

Student apathy a myth says Registrar Blue

Motivation. Apathy. Both words are closely linked. Dugal Blue, Registrar of the university, says apathy is only a "myth." Students feel, says Blue, that university life, with all its faults, is a relatively comfortable and tranquil existence. But political involvement continues at a low ebb. Pat Flanagan, Assistant Comptroller of the Students Representative Council, says there is a lack of originality of events. One of the major causes of apathy, which Flanagan says does indeed exist, is the size of the university. Another problem is communication. Read on and find out what both have to say. Then let us know what you think.

By D. C. BLUE
UNB Registrar

If one were to give a word reaction test concerning universities, certain clichés might become rather evident. The word 'Administration' would probably produce an answer like 'red tape' or 'high handed', 'faculty' might get an 'ivory tower' response, and probably one of the commonest reactions to the word 'student'

would be "apathy". A great many people, including many students themselves, and certainly those who write in student newspapers, seem to believe that apathy is the chief characteristic of student bodies as a whole.

There are times when I have been inclined to use this phrase myself, particularly in connection with elections to student government and of student senators and governors. Positions filled by

acclamation, or not filled at all because nobody was nominated, and only about a quarter of eligible students bothering to vote — these all suggest a monumental indifference and apathy. (Actually, over 20 percent of eligible votes cast is above average for all but the smallest colleges.)

Four and five years ago some of your predecessors argued, negotiated, held protest rallies and generally raised hell in order to get student representation on the Senate, the Board, faculty committees and departmental committees, and to have open Senate meetings so that students and others could attend. Now with most of these things achieved, one sometimes wonders what the fuss was all about. It is amusing, were it not almost tragic, to look back upon the elaborate preparations that we made to handle the expected hordes of visitors to Senate meetings — tickets to be issued to first comers, crowd control measures, and elaborate codes of behaviour. Nowadays, except for our faithful Brunswickan reporters, the presence of a

strange student in the galleries has a thrilling novelty about it.

Yet, on the other hand, the students who have been elected to these bodies, and to the many faculty committees have done a very good job, contributing not only time and energy, but some very useful insights, and they have had a lot of influence. SRC executives (on both campuses), student senators, and other student representatives have taken initiatives and raised issues of real concern to students — for example housing, fees, loans and placement. The Brunswickan, the radio station and many other organizations are, in my own opinion, at the best they have been for years. (Naturally, this does not mean that I agree with all they say and do.)

Is it, however, the case that a small interested group does everything, while the majority sit back and yawn? Over the last year, I have asked quite a few students why they had not voted in elections, or why they themselves had not run for office. The answers surprised me. What I had expected to be told was that they couldn't care less, that it was all a farce, that you couldn't change the system. A few said that they didn't know any of the candidates — to which one can answer — "what did you do to find out about them?" More frequently, however, I got the answer that all the candidates seemed pretty good, that there was nobody who really deserved to be beaten. While this might be encouraging to the candidates who ran, it suggests easygoing acceptance rather than critical examination. My dictionary defines apathy as "indifference to suffering, lack of feeling, indolence of mind".

I know a few people who can be described as "indolent of mind", but, by and large, the students I know and talk to don't seem indifferent to suffering, or lacking in feeling. I get the feeling that one reason why students at present make comparatively little protest is that they feel that university life is, with all its faults, a relatively comfortable and tranquil existence, and that it would be selfish to

insist on further improvement when there is so much real hardship and injustice in the world outside. Some of the apparent apathy towards student groups and concerns may, in fact, be a sign of wider vision and greater social concern. However, even here, if it is not apathy, there does not seem to be too much overt activity. Some people on this campus have tried to focus student concern on community and national problems, but these have tended to be small isolated thrusts.

Most surprising of all, to me, is the fact that, although most students are now eligible to vote, political activity and involvement seem to be at a very low ebb. There certainly, in my view, is a place for experience and the older voice in politics, but there is very definitely a need for freshness and enthusiasm.

You, the present students, seem to me to be more serious, generally better-informed, and more alive to the problems of our age, and our society, the scandal of poverty within affluence, the wastage of human resources, the despoiling of nature and the evils of pollution, and the short-sightedness of so much of our industrial and social activity, than any before you.

I have a fear that many of you are hesitant and hold back from involvement because you feel that the political process is so imperfect and futile that participation is a waste of time. The democratic form of government has faults and imperfections, but it is the best hope we have for saving this world. If yours is really the concerned generation, then your votes, your voice, your involvement is what our society most needs.

I am old-fashioned enough to believe that the main argument for having students take part in student government and university government is not just that they can help to make the university better, and more relevant to their needs, important though this is, but that playing a part in the politics of the academic microcosm is valuable training for the larger world outside.

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Communication lacking at UNB

By PAT FLANAGAN
SRC Assistant Comptroller

Apathy — I realize that most people won't read past this line — that's the risk that one takes when one uses the word. But as I was approached to do this article, I'd have to suppose that the editor knows what he is doing — or undoing.

I thought a good place to begin was looking at some of the causes of our widespread disease. One of the major causes, and probably the most difficult to overcome, is the size of the university. With such a large number of students, it is almost impossible to generate a feeling of closeness or (might I use the word) togetherness within the university community. Other causes stem from this first one. There are, at certain times, quite a number of things happening at once. There is, most definitely a problem with communication. At the present time, the main source of information is the SUB which sort of leaves the faculties who are not situated particularly close to the SUB (engineering for instance) out in the cold. As a further thought on the communications problem, I think that a lot of the problem lies in the club executive's lack of

enthusiasm. I would hope that this will change with the executive turnover now taking place, but no doubt the "disease" has deep roots.

The most active areas are clique-ish — in that most people get into them because they were influenced by a friend. (I'll leave that point Edison.) At the Leadership Conference, it was generally agreed that there was a lack of originality in events. One very important cause of a—y is the fact that nowadays, there are no real issues to bring people together. When former Secretary of State Dean Rusk was approached by telephone to speak at UNB this fall on issues concerning the Vietnam war, he asked Dr. Willoughby if he anticipated any student rioting or the like. Dr. Willoughby laughingly replied that it had been "pretty quiet on campus for the past couple of weeks!" (Might I suggest we send out a call for one N. Strax.)

Now, I feel there are a number of ways to fight the "disease". Obviously, we cannot change the size of the university, but one suggestion might be to get the faculties more together, especially the arts monster. Create a little more inter-faculty competition.

The establishment of an Information Co-ordinator's office is probably one of the most forward steps to be taken in the coming month. This office will advise on the feasibility of events and handle the dissemination of information on campus.

Another suggestion has been made that every club and organization on campus be given an event to run at Winter Carnival time instead of one organization being loaded down with four or five events. High School students should be given a thorough tour of the campus. I understand the Bruns has a special High School issue in mind. The membership drive for clubs will be happening in the fall. It could be successful if they really worked on it.

Someone has also suggested (I may not say whom) that the SRC members be given SRC cards entitling them to a few "token privileges" (free entrance to SRC events perhaps.) If they get a little more out of it, they might be encouraged to put a little more into it.

You are probably reading this (if in fact you've bothered to come this far) sitting down. I guess if you want something done, you know your next move.

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