

Strike on the horizon for Dalhousie's TAs

University rejects union's proposal for binding arbitration

BY STEVE PETRIE

Dalhousie's refusal to agree to binding arbitration has pushed teaching assistants and part-time instructors at Dalhousie one step closer to a strike.

The union representing teaching assistants (TAs) and part-time instructors at Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent and Saint Mary's Universities, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) 3912, made an offer to Dalhousie's administration to have binding arbitration by a third party to avoid a strike and settle wage disputes.

In a letter sent to the union last week, "The university declined binding arbitration and indicated that we hoped we may yet have a negotiated settlement on the dispute," said Mike Roughneen, director of personnel services at

Dalhousie.

Binding arbitration can only happen in Nova Scotia if both parties agree to it. A recent memorandum to TAs from the deans stated that CUPE 3912 has ended negotiations with the administration at Dalhousie.

CUPE 3912 has been in legal strike position for some time now, as granted to them by provincial conciliators.

According to CUPE 3912 spokesperson Mike Earle, there will be a strike vote on February 18-19, and should a strike occur, March 4 is the planned day.

The strike would include TAs and part-timers at Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent and Saint Mary's Universities.

In the event of a strike, CUPE will be supporting its members with strike pay of \$200 per week after the ninth day, which will equal, or surpass what members are currently paid at Dalhousie.

Earl says that CUPE National is now ready to help with communications and research, and CUPE locals from across Nova

Scotia will be contacted to help financially and otherwise with a strike.

Currently, the union is gaining support by organizing its members and distributing information concerning the strike to university students and faculty members to make its position known. In the event of a strike, the TAs and part-timers have already been given the support of the Dalhousie Faculty Association which is also moving towards a strike vote.

In the event of a strike, the impact on Dalhousie students could be quite large. There are approximately 600 to 800 TAs and 200 part-timers on staff at Dalhousie. Without TAs, there would be fewer people to grade papers, and in some cases, no one to instruct labs and tutorials or give lectures. Without part-time instructors, some classes would also be left without instructors.

Dalhousie spokesperson Mike Roughneen says that it is premature to talk about how the university would handle a strike before a strike vote has even occurred.

"Dalhousie is prepared to negotiate further if there are any new proposals to be made. We can't accept the last proposal [from CUPE], but there is room to negotiate," he said.

In the early 1990s, steps were taken to form a union to improve working conditions, wages, and benefits for all part-time lecturers and TAs at Dalhousie. After long delays, contract negotiations began about one year ago. Agreement was reached on general contract language and proposals (including seniority rehiring), but the two groups have come to a stalemate over wage settlements.

Conciliation meetings between the university and CUPE 3912 were ended in July when the Dalhousie representative presented its wage proposals, stating that these were the final offer and there was nothing more to discuss, and not much progress has been made to resolve the situation since.

The university's final offer would see all salaries based on a flat-rate regardless of department or duties performed by the part-timer

or TA. Wages would rise to a flat rate of \$5,550 for part-timers over three years, and \$2,470 for TAs. These figures include the four per cent vacation pay and rule out any additional supplementary benefits.

CUPE's proposition would see part-timers pay raised to \$7,200 for a full course, the Atlantic Canada standard. TAs would also be given a pay increase, rather than having the partial cuts the university's offer would mean. CUPE believes strongly that fair treatment of part-time faculty and TAs is in the interests of all students, and would pay benefits in terms of the long term quality of education provided at Dal.

Currently, part-timers at Dal make about \$2,500 per half course (\$5,000 for a full course), and TAs' pay varies widely from department to department. For example, TAs in Dalhousie's History department earn \$3,000/year. Under the university's current and final proposal they would face a pay cut of about 22 per cent.

With files from Gina Stack

Banner system good to go — for now

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

Full-year classes may have been spared the axe, but the University seems unprepared to anticipate any future glitches in its new computer system.

The system, called Banner, was unable to recognize full-year classes. The problem was averted by artificially splitting full-year classes, without changing course content.

Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) president Chris Adams, a member of the ad-hoc committee which resolved the issue, is wary about the system's bugs, but remains optimistic.

"I'm somewhat discouraged that we had to get over this hump, but I believe [Banner] is a very good program, from what I have heard and seen so far," Adams said.

He is also pleased about the inclusion of at least one student on every Banner implementation committee.

"If some sort of problem occurs which appears to be minimal to other committee members, but is nonetheless significant...to students, the student representative will be able to bring this to the attention of their fellow committee members.

"Students understand what student concerns are."

Eric McKee, vice-president student services, says problems are inevitable given the size of the system.

"I thought naively it was like a car, you went to the showroom, you test drove it, you read the brochures, you knew what you were getting. It doesn't work that way with these big systems," McKee

said.

"The trick is to work together to make the best adaptation we can."

Gudrun Curri, the Dalhousie registrar, says in a system as large as Banner some concerns are bound to come up, but that a lot of the system's problems stem from mis-communication between Banner representatives, who sold the unit, and University employees.

"I do believe [Banner] didn't understand what we were asking about," she said.

The system, which cost the University upwards of \$2-million, was purchased in part, Curri says, to reduce manual work required for registration and to save some money.

But the modifications required for Banner to recognize full-year classes will both add labour and cost more money.

"You win some and you lose some," Curri said. "The only reason we bought the system was the year 2000 problem — we had no choice in the matter."

Curri says Dal didn't investigate other universities' experiences with the system because they would have been largely irrelevant.

Wilfrid Laurier University, in Ontario, was one of the Banner-operated universities Dal didn't consult before purchasing the system. Laurier's Banner system went through a series of customizations to address its inability to accept full-year classes. The customizations have made it impossible to upgrade the system.

The changes to accommodate full-year classes at Dalhousie should not affect the system's ability to be upgraded in the future.

Curri felt that the committee had

dealt with the threat to full-year classes well, but couldn't possibly foresee problems with the system.

"I can't be prepared for something I don't know," she said.

"[Banner is] something new, it's a huge product and we wish we had all the details — but we don't. We have to be open-minded and problem-solving oriented."

While many glitches are expected, but still unpredictable, it is known that Banner cannot accommodate Dal's current Grade Point Average (GPA) calculations for students who switch degree programs.

Currently, GPA is calculated by degree. If a student switches from a Bachelor of Arts to a Bachelor of Science, or vice versa, applicable credits are transferred and calculated into a new average. Failures are not transferred, and as a result, not included in the new GPA.

But Banner calculates grade point by level, calculating cumulative GPA for all undergraduate courses, regardless of which degree is pursued. Changing degrees would not affect a student's GPA standing.

McGill University is considering purchasing the Banner system.

McKee stresses that although there are problems, Banner is far superior to Dalhousie's current system, Avis. For example, students will now be able to register and access registration information over the web.

"On the whole I think people will recognize that it's an advance."

Harassment allegations

continued from page 1...

them all a bad name.

One male student security guard, who also did not want to be named, said that he knows of no problems with the performance of security guards at Dalhousie.

"I was shocked that we hadn't been told about [the suspension]," he said, adding he had neither seen, nor heard of, any impropriety on the part of the full-time guards.

Sandy MacDonald, Chief of

Dalhousie Security, refused to comment either on the new allegations or the Day case.

Susan Brousseau, the Sexual Harassment Advisor for Dalhousie, said that though her office did not deal with the security department case, "the university wants an environment free from sexual harassment".

She added that in cooperation with her office, the security department does update its sexual harassment training regularly.

News in brief

Zero fighting tolerance at Dalhousie

Six students were kicked-out of Howe Hall after a fight broke out during a residence party two weekends ago.

The fight began inside the dance, and carried further into residence. As a result, six students were asked to leave residence by Jan. 16. Shawn Key, Howe Hall president said it was unfortunate.

"Something had to be done. It went against the rules in the residence handbook. Those rules are pretty simple," he said.

Dalhousie administration offered alternative housing in DalTech and Fenwick Tower to the expelled students and returned their deposits for residence and food services for the January term.

In the future, Key says, there will be a change in the way smokers are run. There is a possibility that Dal security officers will attend each smoker.

Killam Library goes on-line

The Killam Library stepped into the 1990s this month, sending out its first e-mail notifications to patrons.

The new system will remind students when books are coming due, late or on hold. In addition, students will be given the option to renew their loan without transporting the books back to the library. Should the pilot-project succeed, it could save the library thousands of dollars in paper, stamps and time.

Students sign thousands of petitions

Students are demanding a change to the student loan system in Canada by adding their names to petitions that will be collected on "National Student Debt Day".

The petitions will be transported to Ottawa to be presented to government officials on Feb. 2.

The event is being organized by the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), of which Dalhousie is a member. It will follow the "National Day of Protest" being held on Jan. 28 by the Canadian Federation of Students.