Trish Davidson– VP (Student Services)

by Gordon Loane
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Trish Davidson is seeking re-election to a second term as Vice-President Services.

What do you see as the issues in this campaign and what are your priorities including any ideas for new services, for the next year? Overall, the Student Union has an obligation to work a lot on its image after this past year, due to the bad press we have been getting because of the resignations of two SU Vice-Presidents. I feel because of all that, we have probably lost a little respect from the administration, so that is also a part of what the executive will have to work on over the next year. Specifically, as VP Services, I want to see a single point of sale opt-out procedure for the Health Plan. That would be the main goal for the Health Plan. Next year, I would like to focus a lot of my attention maybe in conjunction with others or on my own on Sexual Assault prevention and education and the type of program that the student union has been wanting to do. I would also like to look into getting a used bookstore up and running. I really tried to do that this year. I've received a lot of plans from across the country from other universities, but I did not have the time to implement it.

Do you intend to renew the Union's three-year funding commitment to the College Hill Day Care? Although we haven't had a lot of close contact with the Day Care, we have just let them have the funding every year and let them go from that. I have heard from various students that do use the Day Care and other Day Cares around the city that it is not one of the cheapest around. It would be a good idea if we did continue funding, since we have budgeted for it for this many years. From what I can tell, the Day Care is not in that bad of a need for money. They usually don't take it out until we almost call them and say 'the money is here, are you going to use it?' But, I know they have some goals for what they would use the money for. After those goals are completed, the SU should continue to fund it. I would also like to see something worked out with the other organizations like CAMPUS because we should all be contributing to Day Care. Once the Day Care has completed their projects, I would like to see the Student Union subsidize the Day Care fee so that students would get something of a discount.

There have been many concerns expressed about the opt-out procedure for the Student Union Health Plan. Do you agree or disagree with the statement? There are definite concerns, I agree. There are definite concerns about the opt-out procedure. In no way, shape or form is it perfect or easy. It's complicated and it's a mess at times. A lot of students have come in and expressed to me that they feel it is a mess. There is some confusion because there are a couple of different ways to opt out, and there are different times and different places. I don't really feel it's all of the Student Union's fault. I really feel there has been a lot of heel dragging on the part of the UNB Comptroller's Office. But change is coming and I really feel this year will be the flagship year for the opt-out procedure. There are problems and we are working to solve them.

What can the Student Union do in the future so that students don't feel that they have to write Letters to the Editor to receive a response, which is in their minds satisfactory? Although we have had a lot of people express frustration, none of that frustration has been towards the claim procedure, or towards students getting their money back at any point in time or having problems with their money or anything. The opt-outs are definitely a large part of the concerns, but the reason the Health Plan exists is so students can be covered for insurance purposes and that seems to be going along well. The university has a requirement that students must be covered by some sort of Health Plan. That's the reason for the opt-out. Students could also say 'look, I can't afford to pay' if they were to opt-in. We would then have to start making exceptions for people who just don't have the money. Overall, an opt-in would be a lot more complicated.

What could the Student Union do to improve the Health Plan? Well, I think the opt-out rate is very reasonable. I think there is more good about the Health Plan than bad. We have to maintain our rate which is very reasonable between $95 and $110 per year. It's a really good deal, especially if you wear corrective lenses. I would like to see the eye care benefit raised from $80, since I don't think $80 is all that much to get a good pair of glasses these days. Because it applies only once every two years, if your vision changes, this provision is not totally satisfactory given student lifestyles. So, I would like to look into that. Secondly, I've had a lot of students come to me about adding dental care to the plan. Dental would be great but the cost of the Health Plan would go up significantly. It would more than double the cost. If people want to pay $200 to $250 a year for the Health Plan, then it might be feasible. But I can't see that happening right now. Currently, we do have coverage for accidental dental. When we switched to Blue Cross you are now able, a lot of times, with the card to just pay the twenty percent. If you do have to pay the whole thing, there are places to go and get your money right away. With the previous plan, you had to send in receipts and wait four to six weeks.

What about the credit card situation, given your position on Council? I did not personally ever use the SU credit cards because I was fundamentally against ever getting them. In theory, credit cards work if people that use them are accountable and do everything by the book . For some reason, we ended up with a bunch of people that could not figure out how to use the credit cards properly and decided to use them more for their own benefit than anything else. It's really sad because we are all supposed to be adults and if you can't even handle a measly credit card for the place that you work, it doesn't say much about you really. So I feel it was handled poorly especially by Mr. [Pat] Fitzpatrick. Others used the card (the General Administrator and the VP University Affairs) the way it was supposed to be done. Then you have the people who don't do it the way it is supposed to be done, and it doesn't turn out so good. And I would then say before the last Council meeting of this year if Mr. Lamrock's bills are not reconciled to the liking of Council that he should be demanded to pay anything that is outstanding, whether it be official SU business that is on it or his own personal stuff. If he can't get around to reconciling his accounts by then, then he should be held responsible for it. I think the Foundation has no business interfering, however, I think a motion should come to Council that Mr. Lamrock's wages be garnished for the amount outstanding.

What about the Fulton situation, given your position on Council? When Nahie Bassett quit in December as VP (Finance and Administration), Duncan said he would be willing to do some touch ups on the budget and then said he would be willing to do the budget for the 1996-97 year. He is doing the budget and in that respect he is doing a great job. However, there is a part of me that says he is getting the same amount as I am and he is never in the office, so in that light, I would rather have him do a comprehensive budget and not be in the office than sit around the office and not be able to do a good budget. The VP Finance last year was around the office more than Duncan, but he did a lousy budget.

Some have considered open government a problem this year, how do you feel? As far as the Cellar is concerned, it is a special case because it is a separate entity. To my knowledge, the VP Finance does not have to release the financial records of the Cellar and it is up to Shona Bertrand (Chair of the Cellar Board of Directors). I have this policy where I think everything should be pretty much out in the open, good and bad. I know that if something has gone wrong with the Health Plan or anything in my position, I would rather get it cleared up than let people go on wondering what is going on. I think that is the problem this year. There has been not a large attempt or even a conscious attempt to cover things up in some cases. But there is a general feeling that we don't want students to know because there has already been so much bad press around the Student Union, let's just not rock the boat anymore and maybe we just won't mention it and it will go away. I don't feel that is the right policy or the right stance to take. I think if you can get everything out and explain why things happen and make people understand why things are happening, then for one thing, it will decrease the suspicion between students and their elected representatives. If you screwed up but you can admit that you've screwed up, people will look at you as a screw up for awhile but at least they won't think that you are trying to be sneaky or to be devious with their money.

What is the future of the Student Union Help Centre? Let me put it this way – the Help Centre is quickly becoming not as useful as it used to be. It used to be that the Help Centre was one of the places on campus where you could come and do things that needed to be done that you couldn't do anywhere else. We still have cheap photocopies and that serves a purpose. We used to have a terminal there from the Student Loans, but now you can get that on-line. It still serves the purpose of selling all of our tickets for all of our clubs and societies and you can still get an exam schedule there. I see the Help Centre going through a metamorphosis in the next year or so and I think it has a lot to do with the amalgamation of the services that are offered through the Resource Centre. I do see in some way the Help Centre and the Resource Centre being merged to provided a more streamlined, a less duplicated and more efficient operation. I have done the Help Centre budget and I've helped Tareq Islam do the Resource Centre budget and we have allowed for some kind of an amalgamation, not really coming at more of an expense but perhaps less of an expense than before because they were two separate entities. I can see the amalgamation being up and running for the fall. At least that is a possibility.

We note that the staff of the Student Resource Centre are all volunteer while the staff of the Help Centre is all-paid. Do you see this as an area of concern? Hypothetically, if a merger were to take place – First off, I don't think that the work the volunteers do in the Resource Centre is any less valuable than what the people do in the Help Centre. I feel it is a lot of responsibility to serve students. If the location was merged, there would only need to be the co-ordinator, which would certainly be a paid position, there during the day. Since we have already budgeted for it, I feel everyone should be paid as a part-time worker. Of course, they would be trained not only to work in the Help Centre, but also the Resource Centre training. There is also a lot to be said for employing students.

What are your ideas about the internal restructuring of the Student Union? First of all, I haven't heard the rumours that my position of VP Services would or might be eliminated in a possible restructuring. I feel the position is very valuable. In fact, I get a lot of calls about other things. It seems that when students have a concern about anything in general, they see student services as being the avenue for it. I often feel I'm the first line of defense and I direct other student concerns to another Vice President when necessary.

There has been some discussion of compensation levels for Executive members. Where do you stand on this issue? I really feel that the President, especially, should be a part-time student. It is a large job and it has to be an in-your-face type of position. The President should really be out there, spending a lot of time doing public appearances. In theory, VPs should be able to take a full course load and work here 20 hours a week. Some people can handle that, others cannot. A President needs to monitor the situation and if a VP cannot handle their duties with a full course load, the VP should reduce their course load some. It depends on the individual.

In the past, there have been well-publicized tensions between members of the Student Union and certain university officials. What steps do you believe are necessary to improve or prevent such tensions? There is always going to be tension between the administration and the Student Union, it is just the way it is! It is not necessarily an adversarial role between the two, but I would compare it much to the same way it would be between unions and the administration they work for. The administration does not always want what a student wants, hence the tension. I respect the role the administration plays and I think they should respect the role we play.

What steps do you intend to take to improve media relations of the Student Union? It changes from year to year, so sometimes you have to ride the wave. Let me say that media relations have been tense this year. They have been, at times, unnecessarily gruelling. I must say I have felt rather unscathed in the media this year to a certain extent. It has to happen to a certain degree, but if you don't, people would get away with a lot. Maybe the fact that the media was so tough this year really made me aware of the fact that people are watching. I think it is good for people to feel that the media is going to make the Student Union accountable for what they do. However, there is a fine line between reporting the facts and keeping students abreast of what is going on and bashing.