

Orientation: some alternatives

By Glenn Wanamaker

Dalhousie's annual student tea party, affectionately known as Orientation, is over for another year, and it was, even to Orientation organizers, "disastrous".

Financially, the program will break even when the final results are in, but in terms of a learning experience for new students, it was indeed a failure.

"Orientation stinks," said Pat Cooke, last week, "because it's just a social week. It doesn't educate students, they can't meet professors, and there is no opportunity to meet upper classmen."

There were some attempts this year to combine the social events with educational programs, but all of these innovations were turned down by the university administration.

Clearly, most of the dances and concerts were successful, but for certain events like Shinerama and the Scavenger hunt, the turnout was extremely poor. About 180-200 students turned up for Shinerama to help raise about \$1700 for Cystic Fibrosis. Sixteen people participated in the scavenger hunt.

Cooke feels that students do not want to put anything into the program; they want everything planned out for them. Cooke also feels that "freshmen just don't want to admit that they're freshmen."

The inclusion of an educational program has been tried to a small degree in other years, but it has never worked satisfactorily. "Meet the professor" nights have either produced too few students or too few professors. However, these events were also separated from the social activities.

There seems no reason why professors and returning students could not be invited to come to these social events (the square dances, steer roast, etc.) so that the educational needs could be served in an informal, fun atmosphere.

Attempts at meeting professors, university administrators and student council executive have always been confined to cold, structured speech-making performances, which consist of little more than meaningless welcomes and

platitudes about university life.

In such an atmosphere, similar to the student-educator relationship in high school, it is understandable that students would stay away in huge numbers. Meaningful interaction must be the goal and the means to a successful orientation.

A sample orientation program follows:

— all high schools in the Halifax-Dartmouth area and as many as possible in the province, should be visited by university students. They should be armed with course and professor evaluations, to be handed out. Every student, when he/she first comes to university, encounters certain problems that are not explained in any handbook or university calendar (i.e. exams, term papers, problems with professors, course unions and student services), all of which can be discussed at this time.

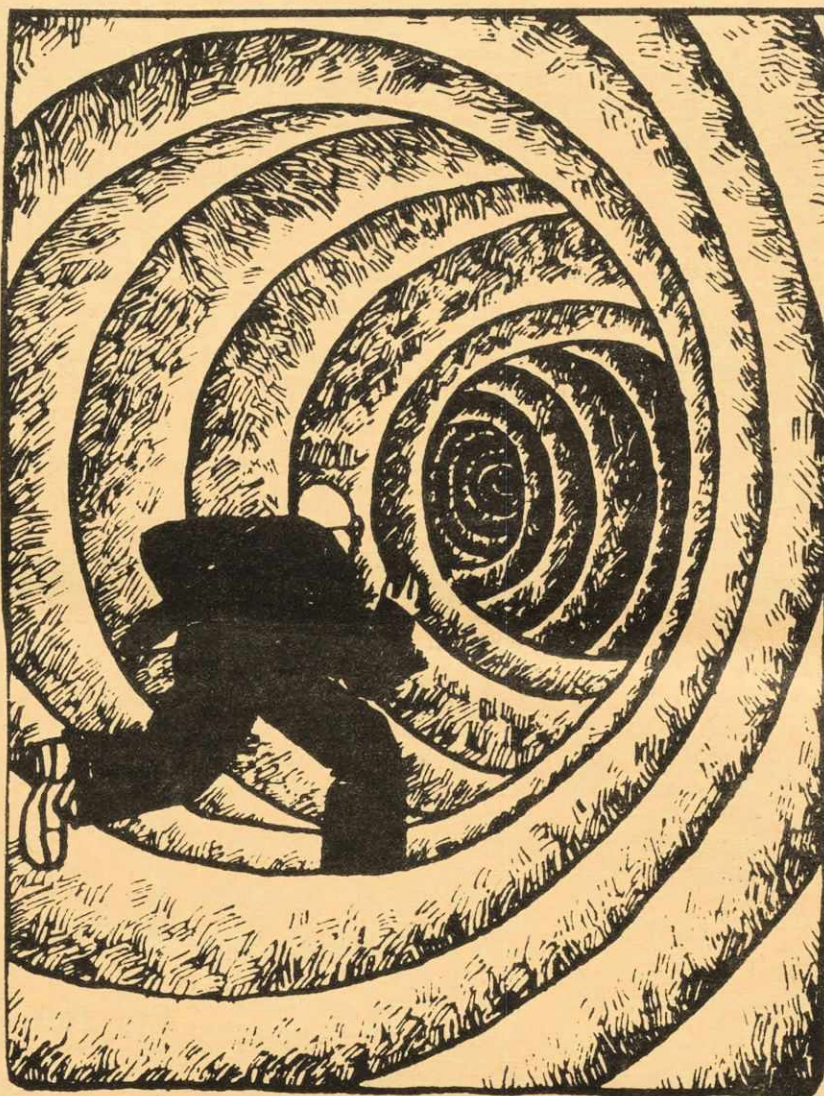
— It must be made clear that students can change any class after registration. Ideally, orientation would include at least one class in each course that they are enrolled in before classes start on a regular basis. This would provide ample time for course changes.

— the ridiculous "initiation" that still exists in residence must go. The fun and games can still continue but there is no reason for singling out first year students.

— A combination of social and educational events as described above can be accomplished if the effort is made. Students that the GAZETTE has talked with this year said that something was missing but weren't sure what it was. General reaction was that social events were fun but they still felt "different" and unfamiliar with the university as a whole.

— Every effort should be made to include returning students in Orientation events.

However, before any orientation program is decided upon for the future, the need to familiarize students with the university's role in educating students for society must be recognized as a decidedly important one. In this context, a real orientation can be planned and successfully carried out.



The Dalhousie Gazette

**CANADA'S OLDEST
COLLEGE NEWSPAPER**

The Dalhousie GAZETTE, a member of Canadian University Press, is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student Union. The views expressed in the paper are not necessarily those of the Student Union or the university administration. We reserve the right to edit or delete copy for space or legal reasons. Deadline date is the Friday preceding publication.

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