

Attitude and communication problems beset central government on campus

Few York students are aware of the extensive responsibilities and diverse roles which student government assumes at York. Then again, only a handful of students understand the problems which beset student government's ability to effectively fulfil its mandate. From the perspective of an outsider looking in, David Dollard, Excal's CYSF beat reporter, describes the central government's role and how student representation may be enhanced.

In existence since 1966, central student government at York has developed an elaborate infrastructure to accommodate student representation. Unfortunately, inherent flaws in the system of communication within government, and the erratic participation by student representatives, have impeded the central government's ability to produce comprehensive policies and to act as a true forum for political debate.

According to the Council of the York Student Federation's (CYSF) Representative Handbook 1986-87, the roles of central student government are: "the monitoring of academic and non-academic policies of the university administration . . . representing the students in dealing with the provincial Ministry of Colleges and Universities . . . the co-funding of various campus clubs and organizations . . . (and developing) policies to deal with matters of student interest."

Most York students are first exposed to student governments in high school, where councils arrange dances, bake sales and if competent enough, coordinate field trips. As outlined above, the responsibilities for a university student government are obviously far more extensive, ranging from allocating funds to campus groups to acting as liaison between students and the Administration.

York, with over 40,000 full and part-time students, is more than just a school; it resembles a small city equipped with its own central square, radio station, newspapers, libraries, health services, diverse social services and cultural groups, security force, and even its own catering services. Obviously then, central student government must reflect the complex society of York by ensuring that students possess the requisite channels in every facet of university life to voice their concerns.

In this respect, York students are well represented in the many governing bodies within this institution. Student representation on the Student-Senate caucus and the York University Development Corporation's Advisory Council indicates CYSF's concern for "academic and non-academic policies of the University administration." Membership in the Ontario Federation of Students illustrates CYSF's regard for student representation to the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities. The



BLINK'S RISKY BUSINESS: CYSF President Gerard Blink gardening on the job.

plethora of cultural/social/and academic clubs under the CYSF financial umbrella demonstrate the "co-funding of various clubs and organizations" on campus. Finally, the drive to end ancillary fees and to push for the revision of the Toronto Transit Commission policy regarding a special "four months for the price of three" Metropass for university students, further signifies CYSF's dealings with "matters of student interest."

Student government is not a convenience, but a necessity to coordinate budgetary allocations for campus groups and to ensure effective representation. Besides this political infrastructure, two more prerequisites are required to meet the needs of effective student representation: active, well-informed student representation and efficient channels of communication between student governing bodies.

To improve the inconsistent flow of information between central and college student governments, CYSF should make the attendance of college presidents mandatory at all meetings. Presently, information is relayed from college representatives to the college president who then reports to the college council.

This system is as confusing in action as it is to read. Just think of the distortions that can take place, especially when this process occurs from the colleges to CYSF as well.

Another problem with communication is the infrequency with which the various college councils and CYSF meet. College councils can meet anywhere from two weeks to once a month, while CYSF meetings take place every third Tuesday. These out of sync schedules definitely debilitate the expeditious decision-making process student government requires to ensure that matters of urgency are dealt with immediately.

Unfortunately, with college councils like Calumet meeting only once a month, CYSF may never bring these concerns to other members' attentions until another full three weeks have passed. To resolve this scheduling dilemma, CYSF should hold meetings once every two weeks while ensuring that college councils convene their respective meetings on the off-weeks, so college concerns are taken care of within the week.

In theory, CYSF meetings should pose as a forum for constructive debate where resolutions and reports are heavily scrutinized before being passed. Unfortunately, CYSF meetings fall extremely short of this ideal where individual views are rarely expressed.

This lack of debate can largely be attributed to the fact that CYSF distributes its Director Reports at meetings, not before. This forces members to read the reports, engage in debate, and participate in passing motions, all within the short span of time of a CYSF meeting. With such restraints, it is highly dubious that they can do justice to their jobs.

A perfect example was the allocation of \$37,000 for the 1986-87 Projects and Events Budget which took place an hour and a half into the September 23, 1986 session. The budget was carried on motion number 19 out of 20 during the meeting. For students to closely scrutinize the contents of the budget while actively participating in the previous 18 motions is next to impossible. It is no wonder that the budget passed with little debate.

Reports should be released a week

prior to the CYSF meeting to give student representatives adequate time to properly consider the report and articulate constructive questions. Moreover, the procedure by which members merely pick up the various directors' reports at the beginning of the meeting never provides for elaboration of the reports by the author.

Instead of describing the contents, the standard phrasing by directors is, "Have you received my report (holding report skyward)? Are there any questions?" In the majority of cases, without the opportunity to read or at least hear a summation of the report, business proceeds without any questioning.

However, schedules cannot take the full blame for the absence of vigorous debate and the vocal representation of constituent concerns during CYSF meetings. For a proper discussion to take place within meetings, student representatives must be informed and prepared to debate the issues on the agenda.

Discussion is not the rule of the CYSF. To date there have been few questions of worth during the Question Period, a time when college representatives can ask any CYSF director questions concerning specific matters. As well, only one college representative has delivered a Private Member's Report which is supposed to take place at the end of the meeting. Often the prevailing sentiment in CYSF meetings is, "When will this end? I hope soon!"

It is high time that CYSF representatives take an active and visible role in council affairs. Often their focus is too narrow, caring only about individual college concerns and not the larger picture of overall university needs.

In addition to the proposed revisions to the scheduling of meetings and tabling of reports, student representatives should make a concerted effort to prepare constructive suggestions prior to council meetings. For one cannot talk about the effective working of student government, unless one first assumes the total

commitment of student representatives involved.

The CYSF has an identity crisis. To borrow a line from comic Rodney Dangerfield, the CYSF "don't get no respect." This was especially evident with the failure of York Security to open the Senate Chamber for the last CYSF meeting before the new year.

A hallway is not the place for any government to hold a legislative session. Would the Sergeant of Arms forget to open Parliament for the Prime Minister and the local MPs, forcing Canada's business to be conducted in the cold?

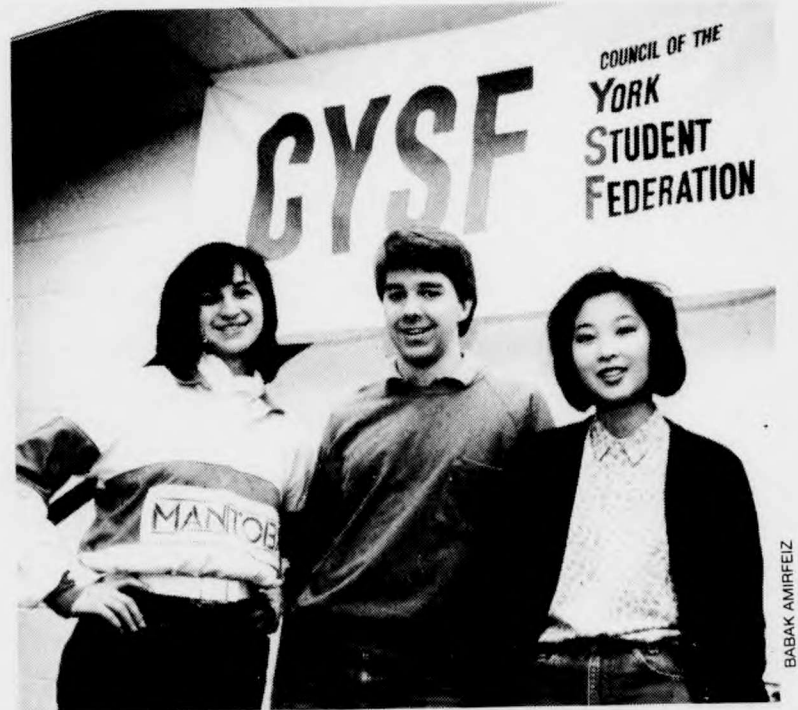
A frustrated CYSF President Gerard Blink indicated that the CYSF needs "higher visibility," and that "(we) do things in the student's best interest, but they never seem to care." The proposed and the long-awaited CYSF newsletter could help mend CYSF's battered ego. CYSF urgently requires a channel where they can keep in contact with students and students can offer feedback. This would bring CYSF into the limelight by making students more aware of the policies which affect them.

CYSF helps maintain the complexity and diversity of our University community by offering a vehicle for student representation, establishing student services and programs, and funding student campus groups. However, at the same time, CYSF is rarely acknowledged by students, who know little about their form of government and demonstrate an apparent lack of interest concerning its operations.

While entering its third decade of existence, internally CYSF has a long way to grow. More effective communication among governing bodies and improved scheduling will help enhance the smooth running of government. However, improvements to the government's infrastructure will not be enough if student representatives are unwilling to meet the responsibility they assumed by taking office.

WE ARE FAMILY:

Anita Antoniani, Director of External Affairs; Adam French, Director of Internal Affairs; and, Nadine Changfoot, Director of Finance are looking, like past directors, to make York students more aware of the CYSF and its policies. Certain changes to enhance communication could resolve this problem.



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