

OPEN MESSAGE TO:

THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY THE PRESIDENT OF DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY THE STUDENTS OF DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY THE PEOPLE OF NOVA SCOTIA THE GOVERNMENT OF NOVA SCOTIA

Dalhousie University, the jewel of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia, is in trouble.

The morale of the faculty is low, faculty are exasperated and frustrated. The students are nervous and anxious. A large part of their energies is focused on the current state of contract negotiations rather than teaching, learning and research. The problem is that negotiations have been deadlocked on two major issues, both directly linked with the quality of education at Dalhousie and the long term health of the University.

Dalhousie faculty have been patient and accommodating. They have indicated their unwillingness to compromise their university in three votes in the past month. Each time they voted loud and clear that they want what is fair. They also showed that the Board indeed has the fiscal latitude to pay decent salaries to the faculty while maintaining its numbers.

As each day passes by without an agreement, faculty are getting more frustrated and disappointed with the shortsightedness and the disregard they are dealt with. Faculty are gentle and agreeable people, but their patience has a threshold as well.

As each day passes by without an agreement, students are getting more demoralized and anxious. Their capacity to learn is replaced with a nervousness for their future. They do not pay tuition to be traumatized; they pay tuition so that they receive a high quality education - delivered by their professors.

As each day passes by without an agreement, the long term impact of these days are becoming more and more irreversible. One has to remember that faculty are the people who work the long hours to teach the students, to bring in the research contracts and grants, to do the projects, to supervise the theses. The list is long. For Dalhousie to maintain its quality and prestige, these people have to continue doing their jobs with the same enthusiasm, vigor and energy.

In a factory it is desirable to have workers "work to rule", in a university this would mean disaster.

It is counterproductive to frustrate faculty for so long, and for so little. The demands of the faculty are reasonable, not selfish. The Dalhousie Board has to see the reality and stop the damage to this University before it is too late. This is now their responsibility more than anything else.

The faculty of Dalhousie University still hope that it will be possible to reach an agreement before irreversible damage is done to the University, to its students, to its faculty, and to the relationship between the faculty and the administration.

All it takes is some good will, some respect and trust in the faculty, and some movement towards reason. The faculty think that Dalhousie University is worth it. The Board should show that they think so too.

A FEW WORDS ON THE ISSUES

The two issues that remain unresolved are the salary of faculty and the complement of faculty.

A recent study conducted jointly by the DFA and the Dalhousie Board showed that Dalhousie faculty are amongst the lowest paid faculty in a group of eleven comparable Canadian Universities. In fact, full professors at Dalhousie are the second lowest paid full professors, lagging behind their colleagues by about 15%.

Over the past six years, the salaries of Dalhousie faculty were frozen twice and further rolled back 3%. At the same time, the cost of living went up by 7.5%. The Board of Dalhousie University paid off a large part of the university debt from these salary savings. The debt however was mostly incurred as a result of charging the financing costs of capital projects, such as building new buildings.

The Dalhousie faculty are demanding that they should be paid closer to their colleagues in other universities. This is not an outrageous or unreasonable demand. The faculty do not want to see Dalhousie become more uncompetitive and not able to retain or attract high quality people.

Over the past ten years, in order to reduce the number of faculty employed at Dalhousie University through attrition, the President has not replaced 113 of the faculty who have retired or left the university. This has resulted in a 15% reduction in the number of faculty since 1987. Over the same period, there has been a 15% increase in the student population resulting in increased class size, increased faculty workload, and decreased student access to professors.

The Dalhousie faculty are demanding that the complement reduction is stopped for the duration of this contract so that the faculty and students can make adjustments. The faculty are not demanding that the losses be recovered, nor they are demanding that this measure will be forever. They are looking for a Letter of Understanding that guarantees a reprieve for the next couple of years.

The faculty do not want to see the quality of education at Dalhousie slide further behind with classes where students do not even have a place to sit. This is not an outrageous or unreasonable demand.

The Board has been giving the same response to both of these demands: No. Dalhousie University does not have money for its faculty.

On the other hand, everyone knows that Dalhousie University has money, millions of it, to build new buildings. In fact, the Board just approved \$23 million for new buildings.

On a similar vein, Dalhousie University has just spent more than \$2 million on a computer program for administration, accounting, etc., and is spending hundreds of thousands to get it working.

Moreover, Dalhousie University has \$185 million in its endowment fund, fifth largest such fund in the country. But clearly Dalhousie is not the fifth largest university in the country.

The faculty find it impossibly difficult to understand why this rich University is treating its faculty like second or third class faculty. They find it equally difficult to understand why the long term viability of the University is compromised by its Board, or why priorities are so clearly ill-placed.

Over the past ten years, Dalhousie faculty financed the early retirement packages from their pension surplus funds so that the University would save money. The university did save money, millions of it, but did not put any of that back into the faculty. Gone are 113 faculty positions.

Most universities in Nova Scotia have reached agreements in the past few weeks. The salary agreements at all these universities are better than what the Dalhousie Board sees fit for Dalhousie faculty. These N.S. universities all receive similar levels of funding from the Government, and they do not have vast endowment funds like Dalhousie. Yet, they seem to have the money to pay their faculty properly. How is it then that these other universities can treat their faculty properly but Dalhousie can't - or won't?

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