

The trials and tribulations of York's college publications

Funding is an important issue as far as *Lexicon* editor John Montesano is concerned. He feels that the University of Toronto's college papers are healthy and thriving and that a big reason for this is that they get their money directly from a student levy. "The situation at UofT is that they have guarantees of office space and equipment, and they know exactly how much money they have to work with," he says.

Eight of the nine colleges at UofT have a newspaper which publishes at least twice a month. Victoria College's paper — *The Strand* — receives \$4.25 from approximately 3,000 students who attend the college. *The Mike*, St. Michael's college paper, was given \$17,000 from student levies as part of its budget. And most of the papers get some funds either through advertising or from student council grants.

However, there are problems at UofT. College papers there, just like at York, have trouble getting a commitment from the students to volunteer their time to make a paper work.

"We've had staffing problems and there have been problems getting editors," said Celio Jordao editor of *The Mike*. "Last year, the editor and chief of our paper resigned and I was hired later." Jordao also said that he knew of some papers that were initially having problems getting funds from their college councils, however he did not mention which ones in particular.

But there is always a problem when York compares itself to UofT because we are such different universities. "York is more centralized," says Jordao. "St. Michael's College and Victoria College are really universities federated within the university. And they are physically separated from other colleges. News in one may not be covered by another group. UofT is more decentralized and it needs college papers."

York professor Fred Fletcher, who was the editor of the campus paper at the University of British Columbia and also a writer for the *Vancouver Sun*, says he has mixed feelings about there being a lot of campus papers.

"I'm in favour of diversity, but there is a problem of community building at York that has to be recognized," he says. "The more papers there are, the more perspectives, the more diversity of opinions there are. But in a relatively small community there is an advantage to a focus, too many voices can create confusion."

McLaughlin president David Tushingham says his college wanted to have a paper this year, but it became more difficult than was anticipated. "We tried to get it going, but we had little financing and no structure in place. No one wanted to take on the responsibility, what interest there had been, disappeared."

Associate dean of the faculty of arts, and former master of Vanier College, Deborah Hobson, says that a lot of the problems in the past have stemmed from the colleges themselves and a lack of commitment on the part of the college councils or the students involved.

But, all of the papers say that their biggest problem still is student apathy, a too familiar story at

York. Getting and keeping volunteers in almost every student activity has been difficult in the past, and most likely will continue to be a problem in the future. But, papers in particular demand a great deal of commitment from the students that participate in them.

Part of the problem is that a lot of students that are interested in journalism as a career today, go to schools with journalism programmes. The pool of students interested in writing, that college papers may have once draw from, has simply drained away and all that seems to be left is a puddle.

At the same time, students today just don't have the time to volunteer. Many students that attend York are mature students, or the first member of their family to go to university, or part-timers and generally have greater financial pressures. Because of this they have to hold down part-time jobs and this puts even more pressure on them academically.

It's quite clear that the people who do participate in campus publications would like to see them thrive. But there has to be more to a paper than just the assurance that it can come out at least twice a month.

"It's a catch - 22," says *Excalibur* editor Nancy Phillips. "College papers, just by coming out regularly, would probably help to increase student awareness and participation in their college. But if you don't have the people to put out a paper in the first place, you're stuck."

The problems the college papers are experiencing have the familiar echoes of the problems the university are facing. Lack of funding, little student interest, and a lack of vision on the part of both the administration and the college councils, clearly top the list of reasons for the failing state of college publications.

Professor Fletcher feels that student publications have the problems they do because that is the nature of the beast. "Student papers rise and fall depending on whose organizing them, which is true of most student bodies," he says.

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