

# The price of opportunity



Upon my arrival to Halifax and Dalhousie four years ago, my first impressions of my new home were ones of optimism. Coming from a city the size of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver combined, I was overwhelmed with the comforting cosiness of the Maritimes.

I learned that my new habitat would be on campus in Howe Hall's once-notorious all-male residence, Studley House.

Although my experience in residence was extremely rewarding, culture shock remained a key player. Come on, jumping the fence of the Public Gardens at 2 a.m. to catch a duck isn't exactly our idea of fun back in Cairo. Vomiting also played an important role in familiarizing me with "rez culture". Being intoxicated to the point of regurgitation seemed to be the aim of every participant in the common drinking fests.

Trying to come to grips with my values and traditions while still being able to adapt to my new home, I went on a search for others of "my kind".

Touring the SUB in a desperate attempt to locate any Arabic-speaking individuals, my eye caught a sign reading "International Students Association". I was almost ecstatic. Too shy to ask for directions, I went on a treasure hunt to locate the association's office.

Walking through the office door, I was hit by a poster of the pyramids of Giza on the wall. Right then, I took a breath that mimicked Cairo's smoggy air, exclaimed to myself, "Home, sweet, home."

Minutes later, when told I could not participate in any of the association's events, I found out that being an international student had some political implications to it. Oh yes, I almost forgot that I am an immigrant. For those of you who still do not realize the fundamental difference between

the two terms, this is for you. An immigrant is every individual who has applied for immigration to Canada and has been granted the permanent residency status. On the other hand, the term "international" indicates that the person's presence here in Canada is not as a citizen or permanent resident.

So what does this all mean, anyway? To me, it meant that I wasn't welcome. So after twenty minutes of heated debate (very patient, eh?), I left the office in dismay. Later, I realized that it is from the differential fee visa students pay that this international student service is made available. However, from the day of that discussion to this date, I have consistently been bombarded with e-mails of the association's event and schedules, all of which I cannot attend. How ironic.

One thing that always intrigued me about the Registrar's office was their admission criteria and requirements. With all due respect to the English language, I found it absolutely hilarious to see that Dalhousie University demands a mark of 580 of its international students for the TOEFL examination. This exam, the Test Of English as a Foreign Language, is a worldwide marker of ability in the English language. With most North American universities requiring on average a score between 520 and 560, Dalhousie stands with only a few other universities on the pinnacle of crippling admission requirements. While many foreign students find it very difficult to achieve such a grade, an estimated 45 per cent of international students rank in the top 10 per cent of Dalhousie students in terms of scholastic performance.

Despite the fact that Dalhousie University is one of the most respected post-secondary academic institutions in Canada, it is by far still an infant in com-

parison to England's Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Even these pioneering universities' TOEFL requirements do not exceed those of Dalhousie.

This issue becomes more complex and confusing when one tries to understand the motives behind such limitations. Does the Registrar's office not realize that the average international student pays \$2,700 more than the citizen or permanent resident?

You think that's bad, take this. Some international professors in many North American academic institutions, including Dal, would not even come close to a 580 if asked to write the TOEFL. This in no way downgrades their credibility as powerhouses of knowledge. An international student told me a few weeks ago that he had spent the past year preparing for the TOEFL in hopes of admission to Dal. After several attempts, he achieved the required mark, but was astonished walking into class on his first day to find that one of his professors' English was incomprehensible.

Perhaps this issue raises a question that undermines our entire knowledge system. After all, linguistic skills and pretentious expression may not be an indication of one's IQ. In fact, after visiting numerous universities across Canada, I have learned that Dalhousie is home to some of the best faculty members in the continent, some of which are international.

Now, in the middle of my fourth and final year of a B.Sc. I

have grown to love this university, city and its people. As a result, I intend to spend the rest of my academic and occupational career here in Halifax (a couple of vacations in Egypt won't hurt).

I would like to see that every

Dalhousie student feel grandiose about their choice to come to Dal yet not forget that some fully capable students are denied the right and honour to the education we receive for often trivial reasons.

ADEL ISKANDAR

## In defence of freedom



BY JOHN KALDAS

There's a sort of folk principle of law you may have heard. It goes something like "Your right to extend your arm ends when your fist touches my nose." Not bad, as far as it goes. It sort of balances the freedom of the individual with the freedom of others. But right now throughout the Western world, and especially in Canada, this notion is being applied to freedom of speech, a truly sinister development.

Until recently, Voltaire's exclamation (practically a definition of civilized life itself), "I despise what you have to say, but I would die to defend your right to say it," was widely quoted and respected. But now, judging by people's words and deeds, it has become a relic of the past. As hollow and meaningless as the old habit of saying "God bless you," in order to keep out the devil after someone sneezes.

What do I mean? Suppose someone on campus were to start going around saying that only a hundred thousand Jews were killed in the Holocaust, or to deny that it had ever happened. Would we just roll our eyes and say the simple truth: "This guy's full of shit!" Or would we get together into a righteous mob and have him censored, suspended from class or even expelled. I really think that we would follow the second course, thereby making the mistake of attacking the messenger rather than his message.

"But he's wrong," you might say; or perhaps you'd say, "We need freedom of speech, but not for that." Well, let me briefly address those two reactions.

Yes, of course he's wrong. So are the people who believe in UFOs, the Loch Ness Monster and who think that Elvis is still alive, but we don't censor them. (Actually, maybe those people are also the ones who think the Holocaust never happened!) The point is, you can't censor people for being wrong, mean or full of shit. It doesn't make sense. If they're wrong, fine, prove them wrong. But don't suppress their stupid ideas, that just makes them fester and takes you off the moral high ground. Besides, if we censored all the fools and liars, how would our political and educational systems work? There would be hardly anyone left.

As for the second objection mentioned above, "Sure, we need freedom of speech, but not for that." Let me ask you, "Then what is it for?" Is it to protect your right to say, "Golly gee, what a nice day it is," or, "Wow, I sure get horny when I'm drunk." No, of course not.

Freedom of speech only exists when people are using it. And they're only using it when they say what the majority or the elites don't want, or can't even bear, to hear. Controversial, unpopular, even dangerous ideas are allowed to enter the marketplace of public consciousness and to either

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Student Union Building, Dalhousie University, 6136 University Ave, rm 312, Halifax, NS, B3H 4J2  
 editorial tel. 902 / 494-2507  
 fax 902 / 494-1280  
 http://is2.dal.ca/~gazette/  
 e-mail GAZETTE@is2.dal.ca

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