

SU Presidential candidates face off

TONY VON RICHTER
THE BRUNSWICKAN

In a campaign that has been more visible and debated than most in recent UNB history, the final stop on the campaign trail proved to be a highly professional affair. Dozens of students turned out to witness the debate between presidential candidates Matt Abbott and Jon O'Kane.

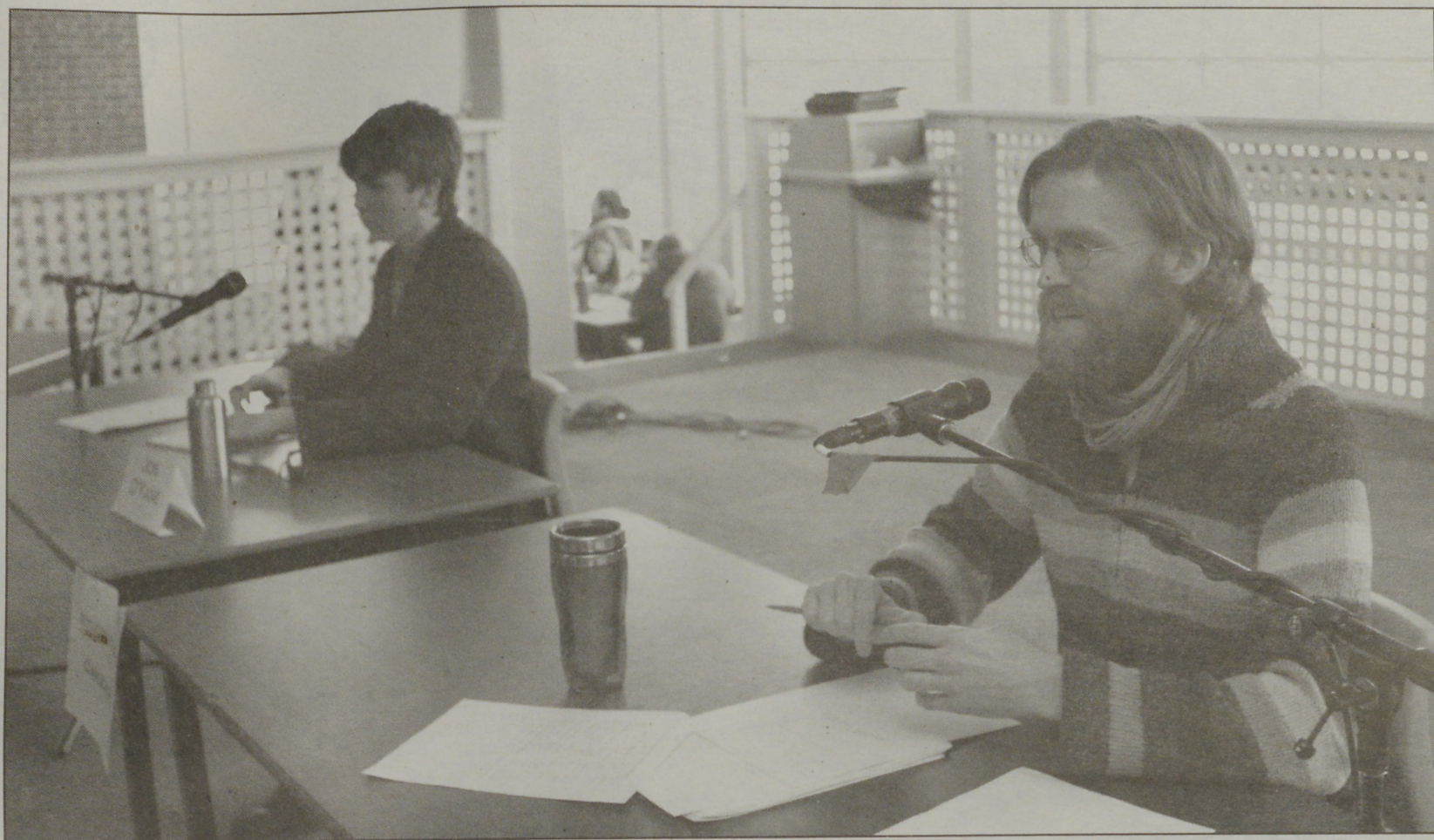
The two candidates discussed a wide range of topics including lobbying strategies, the UNB Woodlot, and the SU budget.

With more people in attendance than is typical for an SU debate, both candidates repeatedly mentioned their happiness with the increased engagement of students during this campaign.

Among the more notable topics discussed was the issue of food on campus. Both candidates acknowledged the need for an increased variety of affordable and nutritious food available to students, on campus. Currently Sodexo has an exclusive contract for food on campus, and the candidates stated that they would work with the administration to try to improve the campus' food situation.

With the wide range of questions and large number of students in the audience, both Abbott and O'Kane were pleased with the event.

"I think it went good. I think there were some clear issues on the table. I think it remained civil and I think it went well. I was very excited that, while there could have been more students there, but certainly compared to my experience in other years there were a lot



Andrew Meade / The Brunswickan

UNBSU presidential candidates Matt Abbott (foreground) and Jon O'Kane (background) spoke on a variety of issues at a debate last Friday in the SUB cafeteria. Issues such as nutritional choice on campus, autonomous student space and student engagement were addressed. Students can vote in their e-Services until Friday.

of students there," said Abbott.

"You always wonder if the students are there for the debate or not, but when the debate began, it definitely quieted down and people were listening. You would hear clapping and comments to what myself or Jon O'Kane were saying, so the sense was that people were engaged,

they were listening and they were there for the debate."

O'Kane echoed Abbott's sentiments about the debate.

"I was very happy with the turnout and the dialogue that Matt and I had," said O'Kane. "It was professional as I expected it to be as Matt and I have

had a great relationship all year long. It's clear looking at the minutes that Matt and I have been divisive on a lot of particular policy stances and social issues, and it's great that we were able to have that debate in a more public forum. We continued the debate that we've been having all year."

"Matt and I have very different stances and approaches to things and feel it's very important to bring that to people in the form of a public debate, and I think it went over very well."

Voting for the election continues until Friday, Feb. 27 at midnight in your UNB e-services.

UNB harassment policies under review

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UNB's harassment and sexual harassment policies are currently under review. The latter has not been reviewed since 1990.

A review committee has been formed that involves various members of the university community, from faculty and administration members to student union representatives. It also includes members of organizations such as the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers and Adult Learners, Part-Time Students.

Shirley Cleave, a kinesiology professor and Associate VP Academic (Learning Environment) of the UNB administration, is the chair of the committee. She says that the recent changes that have been made to the university have sparked the need for harassment and sexual harassment policy alterations.

A major change made recently at UNB was the adoption of a Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities in 2007.

"They haven't been reviewed for a while and there have certainly been changes in our society. It was time to have a look at them," she adds as reasons for the policy updates.

Cleave says that the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities is a framework of what an ideal working, studying and living environment looks like. The updates to the harassment policies are a stepping stone in achieving an ideal university

environment.

Another change made recently at UNB is the hiring of Mark Walma, the university's first Human Rights and Equity Officer. Walma was hired last April. The role he will play in harassment and sexual harassment procedures also has to be embedded in the policies.

Walma has been working in human rights on university campuses for the past 10 years. He says he believes it is good policy for universities to review their harassment protocols from time to time to make sure they are up to date.

UNB Student Union VP Academic Greg Melanson provides the student voice for Fredericton. He feels that the current policies may create problems for students.

"From my perspective, the policy just isn't very student friendly. Students have to go through the same process as administration does if they are harassed by faculty members or vice-versa," says Melanson.

In the case of a student-to-student harassment incident, the issue is dealt with under the Student Disciplinary Code, something that is separate, says the SU's VP Academic.

The procedures following an incident of harassment can be complex. There are two different options: informal and formal resolution. The first includes directly approaching the person perceived as the harasser, either alone or with a Harassment Advisor, as well as mediation. Formal resolution means that a decision must be reached only by a senior administrative member.

The addition of the Human Rights

Officer will likely impact the process by which complainants voice their concerns and the way those concerns are dealt with.

Walma says there has been discussion amongst committee members about creating a stronger informal structure. This means that complainants can approach the Human Rights Officer to voice their concerns prior to filing formal complaints.

"That's a really helpful place to focus on. You can resolve many of these issues without having to resort to a formal process," he says. "Quite often it's a matter of talking to the parties and coming up with a resolution that they're both happy with and can go forward with."

Walma, Cleave and Melanson agree that UNB is a relatively secure space for most community members; however, Cleave adds that it depends entirely on the individual's experience.

"I think it's something we always need to be paying attention to. Some folks have never encountered any [harassment] and so they would say it's a very open and free community. Others have encountered difficulties and feel differently," says the committee chair.

The review committee is looking for feedback from all community members, including anything from past experiences with harassment to suggestions for policy changes. They are not dealing with current individual situations.

The committee's next meeting is today, where they will review the input they have received thus far. Feedback can be sent to sleave@unb.ca or to any committee member directly.

GSA elections examined

SARAH RATCHFORD
THE BRUNSWICKAN

UNB's Grad Student Association (GSA) elected a new president last week: former VP Finance Jason Ainslie. He is stepping into a difficult position, however, due to the fact that only one-third of the executive positions are currently filled.

The GSA holds staggered executive elections in order to maintain continuity, says VP External Neil Cole. Currently, however, this format is "not working very well for us, partly because we don't have a Chief Returning Officer (CRO) to administer the election," he says.

"As it stands right now," says Cole, "we have nine positions that are elected during various times of year."

Last week's election was supposed to fill other positions along with the role of president, including VP Special Events. Cole says that there were no nominations for the other positions, resulting in only the position of president being filled.

There is another election in May, and a third in October.

"The original idea was to create continuity, but without our positions filled it nullifies any continuity," says Cole.

The VP External says this is a "perennial problem" within the association. He attributes lack of candidates for positions to the fact that grad students are often spread thin. Many have jobs on campus, acting as research assistants or TAs. They also have thesis work and regular course work as

well, Cole points out.

"Grad students are just really busy, and it takes the most motivated and (jokingly) self-motivated grad students to want to participate."

Currently, members of the GSA are working together with acting Dean of Graduate Studies Edmund Biden to develop a strategy which will combat the issues with participation.

The GSA is also able to appoint up to two past-Executive advisors. Carson Butts, outgoing GSA president, is being appointed to fill one of these positions. Cole is hopeful that this will help the situation.

Cole also expresses concern with the general coherence of GSA policy. He says that a committee will review the constitution and bylaws.

"There are a lot of errors," says Cole.

The GSA, he says, will take input from members in order to "get rid of contradictions and make for an intuitive, widely-known process among members."

If all goes well, he says, the committee will meet for the first time over the March break.

"The goal is to have a general meeting to discuss and adopt any recommendations before the end of April," says Cole.

The VP External expresses the hope that the organizational principles of the GSA will be strengthened and become a more sustainable process.

He suggests, although he says the rest of the committee might disagree, that it might be more plausible to hold two by-elections rather than staggered elections.

"It seems to be the more logical thing to do with the high amount of turnover among grad students," he says.

Only three out of the nine available GSA positions are currently filled, with the next election to be held May 15.