

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

Untangling self interest and student interest

As the DFA strike looms, there has been much talk about "self interest" and "student interest". The DSU, the DFA, and the administration all claim to be representing the "student interest" in different ways.

According to the DFA, student interests are best observed by demanding that Dalhousie University maintain current numbers of tenured professors, and that those professors be paid wages in line with those at comparable Canadian universities.

According to Dalhousie's administration, student interests lie in keeping professor's wages below market standards and continuing to eliminate tenured positions in order to hold tuition to present levels.

According to the DSU, student interests are best defended by avoiding a strike, whatever the outcome of the negotiations between the DFA and the administration.

Seeing as the DSU has uncritically accepted the administration's claim that meeting the DFA's demands — even part way — will necessarily result in a tuition hike, and seeing as the administration, like the DSU, is more concerned about avoiding a strike than examining the concerns of the DFA, it is possible to consider the positions of the DSU and the administration as, for all practical purposes, identical.

The question is, then, whether the interests of Dalhousie's students are best protected by avoiding a strike at all costs. In my opinion they are not. Although a strike is obviously harmful to students currently enrolled at Dalhousie, it is important to consider the larger issues at stake.

According to the information put out by both the administration and the DSU, the DFA's primary aim is to get more money for professors. Both DSU president Chris Adams and Tom Traves, Dalhousie's president, downplay the issue of maintaining current numbers of tenured professors at Dal.

Nonetheless, this appears to be the issue which is primarily responsible for the breakdown of negotiations between the DFA and the

administration. Moreover, it is an issue which is fundamental to the interests of present and future students at Dalhousie.

The preservation of tenured positions at Dalhousie is essential to maintain the high standards of teaching and research which our university has attained in the past. However, it has been Dalhousie's policy to eliminate tenured positions; 113 have been done away with over the past ten years, while at the same time substantially increasing enrollments at Dal. What have been the results of this policy?

Most obviously, increased class sizes. These larger classes necessarily reduce the ability of professors to have quality, one-on-one interactions with their students, or to have productive in-class discussions. Furthermore, they have increased the teaching and grading workload of our professors, reducing their ability to engage in academic research.

Second, individual departments have been forced to repeatedly cancel certain classes, as they no longer have the professors to teach them. This means that there is a considerable gap between the courses which Dal's calendar says are offered, and those which students may actually take, creating a situation where students have to rearrange their schedules or drop out of certain programs altogether in order to cobble together the courses they need to graduate.

Third, Dal is becoming increasingly reliant on part-time professors who are inadequately remunerated, even by the terms of their new contract with Dal. Part-timers often have to take non-academic second jobs or work at several universities simultaneously in order to earn enough money to survive. This means that the needs of Dal's students can not always be the foremost concerns of a sizeable body of instructors working at Dal.

Furthermore, the varied responsibilities of part-time instructors severely reduce their ability to continue their own academic research, making it

difficult for them to keep abreast of recent scholarship. The preservation of a full complement of tenured professors at Dal has little to do with the self-interest of the individual professors currently working here.

The university has not threatened to lay off tenured profs — it is reducing their numbers by attrition only. No tenured prof need fear for his or her job from this university's administration. The DFA's stance on this issue is determined primarily by their desire to maintain the quality of research and instruction at this university. They are acting to protect the interests of Dal's present and future students.

The other major demand of the DFA, that Dal's profs be paid at rates similar to those of profs at comparable Canadian universities, should not be simplistically dismissed as an example of professors placing self-interest above student interest either. The establishment of market-value wages at Dalhousie is essential to preventing a "brain drain" of Dal's presently high-quality faculty, and to ensuring that innovative, dynamic scholars are attracted to Dal in the

future. While there is a clear self-interest for DFA members to strive for wage parity with the rest of Canada, this does not mean that it is not also an important student concern.

Perhaps it is the DSU executive who are confusing "self-interest" and "student interest". This generation of Dalhousie's students must look beyond their own self-interest, and accept that the harmful effects of a DFA strike may be essential to the preservation of quality instruction and research at Dalhousie. And don't kid yourself, this strike is not just about Dalhousie, but about the future of higher education in all of Canada.

You can be sure that if Dalhousie's administration is successful in pegging the wages of Dal's profs below market standards, and in having a free hand in the elimination of tenured positions, other university administrations will follow suit. As a result, Canada's leading academics will head south in increasing numbers. Dal's students must look beyond their immediate concerns and stand up for the student interest, not just their own self-interest, but the interest of all students — present and

future.

Finally, there is the administration's, and the DSU's, threat of tuition hikes. As the DSU has repeatedly stated, and as was made abundantly clear at their "information session" a couple of weeks ago, this is a complex issue which the DSU does not fully understand. The DSU has neither the information nor the authority to determine whether there will or will not be a tuition hike next year. And while they accept the administration's self-interested statement that the DFA's demands would necessarily result in a tuition increase, it is worth noting that Dal's tuition is already among the highest in Canada — despite the fact that Dal's profs are paid significantly less than national standards, despite the appalling elimination of tenured positions at Dal over the last decade.

If other Canadian universities — including other Maritime universities — can afford to charge students less, protect tenure and pay professors (including part-time professors) more, why can't Dal?

GREG BAK

The killing of medicine

Jack Kervorkian used to call what he does "medicine" until it was pointed out that the term literally means "the killing of medicine". Many feared that killing the medical profession was exactly what he would accomplish if he succeeded in turning physicians into agents of death who were authorized to put the sick out of our emotional and financial misery. But it already appears to be too late.

Although partial-birth abortion has been condemned by the medical profession as never justified, the profession has taken no action against its practitioners. Consider what kind of mind it takes to hold a perfectly formed human child squirming in one's hands and then

puncture its skull and suck its brains out. Do people such as these really qualify to be called medical doctors? Then why are they still members of the profession in good standing and allowed to continue this horrific practice?

The byword of the medical profession used to be "above all do no harm," and the Hippocratic Oath used to say "I will give no deadly medicine." It also included an explicit prohibition against committing abortion (perhaps this has something to do with why it has quietly disappeared from many medical schools). What has become of the medical profession when it welcomes into its ranks those unethical practitioners who have

prostituted their skills to destroy human life, accepts abortion when there is no medical indication, and intrudes itself into families by condoning surgery on minors without parental permission or knowledge?

Yet many, duped by the wedge issues of pain and personal autonomy, want to trust this thoroughly corrupted brotherhood with end of life decisions for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. We are not far from the experience of the Netherlands where euthanasia is legal. The Dutch now fear entering their own hospitals where many lives are involuntarily ended in spite of so-called safeguards.

ALFRED LEMMO

DALHOUSIE SCIENCE SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TUESDAY, MARCH 31ST, 1998 AT 7:00PM IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF THE SUB.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE FOR ELECTIONS:

- *PRESIDENT
- *VICE PRESIDENT
- *TREASURER
- *SECRETARY *CHAIRPERSON
- *DSU SCIENCE REPS (X3)
- *KING'S REP
- *ARTS REP
- *MENTORING COORIDINATOR

* ALL science students welcome AND FREE PIZZA!!