

Students and senate - bridging the gap

by David King

There are now five students on the Senate of York University. Speaking generally, if student representation on the decision-making bodies of this university is to be a meaningful modification of the present processes of university government, it is my belief (as well as that of many others, including the President of this University) that it should be accompanied by an increase in the flow of communications between the governing bodies and the student population.

Therefore, with the hope of at least partially bridging the communications gap which now exists in this university between the students and the decision makers, I have undertaken to write this monthly article to inform the students about the affairs of the York University Senate.

In student interest, the Senate is the most important governing body of this university. Under the York University Act (1965) the Senate is responsible for: "the academic policy of the university; the establishment (by recommendations to the Board) of all faculties, institutes, departments and chairs; the creation of faculty councils which legally are committees of the Senate; the appointment (in consultation with the Board) of the President and Chancellor; the regulation of admission standards; the awarding of scholarships and fellowships as well as all degrees; and the content and curricula of all courses of study".

The role of the Senate

Senate's role in the affairs of this university is in fact even greater than these powers would suggest: the nature of the power matrix in this university is such that Senate wields considerable influence in many executive and administrative areas (rustications, for example) which are legally the responsibility of either the President or the Board of Governors. Additional factors such as the broad frames of reference given to some of its committees operate to make the York University Senate exceedingly powerful in comparison with other university Senates. It would not be a great oversimplification to say that except in matters of finance, (and even here its influence is felt), the Senate runs this university.

Who is on the Senate? The answer, it seems, is every-

body who is somebody at York University. Its ex officio members include the key administrative officers (Murray Ross is its Chairman), the Chancellor, the Chairman of the Board, all the Deans, and all the departmental chairmen. Its elected members (every faculty is represented in proportion to its size) include most of the distinguished faculty members of this university. And, of course, the present total membership of 105 now includes five student Senators: Sue Himmer (Founders III), myself (Vanier IV), Robert Bedard (Glendon IV), Robert Corcoran (Atkinson), and Arthur Jacques (Osgoode) recently named as the graduate student representative.

Senate is only able to cope effectively with the diversity and volume of its responsibilities by extensive use of the committee system. Senate meetings, held on the fourth Thursday of every month from September to June, consist essentially of the consideration of a series of committee reports which are debated upon, perhaps amended, and passed. The role of Senate's committees, including the faculty councils, is thus of considerable importance in the running of the university. I shall discuss their functions and responsibilities in my next article.

Following my discussion of the importance of the Senate in the government of the university, my report on the events of the senate meeting of September 26th may seem rather anticlimactic; nevertheless, it must be said that it dealt with a few matters of outstanding importance to students.

Significant action

One item was significant — the Senate's acceptance of the offer of the Board of Governors to send two faculty members for full four-year terms on the Board. Four faculty members will be nominated by means of a Senate election, from whom the Board will select the necessary two. In commenting upon the decision of the Board, I would prefer to circumvent at least for the present, a tangential discussion of "academocracy" and its implications for the realities of university government. Allow me to say, however, that the decision of the Board was wise; the addition of faculty members to the Board of Governors insofar as it enhances the (political) legitima-

cy of its power, is an important step in the necessary process of rationalizing the decision-making processes of this university.

Another item of business at the meeting was the report of the Faculty Council of Glendon College.

Escott Reid delivered an eloquent commentary on the current state of affairs at Glendon in which he criticized the sensationalist coverage by the mass media of the recent Liberation Week. It was obvious that he has tried to view the actions of the Student Council in a positive rather than a negative light. He said, among other things, that there had been "dissent, but no disorder; dialogue but not confrontation". The Glendon Faculty Council (on which there are five students) is presently giving serious consideration to the proposals made by the Student's Council in its statement "A University is for People."

On the whole, it seems that constructive results may yet ensue from last month's turmoil at Glendon.

Students

One rather topical motion passed by Senate at the meeting was that which formally elected student senators to serve on some of its standing committees: Sue Himmer on the Curriculum Committee, Robert Bedard on the Committee on Examinations and Academic Standards, Robert Corcoran on the Library Committee, and myself on the Committee on University Services.

The real contributions of the student senators will hopefully be made in those committees. Despite our greenhorn status it is our resolve to prove that students can be just as capable as anyone in serving on the governing bodies of this institution. We have *at last been given the chance to prove not by mere words on the pages of a newspaper, but by direct participation in the processes of decision-making that students are not intrinsically incapable of handling responsibility.* And we don't intend to blow this chance. We guarantee no panacea-type solutions for the problems of the students; we make no sweeping statements about the radical changes which we in our roles as senators intend to bring about in this university — but on the other hand, if we accomplish nothing, it will not be for want of trying.

Dave King V IV
Student Senator

letterslotsoflettersletshave

Dear Sir:

It disturbs me that many students at York are either too apathetic or small-minded to understand the importance of YSC.

It's time we stopped condemning and started looking at YSC's potential and the alternatives we have to it.

YSC concerns itself with matters affecting all students of the university. It is an ear to complaints concerning the university administration, student affairs, etc., and voices valid complaints to the proper authorities. In this way it is a liaison between administration and student.

Our present college system makes this communication difficult. We, as students, require an organized body to represent all of the students. Issues, either academic or revolutionary, become confused when each college forms a separate opinion and tries to get somewhere with the Board of Governors. YSC is our necessary united front.

The college system, so highly praised by narrow-minded college councils is not working. The colleges look pretty much the same; in fact, they are joined so that no one really feels closely identified with or a member of one particular college.

Moreover, no one gets a choice of college. One is assigned to a college, probably by a computer. Furthermore, the whole curriculum organization is based on the university, not the college. Students from all colleges take one course together. Tutorials aren't even college-based; pick any tu-

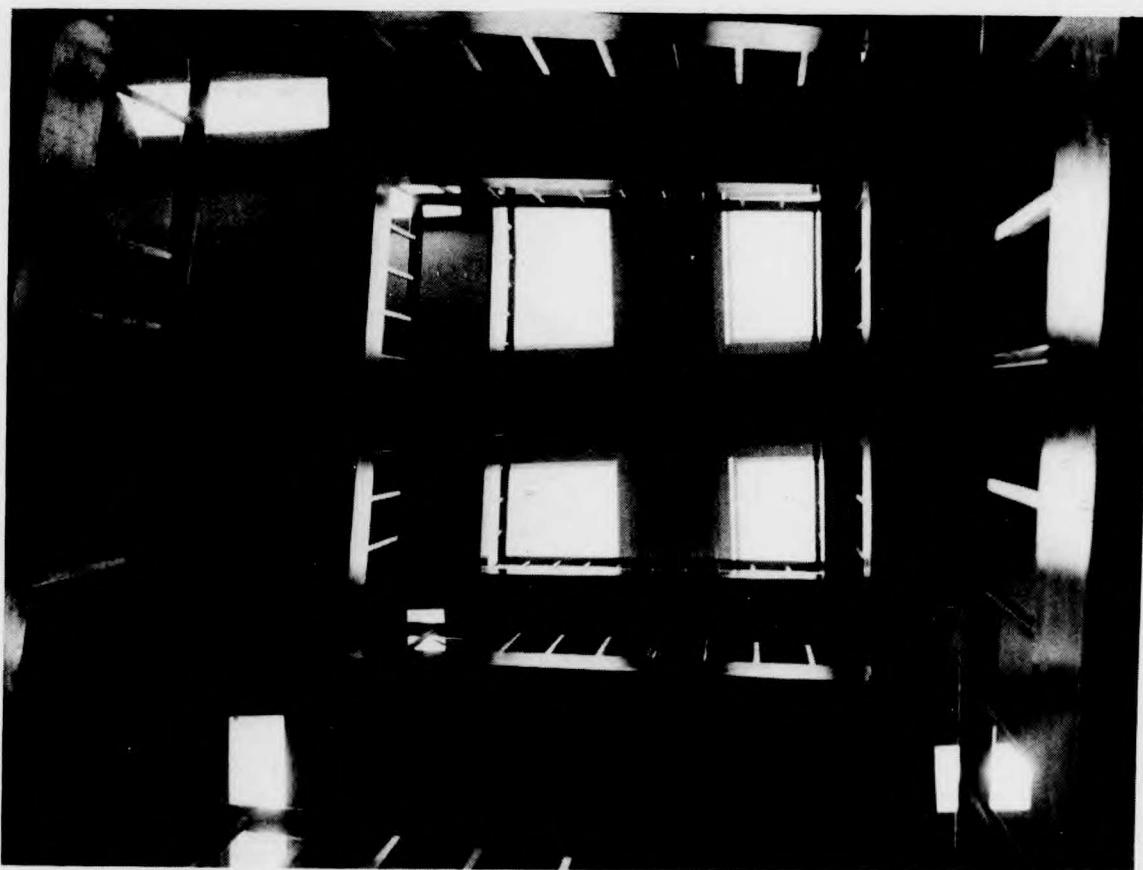
torial and you will always find more than one college represented. So why fight for a college system when academically we are a university?

Finally, the majority of students want to feel associated with York University, not with a college. This is evident to all: how many students bought green Founders jackets? How many would buy a McLaughlin jacket? How many buy York University jackets?

As of now, each student pays \$27 to support YSC and the college councils. Of this, YSC gets \$10 and the council \$17. For what our councils seem to be doing, let's take \$5 from them per student, give it to YSC and let YSC support financially all campus clubs and groups. We can thus avoid red tape when clubs must approach each council individually for funds. The colleges, with \$12 per student can concern themselves with that small group of students that want to associate themselves with one particular college. The college should be subordinate to YSC.

Finally, all colleges should, once established, become members of YSC and be represented on a body speaking for all members of the university. The SRC failed when dissenters left when things didn't go their way. It's high time for York to leave the realm of small-time student organization and create a body representative of a large, progressive and dynamic student body.

Sid Troister
Pol. Sci. III



The principal of Farquarson Science building — what goes up these stairs must come down

Dear Sir:

Lately voices have been raised with alarm concerning the too rapid growth of YSC. Supporters of the college system see, with some justification, that this trend is a severe threat to the decentralized structure of York student government. These criticisms are directed at the wrong party.

YSC is not to blame for the trend to centralization; inactive college councils are. YSC can grow because it is filling a power vacuum.

Founders college council seems more interested in condemning YSC's alleged inadequacies than keeping its own house

in order. One wonders how a college with "the worst magazine . . . (and) the undoubtedly worst orientation programme, two years in a row, of any college at York (Ross Howard in letter to *Fountain*)" can criticize an organization that is at least accomplishing something.

Founders is the oldest college (on the Steeles campus). If the other colleges sink into middle-age doldrums after the inevitable excitement of starting a new college wears off, the college system is in bad shape.

If YSC is disbanded what will replace it? Cross-campus activities would have to be co-operatively planned by the college councils. It will be interesting to see if YSC can do a better job on

the winter carnival than did last year's planners.

YSC seems to come up with most of the new exciting programs. Why couldn't the college council or a group of councils develop a course evaluation sheet? How about A Better Chance program?

The night he won the election, John Adams told me that if the college councils don't serve a function he feels that should be served (e.g. course evaluation sheets) he would have no qualms about YSC's doing it. Who can blame him for that?

Right now YSC is where the action is. College councils — you won't change it by sitting on your hands.

Ron Macnaughton MII