

University environment committee on life support

BY BEN MACLEAN

Saved from extinction by a close vote in the Dalhousie Senate, the University Committee on the Environment remains stuck in a rut of uncertainty.

Established in 1990, the University Committee on the Environment (UCE) has the goal of promoting environmentally sensitive decisions on campus, and to discourage "unacceptable degradation of the environment".

Senate showed concern in its fall meetings when the Committee seemed to have fallen short of this mandate. The UCE has been dormant for the past two years.

David Cameron, who introduced the motion to abolish the UCE and have its responsibilities transferred to the Senate Physical Planning Committee (SPPC), justified his suggestion as a protection of Senate's efficiency.

"When one encounters a committee that can't meet, it weakens the whole nature of Senate," he said.

With 31 senators in favour and 16 opposed to the scrapping of the UCE, the two-thirds majority requirement for the destruction of a Senate committee was not met.

But Cameron stands by his opinion that the UCE should be eliminated, asking why Senate

should even have such a committee. "It has no jurisdiction over environmental issues," he said.

In the early 1990s, the UCE was in much better health. At one time, the group conducted an annual environmental audit, and in 1994, the committee outlined an action plan, giving nine recommendations touching on everything from academic programs to managing buildings and grounds.

While stressing that "it's not that nothing has happened", Deborah Bakker, a masters student involved with NSPIRG, claims that "disappointingly few of the initiatives seem to have been acted on".

Despite progress in areas such as environment-oriented course offerings, she says, "There's much more that could be done."

Cameron, when asked who or which group has been dealing with environmental concerns on campus while the UCE has been stagnant, said the "immediate and pressing concerns", such as the treatment of toxic materials, have been administered by the Health and Safety Committee among others.

"That's where it should take place," he added.

While maintaining that the UCE should keep the role of environmental "overseer" on campus, Bakker agrees with Cameron.

"I am hesitant to assign the environment to one sector so that the others can ignore it."

In this respect, Bakker supports the idea that individual committees should take responsibility for environmental issues. However, this may be easier said than done. Michael Bradfield, chair of the Senate Priorities and Planning Committee, told Senate his committee is already overloaded with other tasks.

Added to the logistical problems of eliminating the UCE are the claims by some that such an action would be "regressive". Cameron, however, warns against using the committee in a game of "smoke and mirrors". He asked, "Are we going to have committees for the sole purpose of trying to project an image of concern?"

When told of the UCE and its recent inactivity, one student said, "If the committee is funded by Senate, it should be active; it should actually be doing something."

Bakker agrees that there is room for improvement.

"The presence of environmental issues hasn't been a priority. There's much more that could be done."

"You have to go beyond the policy to implement it," she adds. "If we're teaching students about the environment and sustainable development, universities should live

by example."

As for the future of the UCE, if senators wish to re-submit the motion to abolish the Committee, they will have to wait at least one year, or submit a modified proposal.

As far as Cameron is concerned,

though, an inactive committee is the same as an abolished committee.

With the responsibility for environmental concerns still up in the air, he says, "In failing [with the motion] we didn't accomplish anything."

Acadia fears strike

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Black has announced that if the situation is not resolved soon, the student union will call for the resignations of both Ogilvie and Sacouman.

"Having allowed the situation to escalate to this point, it is apparent that neither is capable of competently holding their position," Black said.

While Ogilvie refused comment on the matter, Sacouman said, "If it were seen to contribute to the negotiations, I will resign immediately at the same time that Kelvin Ogilvie resigns as president of the university."

Black also announced that if a strike or lockout occurs, the student union will pursue legal action against both parties.

Student frustration is being exacerbated by a work-to-rule action that was launched by

Acadia faculty at the beginning of the month. Professors are refusing to take part in the Acadia Advantage, a program through which students use laptop computers as a major learning tool.

Students in the program, who now number over 1,400, pay an extra \$1,200 on top of their regular tuition and are issued a laptop computer. Using the computer students can download material provided by their professors, access class notes found on web sites or join with other students in chat groups.

Sacouman says professors have not received pay for helping to make the Acadia Advantage program a reality. Other faculty say they are participating in the job action to drive home the fact that they should be able to choose whether they will use computer technology in their classrooms.

Dal prof says students are treated like cattle

BY GINA STACK
AND MARK REYNOLDS

Dalhousie is treating its students like "cattle", according to a psychology professor.

John Fentress, who has taught at Dalhousie since 1974, sent an e-mail to the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) asking them to do something to address the bureaucratic obstacles impeding student's academic careers.

"I can only imagine the frustration level that must occur when one has paid, is given guidelines as to what courses are needed, and then refused these courses — time and time again," the letter reads.

"I hope that the DSU will not allow this terrible situation to fester quietly. It may be that SOMEONE at the senior administration level cares, but that search may be a long one."

Fentress says that students are being denied courses that they need in order to graduate. He says that this problem is acute in his own department, psychology.

"We're reducing faculty and financial support, and increasing enrollment," he complained.

Fentress said that over 70 students were turned away in one of his classes, even though it was a required course for many.

"I'd say that from those 70 students, \$50,000 went into university coffers. That money was collected and [the students] didn't get what they paid for."

Fentress also feels that the quality of education is being reduced.

"As a faculty member... I feel more and more that I am running a cattle ranch. Overbooked classes preclude the individual attention that used to be part of a Dalhousie education."

Fentress said that he sent the e-mail to the DSU in the hope that the student union would speak to the university administration about it.

"It strikes me that individual students feel powerless," he said, "if the student union as a representative body can raise this, it might be more effective than if students went in one by one to complain."

DSU president Chris Adams agrees with much of the content of the letter.

"I weigh it very highly. We really appreciate this sort of e-mail because it gives legitimacy to what we are doing," Adams said.

"When tuition increases, it needs to be countered by a better quality of

education. I truthfully believe in quality of education, that is what I campaigned for."

Adams said that the DSU is already lobbying administration and government for better funding, and so it does not plan to directly address the concerns raised in the letter.

Warrick Kimmins, Dalhousie's vice-president academic, acknowledges that sometimes there can be scheduling problems in large classes, but believes the university is dealing with the issue.

"It's an old problem we have there,"

said Kimmins.

"In undergraduate faculties the difficulty is planning for enrollment... you can't predict what [students] will choose, often one is playing catch-up."

Kimmins explained that when a class has more students than spaces, the administration will try to make more spaces the following year.

Often first-year students enroll in psychology in order to get their science or social science credit. Kimmins explained that the university put on a number of credits

that would also fulfil those requirements, and published a brochure to inform students of this.

Kimmins also addressed the concern that the administration does not care about students who cannot get required courses due to over-enrollment.

"I can't speak for the university, but my experience was quite the opposite," he said.

"That's what we're here for, to help the students."

Student to sue Metro Transit

BY PHIL E. LEWIS

A Dalhousie student, who had a run-in with a Metro Transit bus, is seeking revenge after being forced to pay for the damage to his car.

Last September, Mike Fong was in an accident at the corner of Robie and Coburg while driving home from Dalhousie.

Fong was waiting behind a Metro Transit bus at a red light. According to Fong, he turned into the right turn lane during a red light. While waiting for the light to turn green he began looking both ways.

"The light turns green, I'm looking the other way and the idiot starts his turn [hitting me]," Fong said, referring to the Metro Transit bus.

Fong got out of his car to survey the damage while the bus kept going to the next stop. He caught up to the bus and they proceeded to exchange information. Fong said that the bus driver apologized for what happened.

Fong filed a police report the following day because the damage

done to his car was estimated at approximately \$1,500. The Metro Transit company did not file a report despite the fact that it is mandatory by law to file a police report if the combined damage is over \$1,000.

Fong says that the bus took off the left side headlights of his car, as well as other damages.

According to Lorrie Patterson, spokesperson for Metro Transit, the damage to the bus was done to the "rear bumper and was fairly minimal".

The settlement for the accident has been denied by the insurance adjuster for Halifax Regional Municipality. The adjuster reached this assessment almost three months after the accident.

"It's around Christmas time and they call me up and tell me I'm responsible for \$1000 worth of damage of my own car," Fong said.

Patterson explained that the insurance adjuster reported the bus "appeared to be struck from behind".

According to the adjuster's

report, the bus was in front of Fong's car in the straight ahead lane. The bus had already started its turn and Fong tried to scoot into the other lane and beat the bus.

"Apparently he can prove this by looking only at the damage to the bus...he never bothered to check out my vehicle damage," Fong said after hearing the adjuster's assessment.

When asked why the bus was trying to make an illegal right turn in the straight ahead lane, Patterson stated that there were cars parked along the right side and a bus needs a lot of room to make that turn.

Unfortunately, Fong does not have collision insurance so he has to pay the cost of the damages himself. He still believes he was right and does not believe he should have to pay over \$1,000 for someone else's mistake.

And he plans to raise the funds to pay the deposit for a small claims suit against Metro Transit.

"The only way it could have happened the way they say is if I was driving on the bloody sidewalk."

DFA Strike

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We are monitoring the situation very closely, its outcome could have a huge impact on students," he said. "The council has little legal power, but we have plans underway to get big things done."

"We are...moving towards action...but it is at the discretion of the student body."

At Acadia University, in Wolfville, student action impacted the bitter negotiations between faculty and administration.

A student union organized sit-in, staged at the University's main building, pressured the University president and the president of the faculty association to have a two-and-a-half hour open mike discussion about the talks and possibility of strike.

Acadia Student Union president Paul Black also sat in on the contract negotiations — a privilege Dal denied Adams.

"I received a response from the university administration saying that they felt it wouldn't be appropriate to have a third party observer."

But Cross agrees with the administration's decision.

"It wasn't a good idea, [the talks are] confidential discussions, people must feel comfortable speaking freely."