

Dal's 'speech code'

It's subjects like Dal's new Discriminatory Harassment Policy that bring out the worst in two kinds of people: academics and journalists.

They're like those people you meet at parties — sober and mild-mannered until you give them a glass of wine, after which they become irrational, raving idiots.

Free speech is that wine for those who claim to be its guardians.

During the policy's three years of preparation, several professors expressed their outright opposition to it on the grounds that a university should be a place where anything goes, where debate should rage free and unrestrained, the better to flush out truth. They called it the tyranny of political correctness, a speech code designed to stifle challenging ideas and modes of teaching.

Since its release, columnists for both the Halifax dailies have raged against the policy on much the same grounds. Journalists have always been among the staunchest defenders of freedom of expression, existing as they do to uncover what other, usually powerful, people don't want talked about.

Parker Barss Donham, the *Daily News* columnist, came out with both guns blazing. He blew it.

Donham argued, in essence, that by adopting a 'speech code' (a scurrilously inaccurate term for it) Dal was admitting it had failed in its educational mission to encourage critical debate of controversial ideas. He said the university was telling students that if someone shoved an offensive idea in their face, rather than decimating it by force of reason, they should run screaming to a complaint board that would seek out and vigorously shake the perpetrator by the lapels.

A policy like this is no more an admission of educational failure than the existence of laws foreshadows imminent societal collapse.

Yes, at a utopian university, maybe everybody would respect everybody else's opinion, and never try to degrade anyone for being different, or show prejudice, or exercise power over the other members of the community.

Just like in a perfect world, there'd be no need for laws because nobody would kill or be corrupt.

Because the world is not perfect, nobody would ever argue against the necessity of laws. But it's remarkable how reluctant some people are to admit the basic flaws in the idealized vision of a university.

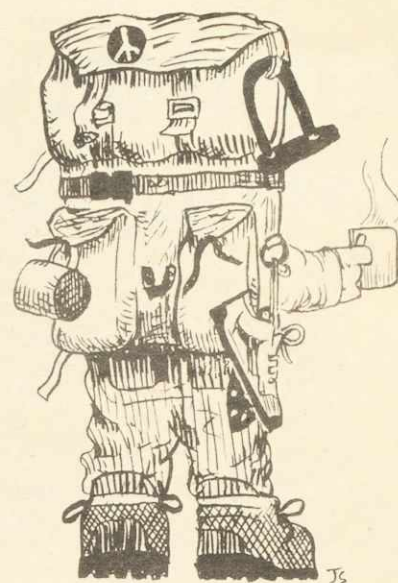
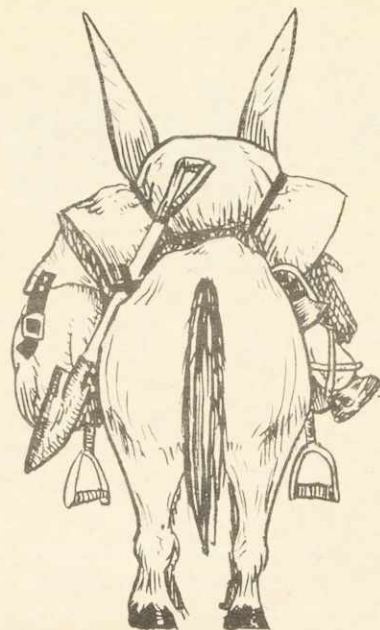
The university is full of power relationships. Some people are paid handsomely to be there. Others must compete and pay through the nose to get in, and constantly prove that they deserve to stay. Some are the designated 'experts', and some are considered more 'expert' than others, while the remainder are expected to demonstrate their intellectual mettle. Some get to stand up at the front of rooms and speak from a lectern, while others must sit in large groups and absorb their wisdom.

This is not level ground. Sure, the interaction among all these people brings great benefit to everyone, including the ones at the bottom of the power pyramid. But it doesn't mean power never gets abused.

That's why society has rules. Whether value codes, charters of rights, laws or harassment policies, they aim to protect people from injury. Words can injure, too.

The policy is certainly not perfect, and is itself open to abuse. But so are any of the rules society sets up for itself. That doesn't mean the rules don't serve a useful function.

Ryan Stanley



COMMON NORTH AMERICAN PACK ANIMALS



LETTERS

The Dalhousie *Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 500 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday 4 pm before publication. Letters may be e-mailed or submitted on Macintosh or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Vernon...and on

To the editor:

Contrary to the 'deconstructions' of radical feminist Mary MacDonald, taking personal responsibility for one's own protection is not at all the same as "blaming the victim". Nor is leaving one's brand new Mercedes convertible with its engine running in a high-crime district anything other than wilful stupidity.

All societies attempt to control predatory sexual behaviour; none succeed one hundred percent. However, only the most arrogant among us would have the nerve to insist that they have a guaranteed right to safety under any and all conditions, irrespective of their own lack of precaution against such monsters as the Teals.

Ms. Mary MacDonald would greatly benefit from reading Katie Riophe's *Morning After*; it's in the Law Library.

Jan Valtin

was different from mine.

Contemplating my roots is a lonely experience. My mother's parents were very dear to me. My grandmother was open-minded and kind-hearted, with a strong faith despite a long struggle with cancer. My grandfather was loving in a stern way, a product of his generation.

But I am afraid to look further back. Most assuredly somewhere in my family tree were slave owners and hateful ancestors who abused people of other races. The weight of colonial history is a heavy burden and sometimes I feel crushed by it. But I cannot change my past nor change the colour of my skin.

I can, however, change the future. I take responsibility to become informed about social justice issues. I read about and study international development. I research the history of minority groups in Canada and try to understand the socio-economic processes which marginalize people. I write letters for Amnesty International, and volunteer to teach English as a second language to new Canadians who are attending high school here. I speak out about jokes or debates which are hurtful to those who are oppressed. My life has been enriched in so many ways by learning from and knowing people from other countries and communities. Hopefully you will continue to share the history, philosophy and cultural diversity of your heritage because some Euro-Canadians are listening.

Kathryn Bates

Heavy burden

To the editor:

This letter is in response to "Blacks on Black" and the other articles about race relations (*the Gazette*, February 17).

My skin is white. In the winter time it turns pale pink, but when I get cold it turns blue. Occasionally, when I have the stomach flu my face turns a sickly greenish colour. Once in 1991 when I lived on the Carib Territory in Dominica, West Indies my body was a shade of golden brown.

The CIDA project on the Carib Territory was to become involved with women's groups there and contribute to the organization of a Women's Conference which would focus on issues of importance to Carib women. I learned about local politics and social concerns. I learned how to pick bananas, cook plantain, pound coffee and pick hot peppers. I felt happy, healthy and extremely lucky to have been accepted by a group of people whose way of life

Don't segregate

To the editor:

I would like to respond to the article entitled "Black Students Unite for Change."

I have no intentions of overshadowing the urgency of the issues at hand, but I feel that the recent approach taken by the Black Student Advisory Centre is somewhat confusing.

I sympathize with Black people who are feeling the burden of the injustices of the past and present. I support any efforts to try and correct the situation. I also attempt to adjust my own behaviour to assist in reaching a state of

racial equality. However, I am a little confused as to what it is that Black people want most. Please somebody correct me if I am wrong, but weren't earlier Black movements directed at trying to integrate a separate and unequal society?

I am concerned about the kind of change an enlarged and more accessible Black Student Lounge will bring about. The very title "Unite for Change" seems to contradict the goals of equality. Wouldn't this be promoting the prejudices and acts of bigotry that society and Dalhousie are trying to eliminate?

When one of the students interviewed in the article what the Black Student Advisory office meant to them, her reply was "Networking." Won't "networking" along racial lines only promote segregation — the situation which the Black movement fought to prevent from the beginning?

Still others described the Black Student Advisory Office as a "Sanctuary," a place to escape the horrible realities of campus and the world outside.

Could the money raised at the dance not be used towards a program that might better meet the goals of Black people? How about a program that promotes diversity and acceptance on campus. Has anyone suggested funding lectures on campus to create awareness? Could a series of lectures be integrated into mandatory Dalhousie curriculum? Can we not try to initiate some types of program that would help open up the green-room and cafeteria to those who presently, and no doubt legitimately, feel uncomfortable there?

I myself don't always feel comfortable around school campus, but I don't feel that searching for a group with a similar ethnic background would be wise. Not only because it would likely be labelled as a fascist group, but because it would be offering a false sense of security without addressing the real issue at hand.

If we are to enlarge the Black Student Advisory office so it can become a lounge, where do we draw the line? Should there be a lounge for all minority groups? Should employers create Black persons lounges in their work environment?

I don't see how this kind of program will assist in bringing us to a state of being "Human to Human."

Toby Moorsom

the Gazette

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