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CASA rocked by embezzlement allegations

BY JEN HORSEY

Alex Usher, the National Director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), returned from a ten-week sick leave to face questions regarding spending by interim National Director, Pat FitzPatrick.

FitzPatrick was suspended from his duties on January 9th, following a phone call between Usher and University of New Brunswick (UNB) President Kelly Lamrock.

At the national CASA conference held in October, FitzPatrick was made the coordinator of CASA's National Conference on Higher Education. In late November, the board of directors (made up of 5 regional representatives, of which FitzPatrick was one) appointed him to the position of interim National Director while Usher, due to illness, was unable to fulfil his duties.

FitzPatrick resigned from the position of UNB VP External in early November amid controversy surrounding his use of the Student Union credit card.

Because UNB was handling the CASA finances before the office was created in Ottawa, UNB and CASA had a funding agreement in which UNB agreed to pay expenses of CASA equal to \$9,000 — UNB's membership fees. UNB also agreed to cover expenses over the \$9000, with the understanding that CASA would pay this money back at the end of the year.

FitzPatrick had been charging CASA expenses using the Student Union credit card. Usher is not confident that those costs were legitimate CASA expenditures.

"Mr. FitzPatrick appears to have told them we would pay [the credit card costs]," said Usher.

It was the use of the UNB credit card which alerted Usher to CASA's financial problems. Lamrock telephoned Usher regarding the credit card bill on January 9. Within 36 hours,

Spending by interim National Director Pat FitzPatrick to be investigated by Ottawa police

Usher had assembled enough information to go to the Ottawa police.

Ottawa Police have agreed to investigate two charges; one regarding a fraudulent cheque for \$225, and the other a theft of \$2,000.

Another investigation is pending in New Brunswick regarding alleged misappropriation of funds, where FitzPatrick, in his duties as coordinator of the National Conference on Higher Education, had signing authority on the bank account for the Conference. This account, which contained a \$10,000 loan from CASA, now contains only \$1,500.

Usher was uncertain whether that money was spent on legitimate conference costs; however, he did comment that at this point only \$1,300-\$1,400 were accounted for.

"The money that has been misappropriated is not from CASA, it is from the Conference," said Usher. "...the finances here are clean, and the problem was Pat and what he was doing in New Brunswick."

Both the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU), and the Alma Mater Society at the University of British Columbia have notified the organization that they will not pay their membership fees until they can review an audit of CASA's financial records.

The DSU's outstanding fees amount to \$9000.

"There was no way that we were going to release funds to an organization that was financially questionable," said Erin Ahern, the DSU's VP External.

Usher claims that all of the information CASA has on this issue, including an internal audit,

will be made available to member schools on Thursday.

Usher regarded this hesitancy in paying fees as understandable.

"What they want is to get this cleared up and know that we've dealt with this prudently and responsibly...if they're convinced of that, then the fees will come in for the rest of the year and we'll be fine," said Usher.

Although Usher appeared confident that CASA could overcome these problems, he did comment that they have not escaped unscathed.

"It's going to mean some crimping here," he said. "As near as I can tell, we're out \$10,000." CASA's total budget is \$128,500.

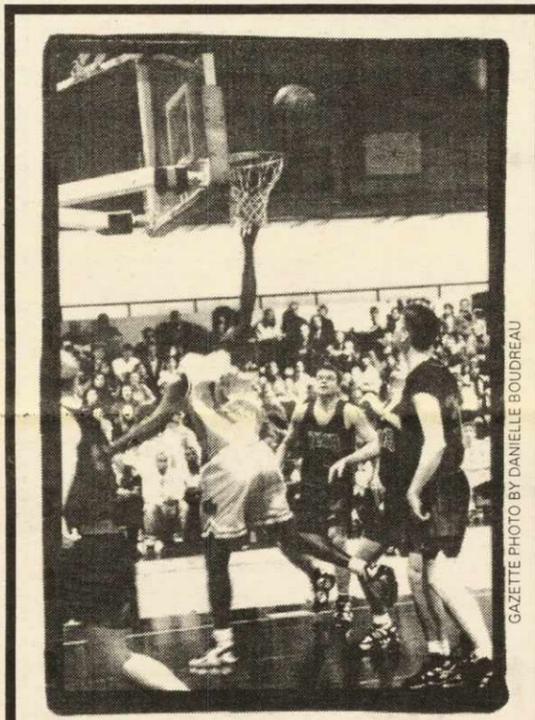
"We're going to be taking a very significant hit for one year, but it's not fatal. It think everybody understands that this is the act of one person," said Usher. "We're not going to let one person do this. Pat FitzPatrick is not

going to do to CASA what Nick Leeson did to Barings."

Neither Kelly Lamrock nor Pat FitzPatrick could be reached for comment.

CASA was created in January, 1995 as an alternative to the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). The aim of CASA is to nationally represent student interests on education issues.

Ahern was uncertain what impact this turn of events would have on the DSU, but she did comment that "it would be a real shame for this organization to fall apart because of one individual."



GAZETTE PHOTO BY DANIELLE BOUDREAU

Hoopsters flying

The Tigers' Reggie Oblitey (#11) takes it to the hoop amid a troika of UNB defenders in weekend action. Dalhousie dumped the Varsity Reds 86-72 on Saturday and nipped the University of Prince Edward Island Panthers 85-79 on Sunday. For a complete update on the past week's sporting events, see page 12.

Smoking policy? What smoking policy?

BY GAZETTE STAFF

The big yellow posters that are hanging in a multitude of conspicuous places in the Student Union Building (SUB) state firmly that a new smoking policy — as it is outlined in those very same posters — was passed in the January 7 Council meeting, and that it is effective immediately.

Some concerned people aren't so sure. If you read those minutes, very carefully, they say that the smoking policy motion is to "...be referred [sic] to the January Annual General Meeting for consideration."

Then that motion is amended. Then the whole thing is passed. Although amendments to existing policy are effective immediately, the minutes of the January 7 Council meeting don't clearly state that this is an amendment to an existing policy (even though there is an existing smoking policy)...in fact, oddly enough, they state that it is a proposed DSU policy.

You have to wonder if amendments to proposed motions that are to "...be referred [sic] to the January Annual General Meeting for consideration" are also effective immediately.

So, if that means that it should be referred to the January Annual General Meeting for consideration, shouldn't smoking still be permitted in the SUB in the meantime?

Confusing, eh? I'm confused, are you confused? But those concerned individuals who brought this to our attention don't appear to be confused. Check next week's Gazette for more details.

Apathy on campus: Extracurricular activities in decline

BY DAVID CAMERON

At about 10:45 p.m. on a cold Tuesday evening in early December, first-year arts student Adam Richard stood outside Dalhousie's Killam Memorial Library.

For him, it's been another long day. "I'm a full-time student and I work full-time. I don't have time to get involved, especially when it comes to student politics," said Richard.

He didn't vote in last October's Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) senate by-elections and referenda because he didn't have the time to familiarize himself with the candidates and the issues.

"I care about issues that affect me as a student, but I just don't have enough time to learn more about them or to get involved," said Richard.

Megan Hannam, a second-year marine biology student, hurries across campus.

"I wasn't informed on the issues and I didn't want to make any uninformed choices," she said, explaining why she didn't vote in the last election.

Richard and Hannam are not the only students who

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chose not to vote. In fact, only 1608 ballots were cast in the by-election, which ran from October 11 to 13. In addition to senate by-elections, students were asked three referendum questions and two plebiscites on one ballot. But students were not required to answer all of the questions.

And they didn't. Less than eight per cent of students voted to pull out of the Students' Union of Nova Scotia (SUNS). For a result to be valid and binding, at least eight per cent of the membership must vote for one particular side of an issue. In this case, the DSU Council chose to stand by the majority (of those that voted) decision to opt out of the provincial student organization.

Some observers suggest that the low voter turnout simply reinforces and highlights the amazing amount of student apathy at Dalhousie.

But DSU President David Cox said describing students as apathetic is unfair.

"I just don't buy apathy," he said. "I think people care, but students want to make informed choices. We

[DSU Council] are trying to be more accountable and get more information out there."

DSU Vice President (VP) Academic Chris Lydon said voter turnout will be higher if the DSU and its representatives continue to become more visible and active in informing students.

"We have to continue our efforts to inform students where their money is going, what representatives they have, what opportunities they have, and what issues are facing them," said Lydon.

One such issue is the Consortium proposal, a response of the seven Metro universities to deal with actual and proposed decreases in government funding for education.

"The Consortium is something that's going to drive up everyone's tuition, has the potential to close programs, and it has got something that can take away whole facets of our university," said Lydon. "Yet, not too many people know about it or its consequences."

Although voter turnout is low, Lydon believes students are adequately represented on the DSU Council.

...cont'd on page 3: "APATHY"