

Membership Advisory: the DSU Stands in Solidarity with the Dalhousie Faculty Association

Academic excellence at Dalhousie University relies on creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all members of our community. The Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) is committed to fostering such a community through offering student-centric services and support, advocating for student needs locally and on a national scale, and by consulting and working with students to better suit the dynamic needs of a constantly changing membership. The DSU plays a critical role in working with our administration and faculty to ensure that the needs of students are at the forefront of strategic planning, programming, decision making, and all other aspects of university governance.

The administration of Dalhousie University and the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) are currently entering a process called “conciliation” regarding negotiations surrounding the renewal of the DFA’s collective agreement (between Dalhousie University and the DFA). Conciliation is a mediated process, often conducted by a third party (in this case, someone appointed by the Province of Nova Scotia), who meets with each group separately and together to resolve differences. Conciliation meetings have been scheduled for January 22, 23, and 29, 2018 – at which point, any information made available will be communicated to our membership. Strike mandates affect us all, and are only a last resort if differences are unable to be resolved through conciliation. A disruption in classes is something we, the DSU, hope can be avoided.

While the specific details of these differences are confidential, some overarching trends and narratives surrounding these differences are apparent. Through engaging directly with students, analyzing national trends that affect academic excellence in post-secondary institutions, and in our collective experience as learners and leaders at Dalhousie University, we stand in solidarity with faculty, who are central to the well-being of our institution. Some of the areas where concern has been expressed are as follows.

Precarious Work

Across many sectors, including post-secondary, we witness a rise in precarious work, including short-term contracts and the erosion of permanent and long-term faculty positions. In the classroom, this often translates to a diminished quality of education along with the perpetuation of unfair working environments for our faculty. While precarious work is considered more flexible and economic, this practice is decreasing faculty access to fair pay; employee benefits; job security; and importantly, the opportunity to access support, training, and skills to provide quality, education.

Faculty Workloads and Expectations

Students recognize the tremendous responsibilities that our faculty undertake and the additional time outside their core responsibilities they commit to their students, department, and research. Given the prevalence of precarious work, students are often reminded of the complexity and challenge of being a professor. These challenges may include not having office space or a regular phone line, balancing multiple teaching positions across other universities, working long hours, and not having adequate time to prepare for or adapt course materials. The implications of this undercuts the fabric of quality

education and sustainable, vibrant, and collaborative academic communities. There is a planned budget reduction across faculties/units that will compromise the quality and integrity of our community, and further the disparity between academic departments. Students need to be prioritized in this decision-making process and be widely included in conversations regarding the specific implications of these cuts per faculty/unit.

Access to Budgetary and Collective Agreement Processes

The representation of students in the budgetary process has been improving, but still lacks thorough consultation. Historically, students have been excluded from collective agreement process, including a student perspective on the faculty/administration relationship. As key stakeholders and developing scholars, students are a necessary partner to finding creative ways to spark new ideas, innovate existing structural obstacles, and creating a Dalhousie that nurtures socially responsible citizens.

Moving forward, the DSU looks forward to the opportunity to have a more profound role in these processes, and holds our leadership in good-faith moving forward to a student-centered consultative model for budgetary and collective agreement development. We hope to see the Administration and DFA come to a mutually agreeable resolution that will serve to support and strengthen the Dalhousie community we are all a part of.