

## Driving us up (against) a wall

Four years ago the mandatory use of seat belts on Nova Scotia highways became law. This legislation was designed to limit the incidence of disability or death resulting from auto accidents.

The purpose is indeed a noble one, but most citizens found the strategy for attaining it small-minded and restrictive. For months after the legislation was passed, landmark cases appeared in court citing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in order to counter the seat belt law. Despite public outcry, the wearing of seat belts is now a Canada-wide phenomenon. The courts found it within the mandates of the provincial transportation ministers to create such

### *The purpose is a noble one, but the strategy for attaining it is small-minded*

laws, and did not find that Canadian's rights were being impinged or restricted in any way by being forced to follow them.

On January 29 George Archibald, Nova Scotia's Transportation and Communications Minister, announced that the Department of Transportation and Communications will be holding public meetings concerning its proposed Graduated Driver Licensing Program. This week-old proposal has garnered considerable acclaim amongst government personnel.

Tom Bauld, Chair of the Provincial Health Council, sung its praises in a press release: "We know the tragic statistics about the number of people who are injured and killed in automobile accidents, and that all this injury and loss of life is preventable. The Council believes that a Graduated Driver Licensing Program would do a great deal to prevent highway carnage, which so often takes the life of young and inexperienced drivers."

The extent to which "young and inexperienced drivers" are going to be discriminated against is manifest in the proposal's goals: for the first year after obtaining a driver's license (not a beginner's license), the driver is only allowed on the road after dark with one passenger in the car, that one being a 'mature licensed driver'. There is no such thing as a legal limit (.08) for first year drivers, any alcohol in the bloodstream is grounds for police to take action (zero tolerance). After one year of driving with this bogus license, the young driver must take a course and another test from the Registry of Motor Vehicles in order to be trusted with adult driving privileges.

Go to the blue pages in the back of the phone book and look up "Department of Transportation and Communications" in the provincial/federal section. Call them up and demand a schedule of dates and places for the public forums announced by George Archibald. Then show up at one of them and bring rotten tomatoes, because this kind of blind discrimination can only get worse.

Jennifer Beck

## The calm in the eye of the maelstrom

When I was in high school I was hungry for an ideology to which I could cling and I rigorously searched for labels which, I ironically thought, would proclaim my individuality. I proceeded to wrap my intellect around Lenin and Marx; Romanticism flowed through my ventricles while anarchy and existentialism penetrated the rebellious and radical parts of my soul. As I began to realize that the fundamental ideas of my newly found 'enlightenment' clearly conflicted with each other, I became excited to begin my 'higher education' where my soul, my heart and my intellect could merge and find a common truth.

This was my starting point for my studies in philosophy. After attending but a month of my philosophy 1000 class, I felt as if a hurricane had swept through my brain and left a scattering of paradoxes and inconsistent propositions whose rationalization seemed utterly impossible.

Like many students, I entered my second year in a very vulnerable position. Alongside developing skills of argumentation and reason, I was still yearning to develop the ideological foundations from which I could build a sophisticated, passionate and sound philosophy. Sitting in class amongst dozens of fellow 'tabulae rasa', I quickly realized how strong an influence the attitudes of the idolator at the front of the class would have. This raised the inevitable question of which opinions would be contributing to the sculpting of our minds.

Anyone who is aware of the recent media attention devoted towards the debate over the proposed anti-discrimination policy at Dalhousie University should be somewhat familiar with the polarity in attitudes betwixt many members of the university faculty. Being a student in the philosophy department, I would have to be immune to any sensory stimulus if I did not notice that some members of that faculty are becoming increasingly involved in this debate, both in the media and in academic forums.

I have undoubtedly benefited from the open and vigorous discussion between my mentors. Naive argumentation and purely emotionally based proclamations will not succeed amongst philosophers. I have heard compelling and persuasive arguments from the supposed 'left', and, for the first time, I have been exposed to non-rhetorical, question raising replies from the 'right'.

Had I been studying in a department which only represented one political or ideological viewpoint, I would not have had this rare opportunity to develop well grounded and not unjustly-biased views on many relevant topics. Moreover, I appreciate the fact that I can observe and absorb intelligent discourse on subjects which are often discussed amongst those who are already in agreement.

I am fortunate that the professors in the philosophy department are extremely accessible to their students. It is wonderful that I can debate such subjects as Dinesh D'souza, Camille

Paglia and the virtues of Libertarianism with one professor, and then all I have to do is walk across a lounge to discuss Peter Singer, Iris Marion-Young and the advantages of Socialism with another.

I have access to a variety of brilliant minds, and their diverse and often conflicting opinions supply an invaluable part of my education. After all, questioning, evaluating and discovering truth are the self-proclaimed purposes of higher education. I feel sorry for those people whose minds have been systematically closed by academic apathy or artificial representations of universal assent.

The greatest crime against enlightenment is committed by those who attempt to close discourse. How can we hope to find wisdom and truth when the paths which might lead us there are blocked by those who prefer to ignore, rather than justify rejecting or refuting ignorant, invalid or even dangerous opinions?

It is exciting to be involved in this on going debate and the disagreement amongst those in the philosophy department seems to be inspiring the sort of open and contemplative thought from which one can truly learn. Although I don't agree with everything I have been hearing, for the first time I feel as if I am learning to ask the right questions and, in turn, my intellectual chaos may finally be subsiding.

Suzu Kovinsky

## LETTERS

The Dalhousie Gazette welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication. Letters may be submitted on Mac or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

### Headlines should swim not stink!

To the editor:

As a member of the Dalhousie University swim team, I was shocked and disappointed when I turned to the sports section of last week's Gazette. The individual at the Gazette who thought the headline "Women swim but men sink" was appropriate for John Yip's positive article about the swim team's performance at Acadia was dead wrong. While the headline strongly reflected a swimming theme, which was creative, it did not accurately reflect the men's team showing.

Two members of the team swam well enough to meet the CIAU standards and will attend the national championships in March. Due to these performances and the tremendous effort on the part of the whole men's team, the Dal men were able to come as close to the UNB men's team as they have been in two years. These achievements were included in the article but were not alluded to in the headline. Article headlines tend to stick in the mind of a reader and this one only served to belittle what the men's team achieved. During the last weeks before a close championship meet, this type of en-

couragement is not what the men's team needed or deserved.

On behalf of the Varsity swim team, I expect greater support from Dalhousie's own newspaper as we head into the AUA finals that could bring two championship titles to our university.

Janet Tingley

Women's Varsity Swimming

### Better compared to what?

To the editor:

Having attended last week's panel on Political Correctness, I feel compelled to contribute my own experience, which has been contrary to Bob Martin's expressed opinion that Dalhousie is the least discriminatory of the major Canadian institutions.

Before I came out as a lesbian, I received a lot of support from professors and teachers academically. My ideas were praised and I was unafraid to voice my opinions. Since I came out, both as a lesbian and a feminist, there have been both subtle and not-so-subtle changes in attitudes toward me and in the classroom environment in general.

Having a perspective that does not uncritically accept the status quo means that I spend my classtime listening to

lecturers who seem oblivious to the fact that only a very few individuals fit the white, middle-class, heterosexual and male-defined norms that are used to develop the paradigms we speak of in my discipline. Everyone else is classified as somehow deviant.

On the occasions I have been compelled to voice my opinion as a member of "deviant" groups, the classroom atmosphere has become uncomfortable, and I have been told that my criticisms reveal that I "don't understand". Furthermore, in the weeks following one of my attempts to speak up as a lesbian, I received several harassing and threatening phone calls, some of which referred specifically to myself and my sexual orientation.

I have received some support both from individual faculty members, the Sexual Harassment committee and the Halifax Police Department. However, what I would like to see is a commitment from Dalhousie that states specifically that this sort of classroom atmosphere is not to be tolerated. In my view, the proposed Discriminatory Harassment Policy would be a big step toward ensuring that such incidents no longer occur. I am not asking for "political correctness", whatever that may be. I am only asking for the right to voice my opinions in an academic setting without fear.

B. Bunting

## the Gazette

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