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Dalhousie Student Union Report to the Board of Governors

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DSU President, Madeleine Stinson

A Thank You

As I begin my second year with the Board of Governors, I want to take time to thank those who support student voices in decision-making spaces. Your contributions are appreciated beyond measure. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue working with you all to represent the Dalhousie student community.

For those of you who I haven't yet had the chance to meet, hello! My name is Madeleine (the French spelling, but not pronounced like the French children's character). I'm a fifth-year Bachelor of Management, major in Sustainability Studies and minor in Security Studies. Originally from London, Ontario, but now very happily rooted in Halifax. My professional experience is in hospitality and my academics focus on cultural and environmental sustainability, and the nexus between those topics and security. My latest work has focused on the CAF's Operation HONOUR and exploring policy changes that will protect survivors and marginalized individuals inside the forces. I also believe very strongly in bridging the gap between students and the institution without compromising the integrity of student rights and access to education. If you're ever curious about what's going on with students, what's happening at the DSU, or why I think the way I do – let's chat! I can be reached at dsupres@dal.ca or by phone at (226)-377-3703.

2021-22 DSU Executive Goals

Governance

- A review of all governing documents and the creation of additional policies such as a sexualized violence policy and international students' issues policy.
- Revision of the DSU's Strategic Plan.
- Creation of additional informative resources for students to better understand the DSU and Dalhousie.

Student Experience

- Programming such as Trick or Eat, Winter Pride, the Racial Justice Symposium, Exam Wellness Weeks, and a Women's Week.
- Launch of the DSU Survey and dispersant of relevant data to groups across campus to better inform student activities, services, and supports.
- Development of an engagement plan to increase student involvement in on-campus activities
- Cross-campus collaboration and planning to facilitate student-oriented events, decisions, and policies.

The executive will also focus on advocating for and providing supports that address several key student issues this year, as identified by our membership:

- The student housing crisis and inaccessible housing resources
- Mental health and general wellness, both in relation to the pandemic and generally
- Accessible education, lowered tuition, and tuition waiver programs
- Harm reduction through many means: food access, safe drinking habits, sexualized violence prevention, etc.

Board Governance Models

As was noted in Board Orientation this Fall, the Board of Governors seeks to represent the best interests of Dalhousie University. This objective, however, is challenging to meet when the Board, at times, does not reflect the University's larger goals, values, or representation. For example, of the 24 standard members of the Board of Governors, only 6 represent students or faculty members of the university. This representation places the Dalhousie Board as the least inclusive of students and faculty in Nova Scotia, and when compared to similar sized institutions across Canada. The Board's membership is not proportionately representative of our community, or reflective of the fact that universities rely on students and faculty to function. These groups of stakeholders are not given the ability to have a meaningful impact in university decision-making spaces, when, the power those spaces hold would, in fact, cease to exist without them.

Across multiple industries and institutions, Boards of Governors most commonly change and reform because their structures fail to be effective. Much of this ineffectiveness comes from separation between the Board and the community it serves. To address this gap, which has been discussed at the Dalhousie Board since at least Summer 2020, more student and faculty members must be added. Reform of the Board, and the principles on which it operates, is suggested to remedy existing tension, and ensure that the Board prevents further disillusion.

University Financial Planning & Tuition Meetings

The annual Board of Governor's "tuition meeting" occurs every April. There's long been a discussion about what happens at this meeting, but less frequently about when this meeting occurs. Student concerns have risen over the timing of the meeting, as it occurs during exam period. Since the consequences of this meeting impact students in a direct (often negative) manner, they often feel that the meeting's timing has been organized purposefully to keep them out of the conversation. Students want to be a part of the discussion, and they deserve to be meaningfully enabled to participate. Moving the timing of this meeting would give students the capacity to engage with Dalhousie's governance in a manner that empowers them, rather than fuelling the separation between the institution and students.

It's recognized that the timing of the "tuition meeting" is tied to the fiscal year and Dalhousie's financial planning. Thus, it opens the door to a larger conversation on our financial planning, how it happens, who's involved, and how it is communicated. Across Canadian universities, a relatively similar model for budget outreach is followed, with varying degrees of length, transparency, and community involvement. The DSU will continue discussion on this topic throughout the year but presents it at this time for consideration and thought.

Decolonizing the Institute

As October is Mi'kmaq History Month in Nova Scotia, we must all reflect as Treaty People, working and learning on stolen land. A Council motion in Winter 2021 reaffirmed the DSU's commitment to prioritizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. We believe that with the privilege of higher education comes the responsibility of contributing to a more equitable future. To help educate students on the TRC calls to action, the DSU created an installation in the SUB to highlight the calls to action that pertain to higher education, students, and academia. They are as follows:

The underlined phrases indicate a call to action that calls directly on post-secondary institutions, and which can be fulfilled solely by the university, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, should it choose to do so.

07: We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

11: We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

16: We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.

24: We call upon medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teaching and practices.

28: We call upon law schools in Canada to require all law students to take a course in Aboriginal people and the law, which includes the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.

62: We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for K-G12 students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63: We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing K-G12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs related to the above.

65: We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

66: We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.

77: We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

86: We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal– Crown relations

What's In A Name?

As a university, Dalhousie has roots as a colonial institution. We are located on unceded, unsurrendered, traditional land of The L'nu or Mi'kmaq People. The way we take up space on this land must be carefully considered, including how we choose to name spaces on it – or rather, whom we choose to name those spaces after. A student at Dalhousie and DSU staff, Abbie Winters, has suggested bringing forward a conversation on the building names at our institution. They have compiled research and historical information that may enable us to determine if the individuals whose names are on our campus continue to represent the values of our community. This conversation is especially important as we look towards developing a Master Campus Plan in 2022. We cannot be separated from our colonial history, identities as colonizers, or actions that perpetuate colonial structures and systems. However, we can choose to make a statement about what kinds of actions and values Dalhousie will choose to honour in our spaces. The re-naming of buildings on campus with violent history is a meaningful action with significant value to those who are reminded every day of the fact that, historically, Dalhousie is not a safe space for all.

The following buildings were suggested for consideration:

Alexandra Hall: named after Queen Alexandra of the United Kingdom, a colonizer and colonial power, responsible in part for the historical and ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples in North and South America.

Forrest Building: named after Revered John Forrest, with ties to the Residential School System in Canada. While he did not work in one, he failed to condemn them.

Tupper Building: names after Sir. Charles Tupper, a colonist, responsible in part for the historical and ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Kellogg Library: named after W.K Kellogg, a known eugenicist and racist.