

Reality check: Do you really need a laptop?



TECH PERSPECTIVE
Doug Estey

How many times over the course of your university career have you or one of your friends been subject to the peril and devastation associated with owning a laptop computer?

Of all people, I'm probably the last person you would expect to challenge this. You, dear reader, make an excellent point (and my roommates will gladly disclose the number of computers that I own, even if I won't.)

But alas, this isn't some environmentally-motivated spiel about consuming less power on the planet (as serious of a situation as that is). The fact of the matter is that laptops actually consume substantially less power than ever before, thanks to a technologically-motivated race to create machines that burn through their batteries slower. It might not be the most sound motivation, but it works.

We're students, and we all need a form of mobile computing. It begs to be pointed out, however,

that almost every one of us immediately turns to a laptop – be it an Apple MacBook, Dell Latitude, HP Pavilion or Toshiba Satellite – as the one and only answer to our word processing, album torrenting and web browsing needs. They're still hefty, they still weight in at up to 4 kilograms, and they continue take up valuable space in our backpacks.

So why haven't we come up with something better?

I don't know how many of my friends have dropped a great deal of their student loan for the year on a shiny new laptop only to have a renegade glass of milk or beer suddenly attack it without warning, but it's more than I can count on one hand, and that's a problem.

Economically, these are some hard times we're facing. Ever considered, you know, not spending a full semester's tuition on a notebook PC?

There are alternatives, and they're materializing much faster than you may think. At your very own UNB bookstore here on campus, you can actually walk in, spend \$299 plus tax, and pick up an ASUS eeePC (or Triple E PC as they're often called). No, they aren't a portable DVD player. But these so-called

"netbooks" do offer wireless N networking, SecureDigital card reading support and a webcam.

Not to mention the fact that they weigh less than a kilogram and feature a near-full size keyboard and boot up in approximately twenty seconds.

In fact, there isn't much these little machines can't do, considering that the average student doesn't need video rendering or disc burning capabilities on the go.

I'm not hating on laptops. I even own one myself. But I am seriously considering switching to a piece of technology that is easier on my back, less of an expense, and much more portable.

More portable than a laptop? Oh yes. Let's face it: you don't see people whipping them out left and right unless they're sitting down at a power outlet somewhere.

Next time you're in the computer aisle at Future Shop, think again before splurging your student loan away on a full-size laptop. Netbooks just might be the way of the future, and along with wifi tablets and touch-based cellular smartphones, they could make your life a lot easier.

Doug Estey is Arts Editor of the Brunswickan. He can be reached at arts@thebruns.ca.

Falling through the cracks



STUDENT BEAT
Stephanie Lord

At a time when students who are new to UNB come closer to reaching the end of their first semester, and those in their last year are straightening out their final course requirements and tying up loose ends prior to graduation, many students are taking time to reflect over the previous semester or their time spent here at UNB.

A reflection upon the days, months, years spent at UNB has much to do about the memories, the friendships, the life skills and experiences you've encountered during your time at the institution but it also can release quite a bit of pent up frustrations or disappointments that one has suffered. The question is: is the "Only one U" marketing campaign for UNB, with the idea that this university is accommodating to yourself, the individual, true? With such a large administrative team and high teacher to student ratios, the question remains, shouldn't someone be caring and looking out for you?

This institution is proud to call itself Canada's oldest university and brags that it has been ranked so high on the Maclean's annual rankings on national comprehensive universities

in Canada – but there are still so many internal issues that have led many students to fall through the cracks unnoticed.

With students saving their earnings from any and all jobs, taking out student loans or borrowing from their parents (which places them in a position where they are forced to surrender their independence), there is a lot to be expected when making such a major financial and time commitment. From glitches in academic requirements, to a lack of personal accommodations, to serious misunderstandings in communication between select students and different aspects of the university, it is little wonder why retention rates are suffering here at UNB.

I have faced such difficulties, as I'm sure many others have. My issues however lie in the academic administration.

As a concurrent Arts/Education student with a double major and a double minor I am able to clearly see the divide between faculties, as well as the lack of support on behalf of the university to assist students with academic requirements. There is also little sense of accommodation, which I believe should exist when paying one of the highest Canadian tuitions annually. In order to assess and ensure that I am following the requirements needed to complete my program, I must speak with five individual departments, all of which insist placing priority on their own course requirements.

From my experience, it is evident that there lays a significant amount of disconnect between the individual sectors of the University of New Brunswick. During my most recent summer working with the Student Union, I dealt with a large number of parents as well as prospective and current students with complaints regarding information on separate aspects of the university.

A major problem is that there is no single place on campus a student can go to ask any questions of the university; for academics, you must speak to the registrar or the individual faculty or department; for residential problems, to ResLife; for questions of the health and dental plan, to the Student Union. Whatever the reason, something has to give and a change should be made.

There are many different people and sections of this university that accommodate individuals and do succeed; however, there is much room for needed improvement. Perhaps the lack of school spirit at this university is due to the university's lack of investment in students as individuals.

Take a look at your student number, reflect over your time here at UNB Fredericton, and consider if all those promises made to you in your high school by UNB scouts and UNB literature and ask: have you been treated like there's only one U? Stephanie Lord is VP student services. Student Beat is a weekly column by UNB's student leaders examining issues pertinent to students.

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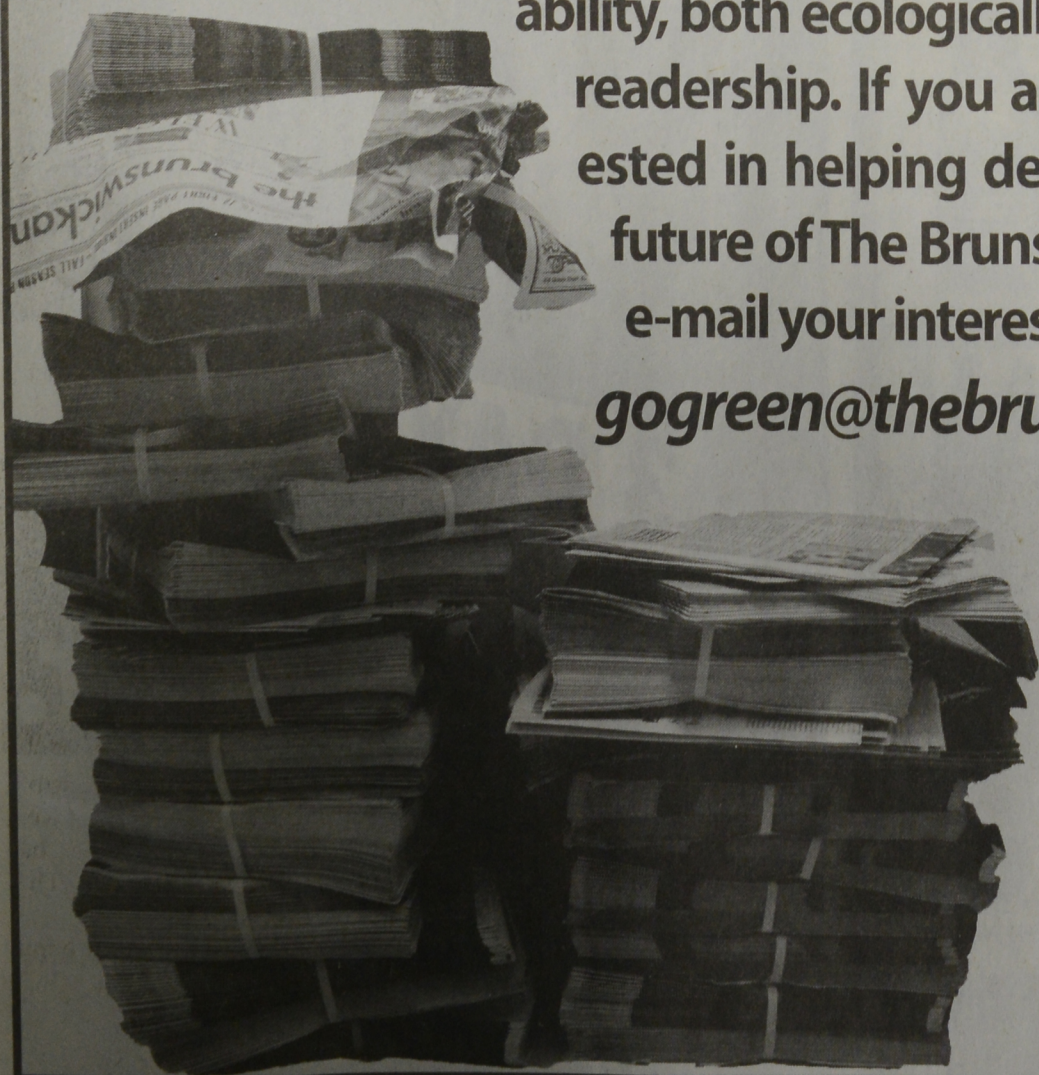
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