

Put up or shut up

Greetings. This space usually houses the debatable wit and wisdom of my editorials, but this week I'm using the space for a special informational commentary in response to requests and suggestions I've received from students and paper staff for some time. This is the second-last issue of the semester, and since next week's editorial space will be taken up by heartfelt thank-yous and mushy good-byes and the like, this seemed like the last opportunity to sneak in a few important words on the topic I'm addressing here: the content of the student newspaper- what it is, what we want it to be, who produces it, and how it should be done. Basically, if you care about this paper and what appears in it, read on.

The paper's goal is to provide a forum for student opinions, ideas, and writing, to provide stories on local, national, and international news and issues, and to cover university life. We do this to the best of our ability, but we can't cover everything, and it's often most difficult to dig up stories on campus life. We sometimes receive complaints that we have too little news-writing in the paper or that we haven't covered a particular item someone wanted covered, but we can't be aware of everything going on at the campus. If something interesting is happening on campus, then tell us. We're not psychic, we appreciate information and we try to follow up any tips or stories we're given.

One letter-writer in the Feb. 18 issue blasted us for not having enough campus news and sports or features on campus life. It's quite easy to complain about that, but quite another thing to remedy it. Firstly, it's a small and sparsely populated campus. Outside of sporting events there's usually not a lot of excitement, and when major stories have broken we've been on top of them (the news and current affairs content of the paper this year easily surpasses or at least equals that of previous years); still, there's not always a lot of campus events to report on. Secondly, I would ask our critics exactly who is going to write all this news and sports and "campus life" info they crave. It was difficult to restrain hysterical laughter when one letter writer suggested I have my "news team" concentrate on these things. The reason that's so

funny is that the X-Press does not have and has never had a "news team" per se. Our writers are ALL VOLUNTEERS. They write what they want to write. I can try to assign things to them, but it's all voluntary. Very seldom, if ever, do volunteers jump at the chance for "campus life" features I try to assign them (student council, professor profiles, lectures, meetings etc.) Similarly, though there are often complaints about our lack of sports features we have never had a person willing to write sports for us regularly over the past few years apart from our "Offsider" hockey columnist. There are a handful of paid staff members (myself, the Produc-

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tion editor, the Ad Manager, Photographer and Typesetter) but our duties do not include writing, though in addition to our jobs and school-work we all pitch in written contributions anyway, from news to fiction to entertainment to features. The staff we have is underpaid and overworked and putting as much into the paper as time and energy allow them. We are only a handful of people, though, and we rely heavily on volunteer participation. From our limited resources we draw as much info as possible from as many writers as are available to us.

The aforementioned Feb. 18 letter was one of several to touch on another point, criticism of the amount of entertainment features in the paper (letters have specifically targeted the ComiColumn, View From the Top, Twentysomething, etc.). While we may feature many entertainment and commentary columns these are never in place of news or sports. If we have news and sports features they take precedence, and when time or space limitations force our production editor to make cuts during layout then the first thing to go are entertainment columns like Turkey Dinner, ComiColumn, and the like (note the absence of

said columns in the Feb. 18 and March 11 issues for instance). The Feb. 18 letter also complains of these and other features not being campus-oriented, but the paper's goals have never been and should not be narrowly restricted to sporting and academic features. Entertainment reviews of movies, comics, music and books are as relevant to us as they are to any other readers, and commentary features like Stan Livingstone's "Twentysomething" may not always cover a specific campus topic but they do touch on the thoughts and feeling of the readership and as such they are quite relevant to readers.

As I've stated, I believe (and a good deal of reader commentary I've received concurs) that we've produced a good product overall, certainly on par with or exceeding previous campus newspapers. Still, though we've done the best we can we're not perfect, and there's room for improvement such as the additional news and sports features readers request. I have taken steps toward that by arranging for a paid staff news writer position in next year's paper budget, but while that's a positive step, it still doesn't guar-

antee coverage of everything readers might want. The final solution, and this is the most important point I have to make, rests with YOU. You, the students. We're students ourselves, and we will always need students to produce this paper for the students. We take all comments into consideration, but if critics really want to put their money where their mouths are then they should offer constructive solutions or, better still, pitch in. If there's something you think should be in print, then try working on it yourself and bring it to us. We're always seeking new blood and new ideas. If you really want to improve the paper in any way, take responsibility for your student newspaper and make a contribution. The X-Press staff have and will continue to strive for perfection, but if the student body really cares about its paper then it is their responsibility to contribute. Otherwise, reader criticism can seem fairly hollow and hypocritical.

It's something to think about for next year.

*Sean McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief*