

William Prasifka

Treasurer

Easter 2013



My name is William Prasifka and I am running to be treasurer next term. I am originally from Dublin in Ireland but did my first undergraduate degree in Columbia in New York. I finished last May and am now doing a two year law degree at St. Edmund's College. I am currently the Diversity Officer for the Cambridge Union. Below is a list of the most prominent issues affecting the Union and some comments on them:

Free Speech

The central policy debate within the Cambridge Union Society concerns the limits of free speech. Many members support a “no platform” policy whereby they argue that the society should refuse to give a platform to speakers deemed to have ideas that are discriminatory and outside the main stream. They argue that the Cambridge Union is not the government and that in rejecting speakers based on their ideas they are not making a judgment about free speech. I reject this argument. Nowadays governments rarely ban things outright. Smoking will not be outlawed anytime soon, it will just get progressively more expensive and be permitted in an increasingly restricted area. In a similar manner, no requirement to carry ID will be imposed in the near future. You will only need it if you want to go on a plane, car, government building, pub etc. Over the last few decades the government has placed few overt restrictions on free speech. Yet increasingly, “soft” restrictions prohibit people freely expressing opinions. Sponsors and advertisers threaten to withdraw funds if controversial speakers are invited. Over the coming years private organizations will an increasingly important role in protecting controversial speech. If the Cambridge Union - a student run non-profit organization - cannot protect it, who can?

Specific Fundraising:

The main role of the treasurer is fundraising. When I was at my last university I was involved in a fundraising effort on behalf of the sailing team to raise \$50,000 for a new fleet of boats. We raised the money by specifically targeting donors for specific projects. Rather than just sending out generic letters we did our research. Such a program needs to be implemented at the Union.

Disabled Bathroom:

It is ridiculous that the Cambridge Union Society does not have a disabled bathroom. Last year a paralympian was told that the only bathroom available was in a restaurant down the road. Such a project will cost roughly £8,000. We could fundraise this amount through specific targeting.

College Pays Membership Fees:

As Diversity Officer I am working on ways to reduce the cost of membership fees. The more members the Union has the better. Approximately 80% of the Union's revenue comes from membership fees. If fees are reduced outright it severely affects the society's capacity to operate. I want to pursue two avenues that can both ensure the Union is financially stable and that will increase access. The first is to obtain outside sponsorship to pay the cost of joining the Union to those who can demonstrate financial hardship. The second is to establish relationships with specific colleges whereby the Union membership fee is attached to a college bill. It is much easier to pay membership fees in conjunction with tuition fees. Over time this could develop into colleges subsidizing membership.