

Are professors being helpful or self-serving?

Discussing the labour dispute in class

BY BRIANNE JOHNSTON
AND GREG MCFARLANE

With a strike looming, many professors are using class time to inform students about the negotiations and, generally, students seem willing to listen.

With the potential loss of class time after Mar. 24, you might think professors and students would want to cram as much work in as possible. However, most students seem to appreciate the professors' updates on negotiations.

Johannes Wheeldon, a second-year political science student, believes that due to the impact a strike would have on students, professors should discuss the issues in class.

"If they're in a position where it will directly affect us to the point that it will, it does little harm to take ten minutes out of a class or an hour out of one class throughout the term to discuss something that is so important to everyone," he said.

Wheeldon admits that students are probably getting a biased view from professors, but he would still like to hear their side.

"At least [professors] inform us somewhat. I'd rather be informed halfway than not informed at all. And it gives us

an opportunity to ask questions that we want."

Logan Ward, another Dalhousie student, echoes Wheeldon's sentiments. He feels that because of the lack of information he is getting from the administration, the couple minutes a day his professors take are well worth it.

"I wouldn't know much about the [faculty dispute] otherwise, besides hearsay, so I'd like to hear their position.

"I don't hear much from [the administration]. I'm sure that if you go ask they would tell you more, but the profs and students are the only way you hear about it."

For most students, professors are their only source of information. They interact with professors daily and rarely, if ever, take the time to talk to administrators. While the nature of this situation allows professors a greater opportunity to talk to students about a strike, it also gives them an up-front look at the problems facing students.

"Management aren't in the classroom. They don't teach," said English professor Andy Wainwright. "They manage money. That's what they do. Sometimes they do it well and sometimes they obviously don't do it well."

The fact that many students feel that management is so far removed means student

naturally feel closer to professors.

"Students need to have as much information as they can," Wainwright said.

"Whatever it is I say to students has an impact within a particular period of time. They go outside of that classroom and they get a whole lot of other information."

But Dalhousie Student Union [DSU] President Chris Adams says that professors should be careful when discussing the strike in class.

"The reason I am most hesitant about the professors is because, with their power as teachers, sometimes misinformation is promoted in classrooms; and maybe that isn't the fault of professors," Adams said.

"I know some classes where a significant amount of time has been taken by the faculty to discuss the issue...but professors have to understand...some students would feel intimidated to ask a professor to stop talking about this sort of thing in class or say, 'this information is wrong or biased'."

Judith Thompson, an adjunct professor in the English Department, has not discussed the strike in class because of the peculiar situation that she finds herself in. Although she teaches courses at Dal, she is paid by King's and is therefore

not a member of the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA).

"I haven't talked about [the strike] because I don't exactly know [what I'm going to do]. I have to consult with other members of joint faculty...my situation is a very difficult one."

Although she doesn't talk about the strike in her classes, she does see how classroom discussion could have both positive and negative affects.

"I don't think it's necessarily appropriate for people to be engaging in demagoguery in class, but I don't suppose that many people are actually doing that," Thompson said. "I believe that one does spend time in classes...trying to link what they are doing to broader issues outside the class."

However, some people on campus do believe that students and faculty should be on the same side.

"The alliance should be between students and faculty — that is what the quality of the university is based on," Wainwright said. "Why should they be split when faculty is saying 'there is something very wrong here'?"

Wheeldon agrees.

"It is in our best interests to have professors that are happy, professors that are being paid well, professors that are being represented and have a good arrangement with the Board of

Governors," he said.

"I simply don't believe that the money is not there; the board is under mismanagement. It is expensive to run this university, but if you want to have a major institution you have to pay for it."

Adams, on the other hand, prefers to be critical of both the DFA and the administration.

"Both sides are using the students as bargaining chips," he said. "They're saying that, 'hey, we're interested in students...we're looking out for the best interests of students.' I would disagree."

"They're looking out for their own interests. [The DFA] is saying that they will go out on strike if they do not receive what they've been asking for. [The administration] is saying that our tuition will go up exponentially or we'll have cuts to other services, and this is definitely detrimental to students."

Krista Warnica, a third-year statistics student, believes that throughout everything students are the ones who are ultimately going to suffer.

"[We're] victims. We should be allowed to be among the negotiations," she said.

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WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW: YOUR RIGHTS DURING A STRIKE OR LOCKOUT

Wondering whether you still have to go to class during a strike? What about that big essay that's due? This is not the first time the university and the professors have gone head to head, and students have rights in the event of a strike or lockout.

Some professors have been pushing assignment dates forward in order to get work marked in the event of a strike. However, according to the Academic Regulations in the 1997/98 Dalhousie Calendar, professors have no right to do so without the approval of the class.

Section 18.1 of the Academic Regulations state: "any changes to the course outline which affect assessment components, the weight of individual assessment components, or examination requirements with a value of ten percent or more must have the approval of at least two-thirds of enrolled students in order to be valid."

In the event of a strike, Senate adopted resolutions in Oct. 1988 affirming that:

1. Any [academic] regulations requiring attendance at classes and participation in examinations or tests shall not be enforced for the duration of any legal strike [or lockout];
2. Students have the right to cross or not to cross picket lines during a legal strike [or lockout] without any formal academic penalty.

And in 1991, Senate adopted the general principle that no student be adversely affected by missing a deadline because of a strike or lockout.

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