Stephen Macdonald - VP (Finance & Admin.)

by Joe FitzPatrick
Co-News Editor

Stephen Macdonald is a third year student in Business Administration looking towards a concentration in Accounting. He has served on the Student Union finance committee and is currently a member of the Campus Police.

What do you see as the issues in this campaign, and what are your priorities for the next year? The issue in this campaign is the waste that we've seen in the past year. Being on the finance committee, I saw it everywhere. I've seen too many budgets go over this year – we need stricter control. We're not going to have people going off and spending $50 a day on conferences. It's going to be cut down, and then we can put more money back into student programs. This year, we subsidized the losses of the Student Union by taking money out of the clubs and societies – that's not fair, because that's were the students get their benefits.

My priorities are: Getting the funding back up for clubs and societies, cutting down administrative costs, merging the Resource Centre and the Help Centre, working with the Activities Directors to make our shows better and more profitable. Basically we have to get away from sitting up in a back room spending money.

What are your ideas about the restructuring efforts? I'd like to see fewer Executives. We could be paying them more. We can look at Councilors who cover bigger faculties – I don't know if that will save any money, but it will make it more efficient – and that's key. It's too much of a bureaucracy – we don't a big enough budget to warrant the number of people we have governing it. Things need to be downsized. Instead of a lot of little boards with their little fiefdoms, we need to centralize authority in the Student Union.

There has been some discussion of compensation levels for Executive members. Where do you stand on this issue? I think they're fine where they are and I think we need fewer Executives. I would be happy to see University Affairs and Student Services as one position. VP Finance has enough on their plate, right now. The VP External I could see not as an every day position. I support a full-time President, but none of this nine bucks an hour crap. We just can't afford it. Quite frankly, this should be something that students do for their resumes. This is a great experience. They should serve the students and make a little money doing it.

What about the credit card situation? It was a fiasco. I would like to see an amendment that we never have them again. It got to the point where Executives were out there spending money at restaurants, taking people to lunch and two months later it was 'what did I do with that guy.' It was ridiculous. The nature of credit is that 'it's there, let's use it.' If there's ever a situation where we had problems using our checks, I can see a situation where we'd have one credit card with a small limit that could be signed out, but nothing like 5 with $6,500 limits.

What concrete steps will you take as VP Finance to improve the financial accountability of the Student Union? The first step I would take is to work towards enforcing the policy we have. It is there, but it needs to be used. If this is the budget – you don't go over it. None of this stuff where the President says 'it's okay we'll approve it later.' Maybe we'll have three signing officers. If they run over – they run out of cash.

Given that the SU has an open book policy, do you feel that The Cellar, a corporation wholy-owned by the Union, should be held to the same scrutiny? Absolutely. I know that *The Brunswickan* was going on about how it could never get it. It's a Student Union corporation and the students are paying for it – and now they're losing money on it. They need to know how much, now, so that they can make a decision on whether we want The Cellar or not. None of this 'six weeks down the road, maybe they'll get some sort of paper out to you.' I don't see any reason why a student shouldn't see it on a day's notice.

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? We have to figure out where we're wasting. With paper costs what they are, we can't afford to have Councilors in there just making photocopies. We have all the computers, all the equipment we need. Seriously, how many kinds of pencils do you need?

Do you feel that the benefit derived from the Conferences budget, which stands at $17,000 justifies the expense? No. From the Council meetings I attended, I heard Councilors report how they went down to Washington and had a great time writing their names on little pieces of paper and learning the benefits of abstinence. This is great, they told 16 members of Council – what does this benefit the rest of the students? I can see spending money on CASA and the NBSA. I'd like to see that cut back somewhere in the range of $10,000.

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? From my own experience, the Pillar is very agressive in their advertising. I think it's important not to decentralize the student media. I think it's important to keep a strong presence with our paper and have an excellent quality student media. Student publications and yearbooks – it's always worked well in the past, I think we're probably doing alright in that path.

Do you feel Student Union fees should be increased this year, and will you support an increase next year? I don't see any reason why we can't decrease them. There's enough room now to cut some things and keep it below $100. I'd work during my entire term on keeping the student services side high and the administrative costs down.

Over the last several year, increases in SU staff salaries have significantly exceeded increases to university staff. Comment. I think what's happened is that there are students who make decisions a year at a time, and they become good friends with the staff and think they should get more money. But this is a time of restraint and as long as the salaries for our secretaries are in line with salaries in the business world, I would impose a salary freeze on the workers. I think as secretaries go, they're doing fine. I think we probably need them and they're probably making enough for a few years.

Monique Scholten - VP (Finance & Admin.)

by Joe FitzPatrick
Co-News Editor

Monique Scholten is a student in her fourth year of Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting. She has been involved in the Business Society, intermural sports, and has been a peer mentor.

What do you see as the issues in this campaign, and what are your priorities for the next year? Students want to get rid of the hidden agendas. Everybody has really been frustrated with the Studen Union, basically, it's not that they're not doing a good job, but because they're not communicating with the students. And they're not working together as a group.

My priorities are: Financial policy and budget controls – Basically, the financial policies are good, they have the students' best interest in mind. The problem is that I don't think that they are being followed like they should be. I'd also like to put tighter controls on the budget, so that students' money really is being spent as it should be.

What are your ideas about the restructuring efforts? There are a lot of things that are good about the current structure, but there are a lot of things that have to be changed. Specifically, the Executive. I think it would be in the students' best interest that there were maybe more students with responsibilities, by delegating responsibility. There would be more input and it would be more representative.

There has been some discussion of compensation levels for Executive members. Where do you stand on this issue? I do think that the President of the Student Union should be paid, that's a pretty big job. Most Student Unions in Canada pay their Presidents, and they're actually paying more than what we've budgeted. As for the Executive – right now, the honouraria for the Executive is quite high. It's to the point where it might get out of hand if it keeps going like it is. I think they should be paid, they do have a lot of work, with 15-20 hours a week and committees, but with the summer job, if they could delegate some authority to more students then I think that would alleviate some of that pressure.

What about the credit card situation? What happened this year should never have happened. It wasn't right. It's not ridiculous to say that the Executives should have credit cards, but I don't feel that they should next year. I wouldn't allow them to have credit cards next year. People have to regain trust in the Student Union before we have them again. There is a danger that Executives get on power trips and think 'hey I'm an Executive, I can go out and spend this' when it's really not necessary. A credit card just gives them the means to do that.

What concrete steps will you take as VP Finance to improve the financial accountability of the Student Union? One of the big problems now is that all the clubs which get funding for the Student Union are not accountable for their expenditures. The clubs where it's possible to go over budget – it's no skin of their backs. [The club executives] are only there for a year . I had thought about a system of personal fines for Executives of clubs or committees which go over budget. Nothing big, but just enough to make them aware. I would also like the full-time bookkeeper to sit in on some of the meetings of the Finance committee because this person would be around year after year, and this person would know some of the problems which come up. This might prevent old problems from resurfacing.

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? Definitely. It's the students' money. I don't think anything the Student Union does should be behind closed doors. We're not doing it for us or The Cellar or the Management of The Cellar – we're doing it for the students. If they want to see it, they should be able to see it.

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? I would just keep tighter control on everything to make sure that people are being careful. Again, I'd like to get the bookkeeper more involved.

Do you feel that the benefit derived from the Conferences budget, which stands at $17,000 justifies the expense? I feel that the Executives are spending too much money on conferences. I'm not saying that the Executives are going on the Conferences just for themselves, and I know that there are some conferences that are necessary. Plus, I think it's important to see what other universities and student organizations are doing. It is important to have conference budgets, but I don't feel that it should be that high.

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? Again, it's not just my opinion that counts. But I don't think so. To a certain extent, if a faculty wants to include that in their faculty society budget, then I might consider it.

Do you feel Student Union fees should be increased this year, and will you support an increase next year? No. I don't think it should be. The general consensus is that students are already paying too much, and not getting what they pay for. This would definitely be bad timing to increase the fee – it would create anarchy among the students. I think a $700,000 budget is enough for what we're trying to do.

Over the last several year, increases in SU staff salaries have significantly exceeded increases to university staff. Comment. The amount that the Student Union pays its paid staff is not a substantial portion of the Student Union budget. I think that it's something which should be watched and make sure it doesn't get out of hand, but I don't think it's ridiculous.