

# Why is Dalhousie undisciplined?

BY DANIEL CLARK

One of my duties as a student Senate representative is to sit as an alternate on the Senate Discipline Committee. This is the organization that is responsible for listening to complaints concerning students, and assessing whether they are valid. We then assign a punishment where we deem it appropriate.

I cannot discuss actual cases as they are deemed confidential, and are always handled with the utmost care and consideration. In my tenure as a Senator I have had occasion to sit in on seven cases, and with only one exception, it never ceases to amaze me how blatant most of these cases are.

The majority of cases heard by the Committee deal with plagiarism. The message does not seem

to be reaching the students that most plagiarism cases are caught. It seems to me that Dalhousie professors, in general, take great pride in making sure that whatever mark they assign is deserved.

In one instance a professor back-checked all of the student's bibliographical references because the paper seemed to be just too good for the student. Sure enough he had plagiarised a large part of

another person's analysis.

We take our job on this committee very seriously. If anything, we tend to be too lenient. We are always expressing concern about the student's future, and how whatever punishment we assess could affect it. If at all possible we try to discipline a student in such a way so that they have to rectify the mistake.

I have never heard of a repeat offender at Senate Discipline (although I am sure that it has happened), and I can only hope that an experience before our committee has taught the student not only the impossibility of getting away with the offence, but how committing the offence never actually helps them.

There was one case where a student plagiarised most of an essay from one book, but did it so badly that he would probably have failed the assignment anyway. To a certain degree I am glad to note that many of these offenses are ill-conceived, and are wrought from pressure rather than malice. This does not excuse it, but I hope Dal

students would be smart enough not to consider these practices as a road to a degree.

I want to congratulate the hard work of the Student Advocates who offer superb counselling in the face of tough issues. They are a more pure version of the standard on which lawyers are based. Their job is to make sure that the student is properly represented, does not get abused by the system, and has a fair chance to defend himself.

The hardest thing I ever had to do on this Committee was to suspend a student whose actions had not only been blatantly inappropriate, but may have also caused harm to the individual's fellow students. I have yet to have regrets about a decision the Committee has come to. However, in several cases I could not help but wonder if we are creating a society where academic achievement is standard, and a lack of that achievement restricts one's potential. We are in fact driving our friends, family, and even ourselves to more drastic measures; just so that we can "break even".



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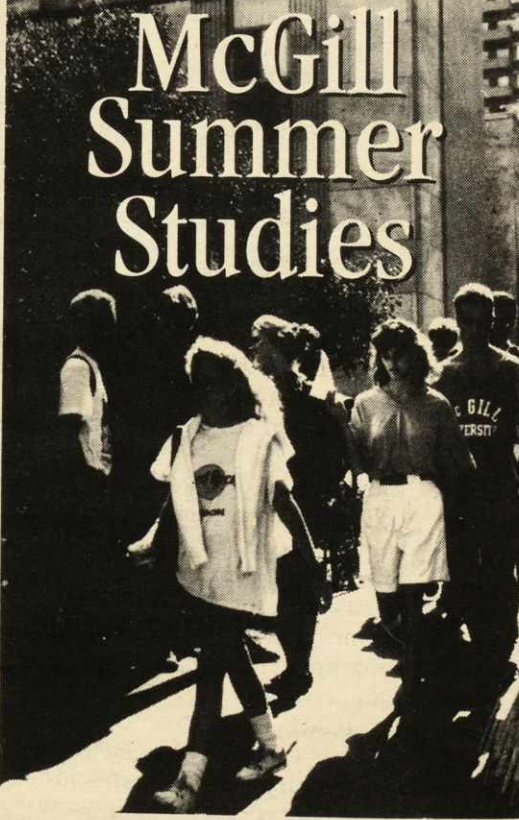
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