EDITORIAL

The Student Union: Tuning out CHSR

by Allan Carter

Last year the UNB Student Council decided to cut funding for the position of program director at CHSR-FM, the campus radio station. Council decided to give CHSR-FM six months to find alternative funding agencies to fund the position, or CHSR could also completely revamp the position. Whatever CHSR decided to do, council felt that it was not their responsibility to fund the position anymore.

Now the six months are up and last week CHSR asked council for $2,500 in order to fund the position for the rest of the year, since the search for alternative funding agencies continues. The salary for the position is about $17,500.

But certainly funding the position is not a major problem considering that last year's Student Union surplus totaled $58,761, ($33,675 of this surplus was transferred to a SUB expansion fund). It would appear that the Student Union has some other problems with the radio station.

For instance, Anna MacDonald, VP University Affairs, made her feelings known about a few comments which Jeff Whipple, CHSR station manager, made this September at a National Community Radio Association Conference. Whipple contends in a news story this week that he advised other radio stations to separate their own policies and administrative structures from the Student Union's mandate. This is necessary, argues Whipple, because inevitably conflicts will arise among the two organizations. Naturally one would assume that if the correct policies and procedures are implemented, such conflicts could be dealt with accordingly.

MacDonald, however, claimed at a Student Council meeting that Whipple's comments were not constructive and that the Union has been "bitten." She stated that Whipple chewed the Union up, spit it out and that he now has the audacity to ask the Union for more money. "I am a firm believer that you don't bite the hand that feeds you," stated MacDonald.

These unrelated comments were stated before council was to decide whether or not to give CHSR $2,500 for the rest of the year to help them maintain the program director's position. MacDonald's feelings about Whipple's comments at a conference three months ago have little bearing to whether or not the Union should continue funding the position for the rest of the year. One must ask whether or not MacDonald, who appears to be very upset with Whipple's comments, approached Whipple and discussed the matter with him. MacDonald may be completely justified in having problems with what Whipple had to say about the Union at this conference; however, she should have used a more appropriate manner to state her position.

So, what is the Union's reason for cutting the funding for the program manager position? Well, opinions among councilors appear to be varied, but for the most part council feels that students are not benefiting fully from the station with two paid professional positions: Station Manager and Program Director. The argument is that a student or a group of students should be taking on the responsibilities as Program Director so it is the students who are gaining valuable experience while working at the station.

On the surface, such an argument seems to make sense. After all, if the station is funded primarily by the students, then it only makes sense that they dictate what goes on at the station. Yet does such student control have to come by eliminating one paid staff member? The Program Director's position is essential in a volunteer organization like CHSR in order to ensure a reasonable level of continuity and consistency. This position is responsible for training new members, most of whom are students. While this position is also responsible for programming, one must remember that the majority of programs are created by students

So what is the Union's problem with the position? Perhaps, it is a matter of accountability. For instance, if a student has a problem with one of the paid staff's conduct, is there a course of action which the student can take in filing a complaint? The ultimate control at CHSR lies with the Board of Directors. In fact, any decision by the Board is final, since the Board is responsible for CHSR's CRTC broadcasting license.

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The question which must be asked is whether or not the Board holds the paid management at the station accountable for their actions. Presently, the Student Union is reviewing the conclusions of a task force which CHSR created last term to investigate the structure of the Board of Directors. What conclusions the Union will make on the task force's assessment is any body's guess. If the Student Union has a concern about student control at the station then perhaps the Union should investigate the structure of the Board of Directors and question any policies which may be in existence that might possibly stifle or curtail student involvement and feedback. Trying to force the station to cut the program director's position in order to promote greater student involvement at the station, will only create worse communication problems between two organizations which already have, at the best of times, a tenuous relationship.

Another factor which must be considered and one that the Union appears to have missed, is finding out how CHSR student members feel about the present management system at the station and whether or not they have any problems with it. The fact that a task force was created to investigate the Board of Directors is an indication that some problems do exist. Focusing on structural aspects, working with members of the station and compiling feedback from students who work at the station would be a much more constructive and progressive project for the Union then cutting their funding for a necessary and vital position.

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