

# THE GATEWAY

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MIKE OTTO

**FIGHTING BACK** Rundle Park hosted to the MS SuperCities Walk to tackle Multiple Sclerosis. See feature page 7.

## Edmonton Student Alliance in the works

RYAN HEISE  
Deputy News Editor

The plight of students' issues often seems to fall on deaf ears, but in a year when Edmontonians will be voting in both municipal and provincial elections, student government executives from postsecondary institutions across the city are hoping their pooled resources will be able to instigate positive change.

Over the past few weeks, the University of Alberta Students' Union and Graduate Students' Association, the NAIT Students' Association, and the Grant MacEwan Students' Association have been in talks to form a new collective known as the Edmonton Student Alliance (ESA). This organization would lobby on municipal issues affecting students from all three institutions.

As SU President Michael Janz explained, the ESA has yet to be formally created, but initial response to the idea has been positive from all parties.

"We've made the offers to cooperate, so we're seeing who would be interested in participating," he said. "The feedback around the table was very good, and all of us expressed that we do have a lot of common ground, especially with it being a municipal and provincial election year."

NAITSA President Kerri Wyspianski agreed with Janz, citing that combining the voices of the four organizations was "a great opportunity."

"All of us have a lot of common issues; there's just no point in fighting for them on our own when we can work together," she said.

In a memorandum of understanding that the U of A SU sent out to the other three student government bodies, the issue of accessible and affordable housing was clearly a major rallying point for the potential ESA. With Edmonton vacancy rates predicted to dip below one per cent in 2008, the executive presidents of each organization stressed the importance of this issue.

"I really like the idea and am very much in favour of student groups being able to work together on issues," GSA President Julie Charchun stated. "Particularly housing right now, which is a major issue for all students."

"I can't emphasize enough how upset grad students are by the housing situation."

Janz also noted that, like the U-Pass, the housing crisis is something that directly binds Edmonton universities and colleges together.

"There are U of A students living in the Grant MacEwan residence, and it just shows that, though we're different institutions, we still have a lot of

interconnectedness," he said.

If the ESA is formed, it would mark the second major lobby group that the SU would currently be involved with, alongside the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS). But while CAUS advocates primarily at the provincial level and the ESA would focus on municipal issues, there remains for U of A students a lack of formal federal advocacy on their behalf. The U of A SU hasn't been part of a federal lobby group since 2003.

However, Janz was quick to point out that PSE is the responsibility of the provincial government, and added that the subsequent issues surrounding it are more often than not localized.

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**MICHAEL JANZ,  
SU PRESIDENT**

"There's a lot more opportunity right now for us to focus our efforts [municipally and provincially]," he explained, adding that Edmonton schools have lobbied federally through efforts put forth by CAUS despite not being affiliated with any official federal advocacy group.

The ESA, if formed, would be a consensus-based organization, and none of the groups that are tentatively involved seemed worried that any one school would dominate it.

"The purview of the ESA is really to focus on the 80 per cent of issues we agree upon," Janz explained. "There's no way we're going to make one of the associations send out a message that's contradictory to their own agenda."

Charchun added some of these Edmonton-based student associations already have had experience working together, and that it's possible for them to achieve goals collectively.

"We worked really well with the SU on the U-Pass last year," Charchun said. "I think we're going to be able to work together [on the ESA] in some capacity."

As of press time, Grant MacEwan Students' Association President Justin Benko could not be reached for comment.

## Public Interest Alberta turns three

SCOTT FENWICK  
News Writer

Public Interest Alberta (PIA) is celebrating its third birthday this June as it gears up to become a player in provincial politics—not an easy feat for a group that criticizes the Alberta government.

As an advocacy organization, PIA is running six campaigns that promote social issues in Alberta. Graham Thomson, the *Edmonton Journal's* Legislature columnist, said he didn't expect Alberta's political climate to support PIA for this long.

"This is a province that doesn't have a rich culture in questioning authority. For [PIA], it's been a long uphill battle to actually do much," he said. "They should be congratulated for pushing so hard for so long, because it must be frustrating for them."

Larry Booi, PIA's President, acknowledged that the group has had little effect on government policy, but says

PIA's influence in Alberta is larger than he predicted.

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**GRAHAM THOMSON,  
EDMONTON JOURNAL COLUMNIST**

"I think where we're doing better is in affecting the public consciousness," Booi explained. "I think in childcare, postsecondary education, K-12 education, seniors [issues], and [democratic reform], we've had a substantial effect in how the public views the debate."

University of Alberta political science

professor Steve Patten noted PIA has been able to set the political agenda with Albertans.

"When they release a report, not only does it have thoughtful policy analysis, but it also represents what a lot of ordinary Albertans are saying on the issue," Patten added. "PIA has been really effective in organizing campaigns they want the public to focus on."

PIA Executive Director Bill Moore-Kilgannon credits the group's task-force model for its effectiveness. A PIA task force will hold open forums around the province so they can hear the public's thoughts on what the group was studying.

"[The task forces] become our key observers. They become the way in which the organization ties into what's really going on in people's lives."

In PIA's three-year history, Moore-Kilgannon considers the group's work in its postsecondary campaign a notable achievement.

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### Cadence Revival

Edmonton rap's fortunate son, Cadence Weapon, brings the party back on his new album.

A&E, PAGE 8



### Green, gold, red, white

Thirteen past and present Bears and Pandas have made the Canadian volleyball national team.

SPORTS, PAGE 10