

the PICARO

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What does 2001-2002 hold for The Picaro?

With the 2000 - 2001 academic year at a close, a question facing The Picaro staff and by extension the Mount student population is "what does the future hold for our campus paper?"

With a new Students' Union executive on its way in and new staff being hired at The Picaro, this is an ideal time to plan for coming years. A suggestion put forth by The Picaro and agreed to by Students' Union would be to levy a media fee on students. We realize that a proposal such as this requires explanation and we will try provide it.

In 2001 - 2002, The Picaro anticipates

funding its operation through three primary means; funds from student fees, advertising revenue and fund-raising.

The Picaro proposes to levy a modest fee upon students to replace the funding we have traditionally received from Students' Union. Although The Picaro has had a contract with the Union, this has not served to guarantee yearly funding. In the past, this funding has been in the range of \$ 15 000 but has varied depending on our operational budget. We propose to solicit these funds directly from students in the form of a levy of approximately \$5-\$7 per student. This levy could replace a

portion of the student fees that would have been delivered to us under the old contract system, decreasing the burden on individual students.

The levy system has a twofold benefit; it provides The Picaro with a guaranteed source of funding each year and it provides a needed separation between the student newspaper and the student government. By charging a flat fee per student, our revenue would be directly proportional to enrollment. We see this as a fair situation as students form our primary audience and core of contributors. It is students who ultimately hold us accountable. Because

the Mount has a relatively stable population, yearly funding would be secure and not subject to budget constraints or politics. This freedom to operate is critical to our goal of producing a viable, thriving student newspaper. Equally important is the autonomy a levy system would provide. Presently, we are funded by Students' Union as a line item in their budget. Our funding is dictated by the size of their budget. Optimally, our funding from the Union would remain stable each year but in light of recent spending cuts, ambiguity over our contract and misunderstandings this has not been so. Financial disagreements

When bad things happen to good papers

By Jessica Padykula, The Brock Press

ST. Catharines, Ont. — As long as there have been student newspapers, there have been readers disgruntled by their content. The 2000-2001 school year has seen lawsuits, pulled funding and shutdown attempts at universities across Canada. But somehow, student newspaper, supported by their staff and many of their readers, seem to bounce back.

When disaster strikes, student papers that are owned by their student union are often more vulnerable to censorship and shutdown attempts. Spats with student unions, however, are not restricted to non-autonomous papers.

According to Jeremy Nelson, president of Canadian University Press (CUP), about half of CUP's 75 members are autonomous. "The biggest threat to student newspapers going autonomous is being able to get off on the right track financially," Nelson says. "It is difficult for many papers in this respect, because the staff don't usually have a great deal of management experience, which can create problems when dealing with funds."

When student unions decide to withhold funds from campus publications for whatever reason, it is an extremely frustrating situation for all involved, says Nelson.

"It is very unfortunate that every year there are a number of people in charge at student unions all over Canada who just don't get it," says Nelson. What they don't

get is the idea that a paper represents the student body. If the paper is threatened, the collective voice is threatened, as well, he says.

"Eventually students wise up to the fact that it is their voice being cut off when campus papers are compromised," says Nelson. A student paper is meant to represent the thoughts, opinions, and concerns of the student population. Autonomy puts full control into the hands of those who actually work at the paper and know what it's all about," says Nelson. "It is having freedom over your own resources."

However, it doesn't necessarily mean a free ride. The Link, one of two student papers at Concordia University in Montreal, is an autonomous publication. However, the paper has not been able to escape shutdown threats.

According to Ariel Troster, editor-in-chief of The Link, three Concordia students have banded together in an attempt to shut down the publication. These students, calling themselves the Link's Accountability and Democracy Committee, feel the paper does not adequately represent the student body as a whole and argue that the paper favours certain groups while ignoring or being unsympathetic to the needs of others. One of the committee members was previously a writer for The Link. Troster points out that she only called into question the

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Open Letter to the Mount Saint Vincent University community

Don Iveson President-Elect, Canadian University Press

The student press is vital. It is vital to building communities on campus. It is vital to keeping administrations and student associations accountable. It is vital to keeping students entertained and informed. As students, your press is vital to you.

Citizenship means a lot more than simple membership. It requires keeping abreast of developments in your community and engaging those developments critically. Without the aid of an independent community-based press, students' ability to function as citizens in their own community is undermined.

Unlike some campus media, which simply targets students for advertising, the student press is your press. The aim of the student press is not to profit off its audience. Nevertheless, crucial monies from advertising are becoming scarce as other media like bathroom advertising and commercial magazines invade the market. In light of this, it is essential that the student press be afforded guaranteed funding to keep it running during lean

times. It is also essential that this funding be protected from political interference by administrations and students' associations. Students must decide to grant this money, and only the students at large should be able to revoke it by democratic means.

But that will hopefully never happen. Instead, there are other actions students can take to register discontent with their newspaper. If someone disagrees with a story then they may choose to write in and note that complaint in a letter. They can also choose not to read the newspaper. Most critically, however, is this: as long as there is a student press then students retain these choices.

Spending a few years at a university campus is an extraordinary experience. Without a student press it wouldn't be the same. Campus would lose one of its most important voices, and students would lose one of their best defenders. The student press must be protected and even strengthened. It is vital.

This issue has been paid for by
student newspapers across
Canada that support The Picaro

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Editor-in-Chief
Melissa Melanson

Production Manager
Bradley MacKinnon

News Editor
Jennifer Henderson

Arts & Entertainment
Nicola Hanson

Sports Editor
Beth Whyte

Contributors:
Shawn Ahmed
Patti Edgar
Andrew Gillis
Don Iveson
Michelle Angela Leblanc
Jeremy Nelson
Jessica Padykula

The Picaro is dedicated to informing, challenging and entertaining the students of MSVU, and to provide a forum to air their views.

The Picaro reserves the right to edit or reject any material, particularly material of libelous, racist, sexist or homophobic nature. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Picaro or of its editors.

The Picaro is not responsible for or may not share the views or any of the advertisements printed in this paper.

The Picaro
Rosaria Centre
Room 114
166 Bedford Highway
Halifax, NS
B3M 2J6
tel (902) 457-6386
fax (902) 457-0444

Picaro

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between the Students' Union and the newspaper have the potential to negatively effect the relationship between the two organizations. This relationship should be courteous but distant allowing for the student newspaper to objectively review the actions of the Union and report on them to students.

The Picaro's second primary source of funding will be through advertisements. Advertising revenue will be used as a complement to student funding and should in no way be seen as a replacement. With the exception of one or two exceptionally large papers, Canadian university newspapers do not rely exclusively on advertising to fund their budgets. As well as the issue of practicality, a heavy reliance on ads raises certain journalistic questions. As a student newspaper we are committed to providing a voice for student—not merely publishing a corporate flier. The Picaro traditionally relies on advertising to meet 40% of our budget needs. This figure has remained relatively stable over the last number of years and we do not anticipate any significant change in the future.

The third source of funding we will be employing is fund-raising. Fund-raising will not be used to cover our budget but will be employed on an as needed basis to cover costs that do not fall within our operating budget (i.e., attending national conferences)

This proposed outline is not set in stone. It is ultimately The Picaro's goal to be autonomous from Students' Union and we believe a levy is the fastest and most painless way to do this. We look forward to working with the Union in the coming months to meet our mutual goal of ensuring a free press on campus. The Picaro's highest priority will always be to act as a forum for students' issues and expression.

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Bad things

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paper's accountability after the writer's story was cut when she was found to have personal ties to the group she was reporting on. Another member of the committee was told at one point by The Link that a 2000-word essay he had submitted would not be published because the paper didn't publish essays.

These two students, along with one other, have demanded the paper's staff resign from their posts and hand over all of the paper's financial information. They have also demanded the paper change the qualifications for hiring staff.

Should these demands not be met, the committee is prepared to petition Concordia's student union to include a question on the next student referendum, where students could vote to strip the paper of its funding, space and assets. The question stipulates that all current staff be fired and a new publication started using The Link's assets.

"The entire thing is totally absurd," says Troster.

In this case, the paper's autonomy does not completely protect it from the risk of a shutdown. However, they are fighting just the same. Although Concordia's student union is not the one making the threats, they are not intervening to help solve the situation.

As of yet, Concordia's student union has not officially stepped forward in support of the committee. However, according to Troster, their stance towards the Link has been consistent with the committee's ideas.

The tense relationship between the student union and the Link began even before the student protest. Earlier in the year, an ugly scandal erupted involving the theft of about \$200,000 in student union funds. During this situation, an editorial appeared in the paper, suggesting that the students were victims of the union's careless and reprehensible behavior.

"This created a climate where something like what is going on right now can flourish," says Troster, who stands behind the editorial. "But we know the paper will be fine."

Despite The Link's current turmoil, Troster is still an enthusiastic advocate of autonomy.

"Our autonomy is what has protected us in the past," she says. "When it all comes down to it, I'm quite confident in terms of our security." In her view, autonomy is "absolutely essential" for a student newspaper.

"I honestly don't know where we would be without it, and I am shocked that so many papers out there aren't," she concludes.

The Gateway, the University of Alberta's student newspaper, is presently in the process of an autonomy drive in hopes of gaining independence from the University of Alberta's student union. "With regards to autonomy, the biggest advantage would be not having to worry about political consequences [of a story]," says Dan Lazin, editor-in-chief of The Gateway.

Problems similar to those experienced by the Link began at the Gateway in October, 2000. The Gateway printed an editorial about a student union policy they felt was not putting student money to good use. The piece was not taken well by the union, who decided to come down hard on the Gateway and Lazin in particular. The union told Lazin that they found the paper to be grossly over-budgeted and that this was grounds for his termination.

"These were idle threats," he says. "We were not over budget by any means and went to our books to prove it to them."

This altercation put the paper at odds with the student union and their relationship has deteriorated since, "We have been threatened for simply doing our job," says Lazin. "That would not happen if we had autonomy."

The Gateway had been granted a question on a March 7 student referendum asking students to pay a \$5 per year levy to separate the paper from the student union. But the student union councillors decided at the last minute that the paper hadn't followed referendum rules and canceled the vote, in spite of more than 2,200 student signatures on a petition in favour of autonomy.

"Now we have followed all of their precise little rules, so we are hoping for a referendum sometime in the future," said Lazin. "We could go to court, but it wouldn't speed things up, so it's not really worth it."

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But We Love Our Picaro!

Michelle Angela LeBlanc

In recent months, there has been much discussion on campus about the financial relationship between The Picaro and the Students' Union. It has, in fact, become one of the issues of the recent students' union election campaign. One of the concerns, in addition to the funding, appears to be the role The Picaro plays in student life on campus.

The Picaro is one of the advertising tools used by The Canadian Studies Society. Perhaps one of the reasons our society is so active on campus is the publicity achieved through The Picaro. Our small but vocal group relies on The Picaro to get out information about upcoming events and to report on special activities that have taken place, such as the lecture given by Dr. Karen Macfarlane at our annual spring Tea. Without The Picaro, our advertising would be cut in half, having to rely solely on word of mouth and small posters that are tacked to every wall on campus. Looking for something more, the society approached The Picaro about publishing announcements on the events of the Canadian Studies Society holds. Over the past two years The Picaro has been accommodating, even publishing photos every now and again.

This is one of the services we believe a student paper should provide. It should keep students informed about what societies are doing and help to encourage students to become more involved in campus life.

As a society we do not always agree with what goes in the Picaro, but we stand behind our paper and hope that one day there will be a page devoted to the societies on campus.

The Picaro has an awesome role to fill and The Canadian Studies Society wants to be a part of fulfilling that role. Of course, The Picaro needs money. More important, it needs readers and writers. It needs student support and interest. The people working on the Picaro are doing so with no money and very little support from anyone. We wish to tell the Picaro we see their long days and thank them for the support they have given our society. Life on campus will be much poorer if there is no paper.

Hopefully the Student Union and the Picaro will resolve their financial issues. There is much more at stake here than money.

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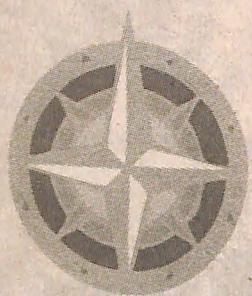
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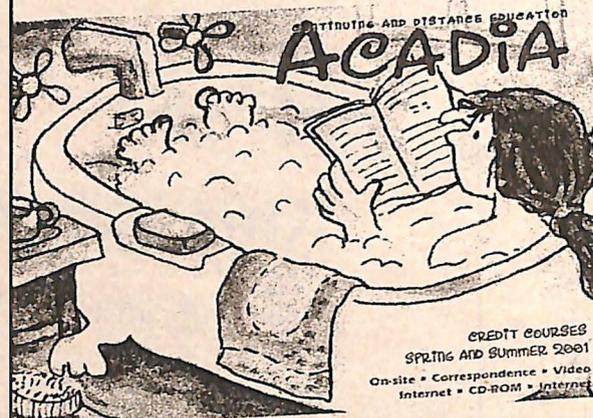
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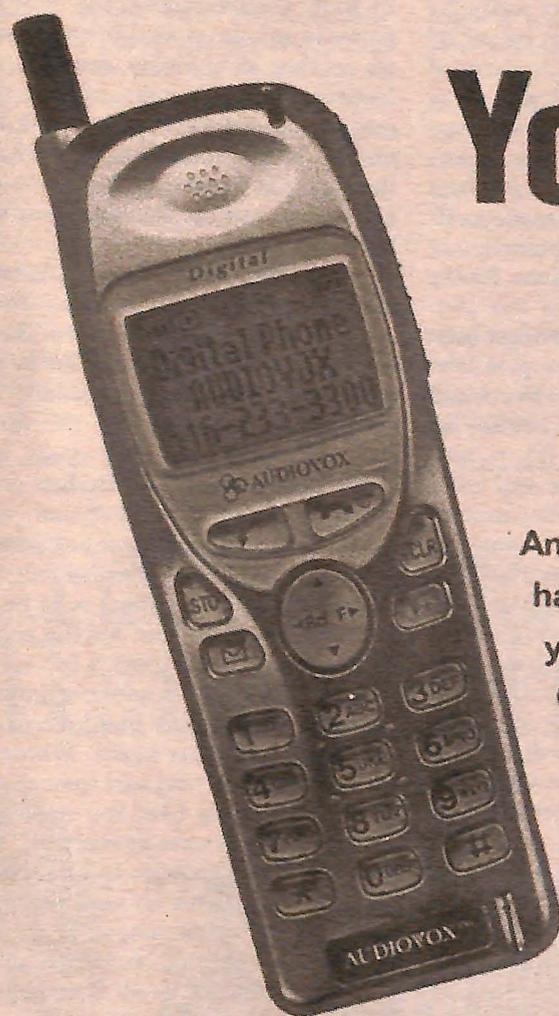


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The Importance of the Alternative Press

Andrew Gillis, Editor in Chief

The end of the Picaro may lead to the end of much more Mount Saint Vincent University may not have a student paper for much longer. To lose the Picaro would be a huge loss because it is the only student media on campus and thus is the only forum for students at the Mount to voice opinions and concerns.

Its demise is the result of muddled finances within the paper itself and the MSVU Student's Union. Ultimately, it has to be seen that the end of the Picaro is at the hands of a student union that doesn't see the importance of student-alternative media.

Where does this mindset come from? Why would a Student's Union view balancing books as more important than having a means for student communication? (ironically, at the only university in Canada with a Bachelor of Public Relations degree.) Is it because the stu-

dent union can't dictate to the Picaro what stories to publish and when they should be printed? Is it that the student union wants a rag to broadcast their agenda to the students at the Mount? As it happens, at the same time the student union at the Mount stopped all funding to the Picaro, they have instigated funding a Student's Union newsletter. Could this be interpreted as the Student Union's attempt to replace the Picaro?

What students at the Mount, as well as at Dalhousie, need to understand is that the student press is an integral part of the university community. The student press can act as agents of change, as well as reflect the views and opinions of the university students and faculty. It is important that students defend and contribute to student media in order for it to work. Student media, and especially the student press, serves a unique purpose

within a university community. It is the voice of the student, it is the vehicle for opinions to be heard, it is the bastion of discourse and the student's interpreter of news. Above all, as a student it is yours, you own it, you put fees into your student media and you deserve it to work.

Most people believe that student media outlets, organizations like the Picaro, will be around for ever. Students believe that the student newspaper is run by a few students in a closed group. It may look that way, but ask any member of any university student paper, whether in Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent or in University of Toronto, it is not the case at all. Student media works only when it is used by the university community, including students and faculty, and when the community contributes to the paper. It cannot be run

only by a few for the many. It would not work.

We at the Dalhousie Gazette support the initiatives of our peers at the Picaro as they fight to survive as an independent, unbiased examiner at Mount Saint Vincent University. We support the continued existence of student journalism at the Mount. We believe that the Picaro plays an important role in the university life at Mount Saint Vincent. It is now the time to act, whether students of Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent or the University of Toronto- any student, faculty or person interested in keeping an integral part of the Mount culture. We must act in protest to keep the Picaro alive.

It is time that we started to value the arts over budgets. It is now time to value culture over bank statements.

Where whining will get you: Acquainted with your student press

Jeremy Nelson, President, Canadian University Press

So you've got a problem with the Daily News. Or maybe its CTV. Whatever the case, you're mad so you vow to march down to corporate HQ and take it right to the top. Let's say it's a particularly bad week and you've also got a problem with your student paper the Picaro. And like the others, you've decided that it too will incur your wrath.

So first you march downtown to deal with the mainstream media bigwigs. Unfortunately you don't have much luck. There's receptionist at the door. There's protocol to follow. There's daytimers to pencil in. And there's the fact that average Joes can't just walk in unannounced and demand to go right to the top. Sheesh! Who do you think you are?

Luckily the day isn't a total write off. Over at the Picaro the only thing you have to get through is a few dozen pizza boxes on the floor. The office is not particularly glamorous of course, but its cozy place with pictures and jokes in magic-marker on the wall and a few computers chugging along in the corner. And of course, there's the editor. Despite the fairly noticeable bags under her eyes, she smiles as you walk in.

You chat. If you smoke, you go out for a smoke. If you don't, you have coffee. Whatever the case, its pretty relaxed. In the end you sort things out. She explains that you were right to be concerned about the article you read. But it was written by a volunteer and the paper has a mandate to accept volunteers submissions. The Picaro is a non-profit service, she explains — a forum for all students.

Hmm...a forum, eh? What's this you said about volunteers, you ask. Her eyes light up (us newspaper types like volunteers). You don't know where they come from or how it happens so fast, but all of a sudden there's a bunch of writing resources and how-to sheets on your lap

and a tape-recorder in hand.

So you write the story. It's a good one, about a new program the Mount is starting. The social history of cheese making, or something like that. And next week, not only is your name on the front page of the paper, but your belly is full of Gouda (or Brie if you prefer. But I prefer Gouda). You think that's it. But no.

You get a call from the editor. Apparently, these folks at this organization called Canadian University Press (CUP) thought your story was pretty fun. So they're putting it on their news wire. And now, 75 papers across Canada, some of them with circulation of more than 20,000 issues, have the chance to inform your readers about the new Mount Saint Vincent centre of excellence for the study of cheese. Wow.

The same day you also get a call from the Daily News or maybe CTV or whoever it was you marched downtown to see. They say your complaint has been taken under advisement and they thank you for your feedback. You know it's a brush off. But what do you care? You're not complaining about the news anymore. You're not on the outside looking in. You're making it.

Maybe you volunteer more after this experience. Maybe you edit the paper, or become a regional bureau chief for CUP. Maybe you go on to make a name for yourself in journalism, joining people like Peter Gzowski and Pamella Wallin who also got their start in the student press. Or maybe you write books. Did you know that Pierre Burton and Margaret Laurence also started a student paper? Or maybe it's politics. Yep, student newspapers also produced a host of MPs and even Joe Clark. (He even ran for president of CUP and lost — who knew it was the start of a trend?)

Whatever the case, because the door was open, because the editor would talk to

you, because you could actually write for the paper, because it was a paper owned by the community it served, well, it changed your life. It could be in a small way — by helping improve the community on campus, learning writing skills or just understanding media better — or it could even change your career path. But it made a difference for you and more importantly, you made a difference for the readers, Pretty cool eh?

That's the way it works. That's what happened to me, and now, by a strange collection of mistakes and accidents, I've found my way to the president's chair at Canadian University Press. It's a nice chair. Nice and cushy with big arm rests and well-oiled wheels for whizzing around the office. The coolest thing about the chair though is that it revolves. Not only literally, but figuratively. And so does your editor's seat. It changes, and every year a new student is in charge, ensuring that every year there is new blood at the paper and new ideas on how to serve students. Sure, the revolutions makes us dizzy once and a while and that means we're not always perfect. But neither is the mainstream media.

The cool thing is unlike them, if you don't like it at the Mount, you can walk in and not only complain, but you can write something that you want to see in the paper. I write all this not as some strange tangent, but actually as quite a serious plea for your support. Without your help, you may not have all the neat things I just described for much longer. It's a shame really, because the Picaro has long history at the Mount — it's almost as old as the school. And it, along with its counterparts on campuses across Canada, are pretty unique. Canada is blessed to have the largest collection in the world of student papers that are owned by students, run on a non-profit basis, and democratically run

at that. Unfortunately, the fact that the paper is unique, or that it has a long history, or that it is really quite a beautiful institution doesn't guarantee its life. Like most other things in the world that are unique, storied and full of quirky beauty, the Picaro is fragile. At this point it should actually be put on the endangered species list.

A portion of the money your students union collects each year — four bucks per student or so — the money the Picaro needs to survive, has been cut by you student reps. Its supposedly because of a budget crunch. We don't know the veracity of that statement, but then again, we don't really care much either. Budget crunch or no budget crunch, this paper must be saved. Your student reps have agreed to find a solution. It's a promise only you can hold them to. One option may be simply levying a separate fund for the paper. You may be asked to just pay a buck or two a year directly to the paper, guaranteeing that no student union budget crunch ever threatens your paper again. Whatever the case, its only you that can save them now. They are Princess Lea. You are Obi-Won. The force is your voice as students. Use the force. Okay, bad analogy. In all seriousness though, we need you to save the paper. A phone call, an email, a head in the door to find out what is going on will make all the difference. But we need that help soon. Things are down to the wire. The staff of the newspaper hasn't been paid a cent of their modest honoraria this year. This issue is only being paid for by the donations of student newspapers from across Canada.

There are few chances in your life to leave a legacy. Now is one of them. Stand up for your forum, your voice on campus, and make sure all other students have the same chance in the future.

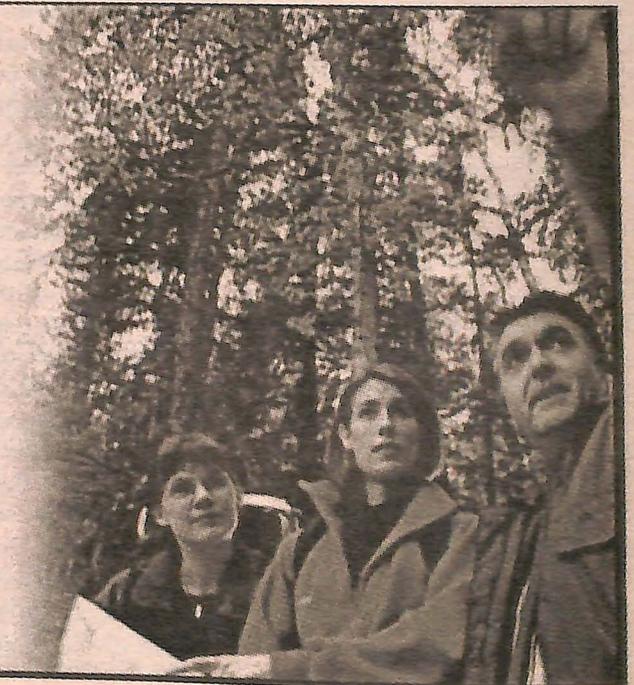
Protecting our natural heritage

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Our Forum is in Danger

To the Editor:

I have been a reader of The Picaro for fourteen years. During that time, its standard has varied wildly. There have been years when it was a pleasure to read — a student paper the university could be proud of. At other times it has been frankly embarrassing, as in the infamous year which concluded with the public shaming of a student for the unforgivable crime of being both a feminist and a lesbian. Yet I've never been so saddened as I was by the last issue — not because of any fault on the part of the editors, but because it is so clear that financial circumstances are making it next to impossible to bring out any kind of paper at all.

The fact is that, whether it is a good paper or a bad paper — and that depends on who volunteers to work on it in any given year — the important thing is that there is a paper. Universities are, after all, first and foremost institutions for the free exchange of information, ideas, and opinions, and it is essential that there is a forum where students can engage in this, not just as members of a class (where you are graded on your ideas and opinions at the end), but as members of a community. It seems to me that any Student Union that refuses to provide adequate funding to the student newspaper out of the fees students pay is doing its members a serious disservice.

Maybe, as the Student Union claims, The Picaro's funding has been cut for purely financial reasons, and there is no agenda of trying to muzzle a potentially critical voice. Nevertheless, it has to be realized that without a strong student newspaper the first thing that suffers is accountability. Given that only a tiny minority of students regularly attend Student Union meetings, how is someone critical of Student Union policy to share her concerns with her fellow students? When major decisions, such as withdrawal from the Canadian Federation of Students, are to be made, where is the forum where both sides can present their arguments, so that students can make an informed

decision?

With the very existence of The Picaro under threat, what everyone needs to remember is that, whether at the national or the local level, the only ones who benefit from the absence of a free press are those in authority, and that the first casualty of its absence is usually the truth. And if that concerns those of you reading this letter, I would urge you to bring your concerns as forcibly as possible to the attention of your Student Union.

Sincerely

Chris Ferns

President Mount Saint Vincent
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