

Getting a failing grade

Consistent high fail-rate classes give students trouble

BY KIRSTIN DANIELSON

Classes designed to have high fail-rates may be more myth than substance.

High fail-rate classes themselves are not an uncommon occurrence at Dalhousie. But are classes with high failure-rates a result of administrative strategies to decrease class size, a reflection of the teaching or the consequence of students slacking off?

The registrar's office does not compile a list of classes that have high failure or drop rates. Neither do individual faculties. But they did acknowledge that certain classes have a less-than-encouraging grade

distribution.

Among those mentioned were Introductory Chemistry (1011A/1012B), Organic Chemistry (2401.01A/2402.01B) and Introductory Calculus (Math 1000.03).

Dr. Charles Warren teaches first-year chemistry. He says the problem isn't administrative policy, but first-year students in transition from high school to university.

"In general the first year

marks tend to be lower. In high school there tends to be some inflation in marks. Students who got 80s or 90s are simply demanding a bit more," he said.

Dr. Warren also says where you attend high school can directly affect how well you perform in difficult classes.

"Not all high schools are equivalent," he said. "There are benefits to going to different high schools."



Shivani Khanna, a second year biology student, took and passed first year calculus. She says that rumours of difficult tests and concepts helped prepare her for the amount or work she faced.

"I had only heard about how hard the class was from word of mouth. It's not like they sit you down when you're signing up for courses and tell you it's going to be really hard," she said. "[And] obviously they can't make the courses really easy [just] because 50 percent of the people might not know the material."

Jordan Zacny, a first-year science student, says he has examined the strategies his classmates are using to succeed the tumultuous first year.

"I've heard that lots of people take statistics second semester, [and] to be more prepared [for it], they take [calculus] first."

He was ambivalent about whether he found the negative buzz surrounding certain classes intimidating.

"You know it will take a lot of your time, [but] every course should be challenging. People are going into different areas. People are intimidated because they are not in their area of expertise."



Photo by Luke Dobek.

Pepsi

continued from page 1...

Coca-Cola balked," he said. "Over a ten year period it's in the millions for the university."

What Chiasson is specific about is that the money is earmarked for student activities.

"It will not vanish into the black hole of the budget. It has to go to things like scholarships, athletics and student life.

"The only reason I'd do this is if I thought it was a benefit to students overall," he said.

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