

U of A prof says religion must be taught in public schools

SARAH TREIT
News Writer

The place for religious education in the public school system was the subject of hot debate at last Saturday's Philosopher's Café, held at the Stanley Milner Library. The keynote speaker, Dr David Smith of the University of Alberta's Department of Secondary Education, argued that not only is religious study healthy in the public system, it's a necessity.

Smith hopes that education would "demystify" religion, and foster understanding and tolerance in public schools already rich with religious diversity. In his opening remarks he asserted that religious education is "impossible to avoid" because it's already taking place in the classroom in the form of peer interaction.

"[The push for religious education is] not a question of trying to insert something, it's a question of trying to work with something that's already there," he said.

Smith contended that although the separation of church and state in Western society has been a political imperative, it has led to a privatization of religion that serves to "parochialize children's religious imaginations."

He stressed the need for a public space for young people to participate in an informed and open debate about their religious ideas.

"The more we share, the more we are in a position to break down the barriers ... that stand in the way of our civility. Ignorance creates fear, fear creates paranoia, and paranoia creates violence against that which we fear," he said.

Moreover, Smith proposed that religious education helps children to learn about spirituality in a context separate from their own family or tradition, allowing them to critically examine their beliefs instead of "falling into the safety and security



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ROLE OF RELIGION U of A prof David Smith wants religious studies in schools.

of the tradition that is received."

"You cannot come to maturity simply on the basis of your own ideas: you come to maturity on the basis of your interactions with others," he added.

He then opened the floor for a lively discussion, which included many arguing that religious education in public schools might be presented in a proselytizing manner. One audience member, who proclaimed himself a "recovering Catholic," argued that religious education can't be separated from religious indoctrination.

However, Smith outlined the distinction between educating and indoctrinating.

"It should never be about indoctrination," he responded, adding that teachers should be trained to "orchestrate the discussion in a way that's fair."

He reminded the audience that religious education is topic already present in today's public education system—whether recognized in the formal curriculum or not.

"Before we throw [the debate] all away, let's see what we can do to make it more creative," he urged.

ten per cent, would go a long way in making up the deficit. Council passed the amendment by a unanimous vote.

RUN IN THE RED?

The next motion would allow the Students' Union to run a deficit of \$25 000 for the next year. Current rules restrict the SU from having their expenses outweigh their income. Councillor Cam Lewis explained that the organization's revenues were expected to increase in the 2008/09 year, although he said that exactly where the money would come from was confidential. However, other councillors argued that the SU shouldn't get in the practice of allowing deficits. In the end, the motion was defeated.

LET'S PAY THE CRO

The next amendment proposed a 25 per cent increase to the salary of the SU's Chief Returning Officer. Supporters of the bill said that the current payment of \$4000 wasn't enough for the number of hours that the CRO puts in while managing the annual elections and other related duties. Others felt the number that was chosen was somewhat arbitrary and expressed concern that the number could be either too high or too low. They said that more information was needed about what other student governments pay their CROs before setting an exact amount. A change was made to the amendment, assuring that the CRO would receive a pay increase in the next year, but with the exact per-

centage to be determined later. It then passed with no opposition.

STUDENT FEES GO UP

Council then moved on to the most heated debate of the night: whether to allow the BFC to increase student fees for the next year. See story on cover for more details.

OTHER MOTIONS

The final three motions of the evening were dealt with quickly. A motion to deal with the predicted deficit by cutting costs from SU-businesses was defeated. Those who voted against the idea argued that there were already concerns that services weren't providing for students, and that cost-cutting under those circumstances was counterintuitive. Another motion calling for more training for Council committees was also defeated.

Finally, a call for the creation for a new part-time position, dedicated to convincing more local businesses to provide scholarships for students, was proposed by Councillor and president-elect Michael Janz. Those opposing the push pointed out that there was a position in the SU's marketing department with a similar purpose, and that small changes could make it a bigger part of the job. The motion was defeated.

A final vote approved the amended budget as a whole. With the matter approved, Council adjourned for the evening.

COUNCIL FORUM

Compiled by Scott Lilwall

Students' Council meets every second Tuesday in the Council Chambers in University Hall at 6pm. Council meetings are open to all students. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 27 March.

PIZZA PIZZA

Council held an emergency meeting Tuesday to approve the budget principles for the 2007/08 year. Accordingly, the first motion of the night was a vote on whether Council should order pizza for dinner. Vice-President (Student Life) Omer Yusuf argued that the meeting wasn't on the regular schedule, and as such there was no budget for dinner. As well, he argued that it was improper to order anything, seeing as the meeting was called to decide how to deal with next year's financial crunch. However, Council approved the motion 12-9, and dinner was ordered.

PRICE INCREASES

The first budget-related motion to hit the table was a proposal to allow the Budget and Finance Committee to raise the price of non-academic goods and services in SU-run business. VP (Operations and Finance) Chris Cunningham argued that the amendment, which would allow the BFC to increase prices by no more than

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- LAST CALL AT MIDNIGHT
- THURS 11 am TO 2 am
- LAST CALL AT 1 am
- FRI 11 am TO 3 am
- LAST CALL AT 2 am
- SAT 3 pm TO 3 am
- LAST CALL AT 2 am

THE POWERPLANT

BAR HOURS

- THURS - FRI 11 am TO 2 am
- SAT 8 pm TO 2 am

RELAXATION SPACE

- MON - WED 8AM - 8PM
- powerplant breakfast
- 8AM TO 11AM
- powerplant dinner (menu service):
- 2PM TO 6PM (MON - WED)
- 2PM TO MIDNIGHT (THURS-FRI)
- powerplant coffee house
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TICKET DRAW AT 5PM.
ARRIVE EARLY. TRY TO WIN.

>> MONDAY, MARCH 19 7PM
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RATT'S TOP 10 FOR FEBRUARY
(as selected by a panel of RATT staff and regulars)

10- Jim

9- Remaining Oiler fans

8- CJSR hipsters

7- Aggies!

6- Robyn/Jeff et al

5- Kappa Sigma

4- Forestry

3- Pandas Hockey

2- Shyam & Phys Ed Fridays

1- UACS "geeks"