

'Speech code' dies

by Ryan Stanley

Dal, unbutton those lips. Freedom of speech was the rallying cry Tuesday night as the Board of Governors voted to kill a proposed university-wide policy on discriminatory harassment.

Supporters of the policy were deeply disappointed by the Board's decision.

"I think we're clearly further away from an effective policy," said a frustrated Sue Sherwin, professor of philosophy. "It was a clear indication from the Board that they don't want one."

Sherwin was one of six people who has been working to develop the policy since 1990, through a committee appointed by Dal President Howard Clark to come up with a policy for dealing with incidents of racism and sexism on campus.

The premise of the committee's work has been that even at a university, there must be limits on free speech to protect women and minorities from abusive attacks.

But it was a legal argument that swayed the Board members, most of whom are community figures and business people not employed by Dalhousie.

"It was jeopardizing freedom of speech," said George MacDonald, a Halifax lawyer. "I don't think there should be a different policy on the Dalhousie campus from that which exists off it" in Canadian law.

He also took issue with the Committee on Discriminatory Harassment which the policy proposed to set up to hear complaints. According to the policy, the committee would

be made up of six people "chosen on the basis of their credibility with the various constituencies affected...and their sensitivity to the issues."

"I envisaged a committee predominantly composed of minorities," said MacDonald. "I don't have a problem with that, but they would have a predisposition to a particular point of view. I don't think they should be judging whether something I say is abusive or not."

Peter Bryson, another lawyer on the Board, agreed. "That doesn't seem to me to be a method by which you ensure objectivity," he said.

But Sherwin says this misses the point. "It isn't a jury, or a disciplinary body. It's a committee to provide guidance and mediation. That's all the power it has."

Sherwin says Board members haven't taken the time to study the policy carefully. "If there's a gulf of communication," she said, "it's their deliberate lack of interest." She says none of them attended a meeting of the Senate February 14, when the policy was debated and approved by a large majority.

She said she fears Dal won't be prepared to handle incidents of abusive behaviour. "I expect that there will continue to be complaints, but there will be no mechanism for hearing them," she said.

Vice-President Student Services Eric McKee, the chair of the committee, said unless he gets instructions otherwise, "I don't think the committee has a mandate to do anything more. Our job was not to decide, but to propose. A decision's been made."

Atwell going places

by Judy Reid

Boxes line the shelves of Lynn Atwell's office. It wouldn't be an unusual sight considering that Lynn is getting ready to move, except that the boxes have been packed and ready to go for more than five months.

Lynn Atwell is Dalhousie's international student advisor and advisor to students with disabilities. When asked if it's true that the centre is to be moved to the Student Union Building, she laughs.

"Ever since I took this job I wanted to be in the Student Union Building." Lynn wants to move from her office on Edward Street to be in a more central location and to be closer to other student services.

"But there was a real necessity for the move when I took on this job of providing services for students with disabilities," she says. "It just made more sense to have it somewhere more accessible with quick exits."

The international student advisor position began in the early '80s. Lynn has had the job since 1989, and only a year later, she also took on the newly-created position of advisor to students with disabilities.

Accessibility is a very good rea-

son for the move to the first floor of the SUB. Although the present location is cozy and well decorated with maps, magazines and figurines from all over the world, the eight steps leading to the front door to the centre make it less than welcoming for some.

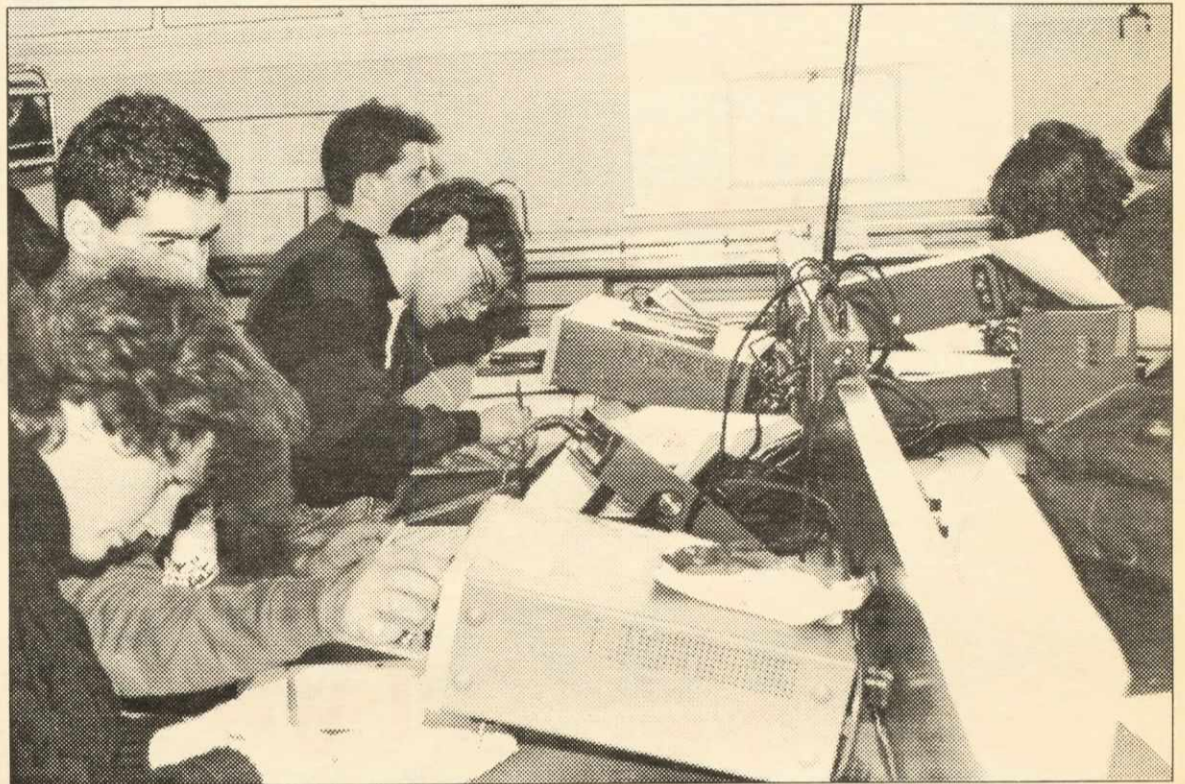
There are approximately 500 international students attending Dalhousie, and at least 40 students with disabilities.

"It depends on the time of year," answers Lynn when asked if one aspect of her job takes more time than the other. "I work on a needs basis. If it needs to be done, I'll get it done."

August to October is a very busy time with the reception and orientation of international students. Throughout the year Lynn also advises students on immigration and financial matters, as well as problems that they may have with their landlord or professor.

Lynn sums up her role as "making the adjustment of new students easier."

Most of Lynn Atwell's time working as an advisor to students with disabilities is spent gathering information, on topics such as what services should be offered.



Packed labs leave science students short on elbow room.

PHOTO: LISA WAMBOLDT

Overcrowded classrooms big pains in the behind

by Garth Sweet

The floor is a hard place to learn.

Overcrowded classrooms have been a sore point with Dal students for years. If you arrive late and all the desks have been taken, you're forced to either sit on the floor, stand, or just leave. Dal has a number of very large classrooms, but none are big enough to contain the monster classes often scheduled for them.

Lynn also arranges services in the classroom for students who have a visual or hearing impairment, or a learning disability. Some of the accommodations may be to have a class rescheduled, to have a volunteer take notes for the student, or to have the lecture taped and transcribed.

Arrangements are never made without consulting the professor first. "Professors are worried that they will give students with a disability an advantage over the other students," explains Lynn.

"There is no advantage given to students. What is given to students with a disability is a bit of a boost to put them on an equal playing field as everybody else."

Lynn gives the example of aiding a student who has a learning disability and can't process written words as fast as speech.

"All we're doing is allowing them to show their true potential."

Lynn's approach to the job has changed over the five years she has held it.

"The first three years I was working here, I was trying to avoid the

The resulting problems are familiar. As classes grow, so does the student-teacher ratio. Chances to ask questions decrease, and the pace of the course suffers as professors deal with the constant distractions and interruptions inevitable from so many students.

The problem touches most faculties and schools.

The education program is one students often gripe about. "It was about the worst class for me," said one student who claimed unless she arrived early she found herself without a desk. She also said the packed class was hot, making concentration harder.

First-year English students are often among those left deskless, despite the program being divided into over 20 sections. The arts departments may lose professors and see the problem get worse, thanks to budget cuts, according to Don Miller, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences administrator.

In the science departments, the problem may be worse than elsewhere. Students are crammed into small classrooms, then crammed into even smaller labs to do experiments and assignments. Professors try to avoid the cramped labs by splitting the classes into two, three or even four lab groups, all using the labs at different times of the week. Even with these measures in place, students are still having to double and triple up on equipment.

Meanwhile, enrolment in the sciences is up, departments are having to deal with shrinking budgets, and aging equipment. Many professors are retiring or going to bigger universities faster than new ones are being hired, forcing some class sections to be merged.

First-year students often get it worst. "If you're late, you have to sit on the steps near the front," complains one first-year psychology student.

Among the science faculties, biology, chemistry, physics and psychology have the worst overcrowding.

Bio 1000 fills the entire Dunn 117 lecture hall to bursting, with students sitting on the steps, between desks or on chairs, writing on their laps. "You feel half-reluctant to go," said first-year biology student Nathan Magardey. "Especially in the first few weeks of class when you are a few minutes late and you know you won't get a seat."

First-year physics classes also crowd Dunn 117 to capacity and beyond. But for them the labs are worse. The class is broken into many smaller lab groups, but even then students have to share equipment among as many as three of them.

Chemistry students also complain of oversized classes, but again it's the lack of laboratory equipment and supplies that plagues them the most. By second year, however, lab and class size problems are fewer.

"[The Chemistry Department] seems to be making the best of a bad situation," said one fourth-year student.

Psychology students aren't so lucky. While student numbers are lower, the classroom sizes are often disproportionately smaller again, making the number of students without seats even higher than other faculties.

Psych students also complained that the crowding problem was more chronic, with even third- and fourth-year courses being overcrowded.

"It's pretty discouraging when you get there and there's no seat for you," complained fourth-year math and psych major Heather Mac Lean. Another fourth-year math major, Christina Juurlink, said, "We usually try to show up to class 45 minutes or so early so we can get a seat."

With faculty budgets being reduced, these problems seem likely to get worse before they get better.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6