

# The great Student Centre debate

## PRO

By ROBERT CASTLE  
and GERARD BLINK

□The authors of this article are the co-ordinators of the Student Centre initiative.

Over the past 10 months an incredible amount of work has been done to demonstrate the benefits of a Student Centre to York students. We began with the premise that York has an incredible lack of space, particularly space devoted purely to the use of students. This hardly seemed unreasonable when confronted with the glaring statistic that the space originally designed for one York student is now shared by three.

Despite an unsuccessful referendum two years ago, we embarked on the present Student Centre initiative, confident that we could address previous concerns and build enough support to win a referendum. It would seem now that the support is there and we are well on our way to a strong showing on March 10 and 11.

But certain questions should be answered before openly declaring our confidence. These questions include: what will go in the Student Centre? Who would control the Student Centre? How much will this cost and when? How will this affect life at York? And what will students be voting for next Tuesday and Wednesday?

As our campaign posters and literature have indicated we would like to see an outstanding collection of facilities in the Student Centre. Foremost is a franchised food court which would be made up of six food outlets such as Druxy's, MMMUffins, and Pizza Pizza. These outlets will provide students both with a pleasing selection of food and a welcome alternative to the existing food services on campus.

Other facilities include a large restaurant/entertainment pub for 500 and lounge space for 1,000. Both of these will do much to provide a warm and inviting atmosphere to our 25,000 commuter students who are afforded so few services on campus. York clubs play a major role in the life of the University, but are rarely recognized for their contribution. Our proposal includes a major space commitment to those clubs, whether they be multicultural, academic, political or social. Bunk rooms, a used bookstore and a photo-

copy/wordprocessing service will all go a long way to provide our students with services which are commonplace at most other universities. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it offers a good indication of what York's Student Centre will be like.

A number of points have now been guaranteed by the University Administration to protect the interests of students. Most importantly, the Administration has agreed that students will have a voting majority on any management structure we create. This gives student representatives responsibility for the operations, expenditures and revenues of the Student Centre. This point alone is a major victory for our negotiating team.

The Student Centre will jointly be funded by the proposed student levy and a direct University grant. The levy which students will be voting on is for \$7.00 per full course or \$3.50 per half course. So if a student were taking a full course-load of 5 courses, they would pay a maximum of \$35. This compares favourably with other student centres across Canada. For example, U of T students pay \$52.50 merely to maintain Hart House.

The levy, which will last the life of any mortgage negotiated for the building, will generate eight million dollars toward the Centre. However, we have always maintained, and continue to maintain, that it is inherently unfair to ask students to pay for a building in advance of construction, if they never have the opportunity to use it. So we have received a guarantee, in writing, from the Administration that the levy will not be collected until the year the Student Centre is operational.

In order to get the project off the ground, the Administration has decided to make a capital contribution of three million dollars to the initiative. It will also donate land worth one million dollars. This land will be leased at a nominal rate of one dollar per year. As you can well imagine, this four million dollar total contribution represents a significant commitment by the University to the Student Centre.

What impact will all this have on life at York? We see only positive

results. Some have tried to suggest that college life will suffer if a large Student Centre is constructed. From the beginning of this project, it has been our intention to complement and enhance the existing communities at York. Besides, if such were not the case, would we have the support of six out of seven college presidents?

Commuters, that great forgotten majority at York, will gain so much. Finally, they will have a place to go and relax, eat, study, sleep, socialize and do all the things that for so long has been denied them.

The benefits seem innumerable, yet there has developed a small opposition campaign led by Mr. Leslie Garant, self proclaimed Interim "Big Guy" (according to his official declaration) of Calumet College. Their main concern seems to be that they fear the "amount of control the University will exercise over the institution." We have written guarantees that students will have majority control of the building. We also have written guarantees that until such time as a formal agreement is signed between student representatives and the University, the levy will never be collected.

Next, Mr. Garant suggests that CYSF has too many problems of its own and that these will adversely affect the Centre. Mr. Garant is fully aware that this is not a CYSF building, but a building for all York students, a building that will be run by an independent management board, free of the wranglings of campus politics.

He finally raises concerns over the financial viability of our proposal. I would be most pleased to see any analysis Mr. Garant or his colleagues could produce that would refute our own MBA Feasibility Study, or a study that would refute the figures of the York University Development Corporation, or that would refute the figures of the University's consulting firm, the IBI Group.

We have done our research. We know this project can and will work. It is up to York students now to demonstrate vision, commitment to the future and collective wisdom. The choice is ours—we can allow York to continue the way it has for the past 20 years, or we can take a bold initiative to move forward and to build our own community.

## CON

By DOUGALL GRANGE ET AL

□The authors of this article are heading the NO campaign in the Student Centre Referendum.

On March 10 and 11 the York student populace will be asked whether they agree to the idea of paying a fee to be used towards the construction of a Student Centre. This would seem to be a valid question and perhaps one worthy of support, however, the question is incomplete. All that is being asked is will we pay for a student centre, not what it is we are paying for?

What brings this issue about is the requirement of a referendum to increase ancillary fees. At first the proposed referendum contained two questions. One dealt with the question of funding, the other dealt with the question of a management board which would oversee the construction and operations of the Student Centre. Now we have the very least that the Administration requires to see this proposal through. Effectively this is an exercise in political expediency. The referendum question is asking the York community to sign a blank cheque. We are being asked to sign over enormous amounts of money for the construction of some type of building, to be put somewhere on the campus, which will provide some type of student service.

What we don't need is a repeat of the Student Centre experiences that have occurred at U of T and Guelph. At both these universities misunderstandings and incomplete contractual agreements led to the initiation of several lawsuits between the student governments and the administrations. The potential for a conflict is brewing as we are being asked to ratify a proposal which is still being negotiated.

What is a majority interest on the management board? What protection do we have from the bureaucracy of the University? What undertaking do we have from the Administration granting the students control of the Centre? Furthermore, even when we know the answers to these questions we will not be given the opportunity to approve the final design and managerial arrangements.

The negotiations with the Administration are not yet complete. We have no deal. So far we have two possible proposals that have been set forth, but no concrete decisions have

yet been made. Once we have said "okay we'll pay for this thing" what happens next? Negotiations continue and a final decision is made. We have, via a communique from Gerard Blink and Robert Castle dated March 2, an assurance from the 'Ninth Floor' that the Centre will not go ahead until the student representatives have in fact negotiated "to their satisfaction... a formal agreement with the University."

Well that is all very well and nice, but who are these student reps? If it's the CYSF, the student population is not represented since the majority of the student body is not represented by this Council. Furthermore, in the past, few people have voted in the CYSF elections and the Council has been dominated by a few individuals.

Finally, it should be noted that the CYSF is under no obligation to ratify any Student Centre agreement with the students. By voting YES in this referendum we will be leaving the whole process in the hands of too few people who clearly have no plans for a second referendum on the final Student Centre package. When we are asked to pay for something, we should have a reasonably clear idea of what it is that we are buying.

The Student Centre campaign has been actively supported by the University Administration to the tune of \$15,000 this year. This has occurred at a time when the University is under severe financial constraints. Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Administration strongly wants this Student Centre constructed. \$15,000 (plus a three million dollar promise) is a cheap price to pay for a \$12 million building.

There is no particular fault with the concept of a Student Centre. There is no doubt that the University is full beyond capacity and that the conditions are becoming worse by the minute. In congratulating the efforts put forth by Robert Castle and friends, it must be said that they are moving too quickly and with too few safeguards. The true mistake of this campaign is not the concept, but rather the method of achieving the goal. It is not time for us to give the nod to the Administration.

It is unfortunate that we are unable to vote for the Student Centre proposal without giving up a fair and equitable bargaining position. Let a NO vote in the Student Centre referendum signal that much more work needs to be done.

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