

Discussing the referendum

Erin: So Michele, what do you think of this upcoming referendum on abortion?

Michele: Although I support the "no" campaign, I believe the referendum will divide the campus and not everyone will be represented by whatever policy comes out of this.

EG: I'm coming from the other perspective — I support the "yes" campaign — but I don't support the actual referendum, which is only going to confuse students. There was no initiative from either pro-choice or pro-life students to run this referendum.

MT: Exactly. Why are we being forced to voice our opinions through a yes/no question? The issue isn't that black and white.

With 10,000 students at Dal, there is bound to be a range of opinions which fall in the middle.

EG: I know that council spent a long time debating the wording of the questions, but the end result is confusing and also misleading. The first question is binding — the council is bound to uphold the majority opinion on the question. It asks whether or not students support a DSU policy on abortion. It's not clear what the policy really means — will it just exist on paper? The DSU is avoiding taking a stand on this question, they're just asking for student permission to debate the issue.

MT: The second question is whether or not a student supports

a woman's legal right to abortion, or whether they are undecided on the issue. This is just a poll of student opinion — but do students want their opinion polled on this matter? I'm concerned with what the DSU plans to do with the opinion of the stu-

a conversation with Michele Thibeu and Erin Goodman

dent body, and will it really be representative of the campus, considering the small percentage of people who actually vote?

EG: Any way you slice it, we're left with an ambiguous outcome in this referendum. I can vote yes to the first question, and yes to the

second question, or vote yes and no, no and yes, no and no, or yes and undecided, or no and undecided. It's rather difficult to run either a "yes" or "no" campaign under these circumstances."

MT: Yeah, really. The best thing would be to stop the referendum, which is going to cause confusion, frustration and open hostility among students.

EG: It will also make the DSU look pretty bad. But council should really reconsider the procedure used to run referendums. They can be easily misconstrued. Students should have access to information on the issue while it is in the process of being debated in council. Upcoming referendums need to be well-

advertised in the campus paper and debated through open forums weeks before they are actually run. I don't feel we were given enough notice on this issue.

MT: Students should have input into what kind of topics are run as referendums, and input into how referendum questions are phrased. Council has ignored students on this issue.

EG: We don't have to have this referendum. Council has the power to stop it, and they should be holding a meeting to reconsider this referendum. Anyone who wants council to reconsider their position on this issue should be letting councillors know NOW.

MT: Don't be ignored.

l e t t e r s

PIRGain?

To the Editor,

It is our firm belief that the establishment of a Public Interest Research Group at Dalhousie University will be both an asset to students and the community. Dal-PIRG will provide a much needed link between the students and the community, in addition to enabling students to research issues of public concern.

It is with this understanding that we, the undersigned, endorse the establishment of a Public Interest Research Group at Dalhousie University, and the \$2 per student, per semester refundable fee.

- Alexander Burton, Arts Representative DSU Council
- David Shannon, President, DSU
- Lori Savory, Dalhousie Assistant Ombud
- Royden Trainor, Chair, DSU Council
- Myrna Gillis, President, Law Students Society
- Leslie McNabb, President, Sherriff Hall Residence Council
- Jane Farrow, Program Director, CKDU 97.5 FM
- Av Singh, Grant's Chair, DSU; Chair, International Students Assoc.
- Nasreen Mahmud, President, Political Science Students Assoc.
- Ginny Luks, President, Eliza Ritchie Hall Residence Council

Straight pride

Dear Gazetteers,

When I first looked at your Feb. 15 issue, I didn't find it much different from any other in its content. Then I realized that I was in fact flipping through a section called "The Gay and Lesbian Reader." This made me realize

just how much information concerning "Gay Pride" one comes across at Dal and in the Gazette in particular; the insert was not different in content from many pages of many-a-Gazette issue. My problem is not with homosexual people per se, but with the extent to which the virtues of gayness are extolled in your pages. If being gay is a natural state of being, then why is the banner of homosexuality raised as a cause, with people trying to raise gay awareness all the time. Isn't that more appropriate for a true special interest group like say, the Pond Scum Conservation Society? One does not see this magnitude of articles on other natural occurrences, like breathing, sleeping or being straight — there is no SPAD (Straight People at Dal) group, or straight pride parade. After all, what I think most gay people are striving for is acceptance, not special distinction. To read about an "encounter" between two gay men, for example, next to an

encounter between a heterosexual couple may seem distasteful to many — I would not be comfortable with it myself — but to isolate gay experiences and give them special attention, this would not only seem uncomfortable, but it may cause some resentment. I guess what it all really boils down to is that there is no need to show that you are justified in being gay by overexposure of homosexual perspectives. I think that you could better fuse into society by getting rid of your childlike exuberance in who you are and being more selective in what and how much you present to the public at large. This would demonstrate a more mature and dignified view of your identity, in my opinion. I know that my argument is a flawed one, but I think that it does bring up a valid point. Oh, and by the way Gazette people,

maybe a special section on sexuality would be a bit more a propos?

Nipun Vats

Referendum

To the Dal student body, via the editor:

I wanted to take the time to drop a quick note of concern. Yesterday I was informed that the *Dal Student Council* is pushing a referendum into the hands of the students body. My question is: *What the hell is this council doing?* Here is an issue of ethics, morals and scientific facts all wrapped into a sweet little referendum. The outcome of this will only cause alienation of students who disagree with the outcome or 'mandate.'

Fellow students: Please recognize the possible ramifications of such a referendum. *Vote no.* Let the student government know that you don't want them to 'ram' this into the union's policy handbook.

Who knows... the following semester may arrive with a referendum on 'sexual orientation' ... ?

Jeremy Smithers

Binding

To the editor:

As a concerned Dalhousie student I would like to express my feelings toward the upcoming referendum issues. The intent of the student referendum is to establish a policy representing the opinion of the majority. Although this process is appropriate for some issues, the question of abortion involves such deeply rooted personal feelings there cannot be a simple yes/no

answer. There is no simple position that can be taken by the DSU which can adequately represent the true feelings of the student body. The only result I see occurring from this referendum is an alienation of students, along with an increase in the already existing feelings of contention between people on both sides of the issues.

How many students would agree to be bound to a position on such a moral issue, decided as a supplement to a student union election vote? The fact that we as students never did ask to have a referendum called on this issue, and the manner in which the question has been put forth, despite opposition from many students, indicates to me that the DSU is out of touch with the student population on this issue.

The function of the student union should be to represent the majority of students on any issue. It is therefore dangerous to set a precedent whereby an official policy is established on a question with such serious implications, affecting future Dalhousie students who will not necessarily have their views represented. In closing, I again stress that it is not the place of the DSU to propose to establish an official position on such a personal question as abortion.

A Concerned Student

Give us a chance

Dear Editor

I write this letter on behalf of myself, the majority of the guys living in our residence, and the many others who, for some reason, pick up your paper in the hopes that there may be an article worth reading.

Our paper is the product of the minds of a few, and does not reflect the views of the student

body as a whole. Contrary to popular belief of other local universities, 90 per cent of the people here at Dal are not gays or lesbians.

Again this year we are 'treated' to a pull-out gay and lesbian section. I must have missed the pull-out varsity sports section, or the pull-out residence activities section. Granted, we in residence or varsity sports make up a small percentage of the total number of students, but so too does the gay and lesbian population, I'm sure. Heterosexuals are made to feel like deviants, with the extensive publicity that goes to homosexuals.

Last year we were faced with the opportunity to decide whether or not we wanted to pay for the use of the Dalplex. Why then do we not have the option of paying for this paper, if in fact our DSU fees go towards it?

I don't feel that this insert heightens awareness, or elevates compassion to homosexuals. Rather, it angers many of the student body that this comes across as being indicative as to the orientation of the majority. If you must print this section in the future (as I'm sure you will, since as one Gazette board member said, "we don't derive our mandate from our students"), at least give other groups a chance to be heard from (ie. varsity sports, residences, etc.) This is, after all, "Dalhousie University's Student Newspaper." I would invite others to write to the Gazette to express their views as well.

Shane Wamboldt



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