

Issues before politics

With annual tuition hikes; increasing student debt; fewer government grants; and university enrollment beginning to decline, the need for a national student voice is evident. But Canada's two national students' organizations prefer to bicker between themselves than do anything constructive for students.

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) traces its roots back to the first days of student protest in Canada. The CFS is Canada's largest national student organization with a membership of close to 400,000 students.

The federation believes that university should be free and accessible to all Canadians.

Since the 1960s, rallies, marches, protests and demonstrations have been its chosen methods to get the government and Canadians to listen.

In the 1980s, more conservative students became discontent with the objectives and activities of the CFS. Instead of working within the federation, they broke away in the early 1990s and formed the rival national student organization, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA).

CASA has grown to include close to 200,000 member students nation-wide, including Dalhousie students.

Until 1996, Dalhousie had been a member of the CFS, but in a referendum held during the student union elections, students voted to leave it in favour of CASA.

Although both organizations claim to represent the interests of students, CASA and the CFS are fundamentally different in their approach; CASA shuns CFS-style protests in favour of government lobbying and negotiations.

On Jan. 28, the CFS held their

annual National Day of Action. The event saw schools nation-wide take up placards and march in the streets.

The local rally took place a day earlier. Starting from King's University, students marched down Spring Garden Rd., blocked traffic, chanted and lit a fire in the Province House driveway.

The next day, students from the University of Toronto and York University made the top story on CBC's *The National* by occupying

stated that Dal was not participating, or endorsing the protest.

The DSU may not agree that protests are the most effective way to get student issues dealt with, but why condemn the actions of people who are obviously fighting for students?

This is the problem with CASA and the CFS. Instead of acknowledging the work that each other is doing, their bureaucracies waste energy calling each other stupid.

Negotiations and lobbying are important ways to gain concessions from government, but without the media-leverage applied through active student protest, talks are futile.

The CFS and CASA are too busy tooting their own horns to realize that in actuality, they could compliment each other. Instead of fighting against each other, they should find a way to bridge the gap, creating a united front for students at a national level. The two groups could be amalgamated, creating both protest and lobby-oriented wings.

Think about what a united voice could do for students on a national level. What kind of picture does it paint for the federal government when students can't even agree on what they want? Do we really expect the government will respond to student needs?

No, not as long as they can play our national organizations off against each other.

Enough is enough. Higher-education is in a crisis situation in this country and it's little wonder.

The sooner student groups stop fighting a popularity contest amongst themselves and start fighting for what really counts (students), the better off we'll be.

GINA STACK

Editorial

a large bank as part of their protest.

On Feb. 2, CASA countered the popular National Day of Action with its own watered-down version known as National Debt Day. The Dalhousie Student Union's (DSU) vice-president academic/external, Kevin Lacey, flew to Ottawa for the event.

Lacey also happens to be CASA's Atlantic regional director. Don't be surprised if he leaves Dal next year to move up CASA's bureaucratic ladder — is this student-interest or self-interest?

The results of CASA's meetings with government officials have yet to be released. Needless to say, they didn't make the national news.

While both organizations believe they are working in the best interest of students, competition between the two is working against students.

In a drive to gain the support of more universities, the two groups are constantly bashing each others' efforts to make the government and Canadians in general listen to student issues.

While some Dal students and professors took part in the CFS's National Day of Action, the DSU

OH SWEETIE, I DO WISH YOU WOULD WRITE MORE OFTEN...

THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE

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Student Union Building, Dalhousie University, 6136 University Ave., rm 312, Halifax, NS, B3H 4J2.
editorial tel. 902 494-2507, facsimile 902 494-8890, e-mail. GAZETTE@is2.dal.ca

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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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Letters

National Eating Disorders Awareness Week

To the editors,

We wish to draw the public's attention that this is the middle of the National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (February 1-7).

Eating disorders are an increasing concern for women and men in today's society. Many people think that eating disorders can only be characterized as anorexia or bulimia. In fact compulsive exercising, compulsive eating, roller coaster dieting and many other actions are also eating disorders that can take both an emotional and physical toll on university students who are already dealing with academic and financial pressures, and who are living away from home for the first time.

Statistics show that 40 per cent of college age women are following diets of 800 calories a day or less, when the average daily requirements are 1800-2200 calories a day. Not only women are affected by eating disorders. Men also feel the need to have a "perfect" body and eating disorders amongst men are on the rise.

Whether it is due to low self-confidence or a need for control, more and more women and men are pushing themselves towards what society dictates as the "ideal" body.

This week is a time to acknowledge the large and growing

role eating disorders have in our society. It is a very real illness that must be talked about before a solution is found.

ALLISON POWER
JENNY BAECHELER

Students, banks and a surplus

To the editors,

In light of the nation-wide student protests last week, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce was mentioned on CBC's *The National* as being sympathetic to the students' plight.

This bank, along with the rest of the major chartered banks, have been flaunting their (combined) \$7 billion profit. Paul Martin and the Prime Minister have been wondering where to spend the budget 'surplus' (what happened to the debt?).

The federal government and the banks should form an agency to give out some of this money to help deserving students. It would be much better spent than the \$20 million the Canadian Bankers Association is spending on those 'feel good' ads for public acceptance and it would probably net Mr. C. and the Liberal MP's many votes.

You could probably even find an unemployed (or should I say under-employed) bureaucrat to run the agency.

LLOYD KERRY
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

"That's a fine pair of chaps you got there pardner."

Warning: The Gazette can kill student apathy.

Correction

Last week, *The Gazette* reported that Dalhousie comic Gunther Brown was the opening act for Simon B. Cotter at the Grawood. Unfortunately, no such person exists. All apologies to Gudger Brown, the real Dalhousie comedian.

