

A lack of engagement



BRING IT ON HOME

Josh O'Kane

On April 17, 2008, I wrote my last chemistry exam ever.

The night before, I sat at the SUB poring over paperwork for hours, trying to assure myself a good grade in Inorganic Chemistry IV.

I wasn't looking over notes. I wasn't looking over textbooks. I was looking at old exams.

It was crunch time and there was no way I could learn all the course material in adequate time. Instead of learning the material properly, I memorized old exams the professor had given the class. I was trying to figure out the formula with which he designed his exams. It was easier to memorize those specifics than the actual materials in the few meager hours I had left.

At that point it hit me that I had barely learned a thing in four years.

Not once in my entire time in the Bachelor of Science program had I been completely engaged by a class.

For four years, professors lectured at me while I was stuck in a dream world. Professors came, lectured, and left. While some did offer help for confused students, it did not change what seems to be a fundamentally flawed lecture system.

I had no desire to learn or even

study virtually my whole way through, because I hadn't been engaged at all. I stayed in the program because I enjoyed the material, but not once did I ever feel like it was important to know anything I was taught.

The best classes I had were when I was able to interact with other students, as well as the professor, to solve given sets of problems. I was encouraged to critically think and discuss issues instead of having material go in one ear and out the other.

Unfortunately, that happened in about three of the 40 different lectures I took over the last four years.

The biggest place of learning was in the laboratory, where I was forced to teach myself the backgrounds behind the day's experiment. If I didn't, I could wind up killing myself by mistake. Other than that, I coasted, and still maintained a near-dean's-list GPA.

If I had been convinced more often to care or to contribute, I probably could have gotten on the dean's list.

But with so little encouragement to interact, discuss topics and critically think during lecture periods, I rarely left having learned anything.

I only really learned what I needed while studying, and even then, I felt so separated from the material I was learning that I would only really be encouraged to study just before tests.

Once a given test was over, I would have no reason to use the

information anymore, and it would escape me until I crammed the information in again.

This is not a good thing, given the whole reason took those classes was to learn – and essentially become an eventually-accredited expert on chemistry.

In order to really get someone to learn, they need to get involved. Lecturing at students doesn't give them a chance to become involved.

Student apathy has always plagued schools, and chances are that it will continue long into the future.

But look at the issue from your wallet's perspective.

For \$5,482 worth of tuition, you should be in a top-quality teaching environment.

Being lectured at is ineffective. Talking for 50 minutes a few times a week is a bare-minimum standard that too many professors aim for, and it doesn't go far enough to help students learn.

Forget student apathy. There are too many cases of professors' apathy that need to be addressed.

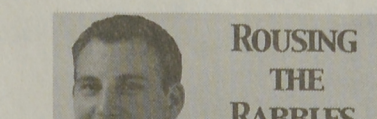
For nearly \$5,500, you should demand a dynamic teaching environment that encourages you to learn – not to daydream.

Next time you're falling asleep in class, barely understanding what's going on, do something about it.

Encourage your professors to get your class to interact. To discuss. Students deserve to learn instead of being lectured at.

Josh O'Kane is Editor-in-Chief of The Brunswickan. He can be reached at eic@unb.ca.

Demand better



ROUSING THE RABBLES

Nick Ouellette

A student newspaper can be a collection of random stories about campus events, a spotlight for arts and entertainment, and a place to learn what is in store. Students returning to UNB will already know that I firmly believe that a good student newspaper is more than that. At the root of its existence, a campus publication that strives to be relevant must create a forum to express opinions and foster debate. It should strive to be as persistent in exposing failures as it is in lauding successes.

My column returns this year to start that process, with a renewed vigour and a more direct focus on student politics and university affairs.

Last year, I demanded better. I still do.

Earlier this week I was walking into the SUB and noticed the sign next to the wooden patio that proclaims The Brunswickan to be Canada's oldest official student publication. This is more than a simple novelty. This paper's history and longevity speak to the skills of its staff as much as it does to the commitment of its readership.

My challenge to every student at UNB this year is to embrace that commitment and demand better. In advertising in this issue, the Student Union outlines many opportunities that the Student

Union offers you. The Student Union is an excellent organization, and one to which I have dedicated more than five years while studying at UNB. It is worth supporting.

That support, however, includes a refusal to accept the Student Union's actions at face value. It means questioning processes. It means questioning details. It is a process in which students act as watchdogs as much as they act as cheerleaders.

Every student at UNB pays \$89 every year to the Student Union. The budget reaches close to \$700,000. We should expect to get our money's worth.

The responsibility is great. When leveraged properly and managed well, the results are phenomenal. When wielded errantly or without care, students' interests are hindered and disorganization can easily ensue.

The goal of this newspaper since it began has been to serve as UNB's student publication. That includes objectively judging what happens on campus, whether in the Student Union, the university's administration, or government action.

Healthy debate and constructive criticism are integral parts of belonging to an organization and living in a society. I invite readers to embrace these values as I incorporate them into this column. Elaborations are welcome where you agree, and challenges are invited where you disagree.

Nick Ouellette, a UNB law student, serves on the UNB Fredericton Senate. He is the Don of Neville/Jones House.

the brunswickan

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The Brunswickan relies primarily on a volunteer base to produce its issues every week. Volunteers can drop by room 35 of the SUB at any time to find out how they can get involved.

About Us

The Brunswickan, in its 142nd year of publication, is Canada's Oldest Official Student Publication.

We are an autonomous student newspaper owned and operated by Brunswickan Publishing Inc., a non-profit, independent body.

We are a founding member of the Canadian University Press, and love it so. We are also members of U-Wire, a media exchange of university media throughout North America. We publish weekly during the academic year with a circulation of 10,000.

Letters

Must be submitted by e-mail including your name, letters with pseudonyms will not be printed. Letters must be 400 words maximum. Deadline for letters is Friday at 5 p.m. before each issue.

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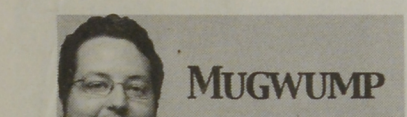
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Have things changed?



MUGWUMP

Tony von Richter

Hello, and welcome to the first edition of Mugwump for the 142nd edition of The Brunswickan.

I'm sure a lot of you are probably wondering just what the hell Mugwump means and why it's the name for this column.

First and foremost, it's a Brun tradition. Beginning in the 1970's, every Brunswickan Managing Editor has penned a column under the title of Mugwump. Traditionally it was a lighter column, done to contrast against the more serious editorials written by the Editor-in-Chief that let the readership know what the Brun stood for.

According to Wikipedia, the word itself refers to a group of Republicans who refused to support party nominee James Blaine, switching their support to the Democratic Party, and were portrayed as fence sitters by the media. That definition as a fence sitter was the initial idea for the column as two sides of an argument were often presented with no side favoured, allowing the reader to come to their own conclusion. I'll still be doing my best to present both sides, but I often will pick one side of the argument over the other.

Alright, so with all of that introductory stuff out of the way, it's on to the topic at hand and that's about the possibility of change at UNB.

At the beginning of last year I wrote in this space that UNB was at a crossroads: that it could become a top-flight school or it could just as easily falter and become your average university – but it would be a few years until we knew the answer.

It's a year later, and thanks to the PSE Action Plan and with some new people coming into the university's administration

(including a successor to retiring President John McLaughlin), it would appear that UNB is on the verge of changing.

But is it really? It's a little early in the year to tell, but when first-year students show up to move in and there are still piles of sod sitting outside the SUB waiting to be laid down near the recently finished entrance, it doesn't suggest that change is on the horizon.

Obviously, poorly scheduled and unfinished construction isn't on the same scale as landing UNBSJ a medical school or implementing recommendations from the PSE Report, but it's not a good sign, especially since campus has had the same problems for years now.

Even though students and professors may change every year, everything else about UNB seems to remain the same. Students returning to school each fall are always faced with poorly scheduled construction projects, issues with parking, and lackluster food options.

It never changes.

I realize that change isn't easy, and it's very rarely fun, but it's not like these are new issues facing the campus. UNB has had the same problems for at least the past five years, if not longer, and, for one reason or another, the administration has done nothing to correct them.

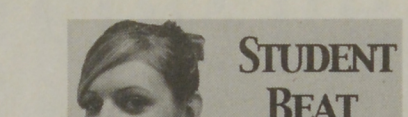
Like I wrote last year, I believe that UNB has the potential to become an excellent school, recognized across the country as one of the top schools in the nation. However, the fact that the university has failed to address any of the relatively minor problems on campus causes me to doubt that UNB will ever live up to it's potential.

I'd like to think that next year, whoever is in charge of this column will be writing about the great steps that the university has taken and that the future of UNB is looking brighter than ever.

Unfortunately I doubt that will be the case, as UNB will likely still be the embodiment of an old cliché.

Tony von Richter is the Managing Editor of The Brunswickan. Email him at managing@unb.ca.

Everyone has a story



STUDENT BEAT

Bethany Vail

Recently I listened to Andy Thibodeau's motivational speech in the SUB cafeteria. Andy travels around to different campuses pumping up orientation leaders for the most anticipated week of university: Orientation Week.

He explained every student has a unique story about how they got involved in their university and how they got to be where they are today. It made me evaluate myself and look at where I am today and how I got there.

I am what is known as a "townie" to the university community. I went to a local high school, Oromocto High, and I never had the chance to live in residence. I signed up for university as a timid seventeen year old who was too scared of the unknown to live in residence, opting to live at home with my parents in my first year. I didn't know that there was a home for townies like myself called Townhouse.

I didn't know that while I was working at my part-time job during the afternoon before Blast Off that all the residence houses were learning cheers. I didn't know that there would be a massive cheer in front of the Aitken Centre so loud and energetic that the building would shake on the eve of Orientation Week. So I arrived at the front doors of the Aitken Centre, feeling timid and unsure.

Then the houses started rushing up the hill, cheering and waving like mad. I wondered to myself what I had gotten myself into by deciding to attend Orientation Week. Everyone had distinct t-shirts that signified what group they represented and specific cheers to go with it. I was standing there in a plain tee and jeans, feeling very out of place and very alone.

But while I was standing there, something happened to me. This

big jolly fellow came over to me, with a big grin. I soon realized he was an orientation leader. When I explained that I was from around town, his face instantly lit up. Apparently he was a "Green Shirt," which is a Townhouse leader. He invited me to join the Townhouse folk in cheers, but I didn't know the cheers. So right there on the spot, this complete stranger whom I had never met before taught me the Townhouse cheers. I was no longer alone.

Later on during Orientation week, I met some girls who would come to be my best friends. I met peers in my faculty with whom I created study groups. I learned that university wasn't really a scary place, but a community that I was a part of and that I could contribute to. It was for that reason why the following year, I found myself in a Green Shirt on the hill by the Aitken Centre, screaming and cheering.

I had a similar experience with the Student Union. I wasn't sure what to expect with it. In fact, I was pretty terrified of the notion of a SU President. I remember discovering the SU hallway for the first time in my first year and cautiously walking through, feeling like an alien who had just landed.

I timidly walked by the President's door and to my surprise a welcoming face looked up and smiled at me. Here I was, an awkward first year stumbling through the Student Union hallway, and I was important enough to warrant a smile from the president of my Student Union! That warming, welcoming smile stayed with me. Eventually I overcame my shyness and went and talked to the Vice President Academic about this looming, uncertain word called 'senate.' Apparently it was a big deal, but more importantly, it was a way that I could get involved and try to make a difference for somebody else.

Everybody has a story about their involvement started at UNB. Not everyone started out through Townhouse, or the Student Union. For some folks, it was sports. For others it was our campus newspaper, The Brunswickan, which you are reading right now. However,

I imagine almost everyone has a story with a moment of when they felt someone reach out to them and take them into the fold.

Maybe you are reading this and are feeling that you are an upper-year student who has never had that moment and it's too late. It is not too late. There are many opportunities for any student to get involved at UNB. Glance around at the bulletin boards, unbsu.ca, Brunswickan ads, or even ask your friends.

You will come to realize the boundless opportunities that you can create for yourself here at UNB. We are all here together, so let's make the best of it and enrich our lives outside of the classroom too. Let's write our own involvement stories.

Bethany Vail is President of the UNB Student Union. Student Beat is a weekly column by UNB's student leaders examining issues pertinent to students.

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