

Roombas, man's new best friend

Jordyn Marcellus
Gauntlet News

First-year master's student Paul Saulnier didn't know that his year-long group project, an emotionally-influenced Roomba, would be so popular when he first presented it at a conference in San Diego a month ago.

"We presented the poster and there were lots of posters there, so it didn't get above-average attention," said Saulnier. "It was after when it got kind of crazy. MIT's information review picked it up and the ball started rolling from there. It just goes to show you how much one outlet can have a huge effect."

Roombas are small wireless

vacuums that can clean on their own. Saulnier demonstrated how his Roomba detects the wearer's emotions by donning a Neural Impulse Actuator, a headband device usually used to play video games. The headband detects facial tension, which allows the robot to "know" when the person is stressed.

The readings are fed through Saulnier's custom programming, complete with facial diagrams to show the differing stress levels, which then transmits wirelessly to the Roomba to skitter away from the wearer.

"The robot is going to watch you, not literally, and your emotions and move based on this," explained Saulnier. "I'm not going to commit



Amanda Hu/the Gauntlet

This Roomba can't understand your emotions, complex human.

to saying that this is the first instance of it in the world, but it's the first that we know of."

While this was a first-year project, Saulnier has decided that the buzz generated from the project is

enough to start working on other emotional-control projects.

Saulnier, a soft-spoken New Brunswickan through and through, laughed at how much press the little Roomba-that-could has received in

the media and on the Internet.

"A month ago, being in my New Brunswick newspaper would have been big to me," said Saulnier. "It's gotten a lot of attention. I totally didn't expect it. I thought the project was going to be dead and that was the end of it. Given the attention, we decided to explore it further."

He stressed that there are numerous future applications for the project.

"The idea here is that this isn't the be-all, end-all [of] implementations," said Saulnier. "We're looking to using better technology, applying it to proper applications and so on. The common denominator is the emotional control; the robot may change, the behaviours may change and the emotions may change — whatever emotions that are relevant."

SU supports faculty amalgamation

Sarelle Azeulos
News Editor

With a possible arts faculty amalgamation around the corner, the Students' Union has taken another step to ensure that the quality of education for the students affected is maintained.

At the end of April, the University of Calgary board of governors will meet and vote on combining the arts, humanities, social science and communication and culture faculties. The Student Academic Assembly voted to support the reorganization on Monday.



Baez

still maintains the different departments and disciplines," said su president Dalmy Baez. "That being said, in our document we have some pretty specific requirements for us to move ahead with this."

Baez sent the list of recommendations and assurances to the University Planning Committee shortly after Monday's meeting.

"The su has been able to play quite a large role at that level," she said. "They've taken a lot of our rec-

ommendations on and we've been able to guide the process."

At the meeting, elected officials added requirements to ensure the hours of advising time available doesn't decrease and that enough student representatives are on appropriate councils for the 7,000-student combined faculty.

The document also calls for a "measurable" increase in quality of education. The assembly decided to keep the wording vague to avoid limiting themselves to using a specific survey, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, for measurement.

The university votes while the su transitions to next year's elected officials. Faculty representatives have decided that due to their current in-depth understanding of amalgamation's consequences, they would come up with a stance and next year's representatives would follow it through.

"The decision doesn't bind the faculty representatives, it just binds the president and the vice-president academic," said vp academic Pamela Weatherbee. "Representatives have to vote on behalf of their constituents and not for the Students' Union."

Social science representative Teale Phelps Bondaroff made this

apparent at the discussion, saying he was in favour of the document, but would still vote against the amalgamation because it won't benefit social science students.

The su currently doesn't have a plan of action if the reorganization results in a lower quality of education.

"We don't think this change in faculty structure is going to fix all of our problems."

— Dalmy Baez,
SU president

"If we find that [by] changing the structure of the way the arts are shaped, things don't get any better, then we know it's not the structure, we know there's a bigger issue," said Weatherbee.

She added future elected officials would have to look at programming, teaching practices and hiring practices to find another solution.

"We don't think this change in faculty structure is going to fix all of our problems," said Baez. "We're not suddenly going to climb to the top of *Maclean's* rankings or anything like that. However, we are confident enough that this reorganization will have enough positive impacts that we're supporting it."

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