

## **End of Term Report**

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Dalhousie Computer Science Society

### **Summary**

The primary role of the Vice President External is to act as the Computer Science representative to the Dalhousie Student Union Council, and to act as a liaison between Computer Science students and the DSU. It is crucial that the voice of students from Computer Science be heard within the DSU due to the unique needs and aspirations of our faculty. As the face of Computer Science within the DSU, the position also comes with the opportunity to meet student leaders from other faculties and societies. This helps to hear outside perspectives on how to improve the efforts of the Computer Science Society, organize attendance at mutual society events, and generally encourage cooperation for mutual benefit.

Going to DSU Council meetings is merely the foundation of the portfolio of the Vice President External. In this role, it can be very helpful to join DSU committees, take part in DSU events and even simply socialize with other councilors or involved members of the DSU to help gain a better idea of how it functions, and how best to approach problems and put ideas into practice.

### **Student Spaces Referendum**

This term, the Dalhousie administration made a student spaces proposal, and requested that the Dalhousie Student Union put the proposal to a referendum. The proposal was to charge each student ten dollars per course, up to a maximum of one hundred dollars per year, to create and improve a number of student spaces across the campus.

The spaces themselves were discussed only in a general sense, with the details of the spaces up in the air and open to student consultation. The general ideas included a new building next to the Student Union Building where the Grad House stands, a Link connecting the Henry Hicks and the Life Sciences Centre, a redesigned University Avenue with improved green space, and a variety of other projects.

The Dalhousie administration, primarily in the form of Tom Traves, was involved in a number of forums to discuss the proposal. At Imagine '07, a great deal of feedback was given regarding the projects themselves, though there was no opportunity to ask questions directly. Additionally, Dr. Traves met with individual faculties to discuss any further questions regarding the proposal and the way it would affect the specific faculties themselves.

Some controversy arose regarding the way the referendum was conducted. Issues that arose included a strong sentiment among the student body that the DSU was either the organization behind the referendum, or was strongly in favour of it. This led to a motion I put forward to officially state that the DSU does not have a stance on the referendum, and supported the right of each individual student to make his or her own

decision. Unfortunately, this may have come too late. It is imperative that as student leaders, the DSU council and executive maintains the confidence of the student body.

Additionally, several concerns were raised about the way in which the university conducted their campaign. The only publicly accessible source of information that was accurate and up to date regarding the referendum was a university-made site found at [yes.dal.ca](http://yes.dal.ca). The university also made sweeping statements about the stance of the DSU on the referendum, and spent over \$11,000 on their “Yes” campaign. This sparked the creation of an ad hoc Referendum Policy Committee to decide whether or not such actions are acceptable. Involvement is highly recommended to future councilors.

Ultimately, the referendum did not pass, and though the plans remain, there is simply no money to put them into practice, according to the Dr. Traves. If student space issues become a greater concern, it is worth noting that these plans require only the financial backing, and it may be possible to re-examine them in the future.

## **Constitutional Amendments**

This term, I coordinated numerous constitutional amendments for the Computer Science Society constitution. To avoid having an overly long meeting, the changes were discussed in an online capacity, suggestions were made, and I prepared a final constitution based on the discussion that was approved by Council and put to referendum.

Two major problems were encountered over the course of the amendments. The first was the difficulty in getting feedback regarding what changes are needed. While a few members of Council were very helpful, most remained silent despite frequent prodding and pushing back the deadline for the changes on numerous occasions. Unless any other major overhauls occur, this should not be a regular problem. The second problem was obtaining quorum for the referendum that was held to approve the changes. As of the end of term, quorum has still not been obtained for the referendum, and the vote includes a stipulation that the vote does not close until quorum is obtained. It is absolutely imperative that future referendums take place as early as possible, to avoid the exam rush, and that all members of the society do what they can to encourage voter turnout.

The changes themselves focused primarily on the makeup and duties of the executive and council positions of the Computer Science Society, such as the representation on Faculty of Computer Science committees, specifying the role of the undergraduate and graduate representatives, and the removal of the Fundraising Representative position. Other changes included revisions to the election process that make it both more fair and more flexible, and fixing various typos.

## **Board of Operations**

A major change that occurred this term was the Board of Operations was created and added to the constitution to replace Dalhousie Student Union committees such as Budget and Finance, Constitution and Policy and numerous other committees. The Board was designed to improve accountability by putting some powers of an individual

executive to a larger body, and to look at the long term goals of the DSU through its constitution and finances. Despite these changes, the DSU Council constitutionally remains the governing body of the DSU. For more details on the Board of Operations, see the DSU Constitution.

### **DSU Committees**

Over the course of my term, I was involved with two DSU committees. The first was the Society Review Committee, which granted me some additional insight into the types of problems that can arise within societies. I also had the opportunity to see numerous constitutions from other societies, and gained a better understanding of what information a constitution should and should not outline.

Additionally, I was involved with the Councilor Handbook Committee, which was tasked with creating a handbook to describe to new councilors the functionality of the DSU Council. I felt this would be particularly beneficial for representatives that are elected each term, such as Computer Science, and therefore may well find themselves to be by far the newest members of Council. The handbook will contain useful background information, terminology and other information that new Councilors will find useful, and I highly recommend future Vice President Externals read the handbook as soon as possible.

### **DSU Teaching Awards**

This year, I was the nominator and the presenter for the DSU Teaching Award for the Faculty of Computer Science. This is an excellent opportunity to reward a professor for outstanding effort on behalf of the students. Assuming the tradition continues, nominations and attendance at the event should be encouraged.

### **Ratification**

This year, there is a plan in place to overhaul Society Policy. In the event that this happens, the Vice President External must ensure the constitution is in line with the policy. Ratification currently takes place online via TigerSociety, which can be found at [my.dsu.ca](http://my.dsu.ca). It would be prudent to speak to the DSU Vice President (Internal) if there are any questions or concerns regarding the ratification process or criteria.

### **DSU Elections '07**

This year, the DSU election featured two candidates from the Computer Science Society, including yours truly, though both ended up in the position of runner-up. This year the election policy was changed to include online campaigning, video biographies and the use of Treos to assist with online voting.