

“My academic mission: To make the powerful care”

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Thank you, this was an unexpected award, and I am deeply honoured. As well, it is a privilege to be able to address you tonight [Slide 1]. My goal – my hope, indeed – is to inspire you to go back to your home institutions with a commitment to keep working to counter the commercialization of the university, as I believe this to be the root cause of many of our contemporary problems within the University.

TWO REPORTS

Dalhousie has recently had the benefit of two Independent Reports that have found the institution wanting in living up to its expected ethical standards, goals and mission [Slide 2]: (i) [*Report of the Task Force on Misogyny, Sexism and Homophobia in Dalhousie University Faculty of Dentistry*](#) (June 2015); and (ii) [*Report of the Independent Committee of Inquiry into the Situations of Drs. Gabrielle Horne, Michael Goodyear & Bassam A. Nassar at the Capital District Health Authority and Dalhousie University*](#) (January 2016).

These reports address two very different cases, but they have an important fact in common. Both reports identify serious, systemic problems with administrative culture, and flawed policies and processes. Tonight, I offer you a few reflections on the decision to “manage” these cases primarily through the Office of Communications and Public Relations, and the Legal Counsel Office.

My comments focus on the opportunity costs. Here were two discrete opportunities for the Dalhousie community writ large to be “Upstanders” and, in my opinion, we failed at this.

Let me start by quoting Sarah Decker and Monica Mahal, American students concerned about bullying at their school. They petitioned the Oxford Dictionary to include the word “Upstander” in the dictionary [Slide 3]. They define an UPstander as “an individual who sees wrong and acts. A person who takes a stand against an act of injustice or intolerance is not a “positive bystander” they are an UPstander.” Further, they make the point that “The concept of an UPstander is critical to the well-being of our society.”

I think we can usefully apply this term to institutions.

First, a comment on the dentistry scandal [Slide 4]. In failing to stand up, we not only failed the four women dentistry students who wanted a formal process and were blocked from having this, we also failed all of our students in not sending a strong message against misogyny and gendered violence. As a result, some were left with the impression of a cover up. Allow me to read for you an excerpt from a poem written by El Jones who, at the time, was Halifax’s Poet Laureate [Slide 5]. She, among many other was deeply concerned about the quality of the University’s response to sexism and sexual harassment. I am sure you will agree that hers is a powerful voice.

The Cover Up

By junior high they teach us cover up
No visible bra straps, midriffs, leggings, cover up
Dress codes target girls for disciplinary action
Remove them from the classroom for distraction
The message is, you exist for sexual satisfaction
We learn your body's more important than your education
The boys just can't control their eyes around temptation
You learn your body's not your own, your obligation
Is to keep it under control or else it's shameful.
At the same time as girl's math scores start degrading
Participation in science class you see fading
Could it be that girl's self-confidence is draining
That women even make it to dentistry school is so amazing
With all the obstacles from birth we're navigating
While boys are learning all about attaining
Girls are learning all about erasing
Acne, blemish, redness, cover up.
Be a cover girl they tell us, cover up.
By high school our personalities are covered up
Boys don't like girls too smart or angry, cover up
Smile baby when you're outside because your face is
Not a mirror to your soul it's public relations
And under covers girls are pressured, violated
But consent and rape no one's ever explained it
We don't know how to name it so we cover up
We say girls shouldn't change their minds and then complain
And maybe the boys just got a little carried away
But smart girls don't get themselves into that situation

You think we'd have learned something from Rehteah
And these are grown men not teenagers
Boys will be boys still tolerated
Female classmates sexual humiliation cover up
Think you can deny it by erasing, cover up
After all it's just entertainment cover up
And now decisions by administration, a cover up.
After all we've invested hundreds of thousands in their training, so cover up.
Just wait for the vacation, cover up
No one suspended pending investigation, cover up.
Most important to preserve our reputation, cover up.
Don't involve the victims in consultation, cover up

There's been months you ignored complaining, cover up
Say you're engaging restoration, cover up
Social justice appropriation, cover up
Ignore the community's outrage and cover up
Dentists who joke about knocking out women graduating? Cover up
Hide their names and we won't know which one might rape us
You don't want to ruin their expectations, cover up
Consideration for the perpetrators first so cover up
It's a national disgrace, a cover up.

DO THE RIGHT THING

My area of teaching and research is applied ethics and I have been known to say somewhat facetiously that when you're caught between a rock and a hard place – when no matter what you do you will pay a price – well, then, just do the right thing [Slide 6].

Ah, but there's the rub you say ... what is the right thing? Well people will have different ideas about this and my undergraduate students are often quick to tell me there are no right answers – 'maybe', I say, "but there sure are a hell of a lot of wrong answers".

In the months following the dentistry scandal when people outside Dalhousie wanted to talk to me about this, they invariably would start the conversation with "what happened?" And they were not referring to the misogyny or the sexism *per se*, they were referring to the institutional response. And what could I say? I think we failed and we didn't have to.

How might things have been different? Several faculty at Dalhousie got together and offered the President a four-step program [Slide 7].

Step one, acknowledge that there is a problem of sexualized violence on Dalhousie campuses, on other university campuses in our province, and across our country.

Step two, apologize for our failure in the past to respond effectively to the problem of sexualized violence on university campuses. For example, when reports of sexualized violence emerged two years ago at Saint Mary's University, UBC, and the University of Ottawa, we failed to stand up.

Step three, commit to the work required to make our campuses safe and supportive learning environments for women and members of other vulnerable groups.

Step four, develop an integrated approach to the problem of sexualized violence on our campuses – an approach that (i) responds to the specific harms and (ii) addresses the underlying systemic issues.

I often wonder how things might have been different if we had followed this approach.

Now let me turn to the CAUT report [Slide 8].

The Independent review committee found that “each case began, not with some egregious action, but with some interpersonal disagreements with colleagues over matters that appear to be within the bounds of what might reasonably be expected to arise from time to time in an academic tertiary care medical environment. The committee found that [Slide 9]:

- (1) none of the essential requirements to guarantee the right to **academic freedom** for academic physicians at Dalhousie University and Capital District Health Authority was met;
- (2) the important concept of **collegiality** was misunderstood and misapplied;
- (3) the high standard of **fairness** required to protect the rights of physicians facing a variation or suspension of their hospital privileges was not met;
- (4) formal **dispute resolution processes** leading to a final and binding decision using fair procedures in a timely manner were lacking.

These are pretty damning findings and you might well wonder what has been the University’s response. Officially? The response is NO COMMENT [Slide 10] because matters are before the court.

Here I want to offer a few brief comments on one facet of one of the three cases – the one involving Gaby Horne [Slide 11]. One of the problems, in her case, concerned her right to determine freely with whom she would collaborate in her medical research. Imagine being told who should be an author on your paper or a co-investigator on your grant? Another problem concerned her apparent lack of collegiality. The report specifically identified the way in which this concept was understood as problematic.

As concerns the matter of collegiality, currently there is a serious problem with (a conflict between) two Dalhousie documents. First there is the 1971 *Dalhousie University Senate Committee on University Government, Report on Tenure* [a Senate and Board of Governors document that is part of the current Collective agreement] [Slide 12]. It states that:

University teaching needs to attract and retain persons whose inclination and training make them relentless pursuers of knowledge. Compromise often does not come easily to such persons, and some friction in a University is inevitable. An efficient administration will keep this friction to a tolerable level, but the **absence of friction is likely to be a sign that the University is intellectually moribund**. Consequently, conflict between a faculty member and his/her Departmental Chairperson or Head or other colleagues in the University should not be taken as grounds for refusing the faculty member tenure, unless he/she acts with such irresponsibility that the work of the University is seriously impaired. [emphasis added]

Meanwhile, in 2013, the Dalhousie Senate and Board of Governors approved *Regulations Concerning Continuing Appointment with Annual Academic Career Development*, in which the Faculty of Medicine establishes its own independent criteria for collegiality:

Collegiality is broadly defined as the ability to function professionally within the academic community, and **involves the demonstrated willingness to work with colleagues** in contributing to the academic mission and governance of the Department, the Faculty of Medicine, and Dalhousie University. As such, it is elevated within the context of professional activities in the areas of teaching, research and administration and, where applicable, clinical service. [emphasis added]

We ought to be deeply concerned about this discordance.

More generally, I would draw your attention to the fact that these regulations include:

- No option for tenure for PhDs in Clinical Departments
- Nothing on Academic Freedom
- No grievance process
- Flawed definition of collegiality

SUMMARY COMMENTS

The fall out of these two “situations” – situations that provoked the two reports being reviewed in my talk here tonight – has resulted in what seem like paralyzing conditions for Faculty.

On the one hand, there are concerns about **collegial governance**. The residual message seems to be “Why can’t you get with the program?” The implication being that we should all “get along” by “going along”, by not criticizing, not pushing, not calling the institution to account. On the other hand, at the same time that we are being enjoined to be “collegial” there is the sense that we are under scrutiny. For example, since dentistry, the head of public relations, legal counsel, and the executive assistant to the President regularly attend Senate meetings. Some Senators experience this as intimidating.

What has impeded progress in both situations? For starters, the surrounding atmosphere in both situations is one of **incredible defensiveness (and sometimes resistance)**—this, to such an extent, that I am not alone in having noticed that some people seem to view the reports as the problem and not the events that necessitated the reports in the first place. Something else that has genuinely impeded progress is **language**, and more specifically our inability to speak the words – sexism, racism, homophobia – instead we talk about **equity and diversity**. And the other words that we are all supposed to get behind are **climate and culture** as we are told that it will take time to fix climate and culture—which is true. But in the meantime, what about fixing **policies and practices**?

Having said this, we may be making some headway with the second of the two reports I have briefly discussed tonight. For instance, my fellow Faculty of Medicine Senators are preparing three motions for Senate, to:

- strike a committee to develop a University-wide definition of Academic Freedom.
- have Faculties prepare a grievance policy for non-DFA Faculty members.
- have the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine prepare a response to the "Report of the Independent Committee..."

At this time, progress with respect to the institutional problems of sexism, racism, and homophobia at Dalhousie recounted in the *Backhouse Report* is less clear. One worry is that the University seems more committed to appearing to be transparent and accountable rather than acting from a commitment to these principles. This is perhaps best illustrated by an example. As recently as last week there was a presentation to Senate by the Faculty of Dentistry on the *Progress Report from the Faculty of Dentistry* on the various recommendations made in the *Backhouse Report*. Recommendation 13 of the Report says:

The Faculty of Dentistry should conduct an independent external review to determine whether RJ [Restorative Justice] sessions, properly constituted to ensure voluntary and inclusive participation, could assist in attitudinal and behavioural change in the student body, staff, and faculty members of the dental school.

How is the Faculty of Dentistry addressing this? They are funding an international conference in June 2016 to present lessons learned. In my opinion there is a pronounced difference between an independent external review and a conference for fostering understanding and implementing prospective change. One very material difference is the follow on expectations for responsible action which accompanies an inquiry as compared with a conference.

Undergirding all of this is confusion—confusion about who is working for who... [Slide 16]. A year ago the University organigram had the President reporting to the Board and the Senate off in left field. Now the Senate is connected, but the Senate, the President, and the Board are on par with one another. More and more the impression is being created that we the faculty are working for the Administration, when I think it should be the other way around and that the Administration should see itself as working for us—that is, supporting us in our efforts to teach and research.

As others observe – this represents a serious threat to academic freedom [Slide 17].

So, the title of my talk is: “My academic mission: To make the powerful care”. To do so, first you have to identify who the powerful are—and here I so want to believe that Foucault is right and that if we want to find where power rests we shouldn’t look to the King, but we should look to the masses who allow the King to remain in place. Power is ultimately at the base. If this is right, then my challenge is to make sure that we all care and that we all have the moral motivation and the moral courage to act. And this brings me full circle to my earlier comment about Upstanders. As defined in the Urban Dictionary an “Upstander” is:

- a person who stands up for his or her beliefs.
- a person who does what they think is right, even if they are alone.
- a person who is not a bystander.

Essentially, an Upstander reduces to someone who has the courage of her convictions.

We need people to stand up and defend the mission of the University as a place of higher learning. Which means, in the words of Ron Srigley we need to **expose the retail scam that is the modern university.**

On the way here I was reading the April issue of *Walrus Magazine* and it includes a damning article by Ron Srigley from the Department of Religious Studies at UPEI on the current state of University education in Canada. His article is titled: "[Pass, Fail: An inside look at the retail scam known as the modern university.](#)"

Let me bring this to a close by sharing with you two gems from that article... [Slide 19]:

Universities seek ways of obscuring the truth of their decline while also creating the impression of ever-increasing achievement. How is this grand *trompe l'oeil* sustained? Behold the growth of university public relations offices, or communications department, as they are more often called these days. These offices and departments work directly for the upper administration, and so do its bidding without resistance. They advertise the university, inflating its accomplishments and spinning its failure so as to maximize exposure and limit damage.

As money is siphoned from academic programs through attrition, it is channeled into a host of middle-management positions ... According to 2013-2014 data from the Canadian Association of University Business Officers, the proportion of university budgets dedicated to faculty salaries dropped from 32.1 percent share – already comparatively low – to just 29.4 percent. By comparison, the growth of the administrative set has been staggering. From 1979 to 2014, central administration and staff ballooned by three and a half times, while the size of the faculty merely doubled.

SLIDE 20

Another thank you -- to my Mom

SLIDE 21

Parting words – Turn your head towards the Sun