

"Ombudsman"

Several years ago this University community officially and unofficially began to recognize that stress was a significant aspect of university life. Some correctives were introduced, even in the absence of definitive information about the area; but nothing was really done to address the key questions of whether the topic really meant much at all or not.

In recent weeks we (meaning now Kim McFarlane, Kevin Gillese, and myself) have been out trying to find an answer to the question of whether University attendance is, or is not, dangerous to your health. What we've learned, mostly, is that there are no easy ways to address, let alone, answer, the question.

If you have problems you want the "Ombudsman" to help with, or if you're someone who wants to help solve others' problems, contact Dirk Schaeffer at 439-6486 (in person at 1010 Newton Place, 8515-112 St.) or Kevin Gillese in Gateway 432-5178 (Room 282, SUB) or at home, 433-2136.

Hardly anyone wants to talk about stress; and if they do it turns out that, other than opinions, they don't have much to say. We weren't looking for opinions though; we wanted facts.

Since psychologists and others have still not reached any agreement on either what stress is or how it manifests itself, we have had to go to tangential sources for what little data we have been able to find. One of those tangents is *suicide*, a topic that nobody wants to talk about at all, but which would seem to be one good way to measure at least the most extreme manifestations of stress. Over the years, we've heard grisly rumours about the suicide rate at the U of A (estimated, in one case, as high as 37 per semester), typically accompanied by patronizing and reassuring glosses from the various institutional bodies involved. Those reassurances, of course, only made us more suspicious, in our paranoid way, that the situation was even worse than it is rumoured to be.

But it looks as if we were paranoid. Suicide, if you're into this, kills about 10 people out of 100,000 each year in Canada and the U.S. — as compared to 15-25 in most European countries. Rates vary for different age, sex, occupational, racial, religious groups; but

they seem to be highest in the young twenties, the group most likely to be University students.

A study published in the *Journal of the American College Health Association* in 1973 dealt specifically with suicide at U of A, one of the few universities singled out for such attention. The reason for that was that suicides at U of A seemed bafflingly low: only 6 in the years between 1962 and 1971, when any reasonable interpretation of demographic data would have led one to "expect" 3 to 6 times that number. In the following three years, there have been only 4, again, about 1/3 of what one might expect. Trustworthy rumour has it, however, that this year there have already been two. Except for this momentary upswing, it seems that attending U of A is one good way of reducing your suicide-risk.

To scotch another rumour, during the entire 3-year period in which the reported 37 suicides per semester occurred, only 15 students died of any cause whatsoever — 3 suicides, 6 accidents, 1 homicide, 5 natural causes.

Another potential index of stress is the activity of the various agencies and services set up to handle it: Student Counselling, Student Health, Student Help, U of A Hospital, etc. Unfortunately, most of these places either do not keep very informative records or do not like to divulge them. Student Help is an exception. Here are some of their data.

Last year (and that year seems to have been fairly representative) Student Help handled 1666 calls, which works out to fewer than 1 per 10 students. Only one fifth of these (336) dealt with stress areas. (This is not to say, of course, that these are all the students who experienced sufficient stress to turn to outside agencies for help last year. But it may come very close, if we can believe the repeated assurances of all the other agencies we contacted that stress and intra- or interpersonal difficulties make up a very small percentage of their clients.)

Of these 336, 72 dealt with academic problems, 58 with personal problems, 56 with sex-related problems (rape, birth control, abortion) and 39 with interpersonal (boy/girlfriend, family) problems. The remaining 111 were into housing, legal, and similar problems. The most impressive thing about these numbers is how small they are: just over 1 student in 100 seems to suffer enough personal or academic stress to go to Student

Help for help — and again, many more go here than anywhere else. Comparable rates for people of the same age in the general population usually appear much higher.

Thus, the best conclusion we can draw from these data so far is that either stress has not really been much of a problem (in the sense, at least, of bothering anyone except the person stressed) at this university in the past; or that an awful lot of people are doing an awfully good job of covering up.

The only sizable indicator of stress we've been able to find, in fact, comes from the GFC Stress Report of the early seventies. The 1971-72 Course Guide Questionnaire included two questions asking how much stress students experienced 1) in University, and 2) in the course being rated. More than 16,000 returns (representing perhaps as few as 4,000 students) were processed. Roughly one-half the students felt they'd experienced stress at the University, with one-fifth using the "extreme" category. But only one-fourth said they'd experienced stress in that course — suggesting that stress was more related to general university considerations than to course or examination pressure.

But if all that seems reassuring, take heart, paranoids: things seem to be much worse this year. Not only does suicide appear to be up, but recent data from Student Help suggest that *this year* they've handled 651 calls in the months of September and October alone. And of these, 207 fell into the "crisis" category, making up one-third (as compared to one-fifth last year) of the calls so far. That is, in the first two months of this semester more than half as many crisis calls came to Students' Help than *all of both* semesters last year. And it ain't even final exam time yet.

Nobody has volunteered an explanation for these data. Our best guess as to what may be happening is based on an old truism: the only good person is a dead person. As people become alive, it follows, they will live more dangerously and do more things others don't necessarily approve of. That's fine. This year, apathy seems less, enthusiasm much more than it has been: it follows that more people are going to become sensitive enough to recognize they hurt. We're sorry, but we're also encouraged.

Next week, we'll try to offer some advice as to what to do when stress hits you.

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Campus press battle escalates

SASKATOON - Two campus newspapers, both claiming to be student oriented, are currently engaged in cutthroat competition for readers and advertisers in the Saskatoon University community.

The *Sheaf*, the Students' Union newspaper and Canadian University Press member, has been joined by *Shadowfax*, a weekly paper dedicated solely to local student news, and first published Nov. 4.

Competition between the two is not simply a matter of who is going to produce the best paper, but a matter of survival, since the amount of revenue derived from advertising and student funding in the Saskatoon campus community is not sufficient to support two papers.

Either the *Sheaf* or the *Shadowfax* must die.

This antagonistic state of affairs is a continuation of conflict which has developed over the last couple of months, between members of the *Sheaf* collective and the salaried *Sheaf* executive. Rather than find a solution to their problems, editor Chris Mushka and three other salaried staffers resigned.

The differences arose over what position the *Sheaf* would take on controversial issues, such as the Oct. 14th day of protest. Parties in the debate became polarized when it was discovered that the staff did not have the input, which had been provided for in the *Sheaf* constitution, into these decisions.

The paper split between those who thought the executive should be able to direct *Sheaf* policy, and those who wanted staff control over policy.

Mushka's resignation was

followed by drastic reorganization of the *Sheaf's* production in order to facilitate its operation under the control of an unpaid collective.

Mushka, after citing problems concerning a "heavy academic load and personal reasons" for resigning, has been active in soliciting funds for her conception of what a student newspaper should be — an informational media aimed solely

at reporting student events. The appearance of the *Shadowfax* on campus last week was a monument to the success her efforts have met with.

According to the first edition of the *Shadowfax*, the funding of this enterprise has been shouldered by the executive of the local Saskatchewan Arts and Sciences Society (SASS).

Al Romanowski, president of SASS, stated he would like the

Sheaf and the off-campus news it carried "removed in favour of a piece somewhat more relevant to campus."

Although the SASS executive has stated they will "bear the risk of starting another campus newspaper," there has been no move on the part of this executive to reach into their own pockets.

The Arts and Science students on this campus, who

pay a mandatory society fee with their registration, are being saddled with the risk involved.

Copyright data concerning last Thursday's feature "The New Narcissism: The Joys of Self-Love" was inadvertently left out. The feature was reprinted from the October, 1975 Edition of Harper's Magazine and the author of the feature was Peter Marin.

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