

EDITORIAL

By Karen Burgess

Accessibility Awareness for University Administrators 101—Lesson Number One: Specially-marked parking spaces do not a wheelchair accessible campus make.

UNB's top administrators, Premier Frank McKenna and Fredericton Mayor Brad Woodside are being challenged to participate in an event designed to raise their awareness about physical accessibility problems faced by students on the Fredericton campus. Pat FitzPatrick, SU VP University Affairs, is asking the powers that be to take some time out of their busy schedules to learn about life in a wheelchair. As part of Physical Accessibility Week (tentatively scheduled for the week of the 21st), UNB President Robin Armstrong, Vice-presidents Frank Wilson (Research & International Co-operation), James O'Sullivan (Finance and Administration), Tom Traves (Academic), Associate VP Finance and Administration Eric Garland, and Dean of Students Tom Austin are being asked to complete some of their daily functions while travelling via wheelchair.

As of press time, Dean Austin and Mayor Woodside, a member of UNB's Board of Governors, have confirmed that they will take part in the Student Union's challenge.

The participants will be given an envelope full of "money" and a registration form and asked to complete the usual student duties like enrolling in classes, paying tuition, getting all those pretty multi-coloured slips of paper signed in triplicate by people whose offices are on the most extreme outer edges of campus—and all in a wheelchair.

It will be inconvenient—this is the point. They won't be able to get into the Old Arts Building, let alone to the Registrar's Office, without being carried: stairs, no ramp, no elevator. They won't be able to get a book out of the Harriet Irving without extensive assistance: the aisles between the stacks are too narrow. They won't be able to get into the bathrooms without going far out of their way: three, maybe four buildings have accessible bathrooms. They won't be able to get to the offices of CHSR: again, stairs, no ramp, no elevator.

It will be damn inconvenient, but then again, it will only be for a few hours. The efforts of the participants will only be temporary, but for some students on this campus, facing the challenges presented by limited accessibility is a fact of life.

What adds particular irony to this situation is the fact that students who face these obstacles on a daily basis can't even go to their representatives on the Student Union to lodge a complaint about the limited accessibility of the campus. They can't get to the SU offices in the SUB. They are on the second floor, and, you guessed it, stairs, no elevator, no ramp.

The university makes an effort to accommodate students with accessibility challenges, but only on an individual, ad hoc basis. Courses for students with mobility or sight restrictions can be scheduled in a centralized, accessible area, the librarians at the Harriet Irving are very helpful, and ramps and improvements can be done here and there when

needed. This is encouraging, but, on a campus where much has been said lately about providing a comfortable and safe atmosphere in which students can learn, it seems to fall a bit short.

Can a student who has restricted vision be safe on a campus which doesn't have Braille signage on its elevators, or reflective tape marking the steps in its staircases? Can a student with restricted mobility feel comfortable on a campus where they have to be carried up a flight of stairs to volunteer at the student radio station, or where they must be accompanied throughout the library because they can't get to the stacks to pick out a book?

The university has taken no action to implement wide-spread improvements to the accessibility of its facilities. Obviously, there are financial restrictions, budgeting constraints, priorities, red tape, endless lists of other problems to be addressed before the campus could be made fully accessible to all the students who pay their \$2,470 a year to come here. As students, we are as aware of the current need for financial restraint as anyone (try surviving on \$60 worth of groceries for a month and a half while waiting for a student loan like one of our staffers did—you learn about budgeting pretty damn fast). But as valid as these restrictions are, they are irrelevant unless they are actually creating an obstacle to the implementation of, say, some form of action plan developed by the university.

Not only does the university not have any such plans in the works, they apparently don't even have a definition of what constitutes an access challenge so they can find out what

the needs of access challenged students are so they can see where the campus is most in need of improvement so they can look at their budget and see that money's tight and they can't afford massive renovations.

The SU may be able to help them out a bit here though. As part of Physical Accessibility week they'll be issuing a residence challenge to see which house can get the most items in a special scavenger hunt. Students won't be looking for the usual scavenger hunt kind of stuff, they'll be searching out the campus' most inaccessible areas. The SU plans to use some of the information obtained in the search to prepare a report on campus accessibility for presentation to the Admin.

The accessibility awareness campaign, co-presented with CFS, will also involve putting up posters and trying to get people thinking about accessibility.

It's a step in the right direction anyway. The university may not be able to afford improvements to all the areas cited in the accessibility inventory, but steps need to be taken to ensure that each student who enrolls at UNB receive the same quality of education. Besides, if they could get Grad Class '94 to pay for completely essential upgrades to the poor lighting on campus, and Grad Class '93 to pay for completely essential upgrades to the library collection, I'm sure the Grads of '95 or '96 would be happy to pay for completely essential improvements to the structure of the buildings in which they get their education.



Pentafolio Inc. Illustration: Steve Young

MUGWUMP

BY JAMES ROWAN

Four years ago, this all seemed like a good idea. Hah. A good idea. Go to university, get a degree, pick up some journalism experience on the way, get a job after graduation... well, now I know better.

What has brought on this new bout of cynicism? I have now entered Grad School Application Hell. There is a stack of applications on my desk nearly six inches high, each individual application requiring transcripts, references, photocopied essays, 500 words on why I want to go to their wonderful institution. This letter, since I'm an English student, must be impeccably well written, perfect in form, style and content and as intellectually stimulating as possible. Furthermore, I must show (and be specific) why the university I am applying to is the best possible university for me, why it has the best possible faculty mix, the best research facilities and the most complete mix of services that someone researching a thesis in my field could want. It should perfectly complement my application and show why I am perfect for them, and they're perfect for me. In other words, I should kiss butt. So, I have to show an in depth knowledge of their faculty and research strengths, and my own abilities and interests. Uh-huh. I'm writing one form letter and changing the names.

The real way you know that you're in Grad School Application Hell is that your bank account is wiped out. With each school demanding \$10-\$60 dollars for the privilege of losing my documentation and laughing at my request for financial aid, my cynicism has hit new heights—or lows, depending on how you look at it. Now, add to that the ex-

Grad School Application Hell

- a view from the front -

pense of mailing (yes, Canada Post, the only company more money hungry than the universities) all those forms, transcripts, cheques and a note signed by my mother saying Jamie can come out to play, and my bank account isn't looking too good right now. Of course, if I didn't have to use Priority Post or sameday courier because the deadlines are next week, it might have been a little cheaper. Of course, last term I was engaged in a desperate (semi-successful) battle to keep my head above the waters of academic mediocrity.

The real reason I am becoming a mite cynical is my awareness that the pursuit of a higher education will probably only serve to make me the smartest and most educated person in the unemployment line. Still, everyone has to have a dream. And considering the state of the economy, I'm going to have to study damn hard to be more educated than that engineer with six degrees ahead of me in the line. Of course, I don't expect to get a job right away and he probably did. Maybe I will be the smartest person in the line up after all.

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The feature in the center spread this week is on SPARC, our new student alumni organization. Y'know, it may be just me, but I'm 90% sure that SPARC is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, as in SPARCstation computers. Maybe someone should look into that before Sun's lawyers do.



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Canada's Oldest Official Student Publication
Established 1867

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The Brunswickan, in its 128th year of publication, is Canada's Oldest Official student publication. The Brunswickan is published every Friday during the school year by Brunswickan Publishing Inc., with a weekly circulation of 10,000 copies on campus and around Fredericton. Staff membership is open to all UNB students contributing to three or more issues, but anyone is welcomed to contribute.

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