

# T PAPERS?

business manager Steve Inor. "They won't be in the situation where they're making money, the student union is running a deficit, and they say, 'Give us the money'."

President John Wilson, "The trend will increase for two reasons - firstly, because student organizations are accepting the concept of freedom of the press, and, secondly, because of increased fiscal instability. With decreasing enrolment and therefore decreasing funding for student unions, the possibility exists that, with lack of foresight, the student paper will be seen as expendable, and therefore deleted, or have budgets wildly fluctuating from year to year depending on funding and ad revenue."

that the council will not be responsible if the paper is sued, as well as increasing the paper's responsibility by forcing it to have a working board of directors to monitor and deal with its problems.

views outside of just those of the staff.

For extraordinary cases where neither of the above work, most papers provide for referenda or general meetings to remove the paper's staff or editors, if they are behaving irresponsibly.

## TREND ACCELERATING

For these reasons, more and more student papers are moving to autonomy. A few years ago, only the Ontario at the University of Guelph and the Peak at Simon Fraser University were autonomous; now they have been joined by the Arthur at Trent University, the Libri at the University of Lethbridge, and the Her Press at Douglas College in B.C. Next year, the Gauntlet at the University of Calgary and the Sheaf at the University of Saskatchewan will also come autonomous, and several other papers are planning referenda soon to do so.

## STEPS TO AUTONOMY

If your campus paper decides to go autonomous, there are certain basic steps it must follow. First, it must ensure it is democratically run by students who work on it; in order to ensure it will be responsible to students once it becomes autonomous. Then, it sets up clearly laid-out, written editorial and financial structures so that it can operate responsibly as a paper and as a business.

Then, it negotiates for financial autonomy. For some papers, this takes the form of a campus-wide referendum asking students for a per-student levy. For others, it's an annual contract with the student union, specifying a grant, with arbitration procedures if negotiations fail.

Finally, in the case of larger papers, it incorporates itself. This guarantees complete legal separation from the student council, so

## PAPER RESPONSIBILITY?

But how will autonomous papers remain responsible? What if they get taken over by a small clique who don't write about student interests?

That's probably the most common concern of students and student councils when a paper goes autonomous. And that's why autonomous papers have safeguards to ensure that won't happen.

The most basic, and most useful, is the principle of a democratic, open staff.

This principle, enshrined in all autonomous papers' constitutions, means that any student can contribute to and join a paper, and, after making a specified number of contributions, can vote on policy. Policy decisions and editorial staff elections will be made by the entire voting staff. Combined with the normal high staff turnover, this has ensured that papers have remained responsive to students in all but one instance.

Ironically enough, that particular paper wasn't autonomous.

Incorporated papers have another safeguard - their board of directors. Because most boards include students and members of the university community, they ensure papers consider

## THE BENEFITS

So what's gained by autonomy?

According to the executive secretary of the National Union of Students, Pat Gibson, it lets papers fulfil their role by being responsible to whom it should be responsible - the students.

"Both the student paper and the student council are there to work for the student population as a whole. The student body funds both, and both should be directly responsible to the student body. Neither the council nor the press should be responsible directly to each other."

Students need information for a democratic student government to exist, she pointed out, and that must be provided freely by the student press.

"The press has its role in that area, which should not be hampered by the student council. But, at the same time, the press should not be responsible only to itself."

Students do not lose by autonomy; they gain, because their student papers no longer have to fear loss of editorial or financial freedom. Without this worry, student papers and student councils can work together where necessary to serve the students. And students can expect better service from both.

Considering there are at least 80 English university and college student newspapers in Canada, this may not seem a large number. But, if Canada's student news cooperative, Canadian University Press, has its way, the trend will be accelerating.

For the last five years, CUP has been pushing autonomy, and, as financial conditions in education get tighter, it expects more and more papers to take it up.

According to CUP

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