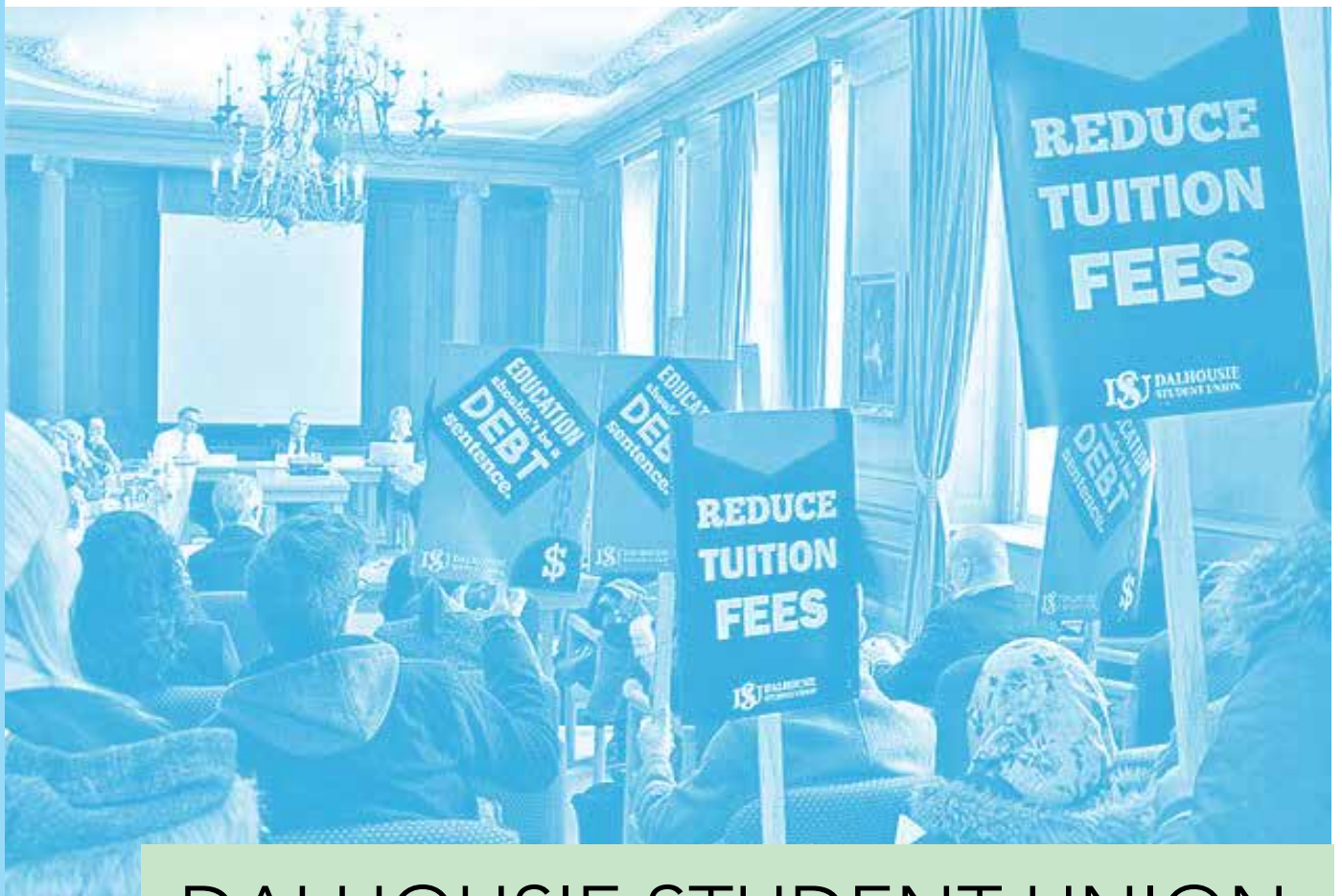


# DON'T SHUT US OUT: A Student Response to the Budget Advisory Committee



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Since the provincial government announced in April 2015 that universities would be allowed a one-time opportunity to increase tuition fees without any limits, students across Nova Scotia have been sounding the alarm about the impact of massive tuition fee increases being announced by universities.

Just behind Life Sciences Centre and the Dunn Building, the King's Student Union made the case for why an increase of almost \$1000 in the Foundation Year Program puts this program out of step with other similar "Great Books" programs and will further the downward decline in enrolment in the program. Downtown, students at NSCAD shut down a Board of Governors meeting after the Board refused to vote on a 37 per cent increase with students in the room. NSCAD students then occupied offices on campus to say they would be forced to drop out if the fee increases go forward.

Since the release of the Budget Advisory Report, Dalhousie students have been joining the chorus of their peers in saying enough is enough with regard to tuition fee increases. Despite a campus closure and a snow

storm, dozens of students protested the most recent Dalhousie Board of Governors meeting to show their opposition to the proposed fee increases. While many were barred from actually attending the meeting, students protested in the cold for the duration of the two hour meeting. At the Budget Advisory consultations, students are showing up in droves to speak to the negative impact of the proposed increases.

This response to the Budget Advisory Committee report echoes the concerns of Dal students and students across the province in focussing on rejecting the tuition fee reset and calls for a more accessible budget process, more affordable tuition fees, and a series of strategic investments to promote access and equity on our campus.

Students are refusing to be shut out of the decisions that impact us, and instead of blocking students out, the university should be centring student voices in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Students recognize that there is a broader issue of government underfunding in Nova Scotia and are sympathetic to the reality of government funding cuts.

We want to work with all university stakeholders – staff, faculty, senior administration – to build a system of free, public, post-secondary education. In order to do that, students are also calling on the Dalhousie University President and Board of Governors to join students in our call to reduce tuition fees through increasing government funding.

As per the Budget Advisory Committee's request, this response will make recommendations on the following questions:

- Are there other alternatives to increase revenues or decrease expenditures beside those contained in this report?
- Are there particular areas that should be considered for strategic investment given strategic priorities and the necessary budget reductions?
- Are there suggestions of other ways to balance the budget?

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

### RECOMMENDATION #1:

- Make the student representatives on the Budget Advisory Committee accountable to students by having the Dalhousie Student Union Vice President (Finance and Operations) sit ex officio on the committee and two students appointed to the committee by the Dalhousie Student Union Council, including one graduate student.

### RECOMMENDATION #2:

- Release the Budget Advisory Committee discussion paper in the fall to ensure full consultation can occur and that there are opportunities to amend the budget.

### RECOMMENDATION #3

- Separate the costs associated with non-essential services, including fundraising, external relations, and senior administration from front-line student services in the Budget Advisory Committee report.

### RECOMMENDATION #4

- Add an additional Budget Advisory Committee report in the fall that provides a mid-year update on the current fiscal year's budget, with year to dates on revenue and expenditure.

## STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR A MORE EQUITABLE CAMPUS

### RECOMMENDATION #5

- Hire at least one new counsellor dedicated to solely to providing support to students who have experienced sexual violence and provide mandatory training on survivor-centred, trauma-informed support for all current Dalhousie Counselling Services staff.
- Provide funding to continue the Sexual Assault and Harassment Phone Line as a project managed by the Dalhousie Student Union.
- Provide mandatory training for all staff in residence, student services, and administration in survivor-centred sexual assault support.

## BALANCING THE BUDGET

### RECOMMENDATION #7:

- Invest \$12.95 million into the operating budget from additional reserve funds in order to freeze tuition fees and maintain faculty budgets in 2016-17.
- End the practice of automatically investing surplus funds into the capital budget.
- Create a policy that future surpluses go first to freezing or reducing tuition fees the following year and improved funding for academic program before being considered for capital costs.

### RECOMMENDATION #8

- Invest \$5.75 million to freeze tuition fees for the 2016-17 year for all students, including students in Agriculture, Engineering and Pharmacy, and international students.
- Invest \$91,000 to freeze the facility fee fees for the 2016-17 year.

### RECOMMENDATION #9

- Invest \$7.1 million in order to maintain current levels of funding for academic programs and student services.
- Investigate potential cost saving measures in senior administration including putting a cap on administrator salaries and reducing funding for external relations, international expansion, fundraising, and

alumni relations.

## ADDRESSING GOVERNMENT UNDERFUNDING

### RECOMMENDATION #10

- Join students in publicly calling on the provincial and federal governments to reduce tuition fees and outline a plan to fund a universal system of post-secondary education.

# ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

**Each year**, the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) releases a discussion paper to solicit feedback from the university community. The committee includes individuals from various constituencies, including students.

Unfortunately, these students are not chosen democratically through the Dalhousie Student Union. This creates a number of challenges, both in terms of logistics and accountability. The Dalhousie Student Union Council includes representatives from all university faculties, as well as representatives reflecting the interests of marginalized communities including international students, Aboriginal students, and women students.

The BAC report states that the “BAC members do not serve as representatives of particular interests but are chosen for their knowledge and individual expertise.”<sup>1</sup> Students should have voices on the BAC who are able to bring to the table knowledge and expertise about the diverse membership of the Dalhousie Student Union. The only way to do this is through the Dalhousie Student Union Council. Otherwise, the student representatives on the BAC are providing only a limited view of students’ interests.

Students were pleased this year that the Dalhousie Student Union was given the opportunity to nominate individuals to the Budget Advisory Committee, but this is not enough to ensure that the discussion of the committee is informed in a way that values the breadth and depth of student experiences at Dalhousie.

## RECOMMENDATION #1:

→ Make the student representatives on the Budget Advisory Committee accountable by students by having the Dalhousie Student Union Vice President (Finance and Operations) sit *ex officio* on the committee and two students appointed to the committee by the Dalhousie Student Union Council, including one graduate student.

In addition to having students on the BAC who are accountable to the student body, there must also be a clearer commitment to broad consultation with the Dalhousie community and adequate time to undertake budget

amendments as required through consultations.

The current timeline of the release of the BAC report between late January and early March does not provide enough time for this kind of consultation process. This year, the timing of this process put Dalhousie out of step with other universities with regard to informing and discussing potential tuition fee increases. Students at CBU, King’s, NSCAD, and SMU were all aware of proposed increases well before Dalhousie students were, despite repeated requests from student representatives regarding the increases.

Moving the release of the discussion paper to the fall would provide additional time to consult students across programs, faculties, and identities.

## RECOMMENDATION #2:

→ Release the Budget Advisory Committee discussion paper in the fall to ensure full consultation can occur and that there are opportunities to amend the budget.

In addition to more time for consultation, the university should provide more detailed

information to students and the public on expenditures. In line with the university's mission, the teaching and research elements of the university should be the priority. Research, teaching and necessary student services must be the core priorities of the institution. Students and the Dalhousie community deserve to know that these elements are at the centre of the university's budget.

The model provided in the Budget Advisory Committee report does not mimic the format of the final version of the budget, leaving out important specifics that students and the public might be interested in. Students may be interested to know that, in 2014-15, the budget of the President's Office was \$3.95 million or that external relations spent more than \$5.6 million.<sup>2</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION #3:**

→ Separate the costs associated with non-essential services, including fundraising, external relations, and senior administration from front-line student services in the Budget Advisory Committee report.

As has been discussed by the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA), another concern with the current budgeting process is that the Budget Advisory Committee bases its current report on the previous year's report, rather than on the actuals for that year. As the DFA has pointed out, this process can create structural, underfunding of particular departments.<sup>3</sup>

Enrolment increases can result in a variance between the budgeted revenue from tuition fees and the actual. In 2015, the BAC report recommended a three per cent increase in tuition fees and shows that the University anticipated to take in \$143,046,000 in tuition fee revenue.<sup>4</sup> The BAC report arrives at this number based on the 2014-15 budgeted amount, which was \$133,475,000.<sup>5</sup> The actual amount in tuition fee revenue for 2014-15 was \$136,384,000, a variance of about \$2.9 million.<sup>6</sup> In the 2015-16 BAC recommendations, the three per cent fee increase was intended to increase revenue by \$3.6 million,<sup>7</sup> but revenue had already increased by \$2.9 million because of conservative budget estimates.

Budget variances are normal. Budgets are estimates, and no one can expect the Budget Advisory Committee or the Board of

Governors to see into the future. However, with two thirds of the year over by the time the BAC report is released, there should be some level of planning being done based on actual numbers, not simply the previous year's budget. When it comes to tuition fees, pairing conservative enrolment estimates and tuition fee increases at the maximum allowable amount have resulted in tuition fee revenue being higher than anticipated year over year. This calls into question whether these increases are necessary for a balanced budget or the university is simply increasing tuition fees at the maximum allowable rate to ensure additional revenue is available.

To be able to better monitor these budget variances, the Budget Advisory Committee should produce a report with the year-to-dates on the current fiscal year.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:**

→ Add an additional Budget Advisory Committee report in the fall that provides a mid-year update on the current fiscal year's budget, with year to dates on revenue and expenditure.

# STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR A MORE EQUITABLE CAMPUS

Over the past year, the Dalhousie Student Union has been proud to put forward number of initiatives that focus on challenging oppression and promoting equity within our university including the new Sexual Assault and Harassment Phone Line and the historic initiative to make the Dalhousie Senate the first university senate in Canada to have dedicated representation for Indigenous students, Black students, students with disabilities, students from the LGBTQ community, and women students. In line with this work, the Dalhousie Student Union recommends strategic investments that focus on building a more equitable campus.

## CHALLENGING RAPE CULTURE

Since September, the Dalhousie Student Union's Sexual Assault and Harassment Phone Line has provided concrete support and information to students who have been impacted by sexualized or gender-based violence or harassment. This initiative, which started as a six week pilot project of the student union and was able to continue through to the end of the academic year with support from the President's Office, has provided the opportunity to provide over 100 students with training regarding on- and off-campus supports for students who have experienced sexualized or gender-based violence. This has equipped dozens of students

across different faculties, departments, communities, and identities with tools to respond to sexualized violence, not only when they volunteer on the phone line, but when they encounter disclosures of sexualized violence in any part of their lives.

The university should build on this successful collaboration by improving survivor-centred supports, continuing to support the phone line service under the direction of the student union, and training other Dalhousie community members in survivor-centred support to reduce secondary trauma for those who disclose experiences of sexualized or gender-based violence.

### RECOMMENDATION #5:

- Hire at least one new counsellor dedicated to solely to providing support to students who have experienced sexual violence and provide mandatory training on survivor-centred, trauma-informed for all current Dalhousie Counselling Services staff.
- Provide funding to continue the Sexual Assault and Harassment Phone Line as a project managed by the Dalhousie Student Union.
- Provide mandatory training for all staff in residence, student services, and administration in survivor-centred sexual assault support.



## CHALLENGING RACISM AND COLONIALISM

The issue of racism on campuses across North America and the ongoing impacts of colonialism in all facets of society in Canada are both issues that have shown that they need attention. This is especially true at the institutional level.

It is important to note that the impact of increasing tuition fees is not felt equally by all students. In the report from the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention on financial support, the Committee notes that “in 2011 34 per cent of African Nova Scotians lived in low-income families as opposed to 16 per cent for Nova Scotia as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> Because of this over-representation of African Nova Scotians in low income households, increases in tuition fees have a disproportionate negative impact African Nova Scotian communities. Similarly, with regards to funding for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis students, the decisions of universities to increase tuition fees combined with the two per cent cap on funding for the Post-Sec-

ondary Student Support Program has eroded the availability of this funding for Aboriginal students.<sup>9</sup> Tuition fee increases also erode any and all internal and external funding for students from these traditionally marginalized communities and, similarly, departmental cut backs can limit growing important academic programs in areas that focus on marginalized perspectives in various disciplines.

Students, faculty, and staff have been at the forefront of projects that challenge racism and white privilege on campus, and that bring students from marginalized communities together to support one another. Whether it is taking students to Africville to learn about the historic displacement of African Nova Scotians or Wab Kinew’s recent keynote presentation at Dal Lead, activities are often undertaken with funding that is cobbled together from various sources. Dedicating a portion the strategic initiatives funding for projects and initiatives that aim to challenge racism and promote support for people of colour and Indigenous people on campus would provide a regular stream of funds for student- and faculty-led initiatives.

### RECOMMENDATION #6:

- Implement the recommendations of the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention to:
  - ◆ Create an Aboriginal Student Advising Centre and Advisor;
  - ◆ Create two new coordinators for access for Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian students; and
  - ◆ Establish a Minor in Black Studies.
  
- Create a dedicate part of the strategic initiatives fund for programs and initiatives focused on racialized, Black, and Indigenous communities including public lectures and events; funding for closed spaces for students, staff and faculty from racialized and Indigenous communities; and other projects that aim to forefront perspectives from these traditionally marginalized communities.

# BALANCING THE BUDGET

**The Budget** Advisory Committee report states plainly that one of the assumptions of the report is that the budget must be balanced. The below recommendations maintain a balanced budget, through the use of accumulated surplus funds.

In 2014-15, Dalhousie posted a \$28.4 million surplus.<sup>10</sup> For that same year, the Budget Advisory Committee recommended increases to tuition fees that amounted to \$4.16 million and recommended budget cuts to faculties and units by \$5.25 million.<sup>11</sup>

Given these recommendations, if the university froze tuition fees and maintained faculty and unit budgets, it would have still posted a surplus. This calls into question, again, whether or not fee increases are necessary for the sustainability of the university or simple a cash grab from students because the government permits it.

The Budget Advisory Committee is recommending a series of tuition fee increases for 2016-17:

- three per cent increase for all students for 2016-17;
- additional five per cent annual increases in Engineering and

Pharmacy for the next three years; and

- 6.3 per cent annual increases in Agriculture for the next three years.

Repeatedly, students have been told they must pay more, while programs and departments face budget cuts. Each year, Dalhousie has increased tuition fees by the maximum allowable amount for programs that are capped through the Memorandum of Understanding, and at higher levels for programs that remain unregulated.

Rarely, if ever, does the university present options with regards to tuition fees. Would the Dalhousie community prefer for reserve funds to be used to freeze or reduce fees? This question is never asked. Consistently, the university has continued acquiring debt in order to construct new buildings and facilities with little discussion or consultations with students, staff, and faculty. The resultant budgeted expenses for debt servicing are not widely discussed, despite taking up a larger portion of the university's budget as time goes on.

While the university has yet to see what the surplus will be for

## RECOMMENDATION #7:

- Invest \$12.95 million into the operating budget from additional reserve funds in order to freeze tuition fees and maintain faculty budgets in 2016-17.
- End the practice of automatically investing surplus funds into the capital budget.
- Create a policy that future surpluses go first to freezing or reducing tuition fees the following year and improved funding for academic program before being considered for capital costs.

the 2015-16 fiscal year, given the current cash reserves, it is reasonable to expect that the University has the necessary funds to avoid the negative impacts that would result from 2.5 per cent program cuts and tuition fee increases as high as 30 per cent.

## A FEE INCREASE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Increasingly, as students and the public have raised concerns about the cost of rising tuition fees, governments and universities have sought to disguise fee increase in a variety of ways. Universities previously tried to circumvent controls on tuition fees by creating or increasing existing ancillary fees. Now, fee increases are called “market modifiers” or “adjustments” or “resets” to make it seem as though these fee increase are some necessary requirement of changes to the market for post-secondary education. Students believe that education should be viewed as a right, and not a commodity, but even based on the University’s own logic, the proposed fee increases do not add up.

The Budget Advisory Committee explains “In late April 2015, the Province announced that universities would be allowed to make adjustments to tuition for specific programs where tuition rates are lower than those charged for similar programs elsewhere.”

Now, let’s look at what is being proposed for pharmacy. Under the current system, Dalhousie charges \$279 per pharmacy credit. This is more than pharmacy programs at the following institutions: Memorial University (\$85 per credit), University of British Columbia (\$245 per credit), University of Laval (\$257 per credit for non-Quebecois Canadian residents), University of Manitoba (\$145 per credit), University of Montreal (\$234 per credit for non-Quebecois Canadian residents), and University of Waterloo (~\$270 per credit). Tuition fees for pharmacy at Saskatchewan are less than \$2 more per credit more than at Dalhousie. This leaves two institutions, the University of Alberta, which charges \$312.08 per credit, and the University of Toronto, which charges \$16,850-\$17,350 per year or about \$495-\$510 per credit. In terms of prices, it seems that the current cost is very much aligned with pharmacy programs in Canada.

For engineering and agriculture, Dalhousie students pay more than the national average in both areas. According to Statistics Canada, the average tuition fees for Engineering in 2016 are \$7,511;<sup>12</sup> Dalhousie Engineering Students pay \$7,932.<sup>13</sup> For Agriculture, Natural Resources and Conservation, Statistics Canada reports the average tuition fees are \$5,520.<sup>14</sup> At the Truro campus, Dalhousie agricultural students pay \$6,366.<sup>15</sup> In 2004-05, the year before the first Memorandum of Understanding between the provincial government and university presidents that included tuition fee controls, Nova Scotia students paid more than agriculture students in any other province and Nova Scotia engineering students paid the second highest fees in Canada, second only to Ontario.<sup>16</sup> Fee controls have actually brought tuition fees more, not less, in line with other Canadian institutions.

# BALANCING THE BUDGET

This year, despite repeated attempts to be let in on discussions regarding tuition fee increases outside of the three per cent fee cap, students were shut out. While our peers across the province were being given information about their University fee proposals, Dalhousie students were left in the dark. Again, students were shut out of budget processes and discussions that impact them the most and now are expected to raise their concerns at an inconvenient time with midterms, student union elections, and other key happenings on campus. The Board of Governors will discuss these increases in April when most students are in the thick of exams or already off to summer employment and will be hard pressed to engage with the Board of Governors directly.

The reserve funds allocated above would allow for tuition fees to be frozen across all programs for all students and stop program cuts.

While students are being told that there are hard times and that students must share equally in the burden, there are elements of the university that could be investigated for substantial fiscal restraint.

For example, former president Tom Traves had the highest salary at the university again 2014-15,<sup>17</sup> despite no longer being employed. Over the past several years, there has been a national conversation on the lavish contracts for senior administrators at universities. Contracts such as these are not fiscally responsible for a time where university students are increasingly relying on food banks because of high tuition fees.

There are other non-essential elements of the institution that are rarely looked at with a close eye. These elements, including external relations and international expansion sought through recruitment or the President's Office, are not necessarily appropriate in the face of more difficult

financial times.

Instead, the University must prioritize the academic mission of the institution and focus on safeguarding academic programs and frontline support services from cuts.

## RECOMMENDATION #9:

- Invest \$7.1 million in order to maintain current levels of funding for academic programs and student services.
- Investigate potential cost saving measures amongst senior administration including putting a cap on administrator salaries and reducing funding for external relations, international expansion, fundraising, and alumni relations.

## RECOMMENDATION #8:

- Invest \$5.75 million to freeze tuition fees for the 2016-17 year for all students, including students in Agriculture, Engineering and Pharmacy, and international students.
- Invest \$91,000 to freeze the facility fee fees for the 2015-16 year for all students, including professional and international students.

# ADDRESSING GOVERNMENT UNDERFUNDING

**The source** of the financial issues faced by Dalhousie and all universities in Nova Scotia is government underfunding. Over the past several decades, governments have divested from colleges and universities, allowing fee increases to make up the difference. This public policy decision to offload the cost of post-secondary education to individual students and their families is at its heart inequitable; forcing low income students to borrow in order to pay high up-front fees and as a result paying more for their education when they repay their loans with interest.

Universities have often responded to this reality by increasing student financial assistance for some students and advocat-

ing for more generous student financial assistance programs at the provincial and federal level. A high fee, high aid model for delivering post-secondary education is not only inequitable, it's also inefficient. Essentially, the argument in favour of this model (those who can pay more should pay more and those who cannot pay should only pay a little or none at all) is the reason for the income tax system. In trying to replicate the income tax system at an institution by institution level, through charging high fees and managing a large, often ineffective, and complex financial aid system is inefficient.

Instead, the Dalhousie University President and Board of Governors should join students in

their call for a universal system of public post-secondary education. In such a system, everyone would pay what they could afford through our progressive taxation system and all students, regardless of their income could benefit from our public colleges and universities.

## RECOMMENDATION #10:

→ Join students in publicly calling on the provincial and federal governments to reduce tuition fees and outline a plan to fund a universal system of post-secondary education.



# CONCLUSION



## **Budgets are about priorities.**

This response describes students' priorities: creating more open, accessible, affordable, and equitable campuses.

By following the recommendations put forward in this re-

sponse, Dalhousie would be leading by example through concrete measures to make university more accessible and affordable. By joining students in our fight for a universal system of post-secondary education, Dalhousie

could help to usher in a new era for post-secondary education in Nova Scotia and Canada.

1. *Draft Operating Budget Plan for 2016-17 (Report LIII)*, Budget Advisory Committee (February, 2016).
2. *Annual Financial Report, Dalhousie University* (June, 2015), p. 16.
3. *Review of Dalhousie University Finances*, Dalhousie Faculty Association (2013), p. 19.
4. *Operating Budget Plan for 2015-16 (Report LII)*, Budget Advisory Committee (2015), p. 17.
5. *Ibid*, p. 17.
6. *Annual Financial Report, Dalhousie University* (June, 2015), p. 15.
7. *Operating Budget Plan for 2015-16 (Report LII)*, Budget Advisory Committee (2015), p. 17.
8. *A Report from the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention: A Focus on Financial Support*, Dalhousie University (October, 2015), p. 32.
9. *Ibid*, p. 22.
10. *Annual Financial Report, Dalhousie University* (June, 2015).
11. *Operating Budget Plan for 2015-16 (Report LII)*, Budget Advisory Committee (2015).
12. “Weighted average undergraduate tuition fees for Canadian full-time students, by field of study, 2015/2016,” Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/150909/cg-b002-eng.htm>
13. “2015-2016 Undergraduate Fee Schedule – Estimates,” Dalhousie University, (April 2015), <https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/admissions/UG%202015-2016%20Fall%20Winter%20Fee%20Schedules.pdf>
14. “Weighted average undergraduate tuition fees for Canadian full-time students, by field of study, 2015/2016,” Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/150909/cg-b002-eng.htm>
15. “2015-2016 Undergraduate Fee Schedule – Estimates,” Dalhousie University, (April 2015), <https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/admissions/UG%202015-2016%20Fall%20Winter%20Fee%20Schedules.pdf>
16. “Tuition in Canada,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, <http://apps.policyalternatives.ca/>
17. *Statement of Compensation for the Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act of Dalhousie University Year ended March 31, 2015*, Dalhousie University (2015).

