

The CASA question

An interview with Erin Ahern, V.P. External

Q: In the referendum question, students must make a choice between Canadian Alliance of Students' Association (CASA) and the federal government. What is CASA's approach to post-secondary student funding?

A: With CASA, there's a three tier system. The first step that we are trying to do is to convince the federal government that cutting federal transfer payments is the wrong thing to do in the long term. It may look like a quick easy fix, but it's the wrong approach.

The second tier has five steps, trying to reorient and restructure the education system in Canada. The five steps are: (1) looking into a rationalization of administration costs across Canada; (2) coordinating provincial systems of higher education, making it so that not every province has a veterinary program. On the micro level, this may hurt, but on the macro level, it's going to make things much more efficient; (3) [is about] teaching in non-university settings (colleges, distance education, Co-op, etc.); (4) instructional teaching and distance education; and, (5) Research funding. The way it works now, research funding is a kind of free-for-all. We're simply asking for a review. The "sixth" step is year-round education — a trimester instead of two semesters, to give students the option to go to class during the summer.

With the third tier, we want to form an Education Beneficiary Fund (EBF). We believe that the people who benefit from university education should be willing to pay for it: graduates and corporations. What we're advocating is the Graduate Beneficiary Contribution (GBC) or the Corporation Beneficiary Contribution (CBC).

With the GBC, there are five main points: (1) we want to make it retroactive; (2) there has to be an income threshold; (3) it (the GBC) has to be a percentage of the tax, and we're asking for 1.5 to 1.7 percent of the income threshold; (4) if we're paying off loans, they should be deductible from the tax (the GBC); and, (5) the GBC should be an income tax and not an employment tax. (The GBC has a base income of \$21,000 so if you make below that amount, you won't be taxed. If, for example, your income totals \$25,000 only the \$4,000 above the base income will be taxed).

The CBC, the way that that would work, we call it "play or pay." Corporations can give directly to universities and have that as tax deductible, or they would be taxed for a contribution.

The EBF (consisting of the GBC and the CBC) would be given to the provinces. It does not go into revenue, it has to be kept separate and given to education

Q: What sets CASA's approach apart from the federal government's?

A: What the federal government has on the table now is the Income Contingent Loan Repay (ICLR). The problem with that is that they would take away all the money they have for education and give it directly to students. Students would pay 100 per cent for their education. (Right now we pay for about 17 per cent of our education at Dal). Your debt would upon graduation would be astronomical, near \$40,000 maybe even \$80,000 and that's only for one degree. They want to do it this way so that the interest they collect on the loans would be put towards the debt. They are trying to download the debt on our generation.

Q: You are leading the CASA campaign, why then should students vote for the CASA approach?

A: Instead of hiking up tuition, you make it inaccessible, an elitist thing...you make education difficult to achieve. Through CASA's plan, you won't be paying a higher tuition — it remains the same. Upon graduation, if your income is high enough, you will pay a very small amount of taxes that will go to education. In effect, you're paying for what you've already received.

Q: What will be the immediate consequences of a YES vote?

A: A YES vote means that CASA will be able to go ahead secure in the knowledge that students are being represented.

Q: What about a NO vote?

A: I don't think it's going to happen. The federal government would be able to say, "well obviously, your plan is for the birds and we don't have to listen to you any more." But it [a NO vote] won't happen.

Q: With a YES vote, how soon would it take to get CASA's program in place?

A: I don't know, as soon as the federal government takes action on what they've learned from the referendum because it's nationwide.

It should be noted that Council will not be bound by the results because the CASA question is a plebiscite and not a referendum. Ahern said they want to get a feel for what students are thinking about the plan.



Election

Capital Ideas Campaign levy

Why should students support the capital ideas campaign levy?

I think students should support the Capital Ideas Campaign levy because first, it shows that they're supporting their university and where it's going in the future; and secondly, it's a good deal.

First of all, the reason I think students should support the capital campaign is because every decade the university solicits funds from corporations and major donors, and these are funds that come externally, not from the government and not from our tuition fees.

So the university has set a goal of thirty-five million dollars that it wants to raise over five years. And when they go to a corporate donor, or a big Alumni donor, the first thing the alumni donor or corporate donor will ask is: "What's the campus community like? Are they supporting this university?" And the university will be able to go, "Well yes students have already supported the capital campaign or the students are contributing this much to the capital campaign" and this does a lot more for them in achieving their goal.

Secondly, it's a good deal. Over five years, with the numbers that we have, our total contribution will be 1.3 million dollars. That will be one of the bigger contributions as far as a single unit of students as compared to other donors. But the end result is 34 million dollars comes along with that. So by having the sound bite or wherever you want to call it, so when someone goes to speak to a big donor, and they can say "look the students are on board the faculty is on board, will you donate a million dollars." They can do that to all these people and get their 35 million. So that's why I think the capital campaign is a good idea for students.

What services can we expect to be introduced and/or upgraded as a result of these funds?

Well, I'll explain two things. There's three areas of priority for the capital campaign. They're academic excellence, student excellence, and campus renewal.

Under academic excellence it's endowments for positions in research teaching programs, equipment laboratories and computing and classrooms upgrades and the creation of a Chair of a Black Studies program, as well as an art gallery for the University.

Campus renewal, there are several priorities the University has chosen, such as a new FASS building, Tupper renovations, residence renovations, upgrades to the various facilities that we have on campus. That would be campus renewal.

The final thing is Student Excellence, and Dalhousie over the last number of years has focused a lot on graduate program scholarships and bursaries, and now we're very weak nationally when we compete for students coming into university undergraduate-wise.

So what we're trying to do now is endow some money for the Campaign so that we can put it towards bursaries and scholarships for students.

Overall, for instance, academic excellence: library excellence, classrooms and stuff like that it's \$12 million. For campus renewal, it's \$18 million and for student excellence it's \$5 million.

The DSU has chosen four areas that it wants to donate money to, if students agree to push it in. That would be for Academic Excellence, we would want to put our money towards better libraries, better classrooms and better laboratories. For Campus Renewal we want to put in a security system called the Blue Light Security System on campus.

Our understanding is that it costs about \$350 thousand to implement the Blue Light Security System and we've told the university that that will be our top priority right off the bat.

Once that is paid for, our second priority will be putting computer facilities in the SUB for students to use because our surveys tell us that we have a shortage of these facilities on campus; and then remaining \$800 thousand will go towards classroom

upgrades, regular classroom and laboratories and other facilities.

So you would deem these enhancements necessary?

I'm leaving Dalhousie after another year here and I might not see the benefit of this, but as Dal's reputation increases, having the degree from Dal, that makes it all the more valuable.

But right now we're in the problem where our facilities are getting run down and whether it's our classrooms, or our labs, and in order for us to compete, and say that our degree is just as valuable as having one from Queens, or McGill, or UBC or St. Mary's or Acadia, we have to have the facilities on campus.

I've talked to Dr. Traves a lot about the Capital Campaign and what he's looking at with the computer facilities for instance, is new wave technology, of new ways of technological advances that we would have which would be state of the art compared to other universities across the country, which would actually make us more attractive, and more reputable throughout the world. So it makes our degree worth more, even if we're not going to see the end of the Capital Campaign.

Gazette funding in question

What can you tell me about the Gazette?

The Gazette is 127 years old and it is the oldest student paper in Canada. It is democratically run, with an emphasis on student participation. The paper is open to any student at Dalhousie, and we try to represent as many voices and interests as we can. There is no formal process by which one becomes a member. It's just a matter of stopping by the paper and showing an interest. You don't even need any experience.

What services does the Gazette offer?

We publish a weekly paper, with a distribution of 10,000 copies both on campus and around the city. Each year we put out anywhere between 24-26 issues. This year there will be 24 issues.

We also provide training to members in all aspects of newspaper production. This includes news writing, photography, layout, and so on.

So how does the Gazette benefit Dalhousie students?

Because we're a student paper, it's our responsibility to cover issues of importance to students. For example, and I'm not saying that this has happened here, but if someone discovered that the student government was spending student's money inappropriately, we would print that story. Our coverage of issues on campus is a major way to let students know what's actually happening.

Why is it important that the Gazette

get their funding directly from students instead of in the form of a grant from the DSU?

A levy moves power from the hands of a few elected officials into the hands of the student population. Because it is our job to report on the actions of those officials, we are put in a perilous situation if it is these same people who determine whether or not we get funding.

The only way that we can properly fulfil our role as a "watchdog" is to be autonomous. This means receiving our money directly from students as opposed to having it filtered through the student union.

Commercial papers are free to report on any issue they see fit without fear of repercussions from the government, and that's the way we'd like to have it at Dalhousie.

From a student's perspective, when it comes to paying your fees, nothing changes. We aren't asking for anything more than we've been given in the past, but it does allow the Gazette to have the freedom to better serve students.

Why should people vote yes for the continuation of the Gazette levy?

Aside from the fact that the Gazette is the cheapest subscription around at \$4 a year for 24 issues (or 16¢ an issue), voting no could shut down the student paper at Dalhousie. Silence the Gazette and you silence a paper that is the student voice on campus.

Vote yes to the Gazette question on the 11, 12 and 13.