour of Coke assures against the loss of funding, and makes sure the SU has a voice at the bargaining table when it comes time to renegotiate a contract.

"I wanted to let [students] know

that voting No doesn't mean getting rid of Coke, and let them know that the University will still sign a deal," Richardson said of his campaign. "This wasn't a question of whether or not we wanted Coke on campus."

"First we focused on the ethics, but then we realized that people really care about the money here—the money that Coke is giving to the University," Ogonoski added.

The agreement was originally signed between the SU, the U of A and Coca-Cola in 1998, and was set to expire 31 May, 2008. Under the terms of the new ten-year agreement, which will be retroactively implemented on 1 June 2005, the company will continue its exclusive hold on campus until 31 May, 2015.

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**DENISE OGNOSKI,
MANAGER, COKE NO**

SU Vice-President (Operations & Finance) Chris Cunningham explained that the U of A ran the risk of not meeting its sales targets from vending machines under the original contract—which would have given Coca-Cola an added two years of sales monopoly without any funding benefits to the University or the SU.

"The most important feature of extending the contract would be the removal of any mention of vending targets," Cunningham said. "Because the new contract will be retroactive it will

do away with that two-year penalty and also remove any mention of having to obtain a certain vending target in the future."

Though Cunningham couldn't confirm when this new contract would be signed, he said that it would be available for all students to view once implemented. The original contract has been private since its signing, but was made available for students to view earlier this academic year.

Still, Ogonoski questioned the SU's business practices and pointed out that the SU exists to represent students—not corporations. She said that denying students an alternative is undemocratic.

Prior to the nomination deadline, the No side was fined \$900 of its \$1000 budget, as the SU's Chief Returning Officer ruled that materials distributed by anti-Coke groups on campus constituted pre-campaigning. The No side argued that the materials in question weren't related to the campaign, but distributed by a separate group; however the CRO ruled against their appeals.

With an unrestricted budget, the Yes side spent \$997 on its campaign while the No side was limited to a largely verbal campaign.

Despite the loss, Ogonoski said lobbying efforts against Coca-Cola will continue on campus.

"We think that the 43 per cent of the people that voted No is a pretty decent number, given that we couldn't reach as many people as we wanted to with our limited resources, so we're going to keep raising awareness," she said, adding that the anti-Coke groups have yet to sit down to discuss a strategy. "We have more flexibility now in how we can do that 'cause we have no CRO to oversee everything we do, and to approve everything we do."

"We think that it's good to have a constantly engaged and educated student body and we're going to try and help with that."



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Fact: On 15 January, 1919, a tank filled with 2.5 million gallons of crude molasses burst on the property of the United States Industrial Alcohol building, located in the heart of Boston. The boiling syrup flooded the streets of the city surprisingly quickly, killing 21 people and injuring dozens more.

Fact: There has never been a death relating to molasses or similar baking ingredient in the 96-year history of Gateway news meetings, held 3-04 SUB on Fridays.

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- ✓ Government Issued Notice of Assessment(s) from previous year(s)
- ✓ Estimate of moving expenses (Must move 40km minimum for school or full time job)
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