

editorial

Open evaluation of UNB academic Staff needed

It is time for the academic staff at this university to be openly evaluated. It is time to produce a meaningful, detailed questionnaire about both the instructor and the course, the results of which can be put to good use helping new students select courses.

Students have keenly sharpened senses when it comes to judging the quality of a professor and the value of a course. If the university is truly interested in increasing the overall quality of the education it provides, it should tap the full potential of this valuable information source.

Currently, the accumulated results of nine somewhat vague questions are buried forever in a faculty member's personnel file. These results are only intended to be used when a given professor is being considered for promotion. Considering the generality of the questions, it is unlikely that much weight would ever be placed on the results; and after a faculty member obtains tenure it seems pointless to even keep gathering the statistics.

The issue of what to do with the evaluations has come before senate dozens of times over the last few years. Almost everybody seems dissatisfied. At least one university department actually threatened to boycott the evaluations. Obviously something must be done.

There seem to be two schools of thought: those who feel the evaluations are demeaning to professors or who think students are incapable of assessing teaching ability, and those who entirely endorse the idea of evaluations but who dislike the current questions.

The former group are an over-conservative old-fashioned group of academics whose numbers are thankfully diminishing, but ever so slowly. The latter group would be able to produce a valid open evaluation were they not impeded by the former group. A middle-of-the-road compromise has developed that actually satisfies nobody.

It is time for the students to take a stand for the betterment of our own university. We must define in our own minds what we need, and then promote this among the more liberal-minded members of the faculty and administration.

The current data collection method — the filling in of computer cards — must be kept, but a new set of questions should be drawn up. It is useless to ask whether the instructor regularly attends class — the department will soon find out if absences are too common. The following is a limited list of possible questions:

Does the instructor mark in a fair and equitable manner?
a) always b) usually c) sometimes d) never

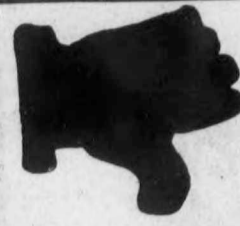
Compared to other courses, was the work-load of this course:
a) too heavy b) heavy c) average d) light e) too light

For the average student, would you regard this course to be:
a) valuable b) average c) useless

Many other questions may be suggested. The questions, though, are not the most important thing to be done. The crucial thing for students is that full summaries of all evaluations be published to aid students in selecting their courses.

Some faculty claim that if evaluations were published, students would be scared away from certain courses. That is the way things should be. Poorly rated faculty would soon start to shape up if registrations in their sections dwindled.

It is the university's responsibility to improve our educational environment; it is our job as students to make sure the university fulfils this responsibility.



mugwump journal

BY MIKE MACKINNON

This is my final Mugwump and I would like to use the opportunity to write about something that has bothered me for the last five years. Because of working on the paper it has been easy to observe the actions of those in the student union and to notice that things are exactly the same year after year.

What I am talking about is the petty attitudes that are prevalent among those who are supposed to be representing us. I am sure that initially their motives are to be trusted but this is not as if both groups disagree with each other's political ideology or approach but rather we have a case of simple personality conflict. This is a situation that has grown worse in the last two years because of the presence of John Bosnitch as president.

It is easy to see why the situation has grown worse. It must be admitted that Bosnitch has the ability to alienate a lot of people. This has resulted in opposition to many of his ideas, even if they may have been sound. We recently saw an example of this in the opposition of the old SUB Board to the proposed take over of the smoke shop by CSL. While it may be argued, in fact it has been, that the move was done in the best interests of the students I have to question the motives of those on the board. The idea had its merits and had the board really looked at it seriously instead of allowing itself to be affected by the personalities involved we would likely be one step closer to having a CSL run store.

An even more serious problem has arisen because of this pettiness. The Board of Governors has received a recommendation from Dean Wilson, a member of the SUB Board, that the lease of the smoke shop be renewed. It is to be expected that as long as this childish bickering continues the administration is never going to take the efforts of the student union seriously and continue to step in when they deem it prudent to do so.

The time has come for our student union to put aside the personality conflicts, the bickering and the pettiness and strive, together, to gain some credibility.

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It was brought to my attention this week that the path between the SUB and the traffic circle by STU is very icy and has missed out on the salt treatment. The installation of lights and regular plowing would seem to mean this is to be considered a "real" path. Why then isn't it salted? Falling on slippery ice is not the right way to start off your day.

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A final comment on the actions of the Saint Thomas SRC. At Tuesday's council meeting it was stated by Vice-President External Mark Slipp that the new council "does not need Brunswick facilities; it will be done off campus." I am afraid they are in for a rude awakening. The cost they will pay for typesetting, offset and photo work will be at least three times more than the cost they had paid here. It is ironic that after complaining about the finances of the Aquinian, council decides to take a course of action that will make the financial situation even worse. Makes you want to question the ability of council.

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In a letter to the editor this week Brent Bartley states "When confronted with the 73 percent YES vote for a student-owned store I did respond that it was nonsense because with 13 percent of the student population voting, 73 percent of that amounts to approximately 520 people, less than 10 percent of the total student population."

The flaw with this line of thinking is in the belief that because only 13 percent of the students voted there is not a true democratic representation of the wishes of the students.

Regardless of the voter turnout, if the majority of those voting vote in favor of a referendum question then that has to be taken as the wishes of the student body. Just because 87 percent of the students cannot be bothered to voice an opinion by voting does not mean the democratic process has not been followed. It is unfortunate that only 13 percent voted but that is the way it is, and the wishes of 520 people have to be taken as the wishes of the majority of the student population.

Perhaps Mr. Bartley would like the system of voting changed.