

Dal and Daltech student leaders to combine

BY GINA STACK

The amalgamation of the Daltech Student Union by the Dalhousie Student Union is near completion, according to student president Chris Adams.

"We have good working relations with the Daltech Union and everything should be wrapped up by the end of January, with a full transition to come April 1," said Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) president Chris Adams.

Adams welcomes the amalgamation of the two student bodies.

"We need one voice for students on campus to help give us strength."

Adams says that except for a couple unresolved service issues, like marketing bands for the T-Room (the DalTech bar), all issues between the two unions have been resolved.

As a result, the DalTech student union will officially become a part of the DSU this April.

Although the DSU transferred fees collected from DalTech students back to the DalTech Union this year, Adams stressed that the DSU is the only official spokesperson for students at Dalhousie and DalTech. He added that the DSU already handles all external and most internal representation of DalTech students.

In order to better represent DalTech students, a second engineering seat, and full computer science and architecture seats were

added to the DSU council this year. Adams says a DalTech board will also be established to act as a liaison with the DSU.

At the last student council meeting, Adams and vice-president executive Bridgette McCaig brought forward a proposal for the creation of a new vice-president position.

Adams says that the goal of the new position of vice-president community affairs would be to help bring the DSU closer to students and unite the two campuses. The proposal has been sent

to the Constitutional Policy Committee and will be voted on at the next General Meeting to be held February 12.

Should the motion pass, the new vice-president would be primarily responsible for community relations on campus and societies. Adams adds that the vice-president would hold office hours on both the Sexton and Studley Campuses, although no details have been worked out as yet.

Adams added that the DSU will not be increasing student fees to finance the new executive position.

Nation-wide action against student debt

BY RACHEL FUREY

TORONTO (CUP) — Tackling the student debt problem will be front and centre this month as Canada's largest student organization plans for a national Day of Action.

The protest is slated for Jan. 28 and will see students from across Canada participate in rallies, marches, workshops and other events in an effort to gain public support and to urge the federal government to develop a national strategy for dealing with student debt.

The Day of Action is being organized by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and is part of the organization's campaign to support a system of national grants and denounce income-contingent loan repayment schemes.

Canada is one of only two industrialized nations which does not have a national system of student grants. By comparison, a \$3.5-billion increase in education funding was recently announced in the United States, with individual student grants increasing by \$300.

"We want to send a strong message to the government leading up to the federal budget that students will no longer tolerate government inaction on the issue of a publicly-funded system of post-secondary education," said Brad Lavigne, national chair of the federation.

The average Canadian student's debt load currently sits at \$25,000. And student bankruptcies have almost tripled since 1993, rising to 12,000 in 1996 from 4,500.

Lavigne says he hopes the Day of Action will lend credibility to the federation's previous lobbying efforts.

"Meetings with governments...has limited impact unless the governments believe our message has widespread support. National Days of Action help illustrate that widespread support," he said.

The federation has teamed-up with several coalition partners to gain support for the national day of protest, including the National Union of Public and General Employees, which represents provincial government unions across the country and several private-sector unions.

Members of the group are also experiencing tough times because of federal government cuts, says Larry Brown, the union's secretary-treasurer.

"[For us] it's job losses and

program cuts. The details of the impact are different but the cause is the same — complete underfunding from the [federal] government."

While the protest will target the federal government and push for positive student aid reforms in the upcoming federal budget announcement, university and college students are also targeting their provincial governments and have come up with a number of innovative ways to try and force their governments to deal with the student debt problem.

At several schools student leaders are planning to tabulate the total amount of debt shared by their entire student body and use these amounts to send a signal to

governments and administrators about the "walls of debt" students will face upon graduation.

At Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, students are planning a teach-in Jan. 24 to raise awareness about globalization and the growing corporate presence in post-secondary education. Another teach-in was slated for Jan. 21 in Winnipeg.

In Saskatchewan, students will be focussing their protests against the Royal Bank, which has a monopoly on student loans in that province.

And at Memorial University in Newfoundland, students are organizing an indoor rally-style "Cuts Carnival" featuring speakers, games, theatre and other activities centering around student debt issues.

Students in British Columbia have collected thousands of the Canada Student Loans Program's fridge magnets that tell students to "borrow wisely", and plan to give them back to the government during a Day of Action march.

"You can sense the anger out there among students," said Maura Parte, chairperson of the BC component of the federation. "You can sense that people feel there's a general attack on students because of youth unemployment, tuition fees, student debt."

Dalhousie, a member of rival student organization the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), has no plans to participate in the event.

BC education minister battles recall

BY ERIN FITZPATRICK

PRINCE GEORGE (CUP) — As the BC education minister faces the possibility of being booted out of office by his constituents, debate is raging over the provincial recall legislation being used by disaffected voters.

The NDP government introduced a law earlier in its mandate through which constituents could force their legislative representative to resign. And now one of their own — Prince George North MLA Paul Ramsey — could face this very fate.

If 40 per cent of eligible voters in the minister's constituency — that's 8,908 people — sign a recall petition before Feb. 3, Ramsey will be forced to resign by March 15 and a by-election will be called for the riding.

"This isn't about politics, it's

about a lack of representation and accountability," said Pertti Harkonen, the Prince George resident who launched the recall motion on behalf of the Canadian Taxpayer's Federation.

Harkonen says Ramsey told his constituents there would be a surplus in the province's coffers when most likely he knew there would be a deficit.

"It's about an MLA who has not adequately represented the citizens of Prince George North," Harkonen said. "Ramsey should have stood up and told us the truth, but he didn't, he toed the party line."

Ramsey says the budget matter was an honest slip-up.

"We made a mistake," he said. "We were too optimistic in our calculations, but this is not the case of an MLA who neglected his duties."

Neil Moncton of Citizens For Local Democracy, the group

handling Ramsey's side of the campaign, says this recall petition and others like it being circulated in the province are actually ploys to reduce the NDP's slim majority in the provincial legislature.

He says he is also concerned about the involvement of special interest groups like the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation in the recall campaign.

"This is not about Paul, or local issues," Moncton said. "The group leading this thing is not from Prince George, and recall was intended to be a tool for dissatisfied constituents," Moncton said.

He adds that there are also those involved in the recall campaign who oppose Ramsey's decision to allow books featuring same-sex parents in BC schools.

Harkonen says there is nothing partisan about the recall campaign. He adds that organizers do not want to re-

fight the provincial election, and are only trying to take back the mandate of an representative they consider irresponsible.

"It's like running in an election, being an MLA and minister of education all at the same time," Ramsey said. "I'm working around the clock, and it's very discouraging, because normally my job is about making positive changes, and now I spend all of my time defending myself against this mud throwing. The time to fight elections should be at election time."

The provincial government is looking at the possibility of changing the recall legislation, or ditching it altogether, this spring.

"We still support the concept of recall," Ramsey said of the NDP, "but we may need to change some of the technical aspects of the legislation to ensure that the principles are protected, and not abused."

Private degree-granting schools in Alberta to go it alone

BY ANDREA BREAU

EDMONTON (CUP) — Alberta is set to become the first province in Canada to offer fully private college degree programs, and this is raising concerns about the future of public post-secondary education in the country.

"I'm concerned...that [this is] part of a much bigger picture. This [initiative] may create a market for private [post-secondary] institutions in Canada," said Howard Sapers, Liberal critic for Advanced Education in Alberta.

The cornerstone of the transition to allowing fully private degree programs is the introduction of independent organizational evaluations for private post-secondary institutions in the province.

This replaces a requirement, in place since 1984, that such schools had to be affiliated with an Alberta university.

The new evaluation process is a recognition of the changing face of post-secondary education in Canada, says Marilyn Patton, head of Alberta's Private Colleges Accreditation Board.

"It's a recognition of non-traditional institutions that maybe didn't fit into the mould. There are many different types of [education] providers," she said.

Patton adds that the changes do not mean private post-secondary institutions in Alberta will have full authority over the degree programs they offer.

"Every new program [a private college] wants to offer must go through a [thorough] process of evaluation...recommendations are

[then] given to the Minister of Advanced Education and an Order in Council must be given to grant [a college] the ability to offer a particular program," she said.

But this does not relieve the fears of Elizabeth Carlyle, national chairperson-elect for the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and chair of the federation's Manitoba component.

"These are businesses we're talking about. [I think] it's a loss of commitment to public education," she said.

Carlyle adds that the federation has heard complaints from students across the country about the quality of education at private post-secondary institutions.

"Students in other provinces [have reported] substandard teaching and false advertising. It's disturbing," she said.

There is also concern among those who will be directly affected by the changes.

Davin Overland, student union president at Augustana University College, one of the province's four private colleges, says the removal of his school's affiliation with the University of Alberta could have mixed results.

While he says private colleges in Alberta will now have more freedom to expand, he is concerned about the cost implications.

As the evaluation program will operate on a cost-recovery basis, schools will have to pay a fee to participate.

"[The fees] will soak up a big proportion of [the college's] funds. It may result in less programs being offered, but [those programs] might be well thought

out," he said.

Patton says though final details have to be worked out, it is her understanding that the private institutions will continue to receive money from the provincial government.

"I don't foresee a divorce from funding," she said.

Semper says he worried about the effect this will have on public post-secondary institutions.

"Creating competition for grants will affect the [public education] infrastructure," he said.

According to Carlyle, the Ontario government is considering the possibility of introducing similar changes.