

# Dalhousie Student Union

## General Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 23, 2014 – Dalhousie Student Union Building, Room 303

### 1. ROLL CALL

Quorum was determined to be present.

### 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Chair Andrew Christofi explained how the motion to elect the Vice President (Finance and Operations) had reached the General Meeting: Board of Governors Representative John Hutton gave notice on September 23; it was reviewed by the Board of Operations on October 2; and was referred to the General Meeting by council on October 8.

#### MOTION TO LIMIT DEBATE

**Be it resolved that** debate on the motion be limited to 30 minutes.

**Moved:** Jenn Nowoselski **Seconded:** Jomel Varghese

#### MOTION TO LIMIT DEBATE CARRIES

William Coney asked why no agenda was formally posted.

Chair Christofi explained that in order to add something to the agenda, 24 hours notice must be sent to the Chair. Chair has not received any emails.

#### MOTION 2015-02-25: A01

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the agenda be adopted as circulated.

#### MOTION 2015-02-25: A02

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the agenda be amended to include a discussion on Divestment from fossil fuels as the first item.

**Moved:** Jeremy Banks **Seconded:** Scott Rairdan

#### MOTION 2015-02-25: A02: CARRIED

#### MOTION 2015-02-25: A01 CARRIED

### 3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### A. Divestment from Fossil Fuels

Jeremy Banks said that he works with Divest Dal and thinks the DSU should divest from fossil fuels. He said he wonders why it is questioned, since it makes sense

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economically, socially and environmentally. He also highlighted that there are a number of people at the meeting who agree.

John Hutton said as Board of Governors representative, he had worked with Divest Dal. He said there are two questions of divestment: Should Dalhousie divest? And Should the DSU divest? Tonight, the meeting is discussing the second question. Hutton said that there is no evidence that divesting would put us at financial risk. It is not a big risky thing; lots of other people where the DSU can invest including renewable energy. Hutton explained this is a moral question: Should we be investing in things that are hurting our future? He added that we need to do something about climate change and use every tool in the toolbox and divestment is one of those.

Jessica said that if we do not take a stand now and change our future, there will be no future. She added that we have the resources for renewable and sustainable energy. said that there are different types of companies: some are just for money and some give and receive. You cant create a friendship on greed and dependence. He said the DSU should divest and stop thinking about bank accounts.

James said that Divest Dal had engaged 1800 students at Dal and garnered a lot of support. He thinks the DSU could make a really strong stand here. Divestment as a tactic is a tried and true path that has been proven. Dalhousie can be the first university to divest and the DSU can really be the key piece to influencing the University.

Taylor Quinn provided some history of the DSU and this issue. There was a project called seed having those sorts of conversations. He said he would like to make a call of action to make a post on the DSU website in the next two weeks to rekindle that group.

Ramz Aziz said the DSU is strongly committed to divestment. He said the Executives is doing divestment policy statements and committing to getting this through DSU council, hopefully by November 25. He said we need to keep pressure at the Board of Governors.

Kaitlynn Lowe asked what is an approximate ideal timeline, and what do we need from students?

Ramz Aziz said the policy should be edited in the next week. It's all about how quickly council can make a decision. He said students should be in touch with your elected reps and show up at the November 25<sup>th</sup> meeting

Josh said that he doesn't know a whole lot about divestment; can anyone speak on alternatives, just where that money would go.

### **MOTION TO EXTEND DEBATE**

**Be it resolved that** the discussion by extended by 5 minutes.

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**Moved:** Josh **Seconded:** Maxwell

### **MOTION TO LIMIT DEBATE CARRIES**

William Coney abstains

Jeremy said that when divestment was on the menu, this room was packed: people care about divestment.

Peter said we had a definition of divestment, but asked if there can be a definition of what divest is? Is it just to remove investment?

Jeremy said yes.

Christine asked if there are any examples of the companies Dal is currently invested in.

James said Sincrew, Sancore, every tar sands company as well as weapons manufacturers.

Mohammed said that this is a university; it should be promoting a bright future. He said Divest Dal is very passionate and commended their work.

Grailing said we could put the money into renewable energy, or whatever we'd like to.

Yazan Matarieh asked how the Executives will publicize when the vote will be?

Ramz Aziz answered: social media, email, posters, gazette: the usual.

### **4. MOTIONS SERVED WITH NOTICE**

#### **A. Motion to elect the Vice President (Finance and Operations)**

##### **MOTION 2015-02-25 N01**

Whereas the Dalhousie Student Union is a democratic, membership-based organization accountable to students; and

Whereas Dalhousie students pay annual membership dues to the DSU; and

Whereas the Dalhousie Student Union's Vice-President (Finance & Operations) is appointed by Council at the recommendation of the Nominating Committee, rather than in a general election of the membership; and

Whereas the Vice-President (Finance & Operations) makes political decisions regularly and has voting power in the DSU Executive and Council; and

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Whereas most student unions across Canada elect their VPFO or equivalent for a similar set of responsibilities;

Be it resolved that the Constitution be amended as follows:

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- 1) Addition of the following to Section 2 of By-law IV – The Council (Members of Council elected by membership):
  2. Council shall include the following people, who must be members of the union at the time of their election and during their term of office, and who shall be elected by the membership at large:
    - a) the President
    - b) the Vice President (Academic and External)
    - c) the Vice President (Internal)
    - d) the Vice President (Student Life)
    - e) The Vice President (Finance and Operations)
    - f) two (2) student members of the Board of Governors; and
    - g) three (3) student members at large of the Senate.

2) The deletion of the following from Section 3 of By-law IV – The Council (Members of Council appointed by Council):

3. Council shall also include the following people, who must be members of the Union at the time of their election and during their term of office:

- a) ~~Vice President (Finance and Operations) who shall be appointed by the outgoing Council~~

and subsequent re-lettering

**Moved:** John Hutton **Seconded:** Dylan Letendre

Hannah Klug requests a count for quorum

Chair Christofi declares there is not have quorum, but there can still be a discussion.

John Hutton said that this motion is about promoting student democracy, transparency, recognizing that the VPFO holds power and must be accountable. Right now, the VPFO is selected by council though a nominating committee; goes through interviews and a crew of insiders pick whose best and puts it to 25 individuals. Hutton said the DSU can do better.

Hutton explains that in the past, the VPFO was not elected because the role required certain experience, so the process required technical rigor. The current process lacks that technical rigor. For example, if the application asks questions such as: what was your most recent supervisors name and what would they say are your greatest strengths/weaknesses? Most application questions are not technical, only a few technical questions.

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Hutton said that elections do not lead to chaos, students can be trusted to elect someone fitting. He said almost all schools elect their VPFO and the DSU stands out as non-democratic. We have a great pool of students; we are not lacking adequate candidates for the job. He said that the DSU can make the VPFO truly representative by making it elected through general elections.

Yazan Matarieh said that the the biggest question here is whether or not an elected person can handle the technical parts of this job? He said we can trust students, but also that it is his understanding that the VPFO supervises the staff handling the budget. The VPFO should be the person giving the students voices, and adding accountability to that supervision.

Jacqueline Skiptunis asked about who had an opinion about divesting from fossil fuels; you think our money should be going in the right place. She said money is political. If students don't vote for people handling our money, we're not taking control of this money. Students pay money every year. She said students should put ourselves in the position where you have some control by electing the VPFO.

Kaitlynnne Lowe gave credit to Jacqueline Skiptunis and Taylor Quinn for doing the research to bring forward the motion. She said the VPFO represents all students regardless of how they are chosen. They embody us in their actions and decisions. The VPFO isn't just responsible for the budget and auditing, they also sit on committees such as grants committee. Lower said if you don't elect someone who shares your views about our money – you lose out on so much.

Peter said he is speaking from a position of some naivety, but asks if the VPFO is elected through council, if we cant trust them why are we electing council in the first place? Council is representative of the student body, it doesn't seem to feel like a gang of insiders.

Mohammed said that one of the things is whether or not they are elected, the VPFO does have a vote on behalf of the student union. Whether they have background or not- they should campaign on that. We should be able to trust our representatives and they should have student support to represent students properly. He said that he has heard a lot of students say that they don't have faith in the DSU anymore and he wants the students to have faith in their student union once again.

Jessica says that she has been involved in dsu for a number of years. She believes in the DSU. The elected members represent the student body. Jessica said she was honored to be on council and took a lot of pride and talked about transparency. To have the VPFO elected is very transparent – all Executives would be elected. Jessica said there has been controversy on why we shouldn't have it be elected, but the DSU has a department; we have staff; we have chartered accountant. Having the vpfo to be able to reach out to students and not be stuck in an office is a very good thing

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Hannah Klug said she has some concerns. She said it is important that there is strong technical background. Klug said that in a general election someone who has personable skills is more likely to get voted rather than who has the best technical skills. She explained that just because the position isn't elected, doesn't mean students have no say on where the money goes.

William Coney said he was wondering with all the talk of electing the VPFO, why is this separate from issues facing any of the other Execs being elected? Shouldn't every position be elected?

Mabub Rahma said that he was elected by a process through the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee did not nominate him, but the council voted for him. He said he is happy to have the job but he thinks it should be elected by the general membership. After meeting with other Executives, throughout the country he has found out that they are elected. It is easier to convince 40 people than 18,000 people.

Rahman said he is not trying to make the next VPFO's life hard, but to make sure it's a good person that is handling the money. It is important to know what are that person's priorities. The DSU has a good accounting department with good staff. He said that if we make this move, it will still run smoothly and show that the DSU is a pure democratic institution.

### **MOTION TO EXTEND DEBATE**

**Be it resolved that** the debate be extended by 10 minutes.

**Moved:** Yazan Matarieh **Seconded:** Mohammed

Chair Andrew Christofi said we do not have quorum.

William Coney said we are not able to vote.

Chair Andrew Christofi said the constitution permits him to adjourn or recess for 15 minutes.

Michael Davies-Cole said we don't have to end as the debate is a forum.

Jenn Nowoselski asked if we continue in the mode of a forum?

Chair Andrew Christofi said the forum could continue for 5 more minutes and then there should be a recess to get more people.

Yazan Matarieh spoke to the issue that was raised about if an elected VPFO can handle technical stuff. He said that if you look at what they do now, they just supervise. They make sure that the people doing the technical processes can handle it. Matarieh thinks

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that students should be able to have a say in that; students cannot settle for a minimal form of representation.

Michael Davies-Cole said he was amazed there was a position that wasn't voted in on the Executive. To address questions about popularity, Davies-Cole said that there can be rules where they must have background. He said all positions must be voted for.

Ali Caledine said that she is speaking as Chair of the Board of Operations and in her personal opinion. She said this motion was discussed at the Board of Operations and we recommended that council refer it to a General Meeting. The Board of Operations also looked over a vetting process, to make sure the VPFO candidates were truly qualified. The Board of Operations decided to recommend to instigate a process where candidates would be interviewed; no one would be barred from running but there would be a document published to show if they have that technical knowledge.

Caledine said personally, she never understood why this isn't a position that is elected. She said the current VPFO is making so many important and fundamental changes to our union. The VPFO needs to empower students; it is inherently political and we should vote them in.

**The meeting recessed for 10 minutes.**

### **MOTION TO LIMIT DEBATE**

**Be it resolved that** debate on the motion be limited to a 3 minute summary by the mover of the motion and three speakers in opposition with 90 second speaking times.

**Moved:** Kaitlynnne Lowe **Seconded:** Joe

### **MOTION TO LIMIT DEBATE CARRIES**

William Coney dissents.

John Hutton said that what we are voting on is if the VPFO should be elected by the general membership or voted on by council. The VPFO has the highest level of power about what money should be spent. This is a very important decision. It is normally done through the Nominative Committee.

Hutton said the VPFO should always have technical experience, but the current process does not guarantee that. He said it is an inherently political position and it should be elected

Hannah Klug said that while it's important that student voices are heard, due to the technical part of this role, there should be someone who understands that technical aspect. She said it is not hard to make mistakes in a budget. She thinks going through the

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Nominating Committee lets people ask specific questions on the candidates' experience. A candidate may just be voted for due to good campaigning and I don't think that's enough for the VPFO selection.

William Coney said that he is morally in agreement to this policy, but his current objection is that this not how an General Meeting should happen, so that's why he is objecting to a motion.

Peter said that one of the most salient points of the debate is that as an appointed official they are not accountable to the students. Many of the students on council represent certain students. Some are faculty representatives to ensure that this isn't insiders. Councillors are who we have elected to make decisions. It's not a cut and dry issue

### **MOTION 2015-02-25 N01 CARRIED**

Hannah Klug, William Coney, Anthony, and Hma Merdan dissent.

### **5. QUESTION AND ANSWER**

Mohammed said he doesn't know who to go to when were trying to organize society events. We booked through the dsu and got crossbooked.

Jenn Nowoselski said that this is her responsibility. If you book a room in the SUB, the DSU has control, but if it's in another building its through the University. She said the Executive can advocate on your behalf to help talk to the right people to make sure that doesn't happen again.

Kaitlynne Lowe asked all the Executives: what is the biggest obstacle you've faced this semester?

Ramz Aziz said that one of the biggest obstacles is relying on certain staff members getting things finished in a timely and detailed fashion.

Mabuber Rahmna said there is no biggest challenge; he wishes he could help people more.

Jenn Nowoselski said that her biggest obstable is having supportive staff members that are reliable.

Jaqueline said that her biggest obstacle is prioritizing and time management.

William Coney said he is just wondering with how things are happening. We established an accesability office and I am wondering whats happening with it, as he hasn't heard anything on it.

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Jenn Nowoselski explained that we have two staff members for the Equity and Accessibility Office. They organize regular anti-oppression training. Held a panel on rape culture. The Equity and Accessibility office is looking to organize a far-reaching campaign like last year. They are also working on a grievance process right now.

Michael Davies-Cole asked how much they have brought in groups and organizations involving different ethnicities.

Jenn Nowoselski said she is not sure on the number. In terms of grievances, she is not sure how many involve issues of race or ethnicity.

Michael said that the people holding positions are both Caucasian, do you know who they've approached?

Jenn Nowoselski said she does not know and apologized.

Jacqueline asked if anyone has any questions about what just happened.

Ali Calledine said she is still processing that procedure. She thinks there were good things and bad things, but there were not enough bad things. Calledine said that there are still a large amount of students who don't know what's going on. We need the Executives to get out there to communicate the decisions that have been made.

Yazan Matarieh said that last year voter turnout was 11 per cent and quorum was an issue today. There is an overwhelming problem with this; what is the exec planning to do about that?

Ramz Aziz said that our strategy is to start early; should be grassroots, there is so much vibrancy during elections. Starting that earlier, so it's not just one week of that vibrancy. He said they are trying to make it an event- a festival to hype up elections.

Mabuber Rahman said that we have a council-appointed Chief Returning Officer (CRO) and we have lost of time to plan the election. In the last two years, more than half of the election budget was not spent.

Jevin said that he wanted to point out one thing out here today that approach is a key thing, as far as educating students. You can't make it seem like you are lecturing students. Important to not just give someone a piece of paper; utilize word of mouth.

Mohammed said that O-Week is huge. The DSU should be advertised more. He said he just thought it was this building. Important to advertise the DSU during the key moments. You remember the big events

Ramz Aziz said that this is a great idea. Would be good to plan to do that next year.

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Jesse asked what happened to the trans issue committee and preferred name policy for students?

Ramz said that John Hutton would speak to that.

John Hutton said that last winter there was a motion to create a trans issue committee so issues could be addressed in a more formal way. Having non-trans people on council making decisions about trans issues makes no sense.

Ramz Aziz spoke with the DalOUT rep and he is drafting a terms of reference for that committee.

Hannah Klug said that for elections, the Elections Committee scheduled class talks last year and they didn't show up; can we make sure they show up?

Ramz Aziz said that there needs to be some way to hold accountability for candidates.

Jenn Nowoselski said she tried to do class talks on Sexton Campus, but they were all cancelled last minute. She thinks it's a much bigger conversation with faculty and what it looks like to have those presentations.

Peter said that if you're concerned about people not showing up, it's an accountability issue.

Jaqueline Skiptunis said there should be conversations, but it also doesn't represent the DSU as they are just candidates.

Ali Celledine said that in discussion how to outreach to students about DSU, it is worth recognizing that there isn't a single person on Executive not doing an incredible job.

Jacqueline said it is very important to criticize. You come up with solution, but invite criticism in the form of saying "this is what you should do about it." She said people should be critical. Come to us with things that need to be changed.

Jenn Nowoselski said sometimes people will say we should have a working group of people to help with outreach, but we do; we have a council. For some reason its not working; Council could be really strong and it isn't.

### **6. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **7. ADJOURNMENT**

**Meeting adjourned.**