

Value of annual *Globe and Mail* University Report Card debated

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Senior News Editor

Prospective undergraduate students got another resource to help them pick their Canadian university of choice with the release of the *Globe and Mail's* sixth annual *University Report Card*. However, the value of the report remains a matter of opinion.

"I worry that these types of surveys [...] aren't necessarily getting at a reliable measure of what students feel is important," said Steven Dollansky, University of Alberta Students' Union Vice-President (External).

The report compiled responses received from 43 000 undergraduate students from 53 Canadian universities who filled out an online survey asking them to rate their university experience. Simon Beck, editor of the *Globe and Mail University Report Card 2007*, noted that as the survey was "self-selecting," the number of respondents per institution varies.

"Obviously the bigger the university, the more likely the bigger the sample was," Beck said, adding that separating the schools into four size groups has facilitated fairer comparison.

"We don't think it's fair to compare a large school with a very small school because they have different challenges and often different aims and goals," Beck said. "You would only really want to be comparing the schools within each size grouping for a fair comparison."

Still, Dollansky said that there are "numerous different surveys done by external groups that all value different things" and that provide several different results.

"Without clear justifiable methodology behind it, [reports ranking universi-

ties] can sometimes be misleading to prospective students," he said.

Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), added that students base their decision of where they want to go on a variety of factors.

"Often times, not all of those reasons are inculcated in [a] single report," he said. "I'm not trying to downplay [the Report Card, but] it's by no means the only criteria that a student will use when deciding what program to attend."

"An undergraduate student knows only [his or her] own situation in that single university."

CARL AMRHEIN
U OF A PROVOST AND
VICE-PRESIDENT (ACADEMIC)

University rankings published by *Maclean's* magazine has faced continued opposition from postsecondary institutions who regard the statistics used as flawed, but Beck noted that the *Globe and Mail's* rankings provide a different resource.

"We feel we do a complementary job to *Maclean's*; it's not really a directly comparable kind of process," he said.

"From the standpoint of an undergraduate student, the *Globe and Mail* report is probably more useful than the *Maclean's* report," added Carl Amrhein, U of A Provost and Vice-President (Academic). "However, the

Globe and Mail report is also flawed in the sense that it takes anybody that signs on to that website."

Students gave their opinions on over 100 different aspects of campus life, ranging from food quality, class size, technological resources, and athletics. And as Amrhein points out, it can't be assumed that students from different universities will evaluate things in the same way.

"An undergraduate student knows only [his or her] own situation in that single university," he said.

However, he said that despite its potential flaws, he still pays attention to the *Globe and Mail* survey, "because it does contain, even in a sort of rough form, information that we find useful.

"Even if it's only the students who get onto that website and respond, that's still a student summary judgment that I should pay attention to," he said. The U of A received less than stellar grades in things such as resident space, quality of food, and the accessibility of professors, and Amrhein added that those results will be considered.

Both Dollansky and Amrhein named the National Survey of Student Engagement as a resource with tight statistical quality control they refer to when engaging the student experience, and Beck emphasized that over the six years of doing the report, he thinks the overall attention that universities pay to the quality of student life has been increasing.

"We really think that [the Report Card has] had a good impact in that the universities take it seriously now and do listen to what their students say," Beck said.



CATERING TO CARS A four-level parkade is scheduled to open in October 2008 and will cost \$32 million to build.

NEWS BRIEF

NEW PARKADE TO REPLACE STALLS LOST DUE TO CONSTRUCTION

Construction of a \$32 million parkade to the south of the Jubilee Auditorium is set to begin in the coming days as the University prepares for a loss of parking stalls due to construction elsewhere on campus.

The four-level, 700-plus stall structure will compensate for the stalls that will be displaced when construction of the Edmonton Clinic begins on the east edge of the Jubilee parking lot early next year, explained Darcy Scott, public affairs officer with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation.

The provincial department will aid with managing the project, while the University and Capital Health will split the bill.

The U of A recently released its Travel Demand Management strategy, which laid out the future for controlling and limiting the amount of single-occupant commuters coming to campus. As Bart Becker, Associate Vice-President (Planning & Infrastructure) for the University, explained, the new parkade will have no effect on this plan.

"It doesn't add any additional stalls," Becker said. "Therefore, it's in line with the Travel Demand Management strategy because we've committed to not increasing the number of stalls on campus."

However, one side effect of the new

parkade will be an overlap in construction between the parking structure and the Edmonton Clinic.

"There's a high probability that sequential construction will occur, and that has already been taken into consideration with our permitting on campus when we did the sales this year," Becker explained, adding that parking passes for the Jubilee auditorium were drastically limited for this period.

The overlap means a that only 240-260 stalls will be available at the Jubilee for approximately nine months, until the parkade opens in October 2008. In the interim, parking for events at the auditorium will be deferred to the Varsity parking lot or Stadium parkade.

—Ryan Heise, Deputy News Editor

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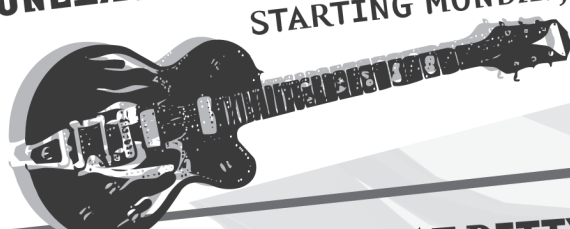
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