

## Student Government History: Summary (1-24)

Student Government History began as part of the GAZETTE's 1973 summer research program. It has turned out to be a larger project than idle curiosity led the author to expect. Last year 1869 to 1919 were covered. The aim is to eventually describe the history to the end of 1973.

The purpose is to present all but the most routine events that happened during the period covered. This is to let readers draw their own conclusions, rather than those of the author. If any theme has appeared so far, it is that student government today is remarkably similar to that of the past 110 years. The differences may well be an aspect of context rather than substance.

Here, for those who were not able to follow the series so far, is a summary of the major events of 1869 to 1919.

The student government of 1869, which almost certainly started at the time of Dalhousie's 1863 reorganization, was simply a general meeting of all the students. It was called the Student's Meeting, and the executive just kept order at meetings. Committees carried out the specific tasks (eg. financial control, Munro Day celebration, annual dinners, operation of the Reading Room). On November 10, 1869 the students accepted ownership of the GAZETTE from the founding editors. One year and 15 days later, the Dalhousie Medical Students' Society was founded.

For much of the 1870's the Dalhousie-led movement to merge all Nova Scotia universities took most students' spare attention. The Students' Meeting concentrated on social events and obtaining benefits such as half-price railway tickets. Debating was the major extra-curricular activity. Lecture series were organized. As the decade closed students became more aware of themselves as a distinct group within the academic community.

In 1880 the model parliament began its career of over 80 successful years, while GAZETTE started to show profits. After student pressure women students were admitted in the fall of 1881. Also, the first Dalhousie teams and gymnasium room were started by the Students' Meeting. The alumni

contributed but the first levy (\$1.00 per head) had to be initiated.

Until 1912 levies, passing the hat and commercial activity were the sources of funds — all voluntary. In 1882 both the gym and the lectures provided an income. A gym teacher was hired and a rugby team formed. Both large and small decisions were made by the Students' Meeting.

In 1885-86 lobbying began for a university bookstore and for alumni representation on the Board of Governors. The latter was the easier goal. In 1887 Dalhousie moved into what is now the Forrest Building. So began a series of battles with faculty over discipline of students' behavior in the building. They lasted until 1915. In 1888 began 15 years of unsuccessful attempts to get compulsory wearing of academic gowns.

Early in 1890 the Students' Meeting began sponsorship of drama. Conflicts with the major societies led to adoption on October 22, 1890, of the first student government constitution. Co-operation with other student governments started while Winter Carnival planning became more difficult. In 1891 the student government began an effort to take over the university's control of social events which succeeded 20 years later. The first request for truly compulsory activities fee was made in February 1893.

The pattern of law students becoming presidents was already well-established in 1899 when the Students' Meeting was renamed the University Students' Council. A year later came a reorganization that established many of the present appointment and election deadlines. GAZETTE editors were no longer elected by the students. Financing was still uncertain and the discipline problems were not settled.

In 1902 the Arts and Science Students' Society began to play an important role. Three years later the Students' Council went through a financial reform that led to greater stability and easier planning. The university opposition to compulsory student fees was crumbling. The Engineering Students' Society was formed. It was also in 1905 that the executive began to act as a cohesive and

influential group.

In 1911 the Dental Students' Society was started. Soon afterwards came a fundamental change in the student government structure. "Mob rule" was replaced by representative government featuring the form of executive we still have. The U.S.C. became the Students' Council. Faced with a referendum and a mass meeting the university agreed to a compulsory \$5.00 fee.

Athletics were still under Council jurisdiction. The Council was confirmed as responsible for all extra-curricular activity, with full power over it. Our present student government is based on the 1911-12 reorganization. An official role in discipline was created. In dealing with the university the new Council proved much weaker than the old mass meetings.

Student participation in university government became something of an issue. In 1914 plans for a Students' Union Building were prepared and as the war broke out \$20,000 had been collected for it. During the war the sharp decline in enrollment caused a Council decline. Minor adjustments in social facilities and rules took much attention.

As an interim measure the Council took control of the Murray Homestead on Studley campus in 1915. It would be the students' building until a new one was built after the war. Women gained equal rights in student government in 1916, and in 1917 a woman Vice-President was elected. The Law students held a 3-year boycott of Council elections. The Studley/Carleton split was blamed.

Two issues dominated Council as the war drew to a close. One was a slander charge against the Treasurer by the Dalhousie Amateur Athletic Club over his description of their hidden use of funds to hire a varsity quarterback. The other was an appeal from the Engineering Students' Society which finally caused the university to force Council to let societies have wide freedom of action.

In 1919 Dalhousie began its role in housing while Senate/student animosity hit new extremes. Controversy over the proper kind of war memorial was the last major item of 1869 to 1919 that can be mentioned here.

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