

THE REDDIN PLAN----

Student power through departmental committees

There is a healthy and growing interest in student power at UNB. However, in my view there is some misunderstanding about where the potential for student power really lies. I would like to give my views on this and explain how students might obtain additional power should they decide they want to have it.

I believe many students have been misinformed about the real locus of power, primarily by what they have been told by a few faculty members inside and outside the classroom. I am not sure why faculty members do this. It may be that some do not understand the system themselves. A more likely explanation is that the few professors who do mislead have little interest in initiating new ideas or improving existing methods and so come to believe they have little power anyway. Rationalization is not new to any of us.

As in most university communities, UNB has what amounts to four major decision levels, the department, faculty, senate and board of governors. The departmental committee is composed of the head and all the faculty in the department. It is this committee which offers most potential for students. The faculty council consists of all members of all departments in the faculty. The senate, in the main, consists of faculty members elected by faculty councils. The board of governors consists primarily of those outside the full time university community. This is the formal system and to a large degree it represents the informal system as well.

Many students, and some

faculty for that matter, believe that all the power in the university is at or near the top and is exercised by the board of governors or senate or president. This is not true for UNB. Real power here is in fact fairly widely distributed. Most of the issues vitally affecting students in this university are decided, or at least recommended, by a head of department alone or by he and his colleagues. This includes such things as teaching methods, new curriculum, new staff and promotions. This would seem to cover many of the issues with which students are directly concerned. It is true that many of these are approved higher up but it is also true that this approval is essentially automatic. In my thirteen years of teaching here and particularly in my recent two years as acting head it became very clear to me that a department could propose almost any internal change and get it accepted. More important, the department was consulted on changes from above and virtually no really important changes affecting the department were initiated outside it. It was all our own work.

The issue facing professors and students is not so much academic freedom or student power but academic initiative and competence.

If students are faced with a faculty member who claims to have no power it might be a good idea to extract from him such things as the number of ideas he has put to his departmental committee in the past year and the number of those ideas turned down; and also the number of proposals he made to his faculty council

and the number turned down. Students should go on to ask what proportion of the proposals made to the senate by the faculty member himself, the departmental committee or the faculty council were turned down.

The final question would be, "Are you in favour of full student membership on the departmental committee?" If he says no his explanation will be interesting, if he says yes then his active assistance to acquire such membership should be solicited.

Well then, if I were a student at UNB and I wanted to advance the idea of student influence I would go about it this way.

FIRST I would concentrate on obtaining influence at the departmental level. This level is where the problems and opportunities are to be found.

SECOND I would arrange a meeting between all the faculty in the department and about the same number of clearly representative good students including all the executive of any relevant student association or club. At this meeting I would press for a single point; formal and full membership of students on the departmental committee. The total number of students on the committee must exceed one, and a number equal to about 30-40 per cent of the revised membership should be sought. The student membership must be arranged so that students spend at least twenty-four months on the committee. In less time than this it will be difficult to exercise any real influence. The students elected must report back to the student association if it exists. If full membership

was obtained I would then consult with other students who are now working under such a system to discover ways to make it effective.

A compromise proposal often made by faculty is "let's set up a joint committee of faculty and students to discuss whatever you want". This is often seen as better than nothing but it becomes in effect a device for blowing off steam safely and actually serves to keep students well away from real influence. An extreme version of this proposal is that students meet alone with the head of department or faculty. While this is very ego building for the students involved they should never accept it. It always results in the head becoming a more powerful go-between than before and often forces him into the position of being hypocritical and of giving in on small things to students to keep the pot below boiling level. The students on their part come eventually to see the committee as simply a delay device. I am not suggesting, and nor do I believe, that this technique is proposed deliberately to hinder real participation; more often the opposite is true. The fact remains however that it often does not lead to the changes students may really want and deserve. I specifically do not recommend that students settle for sub-committee membership or some other minor status. If offered it they should turn it down.

THIRD, If full membership were not obtained, and was unlikely to be negotiated over two months, I would arrange a meeting of all students associated with the department

and all the faculty of the department. I would ask the faculty to explain their position and for representative students to explain theirs. I would not attempt for any voting or show of strength at this meeting, simply rational discourse.

FOURTH, I would again arrange a meeting as suggested in the second step and continue the second-third step cycle until membership had been obtained.

Students can undoubtedly contribute to the departmental committee but at the moment have no constitutional right to membership on these committees and so must be smart about the way they go about getting it. It will not always be easy as most faculty members, while reasonable, are like all men in resisting change in the short run.

Even if students sat on all departmental committees some would still have to sit on the senate. The senate is legally constituted and the departmental committees are not. In addition, such upward linkage of influence will make its exercise more effective.

If students in a department do not obtain influence it is because they don't want it or are not smart enough to go about the right way to get it. If either condition prevails alone I don't see why they should get it. If both conditions prevail they deserve it.

Yours truly,

W.J. Reddin
Associate Professor
Department of Business
Administration, UNB

VIEWPOINT

sex education at u.n.b. adequate?



mike start
president of the src



w.w. meldrum
n.b. education minister



louis j. robichaud
premier of n.b.



dean macnutt
dean of arts



harry mitchell
cleaning agent 007



john diefenbaker
outside agitator



sir max aitken
chancellor, unb



jim dineen,
acting president, unb

Match the appropriate answer with the appropriate person. The first person who brings the right answer to the BRUNSWICKAN office gets a prize that would make any college student happy.

1. "I think it will do much for the new regional growth centre."
2. "Adequate enough for me."
3. "Wasn't that one of the causes of the Sir George Williams incident?"
4. "Why do you think I've been around so long?"
5. "I am glad to see that there is a modicum of order and restraint."
6. "It's amazing what they teach now."
7. "As long as it doesn't get out of hand."
8. "How much does it cost me."