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Standing up for fraternities and sororities everywhere

(editor's note: this article was to appear in the Oct. 8 issue of the Gazette, but it was misplaced. The Gazette apologizes to the author for the lateness of publication.)

For only the second time this year, Dalhousie students were able to pick up a copy of the Gazette without reading about Ian Greene or fraternities in general. Two out of four papers is not bad.

As I am sure there are many like me, I am sick of hearing about it. Yes, I knew him, and yes it had changed my life somewhat, but it has not changed the way I feel about Greek-letter societies. They were horrible and disgusting crimes that could have happened to anybody, and in fact they did. Not everybody that was involved was part of a fraternity or a sorority — it happened to members of Greek societies and to non-greeks alike.

The fact that Ian Greene rented a room in a fraternity house should not reflect on the fraternity itself. The members of the fraternity did not condone his behaviour, and in fact if it were not for their actions, he would not have been caught when he was.

Homophobia still rampant

On the Friday before National Coming Out day (which is October 11), I was one of a few students who walked around campus posting small anti-homophobia signs. These signs were meant to act as a little reminder to the general student body that "we [gays, lesbians, bisexuals] are everywhere".

I was amused by the looks of surprise on my classmates' faces, and I didn't stand around long enough to listen to any conversations that were sparked in response to the signs. I think this was a wise choice, judging from the stories of disheartened friends who heard other students responding negatively or disagreeing with our signs. I'd like to believe that these people are few and far between. I've tried to be content with the fact that we are protected, at least in theory, from homophobia by the laws of this country. I've tried to be comforted by the reassurances and support of others in the queer community. And even while I was trying to find some of this comfort, I was processing the news of the beating and subsequent death of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming.

And this is me raging against his death. Even though being gay is no longer classified as a crime nor as a mental disease (the treatment for which ranged from counselling to electroshock therapy), we aren't safe.

Homophobia is dangerous — in a way that being queer has never been. And still we are considered a threat to the moral fibre of this country, more than the heterosexuals who see hate as a way of life, and who torture and kill gays.

This type of violence is a manifestation of the hatred that resides in all of us. We are all homophobic. We could all benefit from a thorough exploration of the heterosexual values society pushes on us. We cannot blindly accept

I have been a member of a Halifax sorority for four years, during which time I have had to deal with numerous ignorant people who give me a hard time about my choice of university involvement in Greek-letter societies. I am very proud of my choice. It is something I will cherish long after my graduation. What really bothers me is when uninformed people state their opinions of Greek-letter societies. If you really look at it, fraternities and sororities are societies not that different than your regular everyday varsity sports team. There are differences that are obvious, but the similarities may not be.

People claim greek-letter societies to be elitist groups who discriminate against others. This is something that has kept us from achieving society status on campus. If you are not a good enough volleyball player, you do not make the team. If you do not have the grades, the university will not admit you. Greek-letter organizations have certain ideals that they uphold and if you do not represent or believe in these ideals, why be a part of that organization? It would

be like playing baseball, but not liking the rules of the game. Greek-letter societies do not discriminate against anyone because of their race, religion or sexual orientation. Just like sports teams pick the players which will help them win, Greek-letter societies recruit those who uphold similar ideals to keep the fraternity or sorority alive today, and continuing to thrive when we are long gone.

It seems the biggest problem that people have is with initiations. Our rituals have been built on long lasting traditions and everything has meaning behind it. Initiations are to teach the prospective member about our ideals, not to humiliate them. These events or activities are also alcohol and drug free — anyone found possessing these will be asked to leave immediately. We make sure initiation is done in the best interest of the member candidates and unlike what you may hear or see on TV, we do not haze — in anyway, shape, or form.

from blindfolding your rookies and forcing them to drink boiled beer, shaving and dyeing their hair, and forcing them to roll around in fish guts.

Doesn't it make perfect sense that the university takes a percentage of our tuition to pay for athletic and society fees to support them, but would love to have Greek-letter societies disassociated with Dalhousie University? In our

own little way, whether we like it or not, each and every one of us supports and condones this behaviour, yet Greek-letter societies are the bad guys.

Personally I have nothing against the sports teams or societies. In fact many of us involved in Greek life are also members of the

various sports teams and societies on our member campuses. My point is not to attack those involved in these initiations or their practices, merely to point out that we are not as bad as we might think. In fact, were I a member, I would gladly take part in the rituals of rookie or first-year initiation. Funnelling beer and making an ass out of myself would be great — a good way to feel a part of the team.

What I do have is something against those who feel the need to fraternity-bash, maybe those who do should do a little homework and see what they are really all about. I am sure that any one of us would gladly open their eyes to the truth.

LISA MITCHELL



The Sigma Chi fraternity house just off the Dalhousie campus.



Fraternity brothers, upholders of ideals.

CFS clarifies the issues

I would like to thank DSU VP Student Advocacy Kelly MacKenzie for her support for the Canadian Federation of Students in her Gazette opinion piece last week. I appreciate the sincerity of her comments, although unfortunately her argument is undermined by her lack of research and supporting information. In the spirit of co-operation Ms. MacKenzie espouses, I do feel compelled to clarify a few points made in the article.

First, I would like to address Ms. MacKenzie's claim that Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) is "a group which believes all corporations are evil", and consequently, that students should not work for them. This is ridiculous and untrue. 400,000 students across Canada are CFS members, and we all have to struggle to find a way to pay for the high cost of post-secondary education. We recognize that a key part of the debt crisis facing students is the high rates of student unemployment and under-employment. The CFS is currently running a national campaign to that effect.

The CFS has no policy stating that all corporations are evil. What

Ms. MacKenzie may be referring to is the CFS's belief in the principle of fair taxation for all beneficiaries of Canadian social programs, including corporations who save money on educating their employees and paying for their health benefits because of comprehensive government programs. Students and other users of social programs in Canada are now paying a high price for the billions of dollars of unrepaid loans and deferred tax dollars currently owed to federal and provincial governments by many profitable corporations.

In addition, there are substantial reasons why the incursion of private interests onto our semi-public post-secondary education system are not in the best interests of students. One example is the student loan system. Since private banks took over the delivery of the Canada Student Loan Program in 1994, student assistance has become progressively less accessible to students. Examples include recent changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act which bar student loan recipients from gaining protection under that act until 10 years after they finish their studies. This provision is also

opposed by Canada's bankruptcy trustees, and is clearly discriminatory when the figures are examined: since the inception of the Canada Student Loans Program in 1964, 94 percent of students have paid back their loans in full. In comparison, only 15 percent of the \$11-million in Industry Canada loans given out since 1982 have been repaid.

Starting next fall, credit history checks will be applied to many first-time loan applicants, and may bar many students from accessing education. These changes undermine the reason that the Canada Student Loans Program was established in the first place — to give students the money to access education, because no one else would. These changes will clearly benefit those who look at student loans and student banking services simply as a source of profit, and will hurt students and access to education for all Nova Scotians.

Second, I would like to clarify Ms. MacKenzie's claim that CFS is "an organization that believes that private educational institutions should be prohibited". When the private Career Academy schools in

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KATE GREENAWAY