

## BACKGROUND

In December 2014, the Dalhousie Student Union and the broader community were made aware of concerning misogynist and sexist Facebook posts made by students within the Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry. In the summer of 2014, Dalhousie Student Union was made aware of repeated incidents of sexism within the Faculty of Dentistry, including sexual harassment, sexist comments and preferential treatment of students in clinical settings. The students who brought forward these concerns wanted to remain anonymous due to a fear of retribution within the Faculty. Unfortunately, the processes available to these students at Dalhousie would not guarantee anonymity if any real action was to be taken. As a result, these students requested that the complaints not be pursued further.

In response to student and public pressure, Dalhousie President Richard

Florizone launched the external Task Force on Misogyny, Sexism and Homophobia in the Faculty of Dentistry in January 2015. The external Task Force was chaired by Dr. Constance Backhouse from the University of Ottawa and included Don McRae, also a professor at the University of Ottawa, and lawyer Nitya Iyer.

“**The Dalhousie Student Union was active in supporting grassroots, community responses to the incidents in the faculty of dentistry.**”

Throughout the Winter 2015 semester, the Dalhousie Student Union was active in supporting grassroots, com-

munity responses to the incidents in the Faculty of Dentistry. This support took many forms including: participating in community-organized events and protests; releasing statements on the issue of misogyny and rape culture; speaking to the media; co-organizing forums on sexism, misogyny, and racism; and co-organizing a town hall for students to share their ideas and concerns regarding issues of misogyny and rape culture on campus.

Representatives from the Dalhousie Student Union also met with the members of the external Task Force, and participated in the development of “BELONG: Supporting an inclusive and diverse university,” a report addressing Priority 5.2 under the Strategic Direction charter (“Foster a collegial culture grounded in diversity and inclusiveness.”). The Dalhousie Student Union also made a formal submission to the external Task Force that can be read at [dsu.ca](http://dsu.ca).

## THE REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON MISOGYNY, SEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA IN THE FACULTY OF DENTISTRY

The report of the external Task Force on Misogyny, Sexism and Homophobia in the Faculty of Dentistry was released on June 29, 2015. In the report, the external Task Force acknowledges and supports the Dalhousie Student Union’s commitment to fighting for a safer campus that is free from misogyny, sexism, homophobia, racism and all other forms of oppression and echoes many of the statements and recommendations made by students about addressing misogyny, rape culture, and other forms of discrimination and harassment on campus.

The external Task Force’s findings bring to light a wide range of concerning incidents of sexism, racism, misogyny, and sexual harassment. The report also highlights general concerns about procedural fairness in Dalhousie’s response to the incidents within the Faculty of Dentistry. Overall, though, the Task Force supports students’ position

that what happened in the Faculty of Dentistry is not an isolated incident and requires systemic and institutional change. The report plainly states that maintaining the status quo is unacceptable. The external Task Force also acknowledges that there continues to be cynicism and distrust among stakeholders regarding Dalhousie’s ability to address complaints because of a lack of action taken on past complaints, an absence of follow-up with individuals who file complaints and the broader community when action is taken, and a fear of retaliation when complaints are made.

In particular, the external Task Force backs students’ call for a fully-funded ombudsperson office, which can help ensure fair and balanced processes within the University. The report also calls for better supports for students seeking to make complaints regarding discrimination and harassment. These

“**The external Task Force backs students’ call for a fully-funded ombudsperson office.**”

recommendations reiterate the concerns students have raised regarding the lack of options for students attempting to draw attention to systemic issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination and harassment on campus. This need for better processes to address systemic issues of oppressive cultures and climates on campuses is further underscored in the *Report from the Restorative Justice Process at the Faculty of Dentistry*, released on May 28, 2015.

The external Task Force makes 39 recommendations, and suggests that Dalhousie could be a leader in cultural changes around issues of misogyny and rape culture by dedicating resources to research on sexual violence and drawing on the internal expertise of the Dalhousie Student Union, the

South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre, and the department of Gender and Women's Studies. These recommendations, along with additional recommendations made through the Restorative Justice Process and Strategic Priority 5.2 could lead to substantial changes on campus. Dalhousie

President Richard Florizone announced just after the report was released that he would be adopting all of the recommendations of external Task Force. The Dalhousie Student Union and its coalition partners will continue to work on ensuring that this commitment is carried through.

## STUDENTS' RESPONSE

The Dalhousie Student Union recognizes that the incidents of misogyny and sexualized and gender-based violence made public this year in the Faculty of Dentistry and in the Howe Hall residence are part of a broader issue on campuses and in our communities.

**“Students across the Dalhousie campus have been advocates for systemic change and the external Task Force recognizes the value of this mobilization.”**

The Dalhousie Student Union consistently works with student groups like the South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre and staff and faculty to advocate for important comprehensive changes to the University to challenge systemic issues of discrimination and harassment. Over the past several years, the Dalhousie Student Union has focused on raising awareness about rape culture and sexual assault on campus as part of students' objective of creating a more safe and inclusive campus.

Specifically, in response to events in the Faculty of Dentistry and Howe Hall, the Dalhousie Student Union released public statements calling on the University to:

- Provide accommodations for students who have experienced harm as a result of incidences of misogyny, sexual harassment, or gender-based violence on campus;

- Implement an acceptable formal complaint process for students to anonymously report incidents of discrimination and harassment;
- Create a Ombudsperson office to assist students in navigating current University services and to identify where services are inadequate or non-existent;
- Develop a process for students to share their experiences of discrimination and harassment and provide input into addressing these forms of oppression on campus in partnership with the Dalhousie Student Union and other Dalhousie student groups;
- Require that all faculty and staff at Dalhousie attend a mandatory training on sexism, misogyny, and the roots of gendered violence in working and learning environments; and
- Require that all students at Dalhousie take an equity course as a part of their degree which discusses the root causes of gender-based violence and intersecting forms of oppression.

These recommendations were also featured, where appropriate, in the Dalhousie Student Union submissions to the Dalhousie Budget Advisory Committee and the external Task Force.

Over the past several years, students across the Dalhousie campus have been advocates for systemic change and the external Task Force recognizes the value of this mobilization. The report draws attention to how student action and mobilization should not only be welcomed by the Dalhousie senior administration, but is essential to identifying issues on campus and proposing solutions.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Moving the report of the external Task Force from words to action will require further student consultation, action and mobilization. There are lots of opportunities for students who are interested in working on addressing systemic issues of misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and rape culture on campus, to get involved with the Dalhousie Student Union. Some ways to get involved include:

- Join the Dalhousie Student Union External Committee to get involved in campaigns to combat oppression and rape culture on campus.
- Join the Dalhousie Student Union Programming Committee to help plan events that promote consent and equity.
- Get involved with the Dalhousie Student Union Equity and Accessibility Office.
- Join or volunteers with one of the many Dalhousie Student Union societies who work on social justice and equity issues including the South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre, DalOUT, the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group, the Dalhousie Feminist Legal Association, OUTLaw, and more.
- Volunteer for the Sexual Assault Peer Support Phone Line, a new pilot project of the Dalhousie Student Union and a number of societies and campus stakeholders.

For more information or to get involved in any of these initiatives, please **contact Dalhousie Student Union Vice-President (Internal), Kaitlynn Lowe at [vpi@dsu.ca](mailto:vpi@dsu.ca)** or come by the Dalhousie Student Union offices in the Student Union Building!