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Lydon defends late course evaluation

BY MONICA GILLIS

Despite having access to the information as many as five months ago, the Dalhousie Student Union did not release data from last year's course evaluations until last week. And it is only available on the World Wide Web.

The responsibility for the course evaluation falls to Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) vice-president academic/external Chris Lydon.

In a report submitted to council last Sunday, Lydon wrote, "I take full responsibility for this program not being finished earlier."

Data for the course evaluation was collected by 17 students hired — and paid \$2405 by the Union — who worked on it almost a year ago. Their job was to go to each class and get students to fill out an evaluation of their class. The students collected data from 230 classes — the most data ever collected to date — covering most departments at the university.

At a DSU council meeting on May 22, 1996, Lydon stated that the course evaluations had gone into production and that the Registrar's Office had agreed to send them out in the summer registration package. A mishap was reported by Lydon to Council on July 22, 1996, two months after the data was collected, while he was attending a Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) Conference. Lydon reported that the information for the course evaluations had been recycled by Carl Ghetto. Lydon went on to say that it would be another three weeks before the sheets would be able to

be processed.

"I thought I was dead. I wouldn't have had anything," Lydon said this week.

"When I went away to CASA (in July) Carl Ghetto took some initiative, thinking that they had been done already, and recycled them (the evaluations)."

More money was spent on hiring a student to sort through the computer sheets and reorganize the data.

As the evaluation grew further behind schedule, Lydon realized that the evaluation was late already and would be "useless in the third week of September." Executive council made the decision to not spend the \$4000 it would cost to print up the course evaluation. Lydon said that instead he decided to place the evaluation on the DSU website and at the same time do away with the old process of doing course evaluations on paper. This decision was not voted on by council but made by the executive.

At last Sunday's DSU council meeting the idea of a referendum question on whether or not the DSU should continue to even have a course evaluation was brought up.

Lewis Jacobson, vice-president communications in 1995/1996, asked Lydon at council on Sunday if he would support a referendum. According to Jacobson, "Lydon said that he would give it to the students and then voted against it."

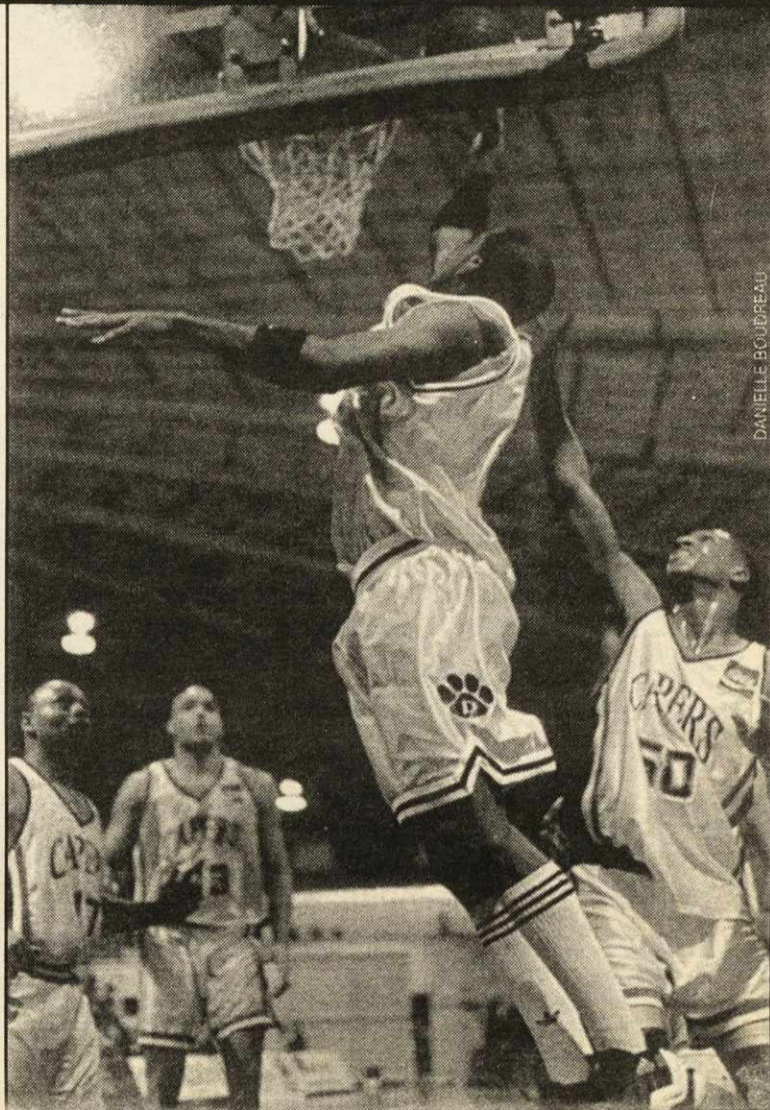
"It is important to give students a say in the whole thing. It's the best way for it to be publicized," said Jacobson.

After numerous amendments

and heated debate, the motion to put the existence of the course evaluation to a referendum was defeated by a margin of nine to six. There was one abstention and 14 absent councillors.

The all-new Course Evaluation Website was put up this past week as part of the DSU Homepage. The purpose of the site, which was proposed at council last June, is to give students the ability to evaluate more classes and to have the information available in time for students to select their classes in the summer.

At the beginning of next year, all students at Dalhousie will be given an e-mail account upon registration to enable them to access the course evaluation. Students will be required to fill out an e-mail in order to evaluate the course. If not enough students fill out the form for a course then the class will not be evaluated and the data will not be used.



Dalhousie jumped back in the win column last weekend against the UCCB Capers. See story page 19.

Budget helps students...a bit

BY GINA STACK

Federal Finance Minister Paul Martin's budget came down this Tuesday, and with it came some relief for students (see box for details).

Both the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) are taking credit for the new student benefits. The Dalhousie Student Union is a member of CASA.

CASA is taking credit for the inclusion of ancillary fees into the tuition tax credit, the tax credit "roll-over" mechanism, the changes to the repayment of student loans, and the altering of RESPs.

"It is a testament to the existence of CASA that today's budget includes these elements," said Matthew Hough, CASA's national director.

"The techniques that CASA uses to advocate on behalf of its members differ from those of other national student groups and we have proven that they work."

The CFS says its intensive lobbying has yielded some good results in the federal budget. Despite these favorable developments, CFS is not happy with this year's federal budget.

"It's good to see that the government has responded to some of our concerns," said Brad Lavigne, CFS's national

chairperson. "These tax measures will help students, as will the prolonged period of interest-relief."

"Unfortunately, the government chose not to address the vital issue of up front and deferred grants. As we told Minister Martin, although students need short-term relief through the tax system, dealing with the problem of rising student debt should be a priority for the federal government."

Lavigne is also not excited about new funding for science and research.

"This new investment in science and research cannot possibly compensate for the billions of dollars in transfer payments for post-secondary education that were cut in previous budgets," he said, "but it remains a significant announcement."

The CFS also added that student tax credits are nice, but you have to make enough money to receive tax credits.

Despite positive initiatives in the federal budget, Hough said that CASA "has discovered an element which could prove to be a significant obstacle to the accessibility of post-secondary [education]."

On page 95 of the budget, Martin alluded to "an additional option for repaying student loans." The option allows student to repay at rates directly tied to their incomes.

Cont'd on pg.3: "Budget"

Alternative Budget feature story, see page 10.

The Federal Budget and you!

Here's a breakdown of what's in the new budget for students:

- The education tax credit will increase from \$100 per month to \$150 per month, and then to \$200 per month for 1998 and subsequent years.
- The tuition tax credit will now be extended to include mandatory (ancillary) fees.
- Students will now be allowed to carry forward all unused portions of these credits.
- The period of time during which students are allowed to defer making payments on their loans has been extended from 18 to 30 months. Interest will also be paid by the government over this extended period of time.
- Annual contribution limits to registered education savings plans (RESPs) will be doubled.
- RESPs will now be transferable in whole, or in part, into an RRSP if unused.
- Investment income from RESPs can be accessed directly, subject to change.
- \$800 million will be set aside for research infrastructure providing an annual average of \$180 million over five years to Canada's post-secondary institutions and associated research hospitals.

Hill sent up the river

BY DANIEL CLARK

Linda Anne Hill, the former Dalhousie finance clerk fired for fraud last June, was sentenced to a year in prison last Monday. Hill defrauded the university of more than \$143,000.

Justice David Gruchy originally wanted to lay down a harsher sentence to send a message to the community. A joint effort by the Crown prosecutor and Hill's defence attorney convinced the Nova Scotia Supreme Court judge that for this crime, motivated by greed, one year was "appropriate."

Dalhousie is not so sure.

"We view this incident as very serious...and a strong message needs to be sent to the community," said vice-president (finance

and administration) Bryan Mason.

"One year is the absolute minimum which sends the appropriate message, especially with all the expense that both the judicial system and our insurance company has invested."

The judge also ordered Hill to repay the money she stole. More than \$17,000, which has been frozen in her bank account since she was charged last November, will be used to reimburse Dalhousie's insurance company, who covered the university's loss.

The remainder of the money, Hill claims, was squandered on "dinners, clothes and playing the big shot."

Hill pleaded guilty last week, but Justice Gruchy wanted extra

Cont'd on pg.3: "River"