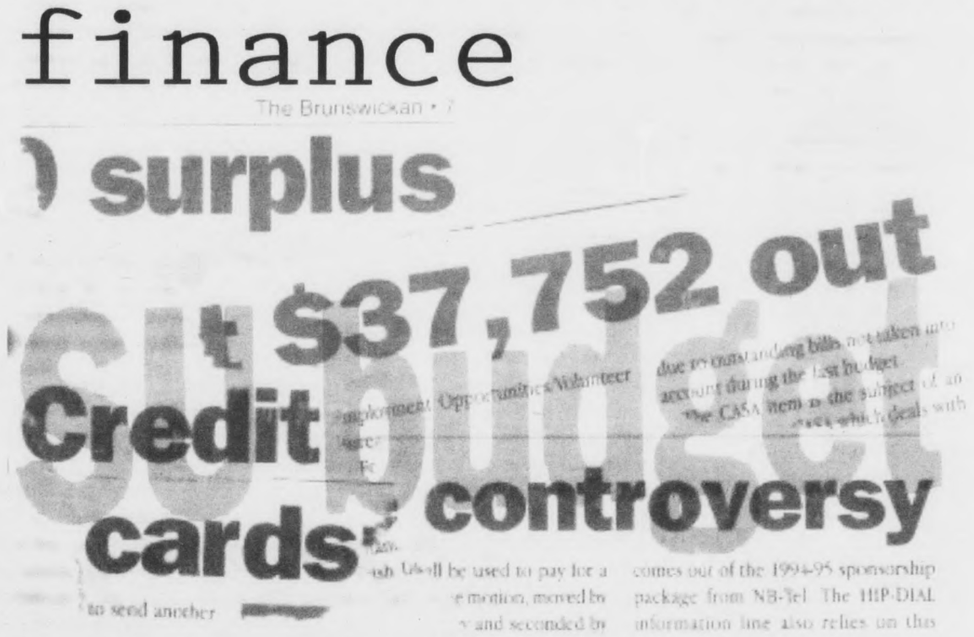
Vice-President Finance & Administration



News Commentary
by Joe FitzPatrick
Co-News Editor

All candidates agree that Finances are at the top of the agenda for the students of UNB.

The position of Vice President (Finance & Administration) has suffered over the past couple of years from a succession of students with no exposure to the Student Union whatsoever. This was compounded by the fact that neither of the past two VPs were around for their summer positions. This led to numerous difficulties stemming basically from a lack of knowledge of the internal workings of the Student Union.

The portfolio description is among the longest – it is potentially the one with the most duties. In practice, there are demands on this position which exceed the other VP positions. Paradoxically, the position is vested with the authority to manage the budget of the clubs and societies but is also charged with the responsiblity for ensuring these clubs and societies are communicating well with the Student Union.

This position is responsible for several of the key aspects of the Union. It is in charge of staff relations, which are histroically tense simply because of the instability, and inconsistency from year to year. In addition, the person in this position must enforce the financial policy, an unenviable task.

The VP Finance will have to find ways to keep a closer eye on the expenditures of the Student Union, itself, rather than the clubs and societies, which have proven themselves able to consistently work within their budgets.

It seems clear, now, that there has been a VP Finance in name only this year, and that, in fact, the appointee was "hired on" to prepare the 1996-97 Budet. The next person to hold this position will have a lot of work to do in catching up.

All of the candidates have business backgrounds (two are in Business, one has already completed a BBA). Two have experience with the Student Union. Only one has extensive experience with the finances of the Union.

In other races, the fact that the "outside" candidate would be more attractive is taken for granted. For VP Finance, the fact remains that a candidate without knowledge of the inner workings of the Student Union will be at a distinct disadvantage.

The one candidate with experience, is not, however, as "tainted" with the label of "insider" as might otherwise be the case. Bertrand has shown, through her (often lonely) persistence at Council, to be a strong advocate for the students of UNB.

The Vice-President (Finance & Administration) shall:

- be the Chief Financial Officer of the Union;
- be responsible for the enforcement of the Financial Policy of the Union;
- act as liaison between the Union and the UNB Foundation for Students and the recognized clubs, societies and organizations;
- advise the Council upon and administer the budgets and special grants of recognized clubs and organizations pursuant to the financial policy of the Union;
- present a report of activities undertaken on behalf of the Union at each regular meeting of the Council;
- coordinate and chair a minimum of two meetings per term of all clubs and organizations to establish and maintain an open level of communication;
- at the request of the Council, report within one week upon the general financial condition of the Union;
- act as staff relations officer in consultation with the President, and be responsible for:
  - (i) administering all staff contracts;
  - (ii) maintaining staff records;
  - (iii) scheduling and chairing regular staff meetings;
  - (iv) presenting staff evaluations and recommendations to the UNB Foundation for Students;
- be responsible for the offices of the Union including, but not limited to, allocation of space and keys, equipment, furniture, supplies and telephone;
- act as a liaison for the Union's Auditors.
- assume such duties as properly fall within the scope of these duties.

Shona Bertrand - VP (Finance & Admin.)



By Joe FitzPatrick
Co-News Editor

Shona Bertrand is a second year Law student, with a BBA, who is currently a member of Council, and has been Chair of the Student Union Beverage Services Board of Directors (which oversees The Cellar) for the past two years.

What do you see as the issues in this campaign, and what are your priorities for the next year? This year, in particular, finance is the major issue. Whether it be with Orientation, the internal Student Union finances, or what have you. If you ask most people around campus what you think the Student Union has done this year, finances is a big part of what people have seen.

My priorities are: clubs and societies, The Cellar, and internal controls of the Union – clubs and societies are important because, if a student does anything, they are involved in their faculty society, whether it be in a Pillar Pub or a Political Science Society Grog. The Cellar is a big priority because of its potential to generate money to funnel it back to things like SMART-PACC and the Student Union. The Union controls, I think, are not inadequate, but they are not necessarily followed.

What are your ideas about the restructuring efforts? As a Councilor, I advocated restructuring in its broad sense. It involves making Student Union Council more accountable by getting them more involved. It also means getting the VPs and the President more involved by defining their roles. It could mean setting the media organizations loose with a media fee. It can mean a whole lot of things. The first question is: what do we want from the Student Union? Basically, the Student Union has changed significantly since the structure was set – but the structure hasn't.

There has been some discussion of compensation levels for Executive members. Where do you stand on this issue? I agree that they should be looked at, and that they should go up. It goes hand in hand with restructuring, however. Unless you can find a way to make Executives more accountable. Council should be the body that makes them accountable. It could mean making job descriptions more detailed, and the office hours more public. Finances do play a role – somebody might be qualified, but can't afford to because some of them are qualified to get a higher paying job somewhere else. You have to make it more accessible to everybody regardless of whether they live at home or have to pay rent.

What are your feelings on the credit card situation? It was embarrassing, it was a fiasco – it never should have happened. It's a good idea in concept, but people didn't follow the rules. I could not comprehend in any way how people could do that. Given this past year, there is no way that I would have them next year.

What concrete steps will you take as VP Finance to improve the financial accountability of the Student Union? The Public Accounts Committee was an idea which I suggested to function similar to what the provincial government's does. When the media asks to see the Union's books – hell there shouldn't be anything to hide there. We're not some private club where we can have a jolly good time and then justify it.

Given that the SU has an open book policy, do you feel that The Cellar, a corporation wholly-owned by the Union, should be held to the same scrutiny? It's more difficult with The Cellar. You have to find a balance with The Cellar between reporting information and making sure that things are on the level, being run responsibly in the students' best interest, and protecting the information from our competitors. The Cellar is a business, and such things as the bar manager's salary need to be protected.

What concrete measures do you intend to introduce to ensure that the Student Union office budget does not go over budget for the third year in a row? The office budget needs to be broken down. There is an attitude that the office budget is the 'trash can' line item. It's where expenses are put that otherwise don't have a line item. It comes down to monitoring. We do need to track expenditures better.

Do you feel that the benefit derived from the Conferences budget, which stands at $17,000, justifies the expense? No. I think that's a really sore spot for students. They don't understand why there are so many conferences. A lot of the knowledge you gain is lost in the turnover. They are important. Some you can learn a lot at.

The Student Union has a financial policy which prohibits the direct support of such publications as The Pillar and faculty Yearbooks. Do you feel that this policy should be maintained? On the one hand, it doesn't make sense to pay for two, but it's a tough issue. We should probably not be in the Yearbook business. There is so much done at the faculty clubs and society level, that the Student Union should help them financially with that.

Do you feel Student Union fees should be increased this year, and will you support an increase next year? No, because I don't want to pay any more money. This year is a tough sell because, as members, we haven't seen a lot accountability and I can't think of any new initiatives which warrant it. As far as next year – that's really up to next year. Basically, I'm not in favour of increases in student fees, tuition, rent, or anything else I have to pay.

Over the last several years, increases in SU staff salaries have exceeded increases to university staff. Comment. You have to put it in context. I think that the support staff is fortunate. It's also a matter of morale. To be honest, it's not a stable environment to work in, with a new boss every year. That may have a play in it. It's also often used as a reinforcement to bolster staff morale.