EDITORIAL

Student Press: The need for fairness

by Allan Carter

The problem with any volunteer student organization is attempting to maintain what can be termed as a moderate level of professionalism. This is never an easy task. At the Brunswickan a genuine effort is being made to keep the public, particularly the students, informed about what is happening on campus and the community. Additionally, the Brunswickan also attempts to be a forum for public debate. Undoubtedly, we have many critics. Some argue that we are not forceful enough. They believe that as a student newspaper, our techniques are not radical or alternative. In other words, we follow the mainstream media line to closely. Others argue that our methods are too bull-headed. They believe that we investigate issues too quickly and tend to forget about the repercussions which some of these issues we deal with may have on the people involved.

These two contrasting observations suggest to me that the Brunswickan has a diverse readership. However, what many do not realize is that we also have a diverse staff. There is rarely total agreement on any issue which comes up at the Brunswickan. Instead, people argue and bicker over their differences of opinion and usually the office can be an insightful (or boring) place to be during such discussions.

One issue which always crops up is the notion of objectivity. True, it is probably appropriate for a news reporter to have absolutely no bias on the story which he/she is investigating. However, in reality, that is never that case. Any newspaper which proclaims that they are totally objective on any issue is either misleading the public or just ignorantly mistaken. Pure objectivity does not exist. What does exist is the need and concern for fairness. Any responsible reporter strives to get all the sides to a story, and there are usually more than two. By obtaining responses and reactions from all sides of a story, the reporter is progressively avoiding showing bias in a story. Of course, the questions asked, the manner in which an interview is done and what a reporter selects to write, all are considerations which illustrate

occasions have I not felt strongly about something which I have been reporting on. In such circumstances, the reporter has two options: he/ she can either refuse doing the story because of their bias, or they can attempt to be as fair as possible. It is in such situations that the competence of an editor is truly tested because he/she. on occasion, must decide whether or not the reporter is a suitable candidate for the story.

Of course, if a newspaper aims at only reporting on events, ceremonies, and rewrite press releases, the responses which they will receive from their readership will no doubt be stagnant. However, if a newspaper strives to report on issues to make people aware of what is occurring, the letter to the editor section and the opinion pieces may prove to be a bit more stimulating and interesting. Such discussion, one would presume, is healthful, particularly in a university challenged to do in any job is inexcusable. If a

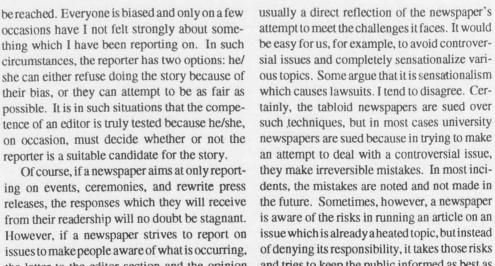
The Brunswickan has come under fire in the past couple of years for a few of the articles which it investigated. Usually such response comes from people who were involved in the story, so such reaction is to be expected and in some circumstances respected. On some occasions, however, individuals have been upset because they did not want what they said printed or they just simply had no comment. Discretion from the people being interviewed is as necessary as discretion from the person who is doing the inter- important to the community. For many who view. In such cases, the incidents are usually have graduated from UNB and are now living unfortunate ones. Nevertheless, if the reporter deems that what was said was important or feels their few sources to what is happening on it necessary to point out that the individual asked campus and around Fredericton. Noting the to respond to an issue had no comment, that is his/ limitations, the newspaper is also a venue for her prerogative. It is a difficult responsibility and those with legitimate concerns, either about the one which usually involves making heart-rend-newspaper itself or issues which are happening

The work at a newspaper is always exciting, but at the same it is extremely challenging. meet the challenges faced by a student newpaper. Sometimes it is tempting not to meet the chal- Some people do not feel that our techniques are lenges. Many question why newspapers are sued suitable, while others feel they are. Such diveror why so many people complain about a news- sity and discussion illustrates that, to some paper's content. I have found that in cases were degree, the newspaper has been successful in that while one strives for objectivity, it can never the newspaper is acting responsibly, lawsuits are meeting the challenges.

attempt to meet the challenges it faces. It would be easy for us, for example, to avoid controversial issues and completely sensationalize various topics. Some argue that it is sensationalism which causes lawsuits. I tend to disagree. Certainly, the tabloid newspapers are sued over such techniques, but in most cases university newspapers are sued because in trying to make an attempt to deal with a controversial issue, they make irreversible mistakes. In most incidents, the mistakes are noted and not made in the future. Sometimes, however, a newspaper is aware of the risks in running an article on an issue which is already a heated topic, but instead of denying its responsibility, it takes those risks and tries to keep the public informed as best as

Shrinking the responsibilities which you are person takes such an attitude in a job, the employer becomes concerned. If a newspaper fails to take full responsibility for their actions, the readership becomes concerned. Each week, the Brunswickan is subject to criticism, praise and concern from its readership. Through letters to the editor, news articles and opinion pieces, individuals are able to express their feelings on a broad range of issues. This process also helps the newspaper to maintain a focus as it takes into consideration what is outside the university, the newspaper is one of on and around campus.

At any rate, the Brunswickan is striving to





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The Brunswickan, while being an open forum for the viewpoints and opinions of all UNB students, may refuse any submission that is judged to be racist, sexist, libellous, or containing attacks of a strictly personal nature. The Brunswickan reserves the right to edit for brevity. Letters generally shouldn't exceed 300 words in length and must contain your signature, student number and phone number, or it will Nor be printed

All copy submitted must be double spaced, on ONE side of the page only and must be legible. If we can't read it, we won't print it. The Brunswickan now accepts copy on 3 1/2 inch disk, either Macintosh or MS-Dos format.

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The Brunswickan Student Union Building P.O. Box 4400 E3B 5A3

University of New Brunswick Phone: (506) 453-4983 Fax: (506) 453-4958

