

Union Health plan fee is inflated

by Gordon Loane
Brunswickan News

The UNB Student Union may be overcharging students for its \$95 health plan next September by as much as \$11,500.

Figures contained in the Health Plan cost breakdown for 1995-96 show that the SU charges an \$11,500 annual administrative fee to partially cover the cost of two salaried employees who look after the plan.

Beginning in September, the Student Union has apparently decided on a new arrangement.

The \$11,500 administrative fee will no longer be charged to the Health Plan but will be covered in the SU's regular operating budget, for which the union collects an annual \$102 student fee.

UNB SU Vice-President Finance Duncan Fulton confirmed the new arrangement in an interview with *The Brunswickan* last week.

The new arrangement was certainly news to SU V-P Services Trish Davidson, who is responsible for the Health Plan.

Davidson told *The Brunswickan* that Fulton never discussed it with the Executive before setting the SU's Operating Budget for next year.

The SU's operating budget for 1996-97 was passed by Council earlier this month.

For his part, Fulton told *The Brunswickan* Davidson assured him that the \$95 health plan fee to be charged again next year was accurate.

Based on a projected enrolment number of 7,100 students at UNB next fall and faced with an \$11,500 reduction in the administrative fee charged to the health plan, simple arithmetic arrives at a reduction in cost of \$1.60.

Both Fulton and Davidson were made aware of the situation two days before the UNB Board of Governors' meeting last week which approved a health plan fee of \$95 for next September, unchanged from this year.

Neither decided to call the university to urge a delay in setting the health plan fee.

UNB's Board of Governors meets again in May.

In the meantime, Fulton has met with *The Brunswickan* on at least two occasions in the last week in an attempt to explain this problem away.

He continues to insist that the \$95 health plan fee actually represents how much it costs to get the health plan to the students.

In the meantime, Fulton has plans to divert the \$11,500 administrative fee that will be collected in the \$95 fee towards projects in the regular SU operating budget.

"We want to have that \$11,500 available for a contingency to have it needs to be there," Fulton told *The Brunswickan* last Sunday.

A second scenario would be to use the \$11,500 in case of a projected short fall in the number of students the UNB Registrar's Office currently estimates will attend UNB next fall. That estimate stands at 7,100 according to Fulton who says he got the number from the Registrar's Office.

A third scenario, if one is needed, would see the \$11,500 used to cover any line-item over expenditures that might occur in the 1996-97 SU operating budget.

In a final twist, the change in the administrative fee policy, the proposed change in policy advocated by Fulton that would divert money from the Health Plan and off load it

in the SU's regular operating budget, a breakdown in costs for the Health Plan and the \$95 health plan fee to be charged in September were never presented to UNB Student Council for formal approval.

Another question is also making the rounds. Why should those who pay the health plan fee have the administrative fee in it charged to them when it is not needed and see their money then be diverted to the SU operating budget to the benefit of everyone while someone who opts out of the health plan pays nothing?

When a question of fairness was raised, Fulton continued to maintain this was not a problem either.



Trish Davidson



Duncan Fulton

This year, \$11,500 from the Health Plan was used to subsidize expenses of the Union.

In 1996-97, students enrolled in the Health Plan will still pay the \$11,500 (about \$3.30 each), but the Union will use \$1.60 from \$102 student Union fee to cover the expenses.

Cleaning contract sparks controversy

by Gordon Loane
Brunswickan News

UNB's Board of Governors has ratified a new three-year contract for cleaning services on the Fredericton campus.

A Halifax-based company, Atlantic Building Cleaners, won out over seven other competitors including the current operator, Modern Building Cleaners.

The new contract takes effect May 1st. Atlantic Building Cleaners decided to offer its new cleaners \$6.00 an hour, a 50 percent cut from what some cleaners with Modern currently earn.

In addition, the change in contractors threw the whole issue of job security up in the air.

Last Monday, the cleaners being affected staged a protest in front of the Old Arts Building which houses the offices of UNB's President and other top officials.

The protests continued Tuesday and Wednesday culminating with a demonstration for job security and fair wages at the Wu Conference Centre last Thursday just before the Board of Governors met to ratify the cleaning contract.

Following a number of representations, including a petition that contained well over one thousand names, the Board of Governors agreed to set up a committee to review the matter.

But the review is shrouded in secrecy. UNB's Vice-President (Finance and Administration) James O'Sullivan, echoed the contents of a terse press release issued earlier Friday, saying he could not get into the specifics of the review or name those on the review committee.

"I am not sure what it will mean to us, but hopefully it will help those who

member of the review committee although he has a seat on the Board of Governors.

It is believed the review committee will look at ways to help the current cleaners, through discussions with the new contractor.

But it is clear that the UNB Administration has taken its lumps over the whole affair.

Fredericton Mayor Brad Woodside, a member of the UNB Board of Governors, calls the move to change contractors a good financial move but

have chosen to stay on with Atlantic," he said.

Hazlett, married with two sons, plans to go home for now and sit tight. Eventually, he will try to land something that pays more than \$6.00 an hour, or something closer to home to reduce his travel costs.

But he is still holding out a small glimmer of hope.

"I hope the review is completed by the May meeting of the Board of Governors," he told *The Brunswickan* this week.

"Five full-time and ten part-time is all they got because of the wages, basically," Hazlett maintains.

There are plenty of individual hardships as well.

One worker, who did not want her name used, said she needs about two more months on the job before going on unemployment for a year and becoming eligible for the senior's pension.

"I guess I will have to go on welfare," she told *The Brunswickan*.

Bud Martin, who works at the Library

a week," he continued.

"We had to really dig to find out just exactly what the salary was going to be."

"It was a real shock to see your wages drop from \$11.43 an hour to \$6.00," Stewart said.

"There is no way I can live on it."

Penny Henry, who has two teenagers at home, works at the Alumni building and would see her hourly wage drop from \$9.63 to \$6.00 after seven years at UNB.

"They should have offered a wage somewhere in between," she said.

"I am not coming back for \$6.00."

"Minimum wage is going up to \$5.50 in July," she continued. "You can go to MacDonald's where I think you can get \$6.50."

"I am also very surprised that ABC did not approach Modern Employees before they generally advertised the jobs," Henry says.

Robert True, a graduate student in political science, attended the demonstration last Thursday in support of the workers.

"I have generally sympathy for people who have built families based upon decent wages," he said.

"They have mortgages and a family to support, now they are being forced to accept \$6.00 an hour which is virtually impossible," True concluded.

Eight students from the International Socialists group showed up, carrying placards in support of the cleaners.

Ric Carrier, a second-year Saint Thomas Student, wondered how workers making just \$6.00 afford to support a family.

"I make \$5.35 an hour as a student and I do not have a family. But even on this I cannot make any headway," Carrier said.

Company	Hours	3-year cost	\$/hour
Modern Building Cleaners	81,126	\$2,846,907.51	\$35.09
Atlantic Building Cleaners	89,191	\$2,642,740.00	\$29.60

While it does not translate directly into wages, there is a significant 15% drop in the cost per staff hour over the life of the three year contract.

bad public relations.

The financial decision is a good one. The University expects to pay \$868,000 in the first year of the new cleaning contract, down substantially from the \$1.2 million it will pay in 1995-96.

But the human cost is an entirely different matter.

Richard Hazlett, who will be unemployed in one week after working at UNB for 19 years, says the review to be undertaken comes too late for him and the majority of his co-workers who decided not to apply for jobs that pay \$6.00 an hour.

"I am glad there is going to be a review but how long is it going to take?" asked Hazlett, who has emerged as a spokesperson for Modern workers.

"I am not sure what it will mean to us, but hopefully it will help those who

"I hope that if they decided to do something then they'll call these people who have gone home on unemployment to come back in to re-apply with Atlantic Building Cleaners," Hazlett said.

Otherwise, it is going to be tough. "According to Mr. Bud Bird (who is associated with Atlantic) it is only \$6.00 an hour everywhere," said Hazlett.

Clearly, there is no shortage of workers that are being affected, but the numbers appear to be in dispute.

UNB's Associate Vice-President Mike Ryan told reporters last week that twenty-two employees of Modern have accepted employment with ABC.

But Richard Hazlett said he was told by a manager of Modern that out of 83 full and part-time employees, ABC got fifteen people who have agreed to come back to work for the new company.

and has been at UNB for sixteen years said he will try to find something else.

"At my age, I probably will not find too much," he said. "But \$6.00 an hour is not a liveable wage."

John Stewart, separated with a family, works in Head Hall. He has been at UNB 18 of the twenty years Modern has had the cleaning contract on campus.

He, too, will find himself unemployed the end of the month. "I did not want to apply."

"It seems like ABC did not really want us to apply."

"They never came to see us, they never talked with us or anything," he said.

"They just more or less got word around for us to apply and that's it," Stewart said.

"They did not even really tell us how much we were going to make for about