

U of L Students' Union

A work in progress...

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Origins of the U of L

In the 1962/63 academic year, Lethbridge Community College began offering university transfer credit courses through its newly created "university section". At the time, LCC instructors began providing a curricula which addressed the academic criteria required for the first 2 years of study in Arts & Sciences at the universities of Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

The University of Lethbridge itself was formally "chartered" in 1967 by the Government of Alberta. This was a time of university creation right across the country and the late '60's saw the establishment of almost half of all universities in Canada - the U of L, U of Calgary and Simon Fraser among them.

The creation of the U of L can be highly credited to intense community boosterism: the City wanted the economic development; city fathers and mothers wanted their kids to be educated closer to home; faculty and students wanted to further their studies in the very place where they started them. So in the Spring of 1967, the Province of Alberta "created" the University of Lethbridge, housed in the Cousins Building at the Lethbridge Community College. The Summer of 1967 saw the beginnings of an expansion of hirings to augment academic programs so that the U of L would have a full slate of Arts and Science courses set to provide for 3 and 4 year degrees and honour professional transfer programs in Law, Medicine and Education.

A unique social and intellectual development at this time was the outpouring of much faculty (and student) talent from the United States as a fallout of the Vietnam War, which coloured the entire Canadian education scene with activist faculty members. Tens of thousands of Americans who considered themselves intellectual refugees (faculty) or outright draft-dodgers (students) made their way north of the border in an exodus which has dramatically coloured both countries – the U.S. having lost many center-left intellectual activists, and Canada having gained them. The U of L inherited its share of these activists and they've left their mark on the place in the form of its Liberal Arts and undergraduate emphasis.

A very significant development at the U of L at this time was that the General Faculties Council and Board of Governors set up the U of L as a “Liberal Arts University”, focussed to a broadly-based curriculum which exposed students to breadth in their program. This was intended to distinguish itself against the larger universities which were trending towards increased specialization early in a students’ studies. Entire degrees could be had, until the mid ‘80’s, which consisted of a very heavy emphasis on non-traditional educational styles with a heavy emphasis on “independent study”.

Origins of the Students’ Union

Out of the LCC came the U of L, and out of the LCCSA came the U of L Students’ Union. The first formal Students’ Union Council was elected on Oct. 2/67, from a student body which numbered several hundred at the time. Its initial energies were directed to building a basic SU infrastructure, establishing by-laws and governance policies, gaining representation on the U of L Board and General Faculties Council (the 2 governing bodies at the U of L) and representing students on individual faculty councils and working committees.

The First SU President: John Brocklesby. First U of L President: Sam Smith.

U of L President Sam Smith was sympathetic to the desire of students to be represented and he cleared the way for students to sit on EVERY relevant agency (and likely a few irrelevant ones too). This representation occurred 4 years BEFORE the inception of the Universities Act which eventually guaranteed those positions for students. Dr. Smith’s decision would, over time, prove to be both “boon” and “bane” for the Students’ Union as it found itself complicit in University governance issues, and often bogged down by bureaucracy and obligation in order to maintain its legitimacy. Likely, the bonds of buildings, mortgages and legal actions was far from the thoughts of the founders of so many Students’ Union’s who had visions of rallies and advocacy as founding principles.

Of note, at this point, was the simultaneous creation of The Meliorist Publishing Society, which actually was chartered in advance of the Students’ Union. At this time (1967) it was an adjunct agency of the Students’ Union, and funded accordingly.

The Students’ Union and The Meliorist occupied space in the Cousins Building until 1971, when the brand-new westside campus of the U of L opened for the first time. The selection of the west-side site for the U of L was always very tenuous, until the faculty and the students had joined in a joint Convocation Day protest march down 4th Ave. South to City Hall, to protest the decision to build the U of L on the SOUTH side of the City. This

protest, and Premiere Strom's follow-up, led to the reconsideration of the west-side site, and construction began in 1969. Clearly though, student activism had had a role in the campus site selection.

Student activism was the hallmark of SU activity and student politics in general. Residence students staged a "rent strike" in the early '70's...The Meliorist printed the banned "FLQ Manifesto" in flagrant violation of the War Measures Act - for which the editors ALMOST were jailed - and the Students' Union was invariably in the midst of it all. SU President Robin Dann met privately with the RCMP to dissuade them from jailing Meliorist staff and seizing equipment from the office; SU installed free telephones, lobbied for Residence washing facilities; SU defeated a motion to disseminate birth control information (now we occasionally distribute condoms, gay pride magazines, and lubrication info!) The SU has also fought against virtually every increase in tuition fees - starting with the WHOPPING increase of 25% in 1968 - from \$150/semester to \$200!

Externally, in 1968, the U of L SU also held a referendum to join the World University Service (WUS), a global assembly of student societies. Later ULSU executives would find getting to Halifax or Ottawa for a NUS, CFS or CASA meeting to be challenging - WUS meetings would be held in Prague, Amsterdam and Italy.

The '70's

The U of L grew from around 500 students in 1970, to about 2000 by 1980. This period marked incredible growth for the campus, the academic program, and the Students' Union. The "Faculty of Management and Business Studies" was created in 1971, and the Students' Union developed its initial statutes which guided its development and organization.

In 1971, the Government of Alberta created the very first Universities Act which determined the organization of these institutions. The Act also embodied a clause recognizing the need for and value of Students' Union's and their right to assess compulsory fees and have them collected by the University for the Students' Union to distribute. This was a significant development, reflected in most provinces, which finally stabilized the financial situations of many Students' Unions.

In 1973, students voted in a referendum to join the National Union of Students (NUS), committing 60 cents/year for each student to this national lobbying organization. The NUS was the forerunner for the Canadian Federation of Students, and set the initial standards in Canada for referended fees and the practices of collecting and distributing those monies. NUS's initial campaigns were focussed on increasing student loan amounts and minimum wages across the country.

During the 70's, the Students' Union occupied office space in C section of University Hall, and The Meliorist occupied space elsewhere (in the Phys. Ed. building), until they were forced to share the C section suite. CKUL radio grew out of the Students' Union in the late '70's, and the C section office suite began to become "very cosy". So cosy in fact, that the restricted space arrangements likely aggravated relations between the SU and The Meliorist - working cheek by jowl - until a mediated "divorce settlement" was imposed on them.

In 1976, a narrow referendum victory determined that Students' Union fees would henceforth become "voluntary". This led The Meliorist and CKUL to seek their own compulsory fees. In 1977 - The Meliorist began collecting \$3.50/student, while CKUL lost its fee bid. In short, by the fall '77, only The Meliorist was adequately funded for operations, which led the Students' Union (who was formally receiving those fees in trust) to begin using Meliorist fees for SU operations.

Through technical arguments (student counts) the 1977/78 Student Council showed that the "optional fee" referendum was actually illegal according to the SU By-Laws, so the fees were reinstated. At the same time, the first Students' Union Building Fund fee was established. The SU fees for fall of 1978 were formally established as follows: \$10 SUB Fund, \$1 ID Fund, \$3.50 Meliorist Fee, \$5.75 SU Operations Fee. The significance of this is that the SUB Fund began so modestly but grew rapidly through the sky-high interest rates of the '80's to create almost \$1.5 million in investments to build the Students' Union Building. CKUL created its 3 staff position structure to manage its volunteer base in 1978, a structure which continues to serve it to this day. They also began the licensing procedure for broadcast, through the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC). Likely, they didn't know that broadcast was still 25 years in the future.

With the '70's closing, there were incessant disagreements between The Meliorist and the SU over the seizure of Meliorist fees for SU operations. After much reciprocal bad will, the U of L, Canadian University Press and the Lethbridge Herald hammered out an autonomy proposal which formally and legally divided the student newspaper and the Students' Union. It was approved through referendum and to this day (2007), The Meliorist is the only known student newspaper in Canada which receives its fees directly from the University rather than through the Students' Union, making its autonomy complete in reality as well as on paper.

The '80's

The U of L Centre for the Arts opened in the fall of 1980, kick starting the rapid development of the Fine Arts at a school generally too small for such ambitious programs. Students'

Union was experiencing intense growing pains all through this period (until the mid '80s) as it experimented with Council structures, Executive compensation, and Federal and Provincial representation. ULSU was a member of the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS).

In 1981, NUS and 2 smaller federal student organizations amalgamated to become the Canadian Federation of Students, which continues today. The U of L SU was either the first or the second member of this organization, as the ULSU and Carleton University SU referendums were occurring at approximately the same time. Both passed. The original CFS fees in 1981 were \$2.50/year/full-time student.

In 1982, U of L Food Services was contracted out for the first time, beginning a history of tensions between student organizations on campus (notably ORS) and the private contractors who have held the contract since. Remuneration for the President in 1982 was \$150/month, Vice-Presidents were \$100/month, and Councillor-at-Large were \$75/month. Key issues for the ULSU at this time included the extension of library hours, increased space for the ULSU and Meliorist, tuition increases, and Residence costs. The student population was approximately 2600 full-time students.

Throughout the '80's, the U of L continued to grow...and struggle. The Fine Arts Faculty commenced collecting a world-class art collection which today is one of the very largest in Canada, with great breadth and representation. It is finally housed in its own building. The School of Management became the Faculty of Management in 1987. The Faculty of Education commenced Masters programs in the early '80s, and the Faculty of Arts and Science began "Special Case Masters" by 1989.

In 1984, the Students' Union's staff structure consisted of a Business Manager and a secretary. The annual budget of the organization was less than \$100,000/year (not counting the SUB funds), and its few services consisted of a part-time cabaret/pub locale, a handbook, and photocopiers.

In 1986, the Students' Union President - Dan Laplante - commenced an ambitious growth plan for the SU which saw the following developments in only 1 year: expansion of photocopying, addition of videogames, free telephones (again), the creation of the very successful Exam Bank, and the hiring of a Project Manager to advance the Students' Union Building. By the end of Laplante's term, the Students' Union had its own architectural plans created, at great expense, to provide for a stand-alone SUB which contained a food court/mall; all student organization offices, meeting rooms and banquet hall, and club facilities. Though the U of L did not go with this plan, the plans did motivate the University to make the SUB its next building priority.

At the same time (1986), The Meliorist received overwhelming support for a fee increase to \$5/semester, giving it the fee it still has today.

SUB plans were frustrated by the sudden resignation of the University President in 1986. He was not replaced for almost a full year, and the interim President did not have the authority to take action on the SUB plans, so development was slow even though the SU had sufficient funds to proceed and the U of L desperately needed the space. In 1987, the Board of Governors finally approved a SUB project plan and selected an architect - George Watson, the project architect for the original University Hall, who had worked with Arthur Erickson on the original U of L.. This was also the same architect who had designed the Fine Arts Building. By spring of 1987, the Government of Alberta approved the design and construction plan for the SUB, and gave the go-ahead for the SU to receive a loan from Alberta Treasury.

In 1988, SU commenced drafting the initial proposal for Alberta's very first undergraduate Health and Dental Plan at the same time as it was developing lease agreements for its pending Students' Union Building. SUB construction commenced in the spring of 1989 with the sod-turning, and was completed in September of 1990 when the SUB opened. Students also voted to implement the Health and Dental Plan, effective September 1990, in much the format it remains today.

By the fall of 1990, the SU staff consisted of a General Manager, Health Plan Administrator, Executive Assistant and Receptionist. The Executive and General Assembly structure was a little different, though the SU finally had an honorarium structure which recognized the significant commitment of Executive members: \$1200/month for President, \$900/month for Vice-Presidents.

The '90's

Externally, the '90's began little different from the '80's. The Canadian Federation of Students had added an Alberta Fieldworker who was obligated to spend 20% time working at the U of L...sharing offices with the ULSU staff. The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) was now in operation about 8 years after the failure and collapse of the Federation of Alberta Students. CAUS and ACTISEC (Alberta College and Technical Institutes Student Executive Council) were making overtures towards working together, some of which were realized and demonstrated a potential of ongoing cooperation.

For the early '90's, the U o f L itself was in a rapid growth phase: SUB opened in fall of 1990, new residence buildings opening in the fall of 1990, Turcotte Hall opening in the spring of 1991...and the commencement of the planning of the LINC, Phys. Ed expansions,

more residences, and eventually Anderson Hall. U of L President Howard Tennant was extremely ambitious in expanding the U of L's academic offerings as well...through exchange agreements with dozens of colleges around Alberta, then Canada, and intense overseas recruiting. It would be fair to say that the U of L was ahead of the pack in regards to expanding transfer programs.

Thus, enrolment climbed rapidly, from 3,000 in 1990, to almost 6,000 by the year 2000. For the Students' Union, this meant a veritable "windfall" in both Operating Funds and SUB Funds. Since the SUB mortgage was calculated off a 3,000 Full-time student body, the SUB reserves expanded rapidly, which the Students' Union has used for the following: 1. bailing the Operations Budget out of bankruptcy in 1995; 2. several major renovations to the Zoo; 3. major overhauls to food court seating and addition of a dropped ceiling in the food court; 4. renovation of the north end into a student lounge space; 5. ongoing capital needs of the SUB.

The SUB mortgage was retired in March of 2007, with a final monthly payment of \$19,300 on March 1.

The '90's represented modest growth to the SU's staff cadre, from 4 to 6 office staff. But the General Assembly shifted from "at-large" representation to "faculty" representation. The '90s began with a General Assembly of 10, and ended with a General Assembly of 18 members. The U of L added campuses in Edmonton and Calgary in the late '90s to provide for college transfer agreements, recruitment enticements and extension courses. These 2 campuses together host nearly 1,000 U of L students. For the Students' Union, meeting the needs of these campuses – in terms of ULSU services – is a challenge, especially with regards to the Health and Dental Plans.

A proper evaluation of the decade of the '90's would not be complete without a review of the ULSU's challenges in fiscal management. In 1994, Students' Union went approximately \$250,000 "over budget" in operations, almost all of it attributable to a single year in The Zoo's operations. Auditor's assessments from that period indicate a combination of extreme discounting of food and drink, to possible overt malfeasance on the part of Zoo Management and perhaps even the General Manager. No charges were ever laid.

Students' Union went through a number of General Managers in this decade: the current GM is the 8th in 14 years. With the precipitous dismissal of a number of GMs, the Students' Union has paid out considerable "constructed dismissal" fees. The combination of Zoo losses and dismissal payouts has represented a boggling sum of money for a small corporate entity. Some of the financial shortfall has been made up from Health and Dental reserves, and some from a one-time Building Reserve bailout, in order to keep the SU

solvent. The U of L was also extremely cooperative in “floating” the SU its fees in advance, throughout the ‘90’s, to ensure that the organization could meet its commitments.

One of the consequences of the SU’s insolvency was the inclusion of amendments to the SUB Operating Agreement – which granted the U of L certain privileges of access and “overseeing” in exchange for taking on a greater burden of the maintenance costs. The current SUB Management Committee consists of 3 SU representatives, 3 U of L representatives, and a Chair agreeable to both parties. This arrangement appears to be working out satisfactorily.

21st Century

Structurally, the Students’ Union has changed little in the past 5 years – the years 1999 – 2004 consolidation of the gains made by stabilizing the organization, though the General Manager’s and Zoo staff tend to cycle through quite rapidly. Much of the stability has come from the stability of the core of operational staff which provide the infrastructure: Randy Ockerman, Susan Curtis, Colleen Van Raalte, and Kathy Broadhead. It bears to name these people individually, since it is their character – and not their roles – which have provided the SU with its capacity to provide services and information to students. Their commitment to work together through the trials of extreme fiscal restraint and employment uncertainty, and to maintain excellent relations with their U of L colleagues, is singular to explain the SU’s survival and return from the brink of bankruptcy.

The 2003/2004 Council of Paul Daniels and Gorm Hansen attempted to commence the ball rolling on SUB renovations to meet the needs of the changing campus, but spent considerable energy in a “standoff” with the U of L Administration over the operations of The Zoo – particularly Thursday Nights. They also went through 2 General Managers which continued a process of operational instability, no matter what the merits of the case.

The 2004/2005 Council were very ambitious to renew a number of ULSU programs, and in their tenure moved ahead with: Level 2 renovation planning; CKXU funding negotiation; creating a campus food-bank; significant operational changes to The Zoo; more Calgary/Edmonton campus outreach; overhaul of the ULSU Health and Dental Plan.

Much of this activity led, logically, to the 2005/2006 Council’s agenda – especially: resolution of student organization leases, construction of the level 2 lounge/gallery, Zoo renovations, CKXU office construction; implementation of new recycling; purchase of 2 new copiers. Additionally, the 2005/2006 Council proceeded with student quality initiatives which represent a significant shift towards improving the quality of a students’ campus experience. One of the main outcomes of those initiatives was a formal agreement struck with the U of L

to create the Quality Initiatives Proposal, funded as a percentage of tuition increases, in which grants, scholarships, research awards and needs-based assistance would be provided through Students' Union's programs and application processes.

During the 2006/2007 Council year, the Student Council enacted the provisions of the Quality Initiatives Proposals (QIP): funding arts groups, funding the campus food bank, undergraduate research support, emergency and travel funds, and scholarships – over \$300,000 in funding. That Council also undertook a diverse range of initiatives: conducted a referendum on Lethbridge Transit's universal pass – U Pass, which was defeated but raised the profile of environment and campus parking issues; contributed significantly to furthering the development of on-campus Daycare; developed professional RFPs (request for proposals) for architects, entitled "SUB Renewal Vision" and "Tennis Court Renewal Vision"; introduced pay-per-view games in the Zoo, along with numerous new events which contributed to a "break-even" year in the Zoo for the first time in 5 years; created the Health Plan Stabilization Fund following one full year of self-insurance for the Health and Dental Plans; developed a new website; and perennially thrashed-about over participation in national and provincial lobby organizations.

A selected précis of Services and Representation, ULSU: (this is not complete...only a general overview)

Federal Representation:

- 1973 – 1981: National Union of Students (NUS)
- 1981 – 1995: Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)
- 1998 – present: Canadian Assembly of Student Associations (CASA)

Provincial Representation:

- 1973 – 1984 Federation of Alberta Students (FAS)
- 1981 – 1995 CFS Alberta
- 1987 – present: Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS)

Health and Dental Plan

- Spring 1990 approval referendum
- Fall 1990 implementation
- Spring 1993 withdrawal referendum
- Spring 1994 approval referendum
- Fall 1994 implementation

- Fall 2005 Plan changes to “Re-Insure/Self-Insure” model
- Fall 2006 Created the first “Health Plan Stabilization Fund”
- Spring 2007 Signed 3-year Agreement with the Graduate Students’ Association to continue hosting Grad students on the ULSU Plans

ULSU photocopying

- 1982: SU starts offering 5 cent copy service on Level 6
- 1986: SU expands from 1 to 3 machines on Level 6
- 1990: SU operating up to 6 machines in SUB and Level 6
- 1992: SU pulls machines from Level 6
- 2005: SU purchases 2 brand-new copiers

ULSU Food Bank

- ongoing: the ULSU has operated a number of food banks over the years, waxing and waning with the interest of the Council. This service has been problematically variable and is inconsistent.

ULSU Exam Bank

- 1986: first commenced
- 2004: scanned and moved “on-line”

ULSU Pub/Restaurants

- 1971: shared space in temp. building, just called “SU Pub”
- 1990: The Lighthouse opened with SUB opening in Fall
- 1992: The Zoo (rechristened from The Lighthouse)
- 1994: \$225,000+ operating loss
- 2003: U of L halts Thursday Nights
- 2004: The Zoo reopens with stricter rules from U of L
- 2004: “The Zoo” is renamed “Union Bistro” – expands food menu
- 2005: The “Union Bistro” is renamed “The Zoo” - expands food menu further

Other Services:

- Student Computer Program
- E-mail stations
- SU Handbook
- ULSU grad photos

- Travel insurance
- SU Service Centre
- ULSU on-line classifieds
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Scholarships & Emergency Monies:

- the ULSU directly commits \$7500 annually to scholarships and development of endowments for same;
- ULSU contract with Coca Cola directly provides \$3000/annum in scholarships
- ULSU provides \$5000 to U of L Financial Aid for an Emergency Funding base managed by Financial Aid
- ULSU provides variable \$\$ throughout the year through Council granted “emergency” loans and grants...otherwise called “dire straits funds”
- ULSU provides \$1000/year from its Zoom Media contract, for student scholarships
- ULSU negotiated \$150,000/year to scholarships, merit and needs-based, through the Quality Initiatives Proposal

Philanthropy

- the ULSU is perpetually helping all kinds of organizations – on and off-campus – with fund-raising efforts and support: Amnesty International, Hope International, Red Cross, Food Banks, Lethbridge Film Society, Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, Daycare Action Committee, Students for Tobacco Reduction, Epilepsy Society, countless student club activities and events, and more charities than can be reasonably recalled.