

In-Depth

S.U. Student Support Centre Ready to Roll

By Luke Peterson
In-Depth Editor

When Daina Debly took on the task of establishing a student support centre at UNB last summer, she was unsure whether her summer project would blossom into a successful venture.

Faced with the prospect of having to secure funding from the UNB administration and also finding a suitable location, on an admittedly crowded campus, the new Student Support Centre Co-ordinator admits that she worked for much of the summer under a cloud of doubt:

"Getting the funding and the location were two very important steps, because without these we wouldn't have had a chance. We had to lobby for it. Chris (Chris Alward - Student Union V.P. Student Services) took care of most of that, because he does the political side of things. Word came through about halfway through my job; so I had to keep working, even though I wasn't sure we were going to get the funding and location."

Slated to open on January 24th, the Student Support Centre will be located in the Student Union Building in the space formerly occupied by Bellboy Drycleaning (and more recently by the Student Health Plan opt-out Centre). While Daina is quite content with this location, she hopes to acquire expanded quarters in the future:

"Right now, it's the best location we could have possibly had a chance of getting, because there's so much (student) traffic. It's very good for the students. It's very convenient. space is so tight on campus; we're very lucky. In three years or so, when the SUB expands we hope to have more office space."

According to Daina, the Student Support Centre will have two fundamental purposes: "Basically our main goal is to have students helping students. It will have two main focuses, one as an information outlet ... and in the second instance, it is a referral centre."

In the future, Daina hopes that student consultants will be placed in approximately fifteen student service departments on campus, including the

Dean of Students office, the Financial Aid department and the Student Placement office. These Student Consultants will be entrusted with the task of greeting and assisting any fellow students who patronize the particular department. According to Daina, having a student consultant on site should ameliorate some of the apprehension that inquiring students might feel, when seeking assistance from a particular department:

"It's a proven fact that students feel more comfortable going to their peers for help sometimes. So, it's kind of like an outreach program where we try to reach as many students as possible."

In order to ensure that student consultants in the various campus departments would be given the opportunity to come into direct contact with the students who patronize the department, Daina aims to institute a system of 'double evaluations', whereby, both the student consultant and the host department are evaluated.

Essentially, such an evaluation system is designed to ensure that the student consultants fulfil their prescribed duties and also, that the department in which they are placed, affords them a suitable working environment:

"We like to have as much feedback as we can, to ensure that the program is working. We don't want to have a student consultant to be placed in some corner doing filing all day, when that's not the goal of our program. Our goal is to have students helping students and assisting (their peers) in anyway possible".

Daina attests that the student consulting system does yield positive results. Similar centres have been successfully established on over twenty Canadian campuses. Having attended conferences and spoken with many other centre co-ordinators over the past summer, Daina cites the help of these volunteers from other campuses as being instrumental to getting the Student Union's own Student Support Centre on track. Furthermore, she credits her predecessor for having established good inter-campus communications:

"Last year, Karen

Cormier, who was the Student Support Centre co-ordinator, did most of the research. She compiled a book about other Canadian universities and what they have set up for programs. I have maintained correspondence with ... Guelph, Carleton, UVic ... they have been so helpful. I really didn't expect that type of enthusiasm, but they've been great."

In addition to the help she has received from other campuses, Daina's work has generated considerable interest here at UNB and another possible future endeavour for the centre might be a student advocacy program, which would be co-ordinated by the Student Union Vice President in charge of University Affairs.

Such a program would allow students, who are in some form of academic difficulty, to avail themselves of the services of another student volunteer who has a good working knowledge of the university's regulations and procedures.

For further information about the Centre, students can phone the Student Union at 453-4955.



Centre co-ordinator Daina Debly (left) and her team of eight consultants will soon be helping students on a regular basis. (Mike Dean Photo)

S.U. Cultural Diversity Festival

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commitment to multiculturalism. Multicultural Associations representing Fredericton, Saint John and Moncton are each expected to contribute to the week's activities.

With an emphasis upon such cultural activities as music, dance, drama, literature and ever-popular ethnic food, the festival aims to educate students by increasing their understanding and acceptance of the various cultural constituencies that comprise their campus and also their country.

According to Islam education is one of the keys to tolerance and acceptance: "As an international student, if I want other people to learn about me, then I must learn about others and

hopefully they (in turn) will learn about me. Therefore, all festival events have an educational value attached to them."

Immediately following Monday's opening ceremonies, a play entitled *New Canadian Kid*, will be co-presented by the Daigle Theatre and UNB's cultural associations. Written by Dennis Foon, *New Canadian Kid* is the story of a young boy's adjustment to life in Canada.

Over the course of the festival, the Student Union Building's Blue Lounge will be home to a different set of displays and information booths each day, while international films and music will be offered each evening.

Furthermore, daily

workshops and seminars have been scheduled to discuss issues such as "Racism and Culture", "Black history of Canada" and "Women and Culture".

The week's events will come to a close on Saturday with a food festival in the Student Union Building cafeteria and an evening of multicultural entertainment including song, dance, skits and poetry readings. In contrast to the various cultural nights hosted on campus, the festival's events are virtually all free of charge. The only exception being a Friday evening concert featuring Halifax recording artists "The Big Picture" which will feature a nominal admission fee of four dollars.

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