

A DSU Proposal for Defined & Comprehensive Student Representation on Senate

Introduction

The question of student representation in the Dalhousie Senate has been discussed in recent years since a former Dalhousie Student Union VP Academic and External brought forward a proposal to increase the number of student representatives. This document proposes similar amendments to the Senate constitution such that there would be student representation on Senate from each Faculty, plus student union representation and the creation of equity representatives. This document will outline some objectives and concerns, and provide examples of Canadian institutions with similar structures, including how Dalhousie compares within the U15 group.

Objective

In advancing this proposal, the Dalhousie Student Union is attempting to achieve four inter-related goals:

- 1) Replace the current arbitrary number of student senators with a model that has each academic unit electing a student representative.
- 2) Strengthen Senate governance by ensuring student senators have a defined constituency to represent and gather feedback from, and ensure that all Faculties have student representation.
- 3) Strengthen the student voice in Senate.
- 4) Address recommendations in the *Belong* Report and Strategic Direction Charters 5.2 and 1.3.

Motion:

We are proposing a new model of student representation on senate. The DSU's goal is to have representation from each Faculty, plus adding an international student and seats for equity-seeking groups to senate. The proposed wording captures the spirit of this goal while leaving flexibility. Following passage of this motion, the DSU will have to amend its constitution as well to more clearly define these positions and establish an elections process. This process is already underway in preparation, with student faculty-based and other relevant societies ready to implement new senator election processes in their constitutions in their winter annual general meetings.

To achieve these goals, the following motion is proposed to Senate for consideration:

Motion #1: SPGC establish an ad hoc committee to:

- a) Examine, in light of the Dalhousie Student Union proposal to increase their representation, the appropriate number of faculty seats on Senate.
- b) Examine means to enhance the proportion of equity seeking groups on Senate, consistent with the Principles and Values espoused in our constitution

- c) Present the results of their examination to the Senate Planning and Governance committee by March 16, 2016

Motion #2: 3.4 (b) Students: Twenty-two (22) students elected for one-year terms using a process as defined in the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) Constitution and in keeping with Senate's principles to advance diversity, equity and inclusiveness. The student members shall consist of:

- President, DSU
- Vice President, Academic and External, DSU
- Fourteen (14) students to represent each of the Faculties. One each from: Agriculture Campus, Architecture and Planning, Arts and Social Sciences, Computer Science, Continuing Education, Dentistry, Engineering, Health Professions, Law, Management, Medicine, and Science
- Two (2) students from the Faculty of Graduate Studies
- six (6) students with one student to represent each of the following constituencies: international students, LGBTQ students, women students, Black/African Canadian students, indigenous students, students with disabilities

Senate's Structure

The Senate is structured to have a number of faculty members elected by their Academic Units, determined by a formula set out in Section 2.1(c) of the Senate Constitution. Members of senate also include representatives from academic administration and from the Libraries, balanced out by Section 2.1(b) that ensures a ratio of three faculty senators for every administrative senator. This proposal leaves this ratio unchanged, but would put the proportion of student senators in line with many U15 institutions (see below). The administrators on Senate are three members of senior administration (the President, Provost, and Vice-Provost Research), the Librarian, and the deans of each faculty.

With only a few exceptions, each Faculty is represented by administrative senators and elected faculty senators. The student senators are the most notable exception. There are 7 students, determined by the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU), with the limitations being that one student must be enrolled in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and another in the Faculty of Agriculture. In practice, two student senators have been the DSU President and DSU Vice President Academic and External, with three others elected at large by students in general elections each spring, and the graduate senator elected during the annual Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students elections.

For the purpose of references, the wording of the constitution is as follows:

2.4 (b) Students: Seven students, one of whom shall be a graduate student and one who shall represent the Agricultural Campus. Students shall be elected to Senate for one-year terms as determined by the Dalhousie Student Union.

Concerns:

1) Student Senator Committee Requirements - Balance and Accountability: Most senate committees and subcommittees require student participation. For the existing student senators to be present in every subcommittee requiring student representation would mean an average of 3-4 committees per senator, a requirement that is not expected of other Senators. This issue is somewhat alleviated by the fact that many subcommittees have set their terms of reference such that the student representative does not need to be a senator, and could in fact be any student. The Senate Planning and Governance Committee, Learning and Teaching Committee, and Academic Programs and Research Committee must have student senators, but

for the rest, any student is eligible to sit on the committee. In practice, these committees have been assigned first to student senators as their workload and schedule permits, and then any unfilled committees have been filled by other students recommended by the DSU VP Academic & External.

While this helps to balance the workload for student senators, it raises concerns about how these additional students are selected, and who they are accountable to. The DSU executives are accountable to the student union council, as are the student senators. They are also accountable to the DSU Council's Academic Committee. The additional students on senate committees are not bound to any such structure. The relationship between Senate and the DSU is respectful, with additional students not generally being appointed without DSU recommendation, and we believe that if the DSU requested students be recalled it would be respected. But technically, recall is not automatically required if the DSU were to express non-confidence in a student committee member who is not a senator.

The proposed motion would increase the number of student senators, eliminating concerns of balancing committee work with academics. But more importantly, it would ensure that all students engaged in Senate's work be accountable to a defined organized constituency. A student senator that actively solicits feedback from members would no longer be a stroke of good luck, but be built into the governance structures of the university and student union.

2) Student Perspective from All Academic Units

All academic units have representation on the senate from faculty members and administration. While senators are expected to consider the interests of the university as a whole in making their decisions, having representation from all the Faculties who are able to speak to their issues is enormously helpful for other senators in forming university-wide perspectives.

The same is not true for students. Because there are only seven student representatives, nearly half of Dalhousie's faculties will not have representation while, on the other hand, two are always represented: Agriculture and Graduate Studies. This lack of representation is reflected in perennial debates at DSU general elections about how to balance representation from Sexton and Carleton campus Faculties. We have tried measures to ameliorate this problem--for instance, the DSU Council's Academic Committee brings students senators together with representatives from each Faculty every month to discuss academic issues and the Senate agenda. This is helpful, but does not address the fundamental problem: with two senators selected from Agriculture and Graduate Studies, only five of the remaining ten faculties can be represented in any given year. Student representation on senate helps all senators form a university-wide perspective, and is beneficial to university governance. Having only partial representation of student perspectives from the faculties is a gap in the senate's structure. This is the primary motivation for the proposal.

3) Diversity and Inclusiveness

Belong: Supporting an Inclusive and Diverse University, commissioned as part of Dalhousie's Strategic Direction Charter 5.2 to foster a collegial culture grounded in diversity and inclusiveness, took a wide view of Dalhousie's structures and made recommendations to advance diversity and inclusiveness. Of note, representation on senate was cited. Recommendation 8(c) of *Belong* recommends adding a position on senate for an elected international student, noting that it should be implemented in coordination with Strategic Direction Charter 1.3 to strengthen student experience, leadership development and additional support services for our locally diverse and international students. Dalhousie's international student population is large and growing. With declining local student enrolment combined with an increasingly competitive environment for Dalhousie to recruit out-of-province students, it is increasingly important that

Dalhousie is responsive to the needs of international students. While the Dalhousie International Students Association is often contacted for consultation and feedback by the administration, there is no structural inclusion of international students in Dalhousie's governance structure. If international students are represented on Senate, it is purely by luck that they won a student-wide election.

Similarly, many marginalized groups are under-represented throughout Dalhousie at all levels. While technically students from marginalized groups are able to run for senate positions, in practice the student senate caucus has not been very diverse, likely an indication that more must be done to make it possible for students from marginalized groups to participate in university governance structures. Where the current structure has not adequately fostered diversity, structural reforms may be needed.

It is worth noting that adding an indigenous student would, in part, meet the challenge of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report to make our universities more inclusive of indigenous perspectives.

Discussions are still underway at the DSU level to finalize the specific equity positions. For example, there is discussion about whether it is better to have a Black Nova Scotian and indigenous representative to specifically root Dalhousie in the local community, or if a broader Black Canadian or Indigenous seat might be more appropriate. In discussions at the Senate Planning and Governance Committee, it seems to be the consensus that this is better determined at the student politics level, which is more easily amended, than in the senate constitution. The inclusion of equity seats as a more general concept, however, is an innovative and exciting possibility. While still subject to change based on student input, we have the following positions in mind: an international student, a Mi'kmaq/Indigenous student, a black Nova Scotian/black Canadian student, a student with a disability, a student from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender community, and a student to represent the women's community.

Student representation in other Canadian Senates: How Dalhousie compares

U15 – Within the U15 group of research-intensive schools that Dalhousie compares itself against, Dalhousie ranks 14 out of 15 for student representation on Senate. Six U15 schools have a model of student representation similar to the DSU proposal. The U15 average senate composition for students is 15.4 per cent, while Dalhousie's is 8.97 per cent. Following the proposed reform, Dalhousie would have 20 student senators out of 92, or 21.7 per cent, making us tied for first place. Senates which have a model of representation by faculty are highlighted in green.

Institution	Number of student senators	Students as a % of senate composition	System of Student Representation	Administration as % of senate composition	Faculty as a % of senate composition
University of Alberta	60 out of 158	38%	Undergraduate representation by faculty scaled by faculty size, graduate student representation by faculty. Student union representatives appointed from the board of governors.	18%	42%
Queens University	15 out of 69	22%	Representation from each Faculty, scaled by Faculty size.	17%	57% Note: 3 staff senators
University of British Columbia	18 out of 85	21%	One student senator per Faculty, One student senator for the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, and 5 members-at-large.	21%	58%
University of Western Ontario	22 of 103	21%	Eleven undergraduate students, elected to represent select faculties and campuses. Seven at-large student senators. Four graduate students.	18%	61%
University of Manitoba	28 out of 158	18%	28 persons elected from each Faculty, scaled by faculty size, as well as the president of The University of Manitoba Students' Union.	18%	62%
McMaster university	12 out of 66	18%	6 Undergraduate students and 6 graduate students, elected by and from the students registered in each of the Faculties of Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences for a two-year term.	27%	59%
University of Ottawa	12 out of 68	18%	One full-time student in each of the Faculties of the University of Ottawa and one student for the two sections in Law. Two full-time students from the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.	19%	63%
McGill University	19 of 107	18%	One elected student senator per faculty. Two arts student senators.	24%	55% Note: 6 staff senators
University of Toronto	8 out of 49	16%	UofT has a unicameral governing model made up of government	4%	29% Note: Two

			appointees, alumni, administration, students, faculty and staff. It is not necessarily comparable to other senates. On the Governing council there are four full-time undergraduate students, two graduate students, and two part-time undergraduate students.		staff senators
University of Calgary	18 out of 113	16%	President and VP Academic of the undergraduate student union, president of the graduate student union. Undergraduate representation by faculty, three graduate students and a postdoctoral fellow.	24%	55%
University of Waterloo	12 out of 96	13%	One undergraduate student from each faculty of the University, plus three at-large student senators. Four graduate students.	28%	50%
Université Laval	8 out of 63	13%	Four undergraduate and four graduate students.	38%	49%
University of Saskatchewan	14 out of 122	11.5%	One student per faculty. Two undergraduate student union executives and the president of the graduate student society sit ex-officio as non-voting members.	20%	62%
Dalhousie University	7 out of 78	9%	Six undergraduate students, one of whom must be in faculty of agriculture. One graduate student.	23%	66%
Université de Montreal	8 out of 119	8%	Eight students.	24%	68% Note: three staff senators

British Columbia – The British Columbia Universities Act specifies the composition of all university Senates in the province. Regarding student senate representation, it requires that at minimum, student representation must be enough for there to be one student for each Faculty:

“35 (2)(h) a number of students, equal to the number of senate members provided in paragraphs (a) to (f), elected from the students who are members of an undergraduate student society or a graduate student society, in a manner that ensures that at least one student from each faculty is elected (BC University Act);”

There are eleven public universities in British Columbia which would follow this model.

Institutions with 1 student per faculty or more

Outside of the U15, other respected institutions have student Senate representation similar to what the DSU is proposing. Mount Allison has been #1 in Macleans rankings for mostly undergraduate institutions for a while now, while UVic and Ryerson both do well in their categories as well (UVic has been #1 and #2 in Comprehensive).

Institution	Number of student senators	Students as a % of senate composition	System of representation
University of Victoria	16 out of 59 voting (77 total)	27%	One student per faculty, one graduate student, six at-large student senators
Brandon University	8 out of 30	26%	One student per faculty, two at-large student senators, student union VP academic
Ryerson University	16 out of 60	27%	One student per faculty, plus one student union representative
Mount Allison University	8 (2 are non-voting) out of 65 (5 are non-voting)	10%	One student per faculty (6), student union president and VP academic (non-voting)

Institutions with similar models of student representation

Institution	Number of student senators	Students as a % of senate composition	System of representation
Memorial University	13 out of 76	17%	7 students appointed by student union, 2 students appointed by graduate students union, 2 students from Grenfell College, one student appointed by Marine Institute Student Union, ten undergraduate students, and three graduate students. The Memorial University senate constitution specifies that the student union should try to have students from as many Faculties as possible.
Acadia University	6 out of 56	11%	Student union president and VP Academic, one arts student, one science student, one professional student, one graduate student

Equity Seats on Senate

In our research, we found no examples of institutions where a university Senate specifically guaranteed representation for students from marginalized communities. Some universities did have at-large student senators in addition to the Faculty representatives (such as UBC), which is the closest parallel to the DSU proposal. Equity representatives on governance bodies is common practice in students unions across the country as well as provincial and federal student organizations. It is also not unheard of in governance of public institutions: for example, the Halifax Regional School Board has a seat elected by and for the African Nova Scotian community.

Dalhousie would be a first in the country to add equity seats to its Senate. Taking steps to structurally include students that have historically faced greater barriers in accessing university would do more than send a positive message across the country. Doing so would intentionally include perspectives that are rarely heard but need to be, leading to academic programs and services that better serve locally and internationally diverse populations attending our university. Dr. Constance Backhouse has reminded us that structural inequalities exist at Dalhousie and elsewhere. The DSU's proposal would be one small step towards structural inclusion and is something which could be a source of great institutional pride.

Student-Faculty Balance

The balance of faculty to students on Senate is an important consideration. Collegial self-governance is central to the university's mission and Senate is essential in upholding it. Ensuring adequate representation of students need not compromise the position of faculty members.

Currently, faculty constitute 51 seats out of 78, or 67%. The constitution specifies that the number of faculty shall be equal to three times the number of ex-officio administrators. This is an important

symbolic number, as it enables faculty to change the senate constitution without the need to secure support from administration or students. An increase in students will alter this balance if not accompanied by changes in faculty representation.

The proposal to increase student representation is not intended to erode the position of faculty, but to ensure adequate and defined representation for students. If the faculty ratio should be adjusted following an increase in students, the process of determining the appropriate balance should be faculty-led. An ad hoc committee to examine the proper ratio of students to faculty is the best way to achieve both goals.

- **Is maintaining the 2/3 majority of faculty necessary?**

It is an important symbol of academic freedom and the collegial self-governance model that makes the university what it is. Simultaneously, faculty are not and have never been a united voting bloc let alone a formal caucus, and thinking in such terms has limitations. Within the U15, there is only one other example of faculty holding 66% or more of the senate, Université de Montreal. Data on U15 senate composition is included at the end of this discussion document.

- **If additional faculty are added, who should be added?**

The options include but are not limited to: new faculty senators (proportional to faculty size), equity-based faculty seats, postdoc representation, contract/adjunct representation.

The DSU position is that such conversations should be faculty-led. We also encourage serious consideration of the creation of equity-based representation for faculty. This will take time to reach a conclusion on, but should not delay implementation of the student reform.

Relationships

In the context of the recent work of the Senate Values and Principles Working Group, the question of senate's relationship arises. The draft text on aspirational relationships of senate to students notes that students bring "unique and essential insight into the effectiveness of our pedagogical methods and their educational needs." Indeed, this is much of the motivation behind this reform proposal: that students from all faculties can share these insights. The reality is that the participation of student senators has not been as diverse as it could or should be. What is senate's relationship with medicine students? Historically, there isn't much of one. And what about senate's relationship with indigenous students? Is senate a place where indigenous students get talked about, or talked with?

Following approval of the reform motion, the relationship of senate to students, and students to faculty should be a consideration when choosing the ideal number of faculty.

Implementation within the DSU

Currently within the DSU, student senators sit on the DSU council as well as the Academic Committee, a subcommittee of council which includes VP academics from student faculty societies and determines DSU positions on academic issues. Following the implementation of the reform at Senate, the DSU would

move to amend its bylaws such that senators are removed from DSU council, and be mandated to sit on their faculty or community society's board. The academic committee would be dissolved and replaced with the senate caucus but perform the same function. This would ensure that senators can be accountable to their constituency, as well as bring the perspectives of many students and not just their own opinions/experiences. The senate caucus would help the students better understand academic issues in a broader context and not exclusively advocate for their own constituency. After all, senators are expected under the code of conduct to consider the university as a whole.

Senators would be elected at large during DSU elections. It is already the case that when students vote in DSU elections, electronic ballots and/or ballot questions can be created for students only in specific faculties. Voter lists for equity-based senators can be created using self-identification data. The DSU is in communication with the registrar's office about finding a way to make such data useable for these purposes. Senators will be eligible to be re-elected for a second term.

Conclusion

It is common at many comparable institutions for students to have per-Faculty representation on university senates. In terms of student representation on Senate, Dalhousie is near the back of the pack both within the U15 and the broader university landscape. The DSU's proposal would shift Dalhousie from a model where the Dalhousie Senate is a careful ratio of administrators to faculty with a few students included, to a model where each Academic Unit appoints deans, faculty members and students to represent them. Dalhousie would move from last to (almost) first in the U15 by doing more than rationalizing and defining its members constituencies, however. It would be demonstrating national leadership in being the first university to deliberately include historically excluded populations such as indigenous students and African Canadians. Following the *Belong Report*, Backhouse, and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, this is an excellent opportunity for Dalhousie to take progressive steps forward.