

by
Alec Bruce



Students' Council President, Peter Rans

Students' council president Peter Rans takes it to the people.

Gazette: Still, Terry Donahue insists that provincial cutbacks have not seriously affected existing university programs.

Peter Rans: I would say Mr. Donahue does not know what he is talking about. Anyone can see what has happened at Dalhousie due to government cutbacks. The compu-

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ter science department is a good example. Here is a relatively new program: just the type people have been telling us we ought to have. It's high-technology. Yet, because of depleted resources, it is not adequately training people. When you see huge line-ups outside the terminal room, you know something is wrong.

How can the academic integrity of the university programs not be suffering? The library is now shutting earlier; and book acquisitions are way down — for the last few years the library has been doing it on a shoe-string budget. I predict that in the next few years we are going to see class-sizes expand. Individual professors will not be replaced, which in turn will increase the academic burden on the remaining professors. Facing all that and then to say the quality of education in this province is not affected by cut-backs is ludicrous.

Gazette: Between government's policies and the reaction of administration the student faces a complicated and gruesome prospect. As the official representative of students at Dalhousie, what can council do to maintain high-quality education and a measure of accessibility for students?

Peter Rans: I believe both the faculty association and the administration are, for the first time, taking the student union seriously. The attrition study that myself, John Russell and Carolyn Zayid did is a major document. It is being taken seriously by the administration, the faculty association and the Council of Student Services. We attempted to prove that 30% of students enrolled at Dalhousie leave between their first and second years of study. We stressed this drain was due to a number of factors — some related to individual performance. Where academic failure is the cause of departure, as far as I'm concerned, that's o.k., that's honest. Some people are just not up to the academic demand placed on them by this university. But we are worried about the other reasons why people leave. I mean, if there is a problem with the students getting

adequate funds, then let's find out about it. If there is a problem with alcoholism on the campus, then find it out. If there is a problem with adequate housing, then find it out. If sexual harassment exists, then let's find it out. If there is a problem with student-faculty relations, then let's have a real course evaluation. These are all things that need to be done in the broader context of financial restraint. The attrition study was just one report — the vanguard, I expect, of many more.

Gazette: But how does the students' council properly represent the students?

Peter Rans: It is encumbant upon everyone who sits on council to take information back to the societies they represent. To a much greater degree than in previous years, this is now being done. But there are always exceptions. It is fair to say communications has always been one of the greatest problems facing the students' council. When I sat on Gord Owen's council, I was so upset about the failure of communications with the university community I agreed to chair an ad hoc committee on communications. The committee continues to work.

Communication is a perennial problem. There, at present a limited number of ways council communicates with people. One way, of course, is through posters and flyers — but these tend to be very overused. Other ways are through the *Gazette* and CKDU. But the best form of communication is one to one. This cannot be stressed enough. It is vital that individual councillors communicate with people on a one to one basis about what is happening in the community. That is why both John Russell and I have tried to attend as many different and disparate meetings as we can.

Gazette: At this point in your term of office, nearly 25% of student councillors who ran for positions last year have resigned or have been impeached. The list is impressive: one graduate studies representative; one senate representative; one board of governors representative; one representative from science, others from dentistry and one Vice President External. Will this attrition of councillors affect students' council mandate of representing the interests of all students?

Peter Rans: I don't think the integrity of council has been challenged by what's come down. I think, if anything, it has been enhanced. As a council, we have had the courage to impeach people who are not doing their jobs. In the past, there have been far too many councillors neglecting their duties. Some haven't even indicated their intention to show up at meetings. If anything, people should be pleased we are saying: If you're going to be a councillor, you have to attend meetings.

Gazette: You were quoted in last year's election as saying, "the only

way to resist cut-backs in education funding is to work through the Canadian Federation of Students, (CFS) and the Student Unions of Nova Scotia, (SUNS)." Relations between these two bodies haven't lately been harmonious. In view of this, will the Dalhousie students' council reassess working through CFS on anything?

Peter Rans: If CFS is a working organization and does defend our best interests, then, I believe, we should be in it — clearly! But if it doesn't do that, then we have a responsibility to acknowledge that to our students.

Gazette: Is the role of CFS presently under investigation by the Dalhousie students' council?

Peter Rans: Yes, this is currently being looked at. I mean, it is very clear we got no satisfaction at the recent national conference, (of CFS at Victoria in November) on a number of issues fundamental to both the structure and democratic nature of CFS. We question whether the organization is not now dominated by a number of interest groups. We wonder whether CFS truly represents the interests of all students across Canada. We are looking at these things very carefully.

On the work of council

Gazette: Aside from the larger issue of financial restraint and council's long-term commitment to impartial and responsible representation, what are some of the more concrete accomplishments of your administration?

Peter Rans: First of all, the second-hand bookstore was something that was promised and was achieved; secondly, the coffee-house on Sunday nights is now a place where people can go and hear live entertainment. In terms of the SUB, John Russell has freed-up the Green room and the cafeteria for regular bookings at a minimal fee, making it accessible to all 'A' and 'B' societies. Generally, entertainment this year is doing very well. The Community Affairs Secretary, for instance, has put on a very good program with the Thursday-at-Noon series.

I think it is fair to say this council has done an enormous amount of work with regard to womens issues — especially, the security problem on campus. Through our security committee, a number of informal escort services have emerged. The lighting on this campus at night is just not adequate to protect the people who walk around after dark. We are attempting to get buses rerouted to on-campus terminals. We are also

In the spirit of the season, we at the *Gazette* present a mid-term report of the work of Dalhousie's students' council. Students' Council President **Peter Rans**, in his usual relaxed manner, proved more than willing to subject his administration to our scrutiny. Staff writer **Alec Bruce** spoke with **Rans** last Friday about such things as government cutbacks to higher education, and the role of the students' council; on-campus activities and council's responsiveness to students' concerns; and plans for the future of the students' council.

— The Editors

On financial restraint.

Gazette: Peter, something that worries nearly everyone in higher education is the provincial government's program of financial restraint. It is currently affecting practically every sector of the economy, and threatening university study. Just recently, we've learned President MacKay is preparing his own scheme of "academic rationalization." Do you think the administration is responding properly to

the stresses exerted on it by the provincial government?

Peter Rans: The university now has a deficit of 10 million dollars. That is a fact. But I firmly believe there has been poor financial management at Dalhousie. Though finances have improved enormously — and in this, Vice President Shaw has had a major role — I am disappointed with President MacKay. I don't think he's been forceful enough in telling the provincial government the kind and extent of cuts to education have been irrational. The closure of the Atlantic Institute of Education was irrational! The government has cut monies already approved and spent. President MacKay should have told the government that that kind of treatment was unacceptable. Dalhousie has spent money on such things as space and allocation only to be told by the government that funds are not available. This university spent that money in good faith, expecting to get what was promised. President MacKay must now publically and forcefully argue the provincial government is damaging the academic integrity of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia.

Quite frankly, until the President does this, I think the faculty association has grounds for being very upset if they are asked during negotiations with the administration to bear the brunt of cut-backs.