

Taxes push building into the red

ASS building student lounge may get the boot

BY KAVERI GUPTA

The faculty of arts and social sciences building has run \$1.1-million over budget — in part because the university forgot to account for sales tax.

Approximately half of the building's deficit was due to the addition of the 15 per cent Harmonized Sales Tax on the \$16-million building.

The other half is the culmination of various cost adjustments made during the building's planning stages.

Bryan Mason, Dalhousie's vice-president finance, says the overlooking of the tax was due to miscommunication.

"When the architects submitted the first reports last winter, they did include the HST. When [the reports] came in this summer, the tax was not included," Mason said.

At first, Mason says, it looked as though the university was on budget with the project. But in June, upon examination of the second set of reports, the university realized the tax was not included in the project's total.

But Mason says people shouldn't get too hung up about the tax.

"It's not so much that the tax is a problem, but it is a complicating factor," he said.

The project's steering committee proposed two major options to deal with the deficit.

The first proposal, already approved, involves dipping into half of the project's \$1-million design contingency — a monetary "safety net". The university is only using half of the contingency towards the deficit to reserve the rest for any further costs.

The design contingency proposal will deal with roughly half of the deficit problem.

The other half could be dealt with by cutting out the student lounge.

Students contributed approximately \$1-million — collected through student union fees — to the building. And, as a result, some are perplexed at the possibility of the student lounge's deletion.

"We're a little annoyed by it," said Ted Chiasson, Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) president.

But Mason says the money students contributed had nothing to do with the lounge, and the lounge was an addition to the original plan.

"When the students committed the money, there was no lounge," he said.

Bill Lord, the university's director of facilities management, agrees.

"Because it worked architecturally, [the archi-

tecs] put it in," he said.

Lord said that the lounge, though added later, is a desirable addition to the building, and now no one wants to let it go.

But while both Mason and Lord are sympathetic about the omission of the lounge, Mason emphasized the need to consider what was initially determined as necessary for the building.

The original plan included classrooms, faculty and graduate student offices, and state-of-the-art technical

equipment.

"That's what sold the students — the teaching facilities and accessibility," Mason said.

The steering committee is also looking at other cost-cutting options.

"But we know that if [the lounge] was eliminated, we would be back on budget," Mason said.

Lord agrees.

"We...are not going to the Board [of Governors] for more money. We want to bring this project in on

budget," he said.

And though he is frustrated by the cost-cutting measures Chiasson agrees.

"It's not good, but it may be a reality we have to deal with," he said.

Construction may start as early as December, though Lord says the plans may not be finalized by then.

"We have a design where we can go quite far [into construction] without having to decide. We don't want to decide too early."

Computer Science building scaled back

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

The elimination of classrooms from the university's new Computer Science building has raised concerns over the university's understanding of Computer Science education.

Money allocated for the removal of bedrock — to create a basement — at the University avenue construction site was pulled when the project ran \$1-million over its \$10.7-million budget.

The university decided to leave the rock and eliminate the two classrooms slated for the building's basement.

While a large, theatre-style classroom and numerous labs remain, the loss of the two rooms — each would have seated about 50 students — will mean that when the building opens in September of 1999, many Computer Science classes will have to be held in other facilities.

Atreya Basu, president of the Computer Science Society, says students will miss the rooms.

"People are upset that the new building doesn't have any classrooms in it...only large theatre rooms," he said.

"I would rather cut the theatres."

Basu says an important component of a Computer Science education comes from the informal working groups that occur between classes, something that will be missing if the smaller rooms aren't there.

"[The smaller classrooms] add an essence to the building.

If you don't have classrooms, just labs or places to hang your coats, it doesn't really make for a real Computer Science building."

Bryan Mason, Dalhousie's vice-president finance, agrees the loss of the classrooms is unfortunate, but says in a building project where speed is a necessity, budgetary and architectural revisions are inevitable.

"There is always a real struggle in any major capital project between the budget and the program," he said.

Currently the Computer Science department is housed in a rented space at the MT&T Centre on Barrington street at an annual cost of \$700,000.

Under the terms of the Dalhousie/TUNS amalgamation, the provincial government provides \$1-million each year to cover these costs.

Mason says the new building is being built quickly so that government assistance can be redirected into building costs.

As a result, he says, construction has begun even though the plans have not yet been finalized.

"You have to remember that we're building this for a faculty that only came into existence about 16 months ago," he said.

"So what the mission of the faculty was and where it was going and what its future was was unknown when we started the building."

Jacob Slonim, Dean of Computer Science, says he would have liked to have the

classrooms remain, but understands there are limits on university finances.

"Given the circumstances, [removing the classes] was the best solution we could come up with," he said, adding that 40 per cent of the classes will still be taught in the building.

But he also says that trying to make the university understand the department's needs is a constant struggle, and he expects more problems.

"I don't think the university as a whole understands the trends and changes of information technology and the impact that it will have on univer-

sities in the future...it's a lack of vision."

But Mason says he, and the university, are struggling to cope.

"We're trying to build a technologically advanced and flexible building," he said.

"What we would have designed five years ago for a Computer Science building and what they need now has changed. And really, the trick now is not even to design it for today but to design as much flexibility as we can into it because who the hell knows what, in three years, they're going to need?"

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