

Last week several friends from across the country called to ask “what’s going on at your university?”

In the same week that a national report gave Dal a failing grade on its sexual assault policies (D+), an indigenous student accused the Dalhousie Board of Governors of entrenched racism, a Muslim student was threatened with disciplinary action for defending herself against islamophobic white fragility, and 1500 intoxicated mostly white students rioted on our neighbour’s lawns and public streets in the guise of university homecoming.

As senators responsible for academic governance, we need to understand, connect the dots, and respond to these recent incidents of systemic racism and white privilege. Our appeal to the next generation of innovative scholars, of serious minded and provocative thinkers and doers has been shaken. Despite the Administration’s work in attracting new investors and state of the art institutes, and despite the purported “great strides hav[ing] been made to increase diversity among the university’s governing body”, these recent events force us to reflect on institutional practices that seem directed at “managing” persistent individual crises rather than addressing the structural problems.

In 2015, Constance Backhouse’s “Report of the Task Force on Misogyny, Sexism and Homophobia in Dalhousie University Faculty of Dentistry” told us that “race is a “ticking bomb” at Dalhousie. “What we heard”, she warned, “suggests an entrenched culture of white privilege”. Kati George-Kim and Masuma Khan are its latest public victims. It is inexplicable for Masuma Khan to be facing the threat of double victimization by a Dalhousie disciplinary action committee, a punishment that was sidestepped by male dentistry students despite offences that make Senator Khan’s excitable

speech pale in comparison.

The Backhouse Report, and the 2016 CAUT report on systemic failures in the Faculty of Medicine have been tabled more than advanced. The recent newsworthy events are all connected to the Administration's failure to respond appropriately and effectively to structural imbalances that continue to plague this university.

The Administration has not realized Backhouse's recommendation to rely on in-house expertise (Recommendation 26); our budget shows a declining proportion of tenured faculty positions; public relations and communications handlers have become more prominent than faculty at public events; the Tiger mascot is the most "present" personality on our website; the symbolic centrepiece of a football game, with serious health risks, played by men only — is the signature event at the homecoming of an "inclusive" university.

While it may seem trite to parallel the "team spirit" in homecoming rallies with white students whose behaviour manifests a sense of privilege, that's precisely what Dalhousie neighbours pointed out at the community meeting last Tuesday after the weekend homecoming riot... "The students" one gentleman said, "were white...they weren't foreign students... they were privileged kids from here and other provinces." They snorted cocaine in front of children, they fell drunk through windows, they urinated on lawns. Our neighbours were concerned for their safety.

Threatening Senator Masuma Khan who used excitable speech when expressing disgust against racist attacks, with "disciplinary action"? As one colleague observed, "Do I understand correctly that using an expletive in a Facebook post is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, but that none of the Facebook posts in the Dentistry scandal were a violation of the Student Code of Conduct? Is this because the Facebook posts in the Dentistry scandal did not meet the threshold of: "unwelcome or persistent conduct that the student knows, or ought to know, would cause another person to feel demeaned, intimidated or harassed ."

What do we need to build an inclusive Dalhousie that puts scholarship and integrity on centre stage? Why is it that it's always the vulnerable and

progressive who get hurt? As the elected body responsible for academic integrity, we need to question an Administration that seems more concerned with frat recruitment than scholarship. I suggest we return to the Backhouse report and do more than reflect. As a starting point, we need to act on her suggestion about using in-house expertise. And this expertise might be augmented by hiring new equally talented faculty (not Administrators) who can help build policies that reflect our values as academics and scholars. We need new faculty to revive this academy and bring us back to what we do well, teaching, doing research, and building a strong community of life-long learners who contribute to an open, respectful civil society.

Submitted respectfully to Senate meeting, Dalhousie University, 23 October 2017

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