

# THE GATEWAY

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MIKE OTTO

**IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE FINALS** Hiding at home in your warm bed won't help: it's time to accept that the end of the semester, like the frigid Edmonton winter, is upon us. This means it's also time for Gateway editors to salvage what's left of their academic careers. We'll be back on 8 January, but look for a holiday treat on newsstands next week.

## Centralized DFU opt-out raises concerns

APIRG is one service wishing it had been consulted

RYAN HEISE  
Deputy News Editor

The initial passing of a controversial bill by Students' Council on 20 November has some student-funded organizations concerned about their future operations.

Bill 6, which reads, "For all Dedicated Fee Units (DFUs) for which an opt out is available, the opt out must be made available to students via a centralized, SU run, online service," passed its first reading by a vote of 23 in favour, two abstentions, and 13 against.

However, the debate at the meeting was fairly heated, with both an amendment to the reading of the bill and a motion to table it to a later date failing by a narrow margin.

Business councillor Scott Nicol, who introduced the bill, said he feels that the current methods for opting out of DFUs have been ineffective for students.

"The [opt-out] processes have stagnated and remained fairly manual," Nicol said. "As a result of this, it has continued to be inefficient for students to opt out."

"Bill 6 needs to come to fruition because technology has advanced to a point where having a centralized opt-out is technologically much less costly than it was in years gone by."

The two DFUs that this opt-out system would most greatly affect would be the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG) and the SU-run Access Fund.

APIRG is a student-run, non-profit organization that provides resources for public interest projects, while the Access Fund is a program that gives bursaries to University of Alberta students in financial need. While the Access Fund currently has a limited online opt-out option, to opt out of APIRG, students can either go to their office or submit a form via mail.

When asked about the passing of Bill

6, members of APIRG were primarily concerned with the lack of consultation on the matter.

"Bill 6 looks well-intentioned, but there's a lot of underlying consequences that weren't necessarily thought of originally or brought to the table," explained Brooke Leifso, an APIRG board member.

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BROOKE LEIFSO  
APIRG BOARD MEMBER

"I think that by not consulting the dedicated fee units affected in the first place, and then not allowing it to be tabled and to allow another couple of weeks of consultation, they sort of did themselves a disservice, and probably their constituents. And they definitely did the dedicated fee units a disservice," said Leah Orr, APIRG's outreach and financial coordinator.

But Nicol doesn't feel that this consultation process is as necessary as those involved in the specific DFUs.

"There's an abstraction between the need to consult on that level because we are not [...] changing the funding structure that students have approved in referendums," Nicol said. "Students' Council [...] has created the DFU-funding mechanism, and we can control how it is run. Hopefully that will be done to the benefit of students."

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## U of A team comes in first at int'l supercomputing competition

JONATHAN TAVES  
News Staff

A team from the University of Alberta made the biggest little splash at November's annual Supercomputing 2007 (SC07) conference in Reno, Nevada, winning the first-ever Cluster Challenge.

The group of five undergraduates and one high-school student, under the leadership of Dr Paul Lu, a professor in the Faculty of Computer Science, beat out four teams from American universities and one from Taiwan.

"The single most enjoyable thing was working

with this team. They were all wonderful. There was no slacker in the group; there was no weak link," Lu said.

The students had worked together on their winning computer since mid-September. To qualify, none of them could have a university degree in any area.

Andrew Nisbet, a team member in his first year of studies at 44 years of age, took advantage of the chance to gain experience that isn't readily available.

"The competition has given me exposure to an area of computer science that isn't taught at the undergrad level," he said. "[With super-

computing], they're trying to squeak out every last possible thing from a computer they can, so there is just a huge opportunity for learning."

The team had the greatest age range at the competition, from Nisbet to 16-year-old high-school student Stephen Portillo—a former summer intern of Lu's.

The group built the machine with expensive hardware on loan from the high-performance computing company Silicon Graphics, who also paid for the team's travel expenses.

"If you were to pay full retail cost for the cluster [that the team used], you would be looking at something like \$90 000," Lu said.

The computer's capability was tested with sophisticated scientific applications: a chemistry code program, an application that studies ocean currents, and another program that generates realistic computer images using a technique called ray tracing.

"The hardest part was working with these applications, because most of them are built by scientists for scientists," said Paul Greidanus, another undergraduate team member.

To understand the science behind the programs, the team used the knowledge of experts in specific fields around the U of A.

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Graham Lettner is off to the real engineering world, and muses over what it means to receive the iron ring.

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### Off with the Forces

Paul Owen profiles Kris Porlier, a U of A student who's off to serve with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

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