

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

## Graduate student issues: why DAGS got involved

Last November 1997, a member of the former DAGS council attended a national Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) conference. At the conference, the lack of national student representation of Dalhousie graduate students was apparent; the majority of the students present were already members in national graduate student associations. At the end of the 1997-98 DAGS term, it was recommended that DAGS form an advocacy committee to better address graduate student issues here at Dalhousie.

Although graduate student issues are connected to undergraduate and faculty concerns, some felt that the graduate student voice was not entirely represented in the various debates this year (faculty strike, TA and part-timer contracts, etc.). Graduate student employment, as an example, warrants national attention. Some of us are concerned about the future of the university as a place to learn and possibly as a place to find work after graduation. Recent developments in education policy make it increasingly hard to find work in academia. The tendency seems to go towards the "disposable teacher" as sessional lecturers are hired for the term and then laid off in the summer. Continuity of the research and teaching process is made more difficult under such conditions. Even an increase of research grants given from funding agencies such as NSERC and SSHERC, though necessary and appreciated, do not directly address the important role

of the university as an educational institution. Another example, the Millennium Fund, proposed by the government does not address the need to ensure a suitable level of tenured faculty.

We do not see graduate student issues as more fundamental or more important than undergraduate issues, we are all in the same boat concerning increases in tuition and class size. However, it is necessary to make known and discuss the complexities that impact upon graduate student education.

What are the options?

The Graduate Student Advocacy Committee and DAGS council recently supported the motion to join a national organization. This membership necessitates paying a fee but would allow Dalhousie graduate students to be connected to a larger national network. Graduate student issues are represented by two different national organizations, the National Graduate Council (NGC) and the Canadian Graduate Council (CGC). The CGC is close in approach to the undergraduate organization CASA (Canadian Association of Student Alliance) of which the Dalhousie undergraduate are members. The NGC is a part of the CFS (Canadian Federation of Students).

The main differences in strategy between the two organizations are that the NGC is more focused on general social policy besides actively lobbying politicians in Ottawa (they have a full time person for this). The NGC, working with the CFS, organizes

rallies and public protest as we have witnessed at Dalhousie during the week of action. We are concerned that the NGC is not completely autonomous from the CFS as policy making has to be co-ordinated with the undergraduate student organization. The CGC was formed in 1992 and is exclusively a graduate organization. The CGC engages in lobbying efforts, however this does not incorporate public protest. Fees are raised by both organizations. The NGC charges considerably more than the CGC.

### Future Directions

The decision of the committee is to follow both organizations (CGC and NGC) actively over the upcoming academic year. The NGC offers the opportunity to join their association as a prospective member valid for this academic year. This involves a significantly lowered fee compared to full membership and we can attend national meetings and actively

participate in their debates. The CGC does not have the possibility of prospective membership but it is possible to join their meetings and list serve. It is hoped that in a year's time Dalhousie graduate student involvement in both organizations will help us to make a final decision about national membership. No matter which organization DAGS finally joins, active participation and support of graduate students at the national and provincial level as well as here at Dalhousie will be needed to fully benefit from membership!

### Background

The issue is emotionally charged. The DSU (Dalhousie Student Union) left the CFS a few years ago. Our committee researched the reasons for the dissatisfaction with the CFS. Old issues of the Gazette document that the CFS had raised their fees, which was not appreciated. Additionally the DSU thought that the CFS did not stick to student issues in their

policy. Perhaps the definition of student issues by the DSU at the time was a bit narrow. However, because of that concern, we wanted to join the NGC (which is part of the CFS) only as a prospective member and be informally involved in the CGC. Our decision to join a national association is *not* seen as a break from the DSU lobbying but a means to enhance advocacy overall for graduate students.

### Conclusion

We believe that membership in a national organization is important for the Dalhousie graduate students but we need to hear from you. If you are interested in the issues and would like to know more, please contact DAGS and join the advocacy committee. email: dags@is.dal.ca

CHRISTIAN HAAK AND  
LISA UNDERHILL  
*Christian Haak & Lisa Underhill  
as members of DAGS Graduate  
Student Advocacy Committee*

## Really missed the point

I realize that many opinions have been tossed around about the infamous "Take Back The Bullshit" opinions article printed in *The Picaro* on September 29, and that by now everyone is sick of hearing about it. Despite my reluctance to contribute to this discussion's continuing, I'd like to respond to Pam Wentzell's letter in the Oct. 22 issue of *The Gazette*.

First of all, I'm not going to comment on whether the article should have been retracted, or if official apologies should or should not have been made. I believe that is the only thing really up for debate here — whether this piece by Stephen Brown should have been printed in the first place — and I'm not writing to discuss that. What seems undebatable is that the article has definitely offended and is definitely offensive, and I find it astounding that Ms. Wentzell, or any female, could read it and not realize this.

About menstruation, Brown wrote: "You may bleed, but masturbated semen makes a bigger mess, and they still haven't found a cure for APH (adolescent public hard-on). PMS may hurt but so does blue-balls." Am I as a female supposed to sympathize with the fact that masturbated semen is messy? If you don't like the mess, *don't masturbate*. I can't choose whether or not to have my period, and it doesn't give me pleasure as masturbating must for Mr. Brown, so that comparison is unfair. The comparison of PMS and blue-balls is equally unfair. To cure blue-balls, *masturbate*. Uh-oh. Looks like Mr.

Brown is caught between a rock and a hard place (no pun intended). Meanwhile, I'm stuck in that I *have* to have both my period and PMS. I don't expect anyone to feel guilty about that. And I won't even try to compare which is messier because these things are not even comparable.

I'm not going to go over all the things that offended me about this article, because that's not the point I'm trying to make here. I just needed an example for Ms. Wentzell to see why the article sparked the reaction it got. I understand that Brown did indeed have a point — that the world isn't safe for anybody and that we can't blame all men for the actions of a few. The problem is that this point got lost in a list of opinions and ideas that are simply disturbing.

And I object to Wentzell's use of the word "feminist" as a negative term. I'm a feminist, proud to say so, and I'm not sexist. I don't hold all men responsible for the actions of a few really nasty ones because that is not fair. It is the men who hold opinions like the ones expressed by Brown that I'm afraid of. This kind of misunderstanding is frightening and not acceptable.

As for the lineup at your door for copies of the article, I too have a list of people wanting my copy. Fortunately they don't want it because they agree with Brown's ideas. I don't know what's more frightening — Brown's article or the females who congratulate him for his misogyny.

GINA GRANTER

## Feminism for dummies

This week we will cover key concepts and terminology, using illustrative examples, and discuss the issue of backlash. Conveniently, this topic has already been introduced by *the Picaro*, courtesy of Stephen Brown and Tim Boudreau. Thanks boys!

### Key Terms

**Sex** — dictated by biology and really creative doctors.

**Gender** — a social construct; it's made up.

**Race** — it's a construct too (you thought it was real didn't you?).

**Sexism** — discrimination based on sex, but really closely related to gender.

**Stereotype** — a way to put people in little boxes (convenient for little minds).

**Misogyny** — hatred of women (this doesn't mean you don't want to date them). If you were wondering, there's no word for the hatred of men.

**Lesbian** — a woman who is emotionally, physically and spiritually attracted to women; not necessarily a feminist.

**Feminist** — a woman who is emotionally, physically and spiritually attracted to equality; not necessarily a lesbian.

Okay kids, now the fun begins.

### Backlash

Summary: so there are these people who are trying to create this thing called equality, and then you get these people (not the same people) who get really angry and start yelling things like "Reverse sexism!" and "No means kick her in the teeth" (see Queen's University Engineering, circa 1991). Around this time people start saying that we don't need feminism anymore. They say things like "You can vote, shut up," and "I had a woman boss once, I didn't like it". Then feminists (see definition) start saying things like: women make 67 cents for every dollar men make (early 1990s). Women are predominantly the victims of sexual assault. Only three women have ever been appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Backlash occurs after significant achievements have been made (or have been perceived to have been made) in the advancement of women (or another disadvantaged group). Backlash can be a call to end changes because goals have been attained (when they haven't). It can also be a demand that we return to traditional times and take up our "rightful" roles (this usually involves aprons and some reference to a Bible or other religious text).

A key component of backlash is that it involves privileged groups perceiving that they are being unfairly treated. Discriminated against even. Wow. Hard life ain't it? (See complaints about Affirmative Action). People say things like "white guys have never had it so rough." This perception goes hand in hand with the idea that women (or any other disadvantaged group) have been accorded too much privilege. Ha ha

ha ha... see previous statistics.

Backlash accompanies this notion people have that there's only so much privilege in the world. Therefore, if women are getting more privilege then men must have less. Uh-huh. Privilege isn't tangible so how can there be a finite amount? But people think weird things sometimes and so, no one seems to want to share the privilege they have. If there is a finite amount of privilege, that's great, but no one deserves it more than anyone else because of a phallus, or the colour of their skin. If there's a finite amount of privilege, we want to share, play on an even field, so to speak. Be equal.

Equality is what we (um, we're feminists) are trying to achieve, in a nutshell (that's really too small to fit this stuff in). Backlash is bad (if you take nothing else from this article, repeat that 10 times out loud), and it happens when people are trying to do good things, like evening out the aforementioned playing field. And backlash still happens, for example, when women get together and, like, march against violence, and sometimes, some guy gets, like, worried that we're after him and then maybe he writes an article in some student paper at, say, the Mount. (So now we know you want to write, which is good, because it's good to get involved in your education. Let us know what you want us to talk about. Hell, tell us we're wrong, just promise to try to write something intelligent.)

For the definitive work on backlash, try Susan Faludi's *Backlash*. It's good. We liked it lots, especially the part about *real* women.

"We haven't come a long way, we've come a short way. If we hadn't come a short way, no one would be calling us baby." — Elizabeth Janeway.

Do you get it?

KIRSTI McHENRY  
and KATE GREENAWAY

