

Mega classes remain controversial to many

BY PHILIP LEWIS

Wouldn't it be convenient to have a food court next to your classroom? How about seats that are actually comfortable? The idea of holding classes in Park Lane theatres was considered last year, but the plan was axed by this year's Dalhousie Student Union executive.

In response to the growing demand by students in large first year courses like psychology, the introduction of mega classes in theatres was suggested.

One of the most vocal members of the committee proposing new space usage was Psychology professor Marcia Ozier.

According to Ozier, who still advocates classes at Park Lane, the space is vacant all day and cost would not have been a major issue.

The shopping centre would have been more than cooperative with the university, as classes would result in a greater number of students (possible shoppers) during weekdays.

Ozier said that cupholders could have easily been adapted for desks, and the cinema is already equipped with the audio and visual equipment needed. In addition, she says that the theatre was willing to offer Dalhousie its own engineer to run the equipment.

Despite the positive aspects of the proposal, one of the first decisions the current Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) executive made when it took power was to take Park Lane off the table.

Instead of Park Lane, the new executive proposed using the

McInnes Room located inside the Student Union Building.

The McInnes room proved to be an inferior option. It only has the capacity to hold 350 students (where Park Lane could hold 500) and employees from Facilities Management would need to move desks in and out of the room after each class. In addition, it was discovered that the MacInnes room was not suitable to handle the audio visual needs of large classes.

DSU vice-president academic/external Kevin Lacey recommended the use of the McInnes room, but later discovered that the cost of renting the room for the classes would be \$19,000 a year, on top of the fee from Facilities Management to move desks in and out.

The Studley gym was also suggested as an option, but the planning committee was told that the cost of moving equipment would be in the neighbourhood of \$120,000 to \$150,000.

There are close to 1,400 students in the psychology department trying to get in to the intro classes each year. Ozier says that something must be done to accommodate these students. As a result, the department will have to raise class sizes (creating mega-classes), or increase the number of sections taught.

Ozier says that professors cannot take the burden of more classes. She says that if mega-classes are created, they will save the professors' time — allowing them to focus on second and third level courses.

Although Park Lane and the

McInnes Room were eliminated as classroom options, the Rebecca Cohn is being used as a classroom. This is not the first time classes have been held in the Cohn. A number of different courses were held in the theatre during the 1970s, but it has not been in use as a classroom for more than a decade.

Lacey, who strongly opposes the introduction of mega-classes, says the Cohn was a reluctant compromise.

"We [DSU executive] succeeded last year in keeping classes out of Park Lane so [The Cohn] was a compromise, unfortunately," said Lacey.

The Psychology Department was offered the use of the Cohn this year, but it was too close to the beginning of the new school year to properly organize classes in the facility.

As a result, first year biology is being held in the Cohn as a pilot program. If all goes well, psychology could move into the Cohn next year.

There are currently 800 students taking Biology 1000 in the Cohn. One major argument against larger classes is that students will feel too intimidated to ask questions.

"Large and small are relative terms. Some people say a class of 150 is too large," said psychology chair, Chris Moore.

Moore says that to address concerns about a less one-on-one relationship between the professor and first year students, the psychology department planned to create a class where third level students would tutor

first year students.

When asked if the introduction of such a program would address some of his concerns about mega-classes, Lacey replied, "as far as I know that program is already in place, to some degree."

Moore says the department is also looking into creating tutorials over the Internet.

Lacey says that there are more than practical concerns that must be factored in to moving classes into different venues like Park Lane. The damage that could have been caused to Dalhousie's reputation was a major factor in rejecting the use of Park Lane cinemas.

In addition to Dalhousie's reputation, Lacey says that his number one priority is "quality of education". Lacey feels mega-classes provide an inferior learning environment.

Despite his concern, Lacey has not attended one of the classes in the Cohn.

"I've been in the Cohn, but I don't take Biology 1000," said Lacey.

Ozier says that she has been contacted by the biology department and the course evaluations for the first set of lectures in the Cohn were "positive to the point that a prof of a class of 30 would be proud".

NEWS-IN-BRIEF

HUSKIES LINEBACKER BANNED FOR STEROID USE

The Saint Mary's University Huskies season lineup-up took an unexpected turn for the worse this week.

Huskies linebacker Matthew Demers was banned from Canadian University sports for four years after he tested positive for the anabolic steroid stanozolol. Demers was last season's AUAA football Rookie of the Year.

The Huskies will not forfeit their only win of the season because of the suspension.

CHARGES NOT TO BE PURSUED IN HOWE HALL, BIKER BRAWL

By Joseph Lambert

Charges will not be laid against participants in a bar brawl according to Halifax Regional Police's public relations officer Gary Martin.

Two Howe Hall residents went to hospital following a fight with bikers outside of the Lighthouse strip club last month. Despite the seriousness of the incident, no one has come forward with evidence.

"We need witnesses to testify in court...that was not provided to us," said Martin.

"One [witness] came forward, but did not wish to file a report."

Martin added that one of the students injured in the fight "did not wish to file a report and was not cooperative [with police]".

Martin could not confirm if the bikers involved in the fight were Hell's Angels, or if the Lighthouse was a regular hangout for the bikers' group.

"I'd tell you if I knew," he said.

Martin says that fear of the biker group could be a factor in the lack of witnesses and cooperation in the case.

"We respond to a lot of calls, a lot of them are like this. People are reluctant to go to court...it is a legitimate complaint [fear of Hell's Angels]. It is understandable to have fear knowing that they are involved in organized crime."

NEW BANKRUPTCY RULES FOR STUDENTS

College and university students who declare bankruptcy within two years of graduation still are responsible for their education debts under Bankruptcy Act regulations that took effect last week.

Students and post-secondary institutions have been voicing concern about rising student-debt loads and bankruptcies for the past decade. This summer, statistics Canada reported that tuition fees in Canada have risen by as much as 18 per cent since 1990. Not surprising, defaults under the Canada Student Loan Program have increased sixfold in the decade up to 1996.

According to *The Globe and Mail*, the federal government is talking to provinces, institutions and student groups about loan reformers, with an eye to changes next year.

For all borrowers, Canada Student Loan repayments of principal and interest do not begin until six months after graduation. But for students in need, a federal-budget change last spring extended the period of interest relief to 30 months from 18 months.

Later this month, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations will meet with federal officials in Halifax to discuss the group's desired changes to the Student Loan Program.

DAL LAW STUDENTS WANTED

Dalhousie law students would be hired by the province to sift through more than 200 boxes of "secret" government files on the Shelburn school for Boys.

Bill Leahy, a lawyer representing alleged victims of abuse, says the students are needed because there are not enough hands available to sort through all the information contained in the files.

Zero tuition debate unresolved

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or an in-depth examination of the post-secondary education policies in this province," said Kirby. "A lot of people have the philosophy of 'ask for a lot and get a little'. Personally, I think that our organization provincially is geared towards 'ask for something more realistic and get something realistic.'

"It's great to ask for an entirely free system, but I'd like to ask for peace on earth too. I don't think I'm going to get that either," says Kirby.

Working towards zero tuition not a goal shared by Dalhousie students either, according to Kevin Lacey, Dalhousie Student Union vice-president academic/external and Atlantic Canada director for CASA.

"It is my impression that most

Dal students don't see this as anything reasonable or something that will affect them in the end," says Lacey.

"They don't believe that zero tuition is the answer. They would rather see us fighting on issues that we can get real solutions to. What we need to do is look at the problems facing students like student debt and come up with rational solutions to these problems, not just demand for zero tuition."

"At the last CASA meeting, Dalhousie and the University of New Brunswick sponsored a motion which called for an income-based remission programme," said Lacey. "This programme would allow students who are needy and with large debts to receive grants from the government to reduce this debt load."

should be considered," says DSU president Chris Adams.

The suggestions include improving publicity for DSU elections, changing the way the elections committee is selected and revamping the way the election is run.

Adams says that some of Riorden's recommendations have already been implemented. He cites the DSU council's decision to appoint representatives to the elections committee early as a case in point.

But he says that other

As well, from October 19 to 22, CASA member schools will be meeting in Halifax to redraw the current student aid program. This process will involve student representatives formulating a detailed plan on the first day. On the next day, CASA will meet with representatives of the federal government to present, discuss and finalize their plan. And on October 22, CASA plans to release its national campaign on a new student loan programme plan.

"I would say our approach is more effective [than CFS's]," said Harrison. "CASA's approach is to work with the government first, then announce our campaign. Whereas, CFS's approach is to release their report first, then try to meet with government."

recommendations in the report could prove more challenging to implement. According to the report, "the current DSU budget and election organization cannot ensure the turnout of more than 30 per cent of the DSU constituency."

Adams says holding five days of voting, instead of the current three days, is a possible option to help increase voter turnout.

Riorden did not limit her report to recommendations. She also claims the election involved "crafty, mean-spirited, self aggrandizing

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Recommendations for DSU elections

BY LAURA GRAY

Recommendations made in the report of last year's chief returning officer should be looked into this year.

The report compiled by the chief returning officer (CRO) of last year's Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) election was recently released. The paper details the process of last year's DSU election and referendum, as well as making suggestions for this school year.

"Many of the recommendations made by CRO Jennifer Riorden