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A united CSA is de-federated from CFS but debate is far from over

News

## A united CSA is de-federated from CFS but debate is far from over

THE ONTARION ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2010 WITH 0 COMMENTS

Decision to de-federate doesn't end legal battle

Written by Erika Marteleira

Last year, University of Guelph students were asked to determine if the student body should maintain its membership with the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). The atmosphere on campus was tense as students petitioned, campaigned, held events and hosted speakers both for and against the motion. By the end of the winter semester, a referendum was held and a majority vote decided that the students at the University of Guelph would indeed de-federate from the CFS.

For those new to campus politics, the CFS is a nationwide student union, which is meant to represent Canadian students' needs to the provincial and federal government. While providing an organizational framework to support student movements, it also has programs that aim to make university accessible to marginalized groups, lower tuition fees, and eliminate sexual abuse on campuses. Each student pays \$7.31 each year to the CFS to fund these initiatives, support CFS in lobbying the government, and access resources like pamphlets and posters. Students who initiated the de-federation movement claimed that the CFS was not fulfilling its mandate, and that the amount of money which students were contributing to the campaign was not being effectively managed. The heated debates that ensued made this the most talked about topic last year, and it is far from over.

There are still contentious issues regarding the CFS petitioning and the previous CSA's involvement with campaigning. But this year, as stated by CSA Executive Demetria Jackson, the Communications and Corporate Affairs Commissioner, the CSA is determined to come together and move forward.

"The CSA executives are unanimous in our position that the University of Guelph has de-federated from the CFS. We have agreed to put our personal politics aside and represent the student majority, who voted over 70% in favour of de-federating," said Demetria. This unification is in response to the conflicting opinions within the CSA last year, which surfaced when the CSA motioned to support the "No CFS" campaign prior to the referendum. Although that decision is still fraught with debate, it is the primary strategies employed by the "No" campaigners that are now under legal questioning.

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Unlawful tactics were purported to have taken place on campus during the initial petitioning by the de-federating proponents. The CFS is now challenging the legitimacy of these petitions, which were used to substantiate the claim of the “No” campaigners for the student body’s desire to have a referendum occur. The CFS has said that it will appeal the rationale of Justice O’Connor, who permitted the referendum in April of this year. If successful, this could prevent U of G from legally being de-federated. His statement, once released this coming September 23rd, will inform the public of the legal grounds for which the petitions had authorized the vote to occur. CFS is refusing to recognize the University of Guelph’s de-federation, and has implied that it will continue to fight the CSA in court. As of the numbers released, over \$70,000 has been spent in legal fees by the CSA in responding to this issue, and if taken to court more will be needed from student fees.

Along with tuition and service fees, this fall students once again paid the \$7.31 in student fees for the CFS. “This money will be held in trust, until decisions can be made to determine what it can be used for once the case is resolved”, said Demetria. This year, the CSA must organize programs and events without the CFS resources. However, these campaigns will be taken out of budget lines which were intended for other uses. Demetria will be holding a series of ReThink campaigns, which target racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression on campus. Compared to the funding received by the CFS, she now only has \$3,500 from the CSA Advertising and Promotions budget to spend on her projects. She must also design, produce, and distribute her own posters and buttons, which were previously supplied by the CFS for similar campaigns.

But what worries her is that the obligations of CSA Executives are not clearly defined when it comes to organizing initiatives. Luckily, members of our current CSA are passionate about addressing oppression on campus, and hope to actually create a positive impact within the student body. Last year, the CSA and many student leaders were so preoccupied by the CFS/de-federation debacle that the most important issues of social and environmental justice were pushed aside. Let’s just hope that this year, the energy witnessed from mobilized student groups involved in the CFS on campus, can be redirected towards actively addressing the needs of students and the larger Guelph community.



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