

# news

## Committee commits to community

by Gazette Staff

Developments continue around Dalhousie's proposed Statement on Discriminatory Harassment. The draft statement was presented at a public forum in the Green Room on November 4th, 1992 (*Gazette* October 22, November 12) and has since sparked a growing dialogue within the university community. Articles have appeared in the *Gazette*, in *Dalhousie News*, and the *DFA Dialogue*, and public discussions have included a meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in December, and a meeting of the Dalhousie Faculty Association on January 13th.

Eric McKee, Vice President (Student Services) and chair of the ad hoc Committee to Develop a Policy on Racism and Sexism, says that the version of the policy presented in November gave rise to a fair amount of comment and controversy. "The committee has received a lot of feedback and will be meeting this week to decide what to take back to Senate."

Response has centred in a large part around a perceived conflict between the importance of maintain-

ing academic freedom, and the need to address the damaging effects of sexism, racism, homophobia, and all forms of discriminatory harassment. The quantity and nature of feedback has apparently produced a slight hold-up in the committee's timeframe. The proposed Statement, originally slated for presentation before Senate in January, will not be presented before February, although "March is more likely", says McKee.

"The fact that there's been a lot of debate is basically a good thing", he continued. Given the importance of the issues it addresses, McKee feels that this kind of policy requires a great deal of public interest and input.

The policy has also drawn attention from outside the Dalhousie community. Nina Butlin, the DSU representative on the six-member drafting committee, points out that "Other universities are aware that this draft policy is pending and have requested copies of it. It stands to be very influential."

Butlin also pointed out the necessity for students to remain aware of developments. "Students may not be

aware of the amount of resistance which exists against even discussing matters of discrimination, let alone the establishment of a policy to provide education and community response to them." Underlining differing perceptions of this policy, Butlin further indicated that "Students might view it as an obvious, necessary and timely step in the university's evolution. They should know, however, that the passing of this policy is not a *fait accompli* and

dialogue reveals that it faces a certain amount of resistance, notably among faculty."

Butlin sees one important aspect of the policy lying in its provision through education for on-going discussion of the kind the draft statement has begun. "The policy creates a space for this dialogue, and develops a forum for working out these important issues in the university community."

Commenting on the evolution of

the policy, McKee remarked that he feels the work of the committee is "at a point where some decisions need to be taken at a community level." Foreseeing further developments, he stated that "The committee is committed to completing its task and bringing it to some kind of conclusion", with possible changes to be brought to the policy in the near future.

## Chilly classroom continuim

by Gazette staff

The Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) Council of Representatives gathered for a lunch-time meeting open to all DFA members Weldon Library this Wednesday to talk about the Discriminatory Harassment Policy. Debate about the nature of DFA's response to the policy was rigorous.

Dr. Sue Sherwin, Chair of the ad hoc Committee to Develop a Policy

on Racism and Sexism was available to answer questions.

Concern was expressed when considering the committee's mandate to recommend action in situations whereby mediation has gone to formal investigation and the decision was made that the person was guilty of discrimination. Some felt the internal mechanism of dealing with this kind of complaints established by the policy was an important part of its function.

"Most agree that since we are a university, we have to protect academic interests," said Peter Edwards, a part-time instructor in the French department. "In a worst case scenario, I personally feel academic interests would be safer placed in the hands of a committee raised from within the university community than in the hands of a judicial panel struck under an outside mechanism such as the Human Rights Act."

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