

AQ funding decision was democratic: STU SU President

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THE BRUNSWICKAN

The St. Thomas University Students' Union handled the Aquinian's request for funding as democratically as possible, says STU SU President Duncan Gallant.

The Aquinian is the official student newspaper of St. Thomas University, and has been autonomous since 1986.

On April 25, incoming Aquinian Editor-in-Chief Bailey White and incoming Managing Editor Chris Fox proposed a one-time fee increase to the 2008-09 STU SU to refurbish their newsroom at the cost of approximately \$3,000.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the STU SU would fund the initiative out of their surplus, should the Aquinian follow a series of agreements, including seeking alternative sources of funding. Costs were whittled down to \$1919.24 by mid-October, when Fox approached Gallant for approval of the proposal.

Gallant then told Fox that in order for the funding to go through, it would need to be approved by a two-thirds majority of the STU SU's students' representative council (SRC). The SRC met on Oct. 30 and voted against funding the initiative 9-3 with one abstention.

Fox says the Aquinian was not made aware of this step of approval.

"I got a call one night from Duncan explaining that this would in fact have to be passed by the SRC by two-thirds majority," says Fox. "This is the first time that I'd heard that."

Gallant says he hadn't told Fox that the SRC would be the next step in the approval process.

"No, Chris was never told that this would have to go to SRC - I didn't explain the entire constitutional power structure - but that doesn't make the process or decision less legitimate. It in fact shows that we used the most accountable, legitimate and democratic process we could to make this decision."

During the school year, the SRC is the official deciding body of the STU SU. At times when the SRC is unable



Kyle Albright / Special to The Brunswickan

The STU SU Students' Representative Council voted not to provide funding for the Aquinian's newsroom on Oct. 30. While STU SU President Duncan Gallant calls the decision process democratic, Aquinian Managing Editor Chris Fox believes the union is not accountable for their actions and that internal issues caused the council to vote down the funding.

to meet, the executive council acts as the deciding body.

Fox says that had he known the proposal needed a two-thirds majority council vote, the Aquinian likely would not have taken the risk it did.

"That's a risk, when you need a strong majority like two-thirds. Regardless of the situation, that's a risk we wouldn't have taken had we known that," says Fox. "But we didn't."

Had the final proposal been given to the STU SU in the summer, says Gallant, the executive would have made the decision by majority vote whether or not to accept or reject funding the Aquinian's newsroom.

The decision was always destined to go to a vote, says Gallant - be it by the SRC or the executive, depending on the time of year.

"There was never any promise to unconditionally give the Aquinian \$2,900 for office renovations.

"All relevant facts were discussed [at council], and in the end the majority of councillors - elected to represent all St. Thomas students - decided that it was not valid to hand over \$1,900 of student money to the Aquinian," says Gallant. "When it came down to it, the decision of whether or not they met the agreement or that the new facts regarding the financial situation of the Aquinian would impact that decision or evaluation, was up to the SRC."

The initial agreement to fund the office was subject to several specific agreements: that the Aquinian would make public their budget and constitution, grow their board of directors, and seek alternative sources of funding. The Aquinian was then to follow up with a second proposal, says Gallant, which was to be approved by the STU SU before granting the funding.

While Gallant says that the process by which the funding was declined

was fair and accountable, Fox disagrees with the process by which the union made its decision.

"I think it's a black and white issue: if it's a contract, you should honour it ... I think it's pretty apparent that it was internal issues as the reason that this was voted down."

Internal issues, he says, include the accountability of the STU SU to students, given the verbal and written guarantee the student paper was given that was breached by the SRC vote. The members of the executive, who voted in favour of the initial proposal on April 25, did not actually take office until May 1. Reasons like this, Fox says, are why councillors voted the funding down on Oct. 30.

Gallant disagrees that this was an issue, as the previous executive had been out of office for weeks and that conversations with the Aquinian over the summer mentioned the next step in approval. He also disagrees that

the vote was unaccountable - calling it, in fact, the most accountable and democratic method to deal with such a situation. Councillors discussed the Aquinian's request at two meetings prior to Oct. 30.

Issues such as the legal legitimacy of the Aquinian - which was recently determined to be an unincorporated company - and the breakdown of their budget were also widely discussed before the vote on Oct. 30. Fox called these discussions irrelevant at the meeting; however, Gallant says they were important issues to discuss in order to council to have made an informed decision.

Fox says that the Aquinian's funding difficulties could become a universal issue.

"A lot of campus papers are funded in part by the university and a lot of them are in part funded in a similar way that we are, where we have to go to the Student Union for fee increase

approval. If they're not honouring contracts with us, then this could happen anywhere... The union is just hiding behind this veil as if they aren't accountable to students; as though they're not supposed to report to students.

"I feel as though the most telling thing is that if the union had a good reason, and if they had a logical point, they'd be writing us letters to the editor and they'd be explaining it, because it'd be stupid not to," says Fox.

Gallant says that in the end, the STU SU followed all constitutional requirements necessary in the situation.

"We gave it as fair a discussion as possible. There were three meetings where it was talked about and several hours' debate given to it. In the end, it had to be made by the accountable process we have, and that is a democratic vote. That is a fair and democratic process."

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