

# EDITORIAL

## Gazette Questionnaire catches us with pants down

After all the finger pointing we've done this year, it's only fair that you have an opportunity to do the same. That was the purpose of the questionnaire we printed in the Gazette two weeks ago. And, as true justice would have it, fingers were pointed right back at us in our noses, our eyes, our ears, and especially our mouths.

As several students pointed out, the format of the questionnaire was designed to encourage criticism more than praise but, even so, when the results were finally out several major problems with the Gazette had become clear. The most stunning rebuke came from our coverage of non-student council, non-political student activities on campus. A whopping 71.7 percent of respondents said we covered different faculties poorly, while 69.4 percent complained that our coverage of societies on campus was poor. Fifty-five percent registered their complaint that we cover student activities on campus poorly. Only 10.5 percent indicated they are satisfied with the paper as it is now.

These criticisms, needless to say, hit home. After all, we are a student paper, one which should be primarily concerned with student activities, and charges that we are not covering them are tantamount to say we are not doing our job. Our statistics mirrored the comments we received in the questionnaires: over and over again whether they damned us or they praised us, students said we need to pay more attention to student activities.

A little later we'll explain how we'll try to deal with this major problem, for no let it suffice that we do recognize it as students' chief concern. Fortunately for us, not all was bad. Sixty-seven percent of Dalhousie students said it would make a difference to them if the Gazette ceased publication (this was about the same degree of support Joe Clark received in his recent leadership review). Eighty-nine percent said our layout and design is good or fair and 74.5 percent said our entertainment coverage is good or fair. We also received a good support for our reportage of sports and student issues.

While it is difficult to make generalizations about the preferences of faculties, there were some notable surprises. The Dalhousie Engineers, a faculty which has a long history of Gazette bashing, was actually nice to us. While they weren't big on our reporting of international issues or our entertainment section, a higher than average 70.5 percent said we do make a difference to them. And whether they like us or lump us they read a higher percentage of the Gazette's various departments than does faculty. Our biggest enemies now prove to be Medicine where a full 50 percent of those



responding virtually said they wouldn't blink an eye if we went down the drink.

The constructive comments and suggestions were helpful. It was pointed out that our entertainment section has too many album and movie reviews (unfortunately they're easiest for our writers to do) and that many of our stories tend to be long on words and short on graphics and photographs. Stories in German, French and Spanish were suggested, as were crossword puzzles. Someone asked for "more snappy stories" and another respondent who

complimented our coverage of student issues, recommended we "tie" them in more to the average student. "More women's basketball", less a schedule for weekly intersarsity sports and less "golly gee, Dal's good", were messages to our sports department. "More people", "more ordinary folk" were comments expressing the wishes of many students.

Suggestions to do this included background features on commonly used Dal services like the Grawood, Pharos, the Killam Library and different professors. Photo interviews with the Logan

brothers, the outgoing Gazette editor (shudder) and the president of Canadian University Press were suggested. Specific ideas like these help us more than unfocused criticism.

Many respondents displayed a flair for pizzaz and vitriol few of our own writers possess. "Cut the shit and keep it simple", commanded one terse comment. "The great tuition debate has been covered from every angle and it's as dead as the constitutional "crisis", observed one reader, rightfully a little satiated with this aspect of our coverage. (He or she didn't downplay the problem of the high cost of tuition, however). "More engineering garbage", pleaded one good time cowboy, while another concluded "it's all shit". "Your audience is waiting, and waiting, and waiting... Use your

muscle for Christ's sake!", advocated a proponent of tough journalism. The Gazette directs itself to "Communists and Fags" wrote one student, apparently as intolerant about other people's sexuality as he or she is ignorant of political science. A more perceptive comment ran as follows: "Much of the Gazette's

international coverage is anti-big business, third world pro-socialist. I'm not a red neck and I can appreciate the danger of multinationals and the like but there are two sides to a story. I think you as a paper fall short in this respect." This last point is well taken, however, don't we get enough of the reverse in our commercial media? Encouragement finally came from respondents like the student who, after a battery of negative comments, implored us to "Keep on truckin".

We intend to bear all of the above criticisms and suggestions in mind. Give the lack of time and resources a paper staff of student volunteers has, many of our mistakes, omissions and imperfections are inevitable. Nevertheless, some of our faults, particularly our lack of student activities coverage, are correctable. You're right to point your finger at us on many things and we accept the criticism. In conclusion, however, we'll throw the ball back in your court. If there's something happening on campus that you want us to write about, call or come up and see us on the 3rd floor of the SUB. And if you really want to improve the paper, join it. It's open to all students and, God knows, we can sure use the help.

**the Dalhousie  
Gazette**

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