

You are not going to see any posters extolling Don Grier's virtues (if there are any), nor will you see any pamphlets that proclaim my support for motherhood and better communication. This is it, my campaign rests on this one page of the Gateway and all I ask of you in consideration for sparing your eyes from the visual pollution I might have caused is that you take five minutes to read the rest of this article and make an informal decision on whether to elect me as your next V.P.—External.

Well, who am I? My name is Don Grier (pronounced Greer) and I have been attending this University on and off since 1974. If you can believe that then another statistic of note is that I have studied in three different faculties over the years — Commerce, Education and Arts. In all that time I have never had any experience in student union politics, the closest I have ever come to it was a year spent as president of Pembina Hall Students' Association. That is not to say I feel that I am unqualified, simply attending this university and being aware of the issues has given me insight into the current issues at hand.

It is quite likely that the debate in this campaign will be dominated by the CFS issue and the pay raise scandal but I wonder if these aren't political hot potatoes and perhaps we are missing the real issue. Although you have likely heard it a billion times before, the real issue is university funding and the tactics the S.U. is going to use when approaching the provincial government on this issue.

Underfunding:

No one should deny that this university is suffering from lack of funds, it is evident all around us: student/instructor ratios have shot up, courses have been cut, research funds have been cut, libraries have gaping holes in their collections and now the imposition of quotas for university entrance.

Quotas:

Quotas are not bad in themselves, if the provincial government sees merit in developing a university that caters to the intellectual elite, such a policy might be worth pursuing. What is disturbing here is that quotas are going to apply across the board, a person who is just average is not simply denied access to some elite school, this person is soon going to be denied entrance to university period. I believe education should be available to those who fulfill basic academic prerequisites it should not be restricted to some fixed percentage of the population. The constant erosion in funding is leading to the worst of all worlds, an institution that has high tuition, restricted enrollment and a mediocre education. We need a cohesive long term education policy that spells out the intent of the provincial government instead of this current policy that evolves out of neglect.

Funding Perversion:

Another critical funding issue is the way in which the universities are funded. Does it not seem strange that the university has little difficulty in procuring over 13 million dollars to construct the "Butterdome" and yet finds it necessary to kick Lister Hall residents out of their rooms over Christmas break so they can turn the heat down and save money? This ludicrous situation is the result of university grants being split in two, the government gives us a general revenue grant for operations and a capital grant for construction and other capital expenditures. The system perverts spending allocation because for some strange reason the provincial government finds it more appealing to grant money for tangible capital projects that they can point to rather than say granting money for added Canadian study courses.

Since 1978 capital project grants have increased by more than 200% while operating grants have increased by 59% in the same period. This leads to a tricky situation: easily obtained capital grants lead to more and often unnecessary building which requires support personnel and services placing an even greater strain on operating revenues year after year.

So why doesn't the provincial government give the university one grant each year and let the Board of Governors (B. of G.) decide on the operating/capital mix. My gosh, we're talking about university autonomy. Surely we can't be serious.

University Autonomy:

University autonomy is an issue that has been pushed around a lot over the years, although recently we have heard little about it from our fearless leaders. It refers not only to shifting more financial decision making to the university level but also to political autonomy of the university.

vote: DON GRIER

V.P. EXTERNAL

If you have any doubts about this you need only check the two top dogs on the Board: John Schlosser and Peter Savaryn both of whom are former presidents of the provincial Conservative party. I am not questioning the Board's ability but rather I wonder about the potential conflict of interest that occurs when the university is in dire funding need, do these members of the Board represent the university's interests or is their allegiance to the provincial government? I'm inclined to think the latter.



Oh What to do:

So what are we to do? Probably the most salient reason for my candidacy in this election is my disenchantment with the quiet lobbying techniques of recent student governments, I am convinced they have little effect. I am reminded of a former student activist who, speaking to the B. of G. said: "Normal channels of communication with the government — representation to the minister through the mails, private meetings with the minister are not effective. Cutbacks have been happening since 1971 and repeated efforts to deal with the government by polite methods have met with failure. It is time you (B. of G.) changed your tactics. A draconian situation should be met with a draconian response." This was said back in 1978.

This student body, if it cares at all about the state of this university, must become more active, more vocal, and more angry about the present state of affairs. When are you going to take notice of the mediocre education you are receiving, or the education your younger brother or sister may not receive at all?

There should have been a march to the legislature this year, perhaps it is not too late yet. It is certain that the inner cogs of the Loughheed cabinet will hear little and care less about petitions and post cards sent by students nor will they hear about the lovely dinners and meetings the local MLAs had with student representatives. But you can be sure that they take notice when 5000 people marching in a line longer than the High Level Bridge appear on the steps of the legislature, in fact, they will likely come out and greet you as they did in 1978.

Those who suggest protest marches seldom result in change may be right. However, I do remember the march in 1978 precipitated a debate in the legislature, some promises to review the student loan system and a lot of embarrassed faces in the legislature. The only fault with the march and a later one in 1982 is that there was little follow up, perhaps we can correct that next time.

Education Coalition:

I do believe that the education coalition is a positive step and commend these responsible for it. It is necessary to show the public that the problems of students are not isolated from society, that we are not just a special interest group, that many of our concerns ultimately reflect the interests of society. As well it is a vehicle to bring other disenchanted people into the fray; I suspect there will be disenchanted people around when some 1500 students are refused entry to the university next fall.

Another alternative is to engage various members of the university and government in open debate at forums and information sessions, we need to bring the B. of G. out of the closet and into the public eye. If there is a conflict of interest let's highlight it and have the governors and government members account for their actions. It is imperative that the S.U. help to initiate discussion and debate on these issues.

CFS and The Salary Scandal:

I would quickly like to discuss the two politically hot potatoes: CFS and the salary scandal. Although unpopular, I believe CFS is a worthwhile organization, these are the people who brought us the travel service (CUTS) and have helped coordinate government lobbying on a national scale. Much of our student loan money is obtained through the feds, many of the work initiative programs are federal, and there is a need to coordinate campus activities and facilitate information exchange — all this is attended to by CFS. Unfortunately the organization has a political arm that is not envied by many, but does this mean we should dump CFS and 'throw the baby out with the bath water'? If the policies are so objectionable, U of A can note their dissension and attempt to persuade others in the organization. We no longer have FAS and there is a need for a political lobby group that coordinates and provides continuity to continually changing campus students' organizations.

The recent pay raise scandal is just that — a scandal. A decade ago S.U. executive members were not paid a cent for their duties. Times have changed and I am told that V.P. External is a full time job, if it is, then I don't think it is unreasonable for a member to receive \$900/month, this is not out of line with what many students make working a full time job. However, the whole idea of councillors voting on pay raises is a little sickening, we need another mechanism for adjudicating these matters — perhaps a rate pegged to inflation, perhaps a referendum on the question at the time of general elections. Any idea of a clothing allowance, holiday pay, etc., is all ridiculous and not even worthy of discussion.

So that's it, a general outline of my position. I was told by a friend that my platform was one of cynicism and she was right. I am cynical about the present state of student government; I am cynical about the present government-university relationship and I am even cynical about you, the student. When are you going to say enough is enough, this is bad policy and I'm angry? The choice is clear: if you are content to elect student union managers rather than student representatives then you shouldn't mind seeing tuition fees rise; you shouldn't mind seeing university autonomy as a pie in the sky idea; you shouldn't mind seeing the reputation of education at this university dwindle; you shouldn't mind seeing your brothers, sisters and friends denied a post-secondary education. I'm a long shot in this campaign and I know it, somehow I doubt if many of you will be swayed by the above discourse and that's too bad. Some day when you are angry let me know — I'll probably still be a student here.