

LETTERS

Continued from page 6
process which took place.

In reviewing the minutes of Senate and its statutory and standing committees, a procedure leading to decision on the withdrawal date issue began during the summer of 1985. During a meeting held on July 29, 1985, the Senate Committee on Academic Administration established a sub-committee:

"consisting of the Vice-President (Academic & Research), the Dean of Management Studies, Health Professions and Arts & Science, and the Calendar Editor to examine the issue and to devise a proposal for uniform policy." (CAA 85:050)

No student representatives were present at the meeting and there were no attempts to contact

students concerning the sub-committee.

As I understand it, the next time the withdrawal date issue arose was at a Council on Student Life meeting, not in the fall of 1985, but on February 12, 1986. At that time the Registrar reported on a number of changes made to the calendar affecting withdrawal dates and class approvals. Why the Registrar brought this to the attention of the Council was not for purposes of consultation (the actual calendar had gone to print on November 1st with the new withdrawal dates inside, and therefore the decision had long been made), but to look for suggestions on how to best inform students of the changes. I am sure the student representatives on the Council were grateful for the chance to give suggestions

on how to advertise the changes.

It is because of these facts that I have no problem agreeing with Ms. Jackson and Ms. DeBoer when they say, "the Administration has enacted this regulation without student consultation."

Nevertheless, the Committee on Academic Administration shall be meeting to discuss this issue once again in the near future. May I be so bold as to suggest that had proper student consultation been sought from the beginning on an issue so important to students, perhaps the issue would have been resolved long ago.

Sincerely,
Jamie MacMullin
President
Dalhousie Student Union

OPINION

Marks aren't everything

By MARY ANNE WHITE

Re: "Biting the hand that feeds", November 20, 1986

As a member of the NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council) Advisory Committee on Research Labour — the committee that advises NSERC on policy for its labour programs (including undergraduate research assistantships, graduate scholarships, postdoctoral fellowships, university research fellowships), I feel obliged to neutralize some of the one-sided opinions and outright misinformation in the recent article on NSERC student programs.

The main theme of the article appears to be that all NSERC undergraduate and graduate awards are based entirely on marks. This is not true, as I will explain. However, it is true that marks give some indication of a student's background and preparation for research, and I believe that the best system is one which utilizes both grades and other factors in reaching such decisions.

First, to NSERC Postgraduate Scholarships: it is important to understand that the method of ranking of the application for these awards is somewhat different depending on whether the student is applying for support for the first, second, third or fourth year of graduate studies. For the first year of graduate studies, the applicant's grades are weighted more heavily than the other factors (recommendation from a professor and from the Department) since, for the most part, at the start of year 1 of undergraduate studies, there is insufficient information to base a decision solely on recommendations. (Many students will not have had any research experience at this stage.) However, as the student progresses in graduate studies, if she or he, having been turned down previously for an NSERC scholarship, re-applies, the emphasis on perceived ability will be increased relative to that on grades. In this way, many "late-bloomers" have been awarded NSERC graduate scholarships.

In any application for an NSERC postgraduate scholarship, the main grades emphasis is on the last two completed years prior to the application, i.e. undergraduate years 2 and 3 for application to postgraduate year 1, undergraduate years 3 and 4 for application to postgraduate year 2, and so on. (The article incorrectly stated that all years are used in calculating the academic standing.) This again allows a late-bloomer to have a chance at a postgraduate scholarship. In addition, the university is invited to include a covering note to NSERC explaining any mitigating circumstances (such as illness) which may require the committee to place less emphasis on a particular year.

It is not true that the NSERC Postgraduate Scholarship Selec-

tion Committee has "a set of loose informal quotas with each university receiving a certain number of NSERC scholarships (plus or minus a few)", as stated in the article. The NSERC Committee recognizes that universities can have good years (and not so good years) with respect to the ability and potential of their graduating class.

As for the NSERC Undergraduate Research Awards: I believe that there is considerable room for improvement in the procedure for making these awards. Here it is true that the main emphasis is marks, whereas allocations to the departments would allow more rational decisions to be made. For example, the NSERC Scholarship Guide, to eliminate students who are cur-

Continued on page 8

Graduation Portraits



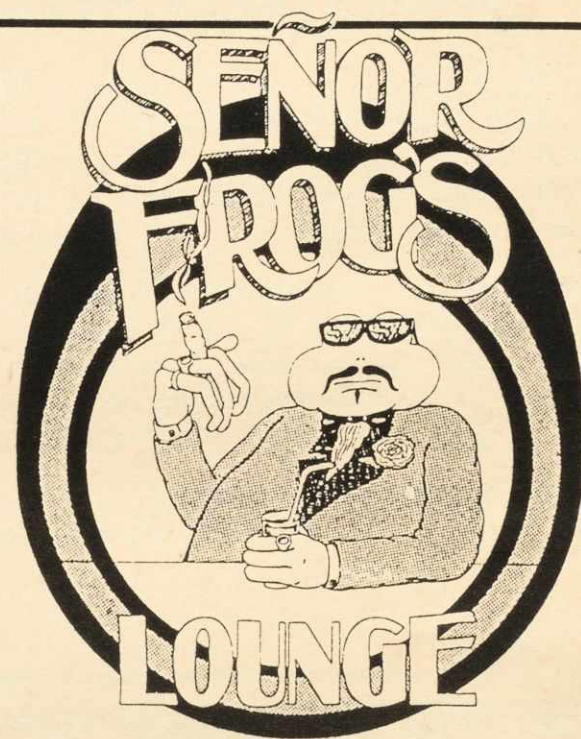
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