

The decline of journalism

"An informed voter is the sword of democracy."
— Thomas Jefferson

Journalists have become obsessed with scandal and titillation rather than information and education. Our governments, institutions, and quality of leadership all suffer as a result.

In the hunt for the "big story" the public debate on substantive matters of public policy is lost to the shocked outrage of the day. Public perception and government action are thus evaluated not by their value and benefit to people's lives, but rather by what journalists deem newsworthy. Style over substance; perception over reality.

How much Brian Mulroney spends on his hotel room when he visits Upper Volta is an easy story to get. You file an Access To Information request, get the numbers, ask some opposition critic to be outraged — voila! instant front page story.

But is the public really served best by such "journalism"? Certainly the public has a right to know such information. But what if scandal and corruption become such an obsession for public and media alike, that the matters which truly affects our lives are lost in the editorial shuffle?

What Brian Mulroney thinks about Free Trade with the United States may well shape the destiny of the Canadian economy, millions of jobs, and our quality of life for decades to come, and is thus slightly more important than his personal expense account.

Yet somehow I have a strange feeling that our PM ordering a \$75 a bottle of wine with his dinner would bump Free Trade off the front page of most newspapers in this country.

These choices of what to cover are even more exaggerated at the student newspaper level where resources in terms of staff and time are very limited. The types of stories that get pursued are extremely sensitive to the direction, inclination, and objectives of those seeking the stories. If those writing news spend all their time searching for scandal, surely they will find some.

How the University of Alberta reacts to this year's 3% budget cut is a story that impacts directly and forcefully upon the quality of our education. Whether the U of A chooses to balance the books by laying off academic staff versus raising incidental fees is a policy decision of infinitely greater importance to students than whether Myer Horowitz drinks cheap domestic or expensive imported wine at the GFC executive luncheons.

The effectiveness of our student leaders should be measured by how well they combat the proposed changes to course drop dates, or how well they advocate student sensitive means of university cost cutting, or the competence with which they publicize student concerns to the wider public. All of these are vastly more important to the real lives of real students than strippers in SUB.

This decline in journalism cannot be entirely blamed on the media, of course. After all, *The National Enquirer* outsells the *New York Times* roughly 20 to one. The economics of selling newspapers thus dictates that a successful publication be more like the former and less like the latter.

When I first saw the quote of Jefferson's, my first response was "it's the one form of disarmament we have been able to achieve." A bitter belief that makes me cry for our society and our liberty, and our democracy.

I believe that the highest goal of journalism is to help rebuild this arsenal of democracy and university is as good a place to start as any.

Ken Bosman



SU stereotypes sex

Well, we're all back for another year and I have uncovered a calculated plot in SUB aimed at promoting sexual stereotyping and discrimination.

Why is it that in the men's wash-room it's "sensitivity" and "stimulation", while in the women's wash-room it's "stimulation" and "protection"?

Is this not an attempt to define the sexual concerns of partners? Also, the women's dispenser is a lovely shade of pink, while the men's dispenser is a harsh white. Does this represent the stereotypical view of women looking at sex as love and men viewing sex as a sterile bang on the side? I hate to think that our S.U. sanctions such blatantly sexual discrimination. IMPEACH!!

Richard Liukko

Two wrongs make riot

Friday night there was a party in Garneau. It was initiated by students. Following this party, there was what many have called a "riot." This, unfortunately, was initiated by the police.

This assertion may seem surprising to some, but I am convinced (and I feel many other students would agree) that the police acted rashly and inappropriately.

The party was large, certainly, and as a result did warrant police attention. But was it necessary to

bring in the riot squad? Most of those present were well behaved, occupying themselves with talk, not brawling.

How did the police expect the students to react to their intimidating tactics? Did they expect the students to scurry away obediently? They should have realized that the students, being accustomed as they are to being dealt with fairly and

being highly conscious of their rights, would react angrily to threats of violence. Obviously police underestimated the will and backbone of the students whom they confronted.

Next time the police would be well advised to holster their clubs and engage their brains.

Gil McGowan

The Fly on the Wall

J. Dylan

Sitting in a big white convertible in front of the Administration Building is a young man wearing Blues Brothers' sunglasses, a Hawaiian shirt, and khaki shorts. A sixties summertime tune is blasting, very loudly, out of his stereo. I have the feeling that he thinks he's in one of those California Cooler commercials.

I don't know if he is waiting for someone, but he is looking at every girl that walks by. No one seems to be paying any attention to him however, save for the little cab driver parked in front of him who doesn't seem to like sixties summertime tunes very much.

The girl who just walked out of the Administration Building isn't paying attention to him. She looks like she is fed up with university, with trying to find her classes, with trying to figure out how to register, with waiting in line at the bookstore, with guys in Hawaiian shirts

and hip sunglasses who play loud music and strain their necks and eyes in order to look at girls.

The guy in the convertible is eyeing her right now. He just turned his stereo up a bit, I guess to impress her. The cab driver is impressed, not with the music, but with the girl. I doubt if he even hears the music anymore. The girl hears it though.

Now she sees that the cab driver is also staring at her and he's not even wearing hip sunglasses. He is wearing a sharp looking shirt, although he forgot to do up the top five buttons, and he has combed his hair twice since he saw her. According to the look she just gave him, this is good enough to place him on her hate list. The cabbie doesn't seem to mind though. Probably because she just got into his cab.

The guy in the convertible looks surprised. I guess he wore the wrong outfit.

