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Dal speaks out on post-secondary education

by Samantha Brennan and Catherine Ricketts

Dalhousie administration expressed their concern about underfunding and the declining quality of education in a brief to the provincial royal commission on post-secondary education.

The university brief was submitted in November and considered at a public hearing on January 6 with MacKay and other Dal officials attending the hearing to speak in defense of the brief.

Financial problems facing universities, academic quality, the value of a liberal education, research and graduate studies, accessibility, autonomy and Dalhousie's role in the community were some of the more important themes running through the brief.

"I have a feeling that the people in this province strongly support education and the quality of education," said MacKay at the hearing. Adding that the government may be misinterpreting that support, MacKay feels that the responsibility of increasing public awareness about the importance of university lies with the university itself.

"If the public doesn't understand, perhaps it's our fault and nobody else's," said MacKay in a later interview.

Although there were some things the student union would have liked to have seen a greater

emphasis on, such as student aid, "we're basically in agreement with what the university brief had to say," said Tim Hill, DSU president.

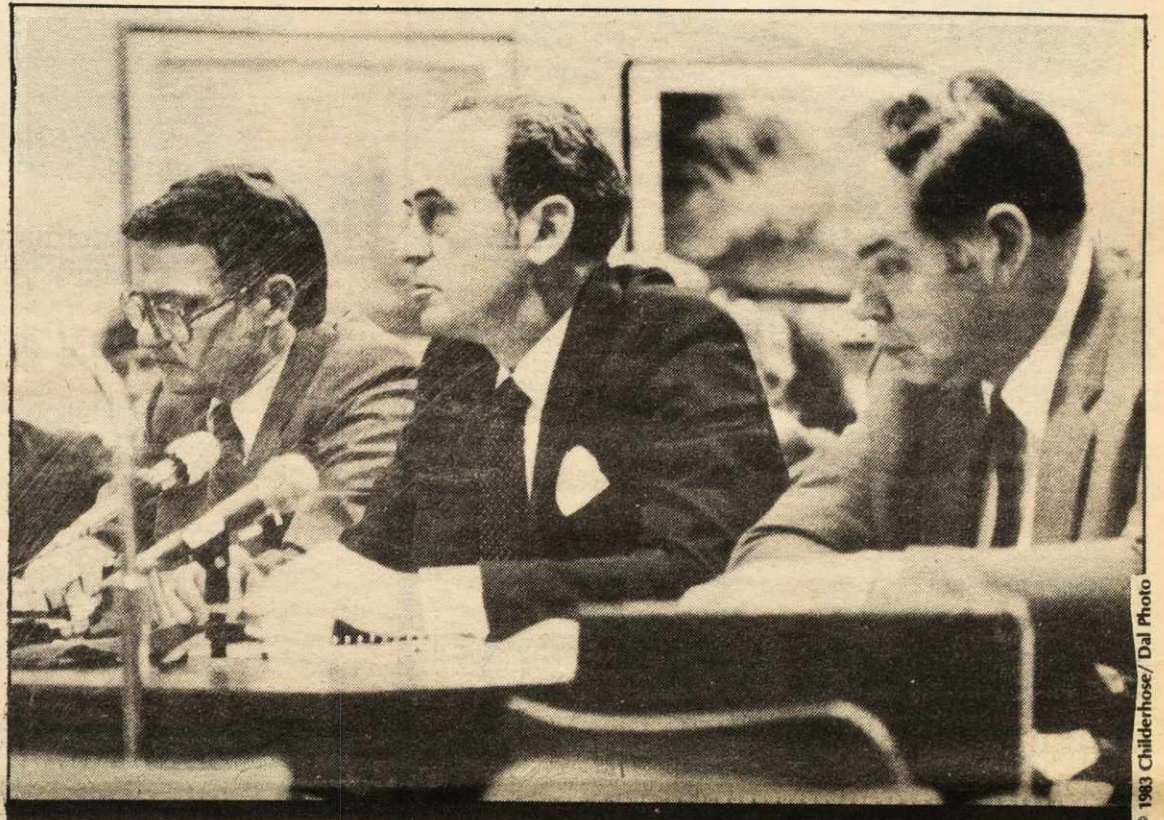
The hearing was structured in a question and answer format with commission members asking for clarification of certain points in the university's brief, and asking for feedback from Dal administration to other proposals submitted to the commission.

MacKay later responded to questions about the controversial Voluntary Planning proposal that universities be "privatized", with the students responsible for seeking funding from the government. "I think their recommendation was not thought through as effectively as I'd like to see," said MacKay. "I'd personally like to see a little more moving in that direction though. We'd save students and institutions from the impact of government decisions."

Commission members expressed concern that universities were not graduating students in the areas where jobs are available, for example in high technology.

MacKay defended the traditional liberal arts education, regardless of whether the student finds work. He sees job-oriented training not as the role of universities, but that of technical, non-academic institutions.

Members of the royal commission on post-secondary



Dalhousie fields questions from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Post-Secondary Education. From left to right Dr. Alastair Sinclair, VP Academic, university President Dr. Andrew MacKay, and Dr. Frank Jones, Senate chair.

education are Joan Gregson Evans, a local actress, Dr. William Shaw, former deputy minister of mines and energy and Rod MacLennan, a prominent member of the Halifax business community.

Former students beware: Dal moves to collect old debts

by Brian Cox

In an attempt to eliminate a three hundred thousand dollar student debt load, Dalhousie financial services handed over bill collecting responsibilities to an Atlantic collection agency, Credit Consultants of Dartmouth.

The debt load includes everything from outstanding tuition fees to delinquent university loans and library fines, said Dal Finance director Mike Wright. Some people are surprised to hear from the collection agency.

"Students leave school without bothering to withdraw, so their names are not deleted from our records," Wright said. "The records show this student as having outstanding tuition fees if their fees were not paid in full at the beginning of the academic

year, so this account is passed on for collection," he added.

The University will cancel the debt if the debtor can prove they did not attend Dal during the year or years for which they are being billed.

"If we're given proof of registration at another school, proof of full time employment or any valid reason why the student didn't come back, the debt will be cancelled," said Wright. In other cases it's just a matter of tracking the individual down.

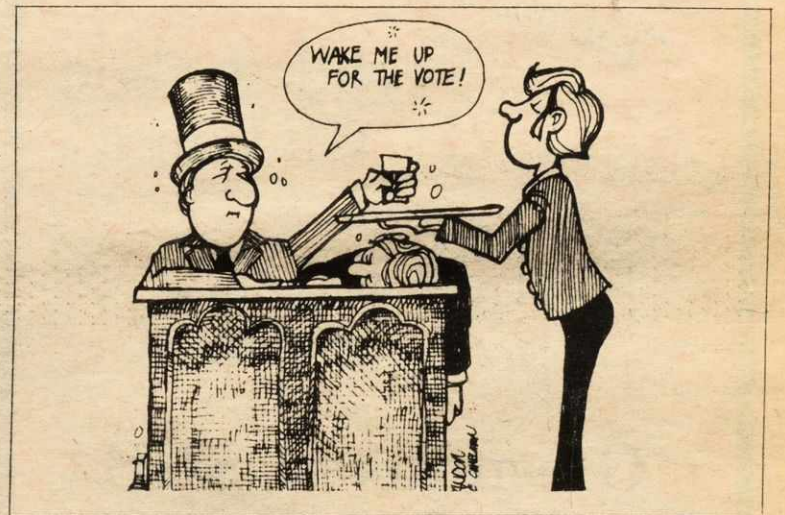
Ombudsman Kim Turner received inquiries from former students who have been contacted by the collection agency concerning outstanding debts at Dalhousie.

"Both cases involved students leaving university without follow-

ing the proper withdrawal procedure," said Turner. "The filling out of withdrawal forms when withdrawing from university is very important." She added, "It's unfortunate the university doesn't have a system for contacting students before referring their account to a collection agency."

This is the first year financial matters have been turned over to an outside agency (with a 20% recovery rate so far). Wright cited a tightened budget and poor economic times as the motive for the move. Debts reaching back three years to the present are now in the collection stage.

"We'll see how that goes before making plans to collect debts over three years old," said Wright.



DSU elections delayed

by C. Ricketts

The Dalhousie Student Union spring elections have been postponed until after the February break.

DSU President Tim Hill said the reason for the decision was a lack of publicity about candidate nominations, which were to have closed January 23.

The deadline for candidate nominations will remain open until further notice and it is anticipated that election campaigning will commence Feb. 27 after the break. Dates will be finalized at the upcoming Jan. 22 council meeting.

"We'd rather move the elec-

tions back than have an unfair election," said Hill. "Democracy can't function in an informational vacuum."

Hill said apart from one full-page ad in last week's Gazette there has been no public notification of the upcoming elections "and it's halfway through the nomination period."

Chief Returning Officer Michael Tilley will be tendering his resignation.

"It's unfortunate. The late elections will affect the ability of the next council to get its affairs straightened before taking office," said Hill.