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EDITORIAL

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Working together?

Graduation is a very special time in the lives of many students. It is the culmination of past efforts, it is a gateway to the future, the end and the beginning. I have chosen in this editorial to view the future, not only of graduating students, but of our University and its fast approaching third century. Marcus Aurelius once said, "Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present." The weapons of reason that guide our University into the next century are ultimately the most important elements in a continued pursuit of quality and excellence in education. Who are the decision makers? What are their priorities for the future? What input do students have in moulding the future? All these questions present themselves at a time when our University is undergoing major and fundamental changes in the relationship between students and administration.

Since students come and go in cycles, it is accepted that long-range planning and policy decisions rest with career administration officials and that these decisions are made by governing bodies, responsible to the entire university community.

However, if one is to embrace democratic principles how much influence and power should these governing bodies have over the majority student population? History has told us that power and reason do not always come hand in hand and thus without power, can students influence decision making on the future of this university?

The Board of Governors is one of the most powerful and influential governing bodies in our university, yet only three students sit on this board. Can three students possibly influence a Board that is fundamentally out of touch with the majority student population? Since this board is a powerful decision making body it must be more in tune with the desires of our broader university community. If in the future this minimal representation of students is maintained a further alienation will take place. We must embrace a co-operational model, one that allows students the appropriate amount of power to express their interests and one that shows the intention of both students and administration to work together for a common

good.

The question of power without representation from all parties concerned is of fundamental importance. In April the university commissioned a Toronto consulting firm to analyze "space utilization" on our campus and make recommendations to the administration. Although the initial "draft" recommendations were not accepted the amount of student input into this study was minimal if not non-existent. The key point that arises from this example is that students, although directly affected by such reports, lack the power of persuasion to influence final decisions. Once again the future of this university rests on a "community" of interest and valued student in-

put cannot be ignored or foresaken for elite decision-making.

If this situation exists then what can we do to change it? At present the Senate of UNB is considering a proposal to appoint an ombudsman. So far the proposal has been narrowed down to two options. Option A would be to rename the Dean of Students office to the "Students Dean and Ombudsman." This would allow the Dean to divorce his or her responsibilities as Dean of Residence while continuing as an administration official. These administrative responsibilities would include the area of students' complaint and conflict. Option B would be to hire a part-time ombudsman to handle student concerns. The

Student Union supports the idea of a full-time ombudsman, more than that of a part-time official.

I believe that an ombudsman would be a positive step in bridging relation between students and the administration. However, in order for an ombudsman to be effective he/she should be independent of any higher authority. As well, broad investigative powers should be granted to ensure efficiency.

In 1978, the University released a "Draft Study on the Future of UNB," within this study the area of student services was discussed; "The concept of a 'total environment' and concern for all aspects of the students development is central to the

purpose of all aspects of student services. The successful implementation of concept, however, is ultimately dependent upon the degree to which all members of staff and faculty accept responsibilities beyond the normal academic and administrative routines. The image of UNB as a large cold place may not be universal, but it is prevalent. Our concern for students must become more apparent and our 'lack of caring' image must be changed."

Recent developments such as the Bar Services Report quite obviously undermine the intentions of this quote. The "lack of caring" image is once again coming to the fore. We must make a concerted effort to bring students and administration closer together. It is not the intention of such reports that ire students as much as the methodology which they follow. As with all other examples, the Bar Services Report is sadly lacking in student input, thus its final recommendations mirror the desires of administration officials more than a majority of those to be affected by them.

This entire editorial has been meant to accentuate the polarized student-administration relationship. We do not know what the future holds but we can begin to cooperate in a manner that respects majority rule. I have not intended these views to be taken as a condemnation solely of our university administration. It is my belief as well that far too few students take an interest in their community at UNB. I think Walter H. Judd best summed up this view by saying, "People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote — a very different thing."

We must all take an active interest in the future of our university. It is only through this route that qualitative change can take place. As a final note — the Board of Governors will be meeting today and it is my hope that they will recommend an ombudsman be hired by the university. It would be a much needed step in showing concern for an under-represented student body.

