

# From the DSU to you: your student union

Hello out there to all Dalhousie students. My name is Ted Chiasson, and I am the president of the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU). I'm sure by now that most of you have heard people talking about the DSU, but you may not know exactly what the DSU is, or why you should care.

First, I would like to clear up some misconceptions. The DSU is not that large building in the middle of campus. The DSU is not a social club for political science students. The DSU is not some scam by the university administration to take another one hundred and twelve of your hard-earned dollars. The Dalhousie Student Union is an organization to which all Dalhousie

students automatically belong.

The DSU traces its roots back to 1866, but it was incorporated by an act of the Nova Scotia Legislature in 1966 (The Dalhousie Student Union Act). The DSU is governed by a council, currently consisting of 42 members, and representing all faculties, the larger residences, and members from several minority groups. The various members of council are elected from within their respective constituency groups according to their own regulations. The day-to-day operation of the DSU is entrusted to a six-person executive, five members of which are elected in general student elections each spring, and a treasurer who is appointed by council.

The roles of the DSU at Dalhousie can be broken down into three main categories. First, the DSU is an advocacy group for students. We have seats on most university committees, including the Senate, which is responsible for academic matters, and the Board of Governors, which is the ultimate authority at Dalhousie and controls all financial matters. By sitting on these committees, we ensure that the rights of students are given due consideration and that students are kept abreast of the developments that will impact on them. The roles of these committees range from academics, to art galleries, to budget considerations. In addition to lobbying internally, the DSU lobbies externally at all levels of government. Provincially we represent, at about 15,000 students, the largest block of students in Nova Scotia, and fight to ensure that the unique interests of Dalhousie as a research and graduate university are respected. Federally, we lobby the government as members of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, a student lobby group representing approximately 300,000 students from coast to coast. Our focus in this group is on finding real, workable, long-term solutions to the many problems and issues facing today's students. These issues include, but

are not limited to, federal transfer payments, the Millennium Scholarship, Canada Student Loan Program reform, issues of student mobility between schools and provinces and youth unemployment.

The second role of the DSU on campus is to serve as a resource base for all student societies. We provide space for meetings, the opportunity to apply for grants, staff who are able to assist in planning and running events, communications between societies and the general university community, and a helping hand to deal with any problems as they arise. Last year we had over 160 ratified societies, with interests ranging from the academic (e.g. Chemistry, Classics, Law), to sports (e.g. Parachute Club, Judo, Outdoors Club), to cultural and religious (e.g. The Indian Students Association, The Dal Christian Fellowship), to the just plain fun (e.g. The Illuminated Thought Society, The Keith's Society). Whatever you're interested in, odds are we have a society for it, and if we don't we can help you start one.

Lastly, the DSU is a business, responsible for running the Student Union Building (SUB) and all of the businesses within it as

well as some operations outside of the building. We currently run the Grawood, the T-Room, the Corner Pocket and we are responsible for all liquor sales on campus. The DSU runs the Campus Copy photocopy and print centre, and will be opening a magazine store in the lobby of the SUB on September 28. We run concert and lecture series throughout the year and rent unused space in the SUB to generate additional revenue, especially during the summer months. All of these operations are run on as close to a break-even basis as is possible. The line between what is a service for students and what is a business is a fine one. Last year the DSU had total gross revenues of approximately \$2.5 million (exact figures are published in the Gazette after the audited financial statements are received) and made approximately fifty thousand dollars, all of which gets reinvested in improving facilities and resources for students, as well as providing a cash cushion for the years when the DSU's books run in the red.

The Dalhousie Student Union is *your* organization, and we encourage all students to get involved. I will try to write updates on issues of interest or importance to students on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. If you have any concerns, either with the DSU or with any matter which I may be able to assist, please call me at 494-1106, e-mail me at dsupes@dal.ca, or just swing on by the council offices on the second floor of the SUB. I hope to hear from you.

TED CHIASSON  
DSU president

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\* \* \*

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