

# EDITORIAL

## Power in the university community

By Kwame Dawes

Who really holds the power in a university? Is it the administration with its position of authority over hiring, firing and policy making? Is it the faculty? Does their power over the professional future of the thousands of students who sit through their lectures make them the most powerful? Or are the students the bearers of the greatest power? Can students realistically argue that the *raison d'être* of the university is themselves? And even if this were the case, does that grant them power? These questions can not be answered without an appreciation of what we mean by the term power. Surely, if power was to be decided by the question of dispensability, it could safely be said that the student is the most powerful.

It may be argued that people could still learn without the physical presence of professors and administrators. All the student needs to be an effective learner is the will to do so and a very good library. Professors are dispensable as many students who have missed terms of lectures have proven over and over again. The university is more a learning institution than it is a teaching institution. The distinction is important only because it points to the place of power and the approach to education within the university community.

But what of the administrators? University administrators are managers of an immense financial unit. They must administer the maintenance of the buildings that house the students, the equipment that the students must use, the books that the students must read and the other essential facilities that students require. The administration must also hire the teachers who will work with the students and dictate policy as to who qualifies to be a student. To a large extent, the university functions as managers for the Board of Governors of the school, who themselves represent the owners. If indeed the institution is owned by someone else other than the students and faculty, it should be increasingly clear that the true power of control lies in the administration. And the constitutions of most universities makes this clear. Students may argue that since they pay a significant amount of fees each year, that they in fact should be regarded as those who hold the greatest power. But this is merely a romantic and unrealistic notion. True, without the students there will be no university to speak of, but the fact is that the university exists and it is now a privilege for anyone to enter its gates. The people who decide who may enter are not the students. Students have to pass exams; they have to meet the criteria set by the faculty and enforced by the administration. The student is granted power when they are accepted as students. As soon as they stop being students (which occurs after three to eight years) they stop having power. It is taken from them. The administration, however is a more constant organization. They exist to govern. Power rests with them. The nature of the exercise of this power, then, is perhaps of more importance than the actual existence of the power.

Fortunately, most universities have made the effort of establishing a series of policies that appreciate the fact that the success of the university depends on the success of the students. They also appreciate that while the role of administration in a high school or an elementary school may entail a stronger hand of discipline and control, at the university, adults are the students. This implies that much of the work of discipline, etc. may be passed on to the students themselves. They grant students positions on their Board of Governors and other decision making organs. This awareness of the role of the student as an adult is relatively new and must be seen as a development of the strong student activism in the last thirty years. Administration has realized that if the students do want to create havoc, they can. They can boycott classes, they can march through the campus chanting slogans, they can burn their books; burn their lecture rooms and kidnap their professors; they can picket the presidents office, and destroy property. They are a mass of humanity that has the potential to be a problematic political force. In realizing this potential, the administration does not relinquish its power, but realizes that it must handle this power wisely. The use of wisdom, then, is where administrations make or break it.

At UNB, the administration has a hierarchical structure that functions on the principle that when the president eventually intervenes, it means that things are most serious. In the mean time, the lesser powers will handle the issues at hand. Thus Dr. Armstrong has said nothing in public about the entire Social Club affair. Let the students continue to deal with it until it becomes a public scandal. Then intervention will be inevitable. This doesn't mean that Dr. Armstrong and the others are not watching the entire thing with careful interest. They are asking questions, and with the kind of hierarchical structure that exists here, it becomes difficult to know when a question being asked by some one lower down on the ladder is not in fact a question from the boss passed down. The administration of the SUB is a case in point. Despite all that is said, the fact remains that administration has a lot of say in what happens in this building. There is a SUB Board and there are students on this Board, but the building is owned in the main by the administration. Students helped to pay for it and were involved in the planning, etc, but the bottom line is that the building is predominantly the property of administration. Administration can ban a student from the building legally. But who does the work of implementing these policies? The SUB Director. Is he/she a part of administration? Certainly, but his/her office is far enough away from the huge green building down the hill to obfuscate the point. So we rail against Kim Norris, the tyrant and not against Armstrong when things come up. And this is how administration wants it. Kim Norris can say he only carries out instructions, and administration can say that Norris is responsible for the building.

In UNB St John, the administration failed to make use of this skilful piece of politics. When Dr Ryan entered the fray of the Student Union administration fracas about what posters could go up in the Student's building or not, she introduced the notion (false or not) that administration was being heavy handed and denying the students the right to their own building. It was a tactical blunder typical of an administration that is overly concerned about the press coverage that a university gets. In my opinion, whenever such confrontational politics occur between administration and students, the transient student population has less to lose and more to gain. They have a tremendous amount of ammunition in their arsenal and the administration is best served to leave issues of this nature alone.

Power is an important thing and students should realize that while the power of control seems to lie centrally with the administration, that they have a certain power of numbers and power of sheer principle that allows them get things going in their favour on campus. As long as students assert that they are adults and that they are here to discover more about this art of being an adult through the sharing of experience and responsibility, they will be able to assert enough control over their lives at university to make the time worthwhile.

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By Al S Tare an

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By Lynne Wa

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