

# OPINION...

## On GSA-SU Relations

In the Mugwump Journal from the previous week (*The Brunswickan*, 17 March 1989), Mr. Bill Traer commented on the GSA-SU issue. I have the impression that he and probably several other people, understandably, do not have the full picture of what has transpired between the SU and the GSA nor of the nature of the problem that currently exists between these two student organizations. I recognize that what Mr. Traer has written is his own opinion. However, kindly allow me to clarify the current GSA-SU situation.

To begin, the GSA WANTS to contribute to the Bruns, CHSR and student groups which have a mixed undergraduate and graduate membership (the GSA supports groups that are composed of graduate students only), a fact that was made very clear to the SU from the beginning. The negotiations for this year consisted of exactly one meeting on the 24 November 1988 between Dean Frost and myself, accompanied by Jim Duncan (GSA Treasurer) who provided the SU with information on the GSA budget. The negotiations were specifically for the Bruns, CHSR and student groups having mixed undergraduate and graduate memberships, as it was for last year when the SU and GSA attempted to settle an agreement. All three of us discussed the financial situation of the GSA. The GSA offered \$7.50 per student (25% of our operating budget) to the SU which was the same amount that was accepted by the SU last year. Dean did not tell us how much the SU wanted us to pay. He stated that he would discuss our offer with his Council and get back to me with a response.

The other occasion when the issue of GSA contributions was discussed took place on 27 January 1989 when Ernest Dunphy, whom I had never met nor seen before, phoned me at home with some information that I had requested from Dean. I thanked Ernest and stated that the GSA wanted to contribute and needed the formula to match the SU contributions, subject to the constraints of the GSA budget.

From that point on and without the slightest warning, Ernest turned ugly and belligerent. Raising his voice, he reeled off several demands, indexed by "I want...". In several instances, he rudely cut me off when I attempted to inform him that the GSA had ever intention of negotiating and contributing to SU services.

I wrote a letter to Dean, dated 27 January 1989, strongly protesting the totally unexpected and unprovoked behaviour of his Treasurer towards me and the GSA. I informed Dean that Ernest's behaviour could serve only to hurt GSA-SU relations and the negotiation process and that the GSA had been negotiating in good faith thus far. I also requested that the letter be made available to the SU Executive and Council so that they may know the current status of the GSA-SU negotiations. To date, I have received no response to that letter except for a telephone message from Dean left at my department on 1st February 1989 stating that the SU accepts the \$7.50 per student offer from the GSA.

While still waiting for a reply from the SU with regards to my letter, I was amazed to read in the 10 March issue of the *Brunswickan* that Ernest wanted a higher contribution (around \$14.00 or \$14.50 per student) from the GSA. This directly contradicts the message that I had received from his President.

The root of the current problem does not lie in reluctance on our part to contribute. On the contrary, we WANT to contribute, as I have stated clearly to Dean again and again, and to Stephane Comeau in an invited interview on 14 March 1989. Rather, the problem lies in Ernest's obnoxious behaviour towards me and the GSA, particularly since Ernest explicitly claimed to speak for the SU. A related problem that I see lies in the lack of actual active and in-depth negotiations where both sides can sit down, discuss matters rationally and calmly arrive at a mutually agreeable solution.

By the way, graduate students are not "freeloaders", unless the same term can be applied to the faculty members, University employees and city residents who have access to and (some do) make use of the services offered by the Bruns and CHSR. As for the support of student groups (and of the Bruns and CHSR), never let it be said that the GSA wishes to "freeload". The SU, in the person of Ernest Dunphy, has just made it difficult for us to contribute cordially.

I agree with Mr. Traer's statement that not many undergraduates utilize the services provided by the SU but yet are required to pay. The same requirements cannot be extended to include graduate students for three reasons. Firstly, undergraduates belong to the association, namely the SU, that chooses to supply the services. Graduate students belong to an entirely different and independent association, much as the faculty members and the University employees have their own unions. Secondly, the services that the SU and GSA are negotiating are primarily public services made available to a large number of people, including the graduate students. However, only graduate students have been singled out to pay for them while the other consumers are left alone. I wonder why. Thirdly, these services were made accessible to non-graduates out of choice by the SU. This is a generous and commendable action. However, the GSA did not request for this action to be undertaken and therefore, should not be coerced into contributing. Based on the above reasons, my personal impression is that the SU treats graduate students as if we are a renegade and non-compliant part of the SU who should be subject to the same SU policies as the undergraduates instead of as members of a separate and independent organization.

The GSA has never attempted to avoid contributing to SU services. Otherwise, I wouldn't have tried to work something out with the SU and the GSA but would have dismissed the entire idea of coming to any agreement with the SU. The GSA does not wish to create a rift between graduate and undergraduate students. On the contrary, the GSA wishes for a co-operative co-existence among all students, irregardless of the level of study. The GSA also wishes for a peaceful co-existence with the SU and, as I have told Dean in our first telephone conversation back at the very beginning of the academic year, seeks to cooperate with the SU for the benefit of all students on issues of student concerns. Personally speaking, I do not believe it to be fair that any disagreement among the officers of the GSA and the SU should result in the creation of bad relations between graduate and undergraduate students who have very little control over how their representatives act, particularly since the avenue of active negotiations has not been pursued.

To summarize, I wish to restate very clearly that the GSA wishes to contribute to SU services and has never considered otherwise. If Ernest Dunphy had not been as rude as he was, if he had chosen to discuss matters calmly, to present his views rationally and if he had been willing to listen to the GSA's views instead of blowing up for no good reason, and if the SU in the person of Ernest Dunphy had requested and not demanded that the GSA contribute, none of this unpleasant business would have happened. The GSA and SU would still be communicating today and perhaps, if I may be optimistic, an agreement might have been drawn up by now. As matters presently stand, the GSA still awaits a response from the SU with respect to the letter of 27 January 1989 that I sent to Dean. The GSA will be perfectly happy to contribute and negotiate an agreement with the SU so long as the SU representative will negotiate, not demand and try to bully. For my part as the GSA representative in the negotiations, I have strived to be courteous and reasonable at all times, mindful of the possibility that an association may be judged by the behaviour of its representatives. The door to negotiations with the GSA is still open. We only ask that the SU respond to my letter, clarifying Ernest's behaviour and how representative his rudeness to me is of SU attitude towards the GSA, and whether Ernest's attempted bullying was actually sanctioned by the SU. Despite Ernest's claim to represent the SU when he spoke to me, I find it hard to believe that the SU would have Ernest approach me in that fashion with his reel of demands. Without clarification from the SU, I have no choice but to believe Ernest. The GSA is also interested in the SU clarifying their position on the size of contribution from the GSA because the SU President and Treasurer appear to be contradicting each other.

In my interview with Stephane, I was asked for my response to Ernest's threats against the GSA. I stated that despite my disagreement with his tactics, Ernest is within his right to make any suggestions he wishes to Council provided that it is within his jurisdiction to do so.

The GSA views this entire business as a matter that can and should be handled responsibly by officers from both organizations. In my personal opinion, it would have been more ethical and responsible of Ernest if he had approached the GSA with his suggestions/threats before approaching the *Brunswickan* or any other body with them.

With the advent of a new student government in the SU, we hope that the situation will improve. If the SU is still interested in drawing up an agreement on funding with us, we will welcome a polite and reasonable representative from it.

I respectfully request that this letter be printed in its entirety despite its length, and thank you for allowing me the space to present the GSA's side of the story.

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GSA President  
21 March 1989

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