

# Opinion

Dragos Ruiu

## Marks trivial



Many students at this university are striving very hard to achieve high marks. That distresses me.

The fact that they are putting a large amount of effort towards achieving those marks does not bother me — what does is the fact that they have forgotten the basic reason why they are here: to learn.

Sure, high marks are important: they will give you a good start on a career. However, they do not carry the weight or importance of knowledge. And marks most certainly do not equate with knowledge.

I know many bright people whose academic records are not exemplary, and at the same time I have met dunces who boast near 9 GPA's. The fact that you can memorize and expend large amounts of effort towards performing repetitious tasks of recall in a two hour period does not impress me.

To me knowledge implies not only an understanding of the subject matter, but also an ability to synthesize information from that subject matter — to go beyond what is taught, and apply that information to new problems. This ability is rarely tested for in university, or even taught.

What's even worse is that at times it seems that classes try to discourage original thinking. Many assignments are so rigidly defined that the only challenge in them is discovering the solution that the professor considers right. I know several people in both Engineering and Arts who looked up what the professor teaching the class researched. They did this to improve their marks, because class-projects involving those topics received higher marks.

I believe that this lack of creativity is a fundamental flaw in our university system. Universities are geared to produce what job recruiters want instead of teaching people to think. This is great if you happen to be a head-hunter for IBM looking for corporate automatons. If, however, you believe that universities should advance our pool of knowledgeable minds, it is truly sad.

The ranks of corporations world-wide are filled with petty middle-managers and bureaucrats with a degree on their wall. All of them have learned that it doesn't matter what you accomplish as long as it looks good on a monthly report, resume, or a report-card.

And we wonder how bureaucracies propagate? The trivial minded, conservative, uncreative simpletons learn all about it at university.

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## Letters

### Stupidly sophomoric

When S.U. Records opened in 1973, it was a tiny hole in the wall at the south end of HUB, selling records out of cardboard boxes stored on rickety tables. Over the years, and led by a supportive Student Council, the store expanded until it became undoubtedly the best record store in western Canada.

As a present part-time employee at the store, I accept a bit of the blame for any financial problems the store might currently be facing (though where this alleged \$7000 deficit comes from is unclear; recent S.U. budget figures show the store with a profit of several thousand dollars). But I believe most of the blame for the store's woes, such as they are, lie firmly at the feet of the Junior Achievement types who run the S.U., and who think the record store can be treated like a chocolate bar sales drive.

Simply put, any business endeavour must have support from its owners, which S.U. Records does not. It was no accident that when the store prospered, it was backed by enthusiastic student leaders. But in recent years, a stupidly sophomoric mentality has overtaken the S.U., and instead of supporting the store, conniving executive members have been running it down in every conversation and every memo passed among them. They have cut back on advertising, they have refused to make substantial, much-needed renovations to the store, and they have shown nothing but negativity toward the needs of the store and the people who work there. When owners display such thinly-veiled disdain for their employees and their livelihood, it's no surprise that the business goes through difficult times.

Yet despite the knives in the back and the snotty arrogance emanating from S.U. management and executive members barely out of their teens, the store has managed to maintain its status as a haven for music lovers. This is so entirely because of the efforts of the store's full-time staff, a collection of music addicts whose knowledge of the field, and of the retail music world, is simply unsurpassed in this city, and whom the S.U. has now decided should be replaced by part-time employees drawn from the student body.

The current S.U. Records staff is certainly not perfect, but its assembled abilities are unquestionable. Combined, staff members have over 75 person-years of experience in the record-selling business. The store's full-timers are intimately involved in most music and cultural circles in Edmonton, and are consequently plugged into every record distribution network and musical cranny across North America. If they are replaced, you will still be able to buy Tiffany records at the store, but you definitely won't find the latest by Mike Stern, Stan Rogers, the Butthole Surfers, Spirit of the West, or Son Seals, for which people from as far away as Winnipeg travel weekly to pick up at S.U. Records.

Current executive members have not the slightest knowledge of or interest in what happened on campus any earlier than the day before yesterday. If you care about S.U. Records, and about the traditions that students before you worked hard to build, then voice your concern loudly. Don't let these naive business hacks ruin the things that make our university unique and worthy of our pride. They'll screw up S.U. Records today, and who knows what they'll set their beady eyes on tomorrow.

Gordon Turtle  
 Faculty of Graduate Studies

### Ask Players

This letter is a response to *The Gateway's* article of October 6, "Smokers fuming". I have a constructive suggestion for the acquisition of funds for adequate ventilation of more designated smoking areas.

First, though, I will state my stance on this entire issue.

1. I consider smoking to be a maladaptive method of coping with stress; a personal problem, just like overeating or overdrinking.
2. Smoking, however, is the only one of the self-destructive habits (besides drinking) which is still socially sanctioned, and which harms not only the smoker but also all who happen to be in the same vicinity at the time.
3. Despite the well-known hazards of smoking, some people simply do not want to stop, and for others it is very difficult to stop. Realistically, such people are not about to quit smoking just because of the nonsmoking policy.

They are also not going to quit their studies, I trust.

4. So the situation seems clear enough. Smokers should still have the privilege of studying on campus in an area where they can smoke. And non-smokers should still have the right to study on campus in an area where they can BREATHE!

The solution, though, is not so clear. After all, smokers smoke (at least initially) of their own volition. They are also in the minority of the population. Because of these facts, smokers will probably not be able to expect university funding for more designated smoking areas. This brings me to my suggestion.

It seems to me that the group of smokers who created and signed the petition and arranged *Gateway* coverage are fairly organized and serious about their situation. If so, it might be possible for the most diligent of them to form a committee on behalf of the others, contact one of the major multinational tobacco corporations such as Players, and arrange for a charitable donation to be made to the U of A to cover the cost of proper ventilation of the designated smoking areas in question.

Just imagine! We might come to see Players as a charitable organization dedicated to the building of sanctuaries for a species which is slowly becoming extinct...

Anyway, smokers, it can't hurt to ask. As I see it, they almost owe it to you — but the rest of us don't.

Linda MacDonald  
 Arts III

### S.U. applauded

Re: Mere money motive

I suggest that instead of sacrificing the God of (student) money, Kerry Winter should appease the God of common sense with a sacrifice of his own mere money to keep an alternative record store open, rather than using my very important money to supply poor-selling records to those who can't afford them. It is a fact of life that the mighty dollar pays the rent, puts food on the table, and fuels this mighty bureaucracy we call university. I applaud the Students' Union for trying to save a few bucks.

Tim Lenfesty  
 Agriculture II