

## Bookstore beefs

To the editor:

Since arriving at Dalhousie University, I have become increasingly amazed by the university bookstore. I have worked for both a retail bookstore chain and a different university's bookstore. I have shopped in at least five other university bookstores. Dalhousie's is easily the worst. Ignoring the bizarre shape (did the designers of the SUB forget they'd have to

leave room for a bookstore?) and the fact that textbook overstock must be stored in an entirely different building a few blocks away (according to one of the staff members), there's also the excellent staff training (When they take the time off from their private conversations to address the customer, it's "NEXT!", as if they've never been to a store where service is embodied in, "Can I help you down here?"), not to mention the extremely coherent procedure for returning a piece of merchandise: A hanging sign directs you to either the returns window or the cashiers; the cashiers will inform you that first of all, you shouldn't have entered the bookstore with a book (the

only way to get to the cashiers), secondly, you should go to the returns window (logically labelled "Buy Backs") but the person who can refund your money won't be back for another hour (there's only one person who knows how to process a return?). Finally, if it's a textbook you want to return, there is a \$3 charge for "reshelving" - at my previous bookstore positions, reshelving returned merchandise was part of the job, not some unnecessary inconvenience conjured up by customers for which they should pay extra.

Oh well, it isn't a real bookstore anyway.

Richard Lim

## New theory on the cuts

These last two weeks have been most interesting for this student representative. During that time I have had time to digest the numerous recommendations contained in the Budget Advisory Committee Report. In addition I have actively participated in and passively listened to debates that centered around Dr. Clark's response to the BAC Report. Furthermore, I have spent many hours 'working' the numbers found within the BAC Report and the university budget along with the appropriate supplementary schedules in an attempt to understand where all of these recommendations were spawned.

This was necessary because it seemed to be the only way anyone could refute the current set of proposals and find alternative solutions that would solve the University's financial problems. Unfortunately, although not surprisingly, I have been unable to find the answers to those problems. What has become abundantly clear, however, is the rationale for Dr. Clark's recommendations.

The explanation will require that we return to the fundamentals of the situation and provide some historical framework in attempt to create a better understanding of recent developments.

For the past several years Dr. Clark has outlined the theme that Dalhousie maintain and increase its profile as a "national" university. Many people, myself included, are perplexed by exactly what the President means when he uses this terminology. Nonetheless this theme has been repeated numerous times and has justified many initiatives including the BAC Report that Dr. Clark has supported.

This justification was used once again when the University commissioned consultants to create a campus plan in 1990. The result of that process was a report titled "A Collective Vision" which details the guidelines by which the campus of Dalhousie will grow. As one can imagine, a plan of this magnitude requires money in order to build and maintain the numerous buildings recommended in the report.

To that end the university has initiated several fund raising programs. The most recent of these programs was the capital campaign that has a goal to raise almost \$100 million in the next ten years. Ironically, this campaign was launched at the President's house the very same day that he accepted the BAC Report and made his own recommendations. It seems safe to suggest that all of these efforts are expended in order to maintain and promote Dalhousie as a "national" university.

The problem with all of these plans is the current financial state of the University. Currently, Dalhousie is saddled with a \$25 million debt. If the status quo is maintained that will increase by \$16 million in the next three years. So how on earth can the university continue to promote its "national university" profile through initiatives

like the campus plan when the University has, for the last couple of years, been consistently cutting the budget of departments across campus? It seems as though the Budget Advisory Report in stimulating Dr. Clark's response has provided a framework to realize these various plans.

Those people who are familiar with the BAC report probably feel that the recommendations contained therein are contradictory to expansionary goals. I beg to differ. Let us turn our attention to the mandate and objectives of the Budget Advisory Committee. In the very first paragraph of the report these objectives are outlined. "The BAC recognized that several general themes would need to be considered by all sectors of the University, including the University's mission, the need for productivity increases, alternative teaching strategies, revenues generation, work simplification, and elimination of lower priority tasks." The report goes on to define the 'Financial Challenge' as it relates to "a shortfall of this magnitude and recognizing the current fiscal situation of governments at all levels, ... all constituents groups within the University would have to contribute to any solution." Please exercise

### What to do with a \$30 million piece of real estate?

your patience as I explain how the committee report ties into the historical background I have provided.

It is noteworthy that of the six objectives three of them, namely increased productivity, alternative teaching strategies and work simplification are dealt with in a cursory manner on one page of a 40-plus page report. The recommendations contained on page 23 indicate the need to continue with complement reduction. In essence the report recommends that the student-to-teacher ratio be increased in the next three years. In contrast, the report delves into considerable detail in order to explain methods of acquiring new monies and cutting existing costs. Certainly, one can see how additional revenues are secured as the report suggests increasing, among other things, differential tuition fees. Similarly, differential cuts in the budgets of faculties will eventually lead departments to cease performing their lowest-priority tasks. Finally, all of these recommendations are geared towards maintaining and ensuring that Dalhousie is a "national" university in the year 2000 as outlined in the University's mission statement. Regardless of your opinion of the BAC report they have technically fulfilled their mandate by addressing all of its outlined objectives.

What is most interesting about the report is not so much what is stated but rather what has been omitted. For example, although the committee denies

any knowledge of which departments were targeted for elimination, it did manage to predict, almost exactly, the amount of foregone tuition revenue that would result from the recommendations. In addition, the committee did not quantify any of the transition costs associated with closure of departments. It is in the realm of possibility that there will be no savings as a result of these cuts as many of the affected professors are protected by a collective agreement. Finally, if one calculates the amount by which faculty budgets would be cut if differential fees were not introduced, it would almost look like an across-the-board cut of 15 per cent. All of these implicit aspects that are not addressed in the report indicate that perhaps the recommendations represent business as usual — increased tuition and decreasing funding for faculties.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the BAC had no intention to lead the university to the inevitable conclusion that the departments of Music, Theatre, Costume Studies and the Masters in Public Administration program be closed. (Note: it was suggested that the departments of Library and Information Studies and Resource and Environmental Studies should be integrated more efficiently into the school of business. It seems these were included so as not to appear to isolate the performing arts.) That being the case, how did Dr. Clark make the recommendations that he did? Remember the historical context I set at the beginning of the article. Ask yourself, what is the result of the closure of the performing arts at Dalhousie? You can be sure that Dr. Clark did not arrive at his recommendations in isolation.

All right, let us assume that the President's response is accepted by Senate. The result of this will be that in approximately three years the Arts Centre will be empty. What is Dalhousie going to do with a \$30 million piece of real estate? (We economists sometimes value assets at their resale value and not the depreciated value.) Some have suggested that the university would sell the asset. Firstly, that would contradict the campus plan and secondly, who would buy that type of building given "the current fiscal situation of governments at all levels" (BAC page 1)? A more probable response is that they would use the facility for additional classroom and faculty-level administration space.

Ladies and gentlemen, I suggest to you that this is the real reason that the performing arts are being slated for elimination. The continuance of complement reduction will require that class sizes increase above the 250 students that currently only Room 117 in the Dunn Building can accommodate. If one were to undertake minor renovations in the Arts Centre, the University could teach anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 students at a given time

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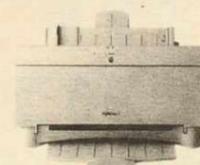
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