

StudentsNS response to *Strengthening Advocacy*

February 26, 2014

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General Comments on the Review Process

- We have sought to address issues in the report line-by-line with evidence for our counterpoints. The document is misleading in three ways: flat-out mistruths, biased interpretations and blatant omissions. It is obviously offensive to those of us working with StudentsNS on behalf of Nova Scotia students and to past representatives to the StudentsNS board, including many Dal student leaders, but ultimately we are not the targets of the review. The review is aimed at Dalhousie students and the Dalhousie Council. The mistruths are primarily mistruths to Dalhousie students. The manipulations in the report are aimed at manipulating Dalhousie students. We are absolutely offended, but Dalhousie students should be the most offended.
- StudentsNS was only contacted once during the review process when offered to comment on parts of the document's draft. StudentsNS provided input indicating that the report was outrageously biased and included a number of mistruths. The authors simply do not make a single positive statement about StudentsNS without a series of counterpoints. We were surprised when the document was still brought forward with only limited changes after we provided that feedback. StudentsNS was never interviewed or offered an opportunity to present to the review committee.
- The document was not authored by the Review Committee. The Review Committee never approved a final review. Instead the document was authored by just one member and two ex-officio members of the Review Committee and claimed to present findings of the review.
- StudentsNS does not object to being reviewed. On the contrary, we support critical reflection on our efforts to ensure we are representing our members and being as effective as possible. However, the Review should respect students' right to know the truth about our organization in making any decision, and the right of our board members, staff and volunteers to have their work represented fairly.

Three Key Concerns With The "Strengthening Advocacy" Document:

- The advocacy review systematically fails to mention that StudentsNS won a referendum with Dalhousie students less than two years ago, in February 2012, to increase the organization's dues. Two of the review's authors were candidates in that election so they cannot have been unaware.
- We have only been around for about 18 months as the better-resourced organization that Dalhousie students voted to create. We have made dramatic reforms to our governance, engagement structures and policy, with DSU participation. We continue to build our organization and reform our processes to address many members' concerns, including those of the DSU. We have significant room for further policy development.
- The review fails to explore the powers and composition of the StudentsNS Board of Directors. Board members set the organization's policy, governance policies,

engagement strategies, plans, etc. Our members control our organization's direction through their participation at the Board, including the DSU. No review is given of how the DSU representatives have participated at the StudentsNS Board of Directors in the past few years. This document will provide a review in this area.

Advocacy Report comments

The following provides line-by-line commentary on aspects of the report that are particularly problematic. These comments are not comprehensive, but do provide a picture of our concerns with the review document's assertions.

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- How has the Advocacy Review Committee completed the tasks assigned it by Council? Did it approve a review document?
- DSU President and VP AE ex-officio members, but are authoring the review document that was never approved by the actual committee.

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- Does the report outline the findings of the Advocacy Review Committee? Were its findings approved by the committee? Why are executives (ex-officio committee members) making the recommendations instead of the committee's voting members?

P. 10

- No note that debt figure from Nova Scotia dates to 2005. There have been significant changes since that time, including dramatic improvements to the NS Student Assistance Program and the \$1283 Nova Scotia University Student Bursary (\$261 for out-of-province students). See <http://studentsns.ca/advocacy/results/> Nationally, median student debt has actually fallen, which is good recent news: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140225/t140225b002-eng.htm>.

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- Who assumes that to enter/exit StudentsNS, a vote at a student association council is required? The DSU's bylaws were recently changed to reference our bylaws in return with respect to leaving an organization. We have not had a process outlined in our bylaws around disaffiliation, though we reference member's bylaws with respect to moving from full to associate membership.

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- How large was the investment in the Millennium Scholarship Foundation? \$2.5 billion. Why is no attention given to any of the positive aspects of this? This is not related to StudentsNS, but remarkably biased.

P. 22

- Position papers should be discussed at councils prior to being discussed and finalized at the StudentsNS Board of Directors. They are released publicly in draft form for one month to allow this to happen.
- Members are permitted to differ publicly on positions if they receive a mandate from their council, pursuant to our principle of member autonomy. The DSU voted in

favour of this amendment to our governing policies in 2013: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2012-12-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>.

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- StudentsNS' Fairness in System Funding report recommended tying fees to the gap between youth employment and employment among the rest of the working age population, so that fees are frozen at 0% nominal growth when youth unemployment is high and frozen at inflation when the gap is small. This recommendation would lead to a 0% nominal tuition freeze for the foreseeable future, as youth unemployment is unfortunately very high. See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/fairness-in-nova-scotia-university-funding-who-pays-and-how-much/> In the DSU council vote opposing the report, the vast majority of councilors abstained because they did not feel adequately informed while only two or three people voted in favour and one against, StudentsNS was not given an opportunity to present the report to Council:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn9vsdx1R4M&list=PLEayUyoIJABHLJ2mN6jXrQBkzEGgp8aa> (Minute 3:22:00).
- The DSU and StudentsNS have been lobbying for the Graduate Retention Rebate to be reallocated to the NS Student Assistance Program since 2009, not just for 13 months. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tax-Credits.pdf>. Through a google search we have not found evidence of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives voicing an opinion on this until 2010: <http://www.thecoast.ca/RealityBites/archives/2010/03/23/ccpa-to-ndp-dont-panic-over-deficit>. StudentsNS held this position prior to our position paper on student financial assistance being released. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tax-Credits.pdf>.

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- We actually have funding to hire campus coordinators, though we ask members to appoint our coordinators so that we don't go over their heads. The DSU representatives never appointed a student assembly trust coordinator. StudentsNS engagement on campus largely goes through our student union members because we lack capacity on our multiple spread out campuses and also because we have a philosophical commitment to respecting member autonomy, in contrast with other student organizations. The DSU representatives supported StudentsNS' engagement structures when they were designed in 2012-13.
- What we "claim" as achievements and setbacks? This is a very biased way to put it and no effort is made to assess the extent to which StudentsNS is responsible for the results. Why would the authors only list our results for 2013 instead of all of them in a supposedly comprehensive review? See: <http://studentsns.ca/advocacy/results/>. We are actually very careful about what is defined as a result, based on the advice of our governance expert. In the review, the authors suggest their meetings with officials are results, in which case it should be noted that StudentsNS has presented to the entire Liberal Caucus, the NDP Caucus, etc. However, whereas the report emphasizes face time with decision makers, StudentsNS emphasizes material policy changes –not all meetings achieve anything. We know for a fact because of our contacts with government that \$10 million in student assistance investments in 2012 and 2013 were a direct result of StudentsNS advocacy.

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- The 2007 MOU put in place a tuition freeze as well as a tuition reduction through the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary. StudentsNS called for this tuition reduction successfully (it's listed on our results list on our web page), although we were disappointed when it introduced a differential for out-of-province students. See: <http://studentsns.ca/2008/03/an-investment-in-nova-scotias-future-but-students-say-more-needs-to-be-done/> and <http://www.trurodaily.com/Education/2008-03-07/article-349346/MacDonald-refuses-to-reaffirm-tuition-reduction-promise-students/1>
- It is unequivocally not true to say we are telling government officials that universities do not need more funding, we have recommended funding increases at the rate of economic growth (growth in government revenues) or the rate of inflation when the economy does not grow. We have also indicated we would support funding increases for targeted services and programs, but there need to be strings attached. We do not support the notion that they are systematically underfunded, however, because we have worried this argument is used to justify increases in student fees.
- Could it be argued that we are part of the problem with regards to rising student debt? Difficult to prove that student debt levels have risen, there is no up-to-date data on this in Nova Scotia. We suspect that student debt has stopped rising because of our successful advocacy around the student assistance program. The average benefit of the debt cap program alone is approximately \$10,000 in loans converted to grants for beneficiaries. See: <http://studentsns.ca/advocacy/results/>. Nationally, median student debt has actually fallen, which is good recent news: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140225/t140225b002-eng.htm>.

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- We aim to reduce debt most of all by converting loans to grants. We did achieve a reduction in tuition fees when the climate allowed it. See: <http://studentsns.ca/advocacy/results/> and <http://www.trurodaily.com/Education/2008-03-07/article-349346/MacDonald-refuses-to-reaffirm-tuition-reduction-promise-students/1>. We were not happy however that the tuition fee reduction mechanism introduced an out-of-province differential.
- Incapable of system-level changes comment in an entirely subjective and biased judgement. What is a system-level change? What if all student loans are converted to grants, as we are asking for, so that many low-income students actually pay dramatically less for post-secondary education? Low-income students may receive enough grants that their tuition is effectively free. Is that a system-level change? That's what we have been doing and trying to do even more moving forward. See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/from-worst-to-first/>
- Over the course of the DSU's membership in CASA and StudentsNS the government's policies regarding tuition fees have generally worsened? We have been around since 2003 and at that time there was no tuition cap: fees were on average \$5,284 (Arts undergraduate - http://www.mphec.ca/resources/TBFEE2003_E.pdf). Since then tuition has never been deregulated for domestic Arts undergraduates (3.8% growth in 2005-2008, 0% in 2008-11, 3% in 2011-14 - <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SNS-Funding-Report-Final-For-Distribution.pdf>) and fees

for Nova Scotia students at least are around \$5,586 (the national average – <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130912/t130912b001-eng.htm>), a total increase of around 9% over 10 years, much less than inflation. This is just among Nova Scotia residents in undergrad arts programs, but for Nova Scotia students at least the proportional increase in fees since 2003 has been smaller than the increase in 2002-2003 alone (fees increased 9.9% between 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 - http://www.mphec.ca/resources/TBFEE2003_E.pdf). Considering that student assistance was 100% loans at that time, vs. 40% grants now with a debt cap, things have gotten significantly better for low-income Nova Scotia students at Nova Scotia universities. Things have not gone as well with international, professional and out-of-province students, though regulated tuition helps for everyone, even if their tuition isn't regulated, as it makes it more difficult to pursue the very large increases from the early 2000s and 90s. The overall picture remains not great, but it is not at all clear that it has gotten worse.

- It should not have been a challenge to get the NDP to freeze tuition? This was the stance of ANSSA; it was an enormous challenge. We didn't do as well as we would have liked at all. See: <http://studentsns.ca/2012/01/new-mou-promises-nothing-for-you-students/>. Yet, under difficult fiscal circumstances we almost doubled the budget of the NS student assistance program. The funding for the NS University Student Bursary disappeared when offshore oil revenues dried up, but the government maintained the bursary. The tuition cap was lower than average tuition growth across Canada – pushed up by Ontario despite the CFS' preponderance there. The whole government had an austerity agenda that impacted all sectors.

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- The comment about bin weights is absolutely not true. We recommended no adjustment to bin weights. Nothing we directly recommend would negatively impact humanities, social science and fine arts education. This is a straw man. We also do not understand how the report would support more job training needs or commercialization-based research... See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/getting-the-most-from-our-universities/>. These concerns about the report were not expressed when it was written and up for approval – See feedback from Jamie Arron and the response to this feedback in the minutes: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2012-12-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>. *The DSU President was on the record as supportive of the report in spirit*, but had concerns about how conditional mechanisms would be designed and further elements beyond the purview of the report. The Board decided to approve the report because they would have later input into any conditional funding mechanisms that were proposed later to ensure they were constructive and to allow for further research work on this basis. The DSU President was supportive of ensuring universities were more accountable.
- StudentsNS has argued that the universities should receive funding increases in line with growth in the economy, but not funding increases from students. We have not supported the idea that they are dramatically underfunded because they are among the best-funded institutions in the world and in the current fiscal environment we are worried that to argue that they are dramatically underfunded bolsters their arguments for greater growth in fees. It is a question of balancing general university operating

funding with other student priorities. See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/fairness-in-nova-scotia-university-funding-who-pays-and-how-much/>. See Jamie Arron's feedback prior to discussion on the report, along with responses from the researcher, vetted by the Chair and Executive Director, at <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2013-04-Jamie-Arron-feedback-on-Fairness.docx>. Most of the feedback simply fell outside the purview of the report. For perspective on the DSU council's decision regarding this paper, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn9vsdx1R4M&list=PLEayUyoIJABHLJ2mN6jXrQBkzEGgp8aa> (Minute 3:22:00). The great majority of DSU council felt insufficiently informed to have an opinion on the report, which is unfortunate because StudentsNS would have been happy to present the report's research and recommendations.

- StudentsNS requires that members provide notice of significant amendments to position papers at least one week prior to Board Policy Retreats so that staff can do research work respecting alternatives. In the only two instances where DSU representatives provided feedback on reports, it was received only four and two days in advance (April 15 before the April 19 meeting, Dec. 7 before the Dec. 9 meeting).
- We do not recommend any tuition fee increases under any circumstances. Money only has value for exchange, it loses value with time, which is called inflation. When youth employment is good then we say students tie tuition to inflation, do not when youth employment is poor. The understanding of inflation and "real" money in the document is completely wrong and discursive. In any case, youth employment is not expected to recover for the foreseeable future so the recommendation is for a 0% freeze, with a very strong argument for it. See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/fairness-in-nova-scotia-university-funding-who-pays-and-how-much/>

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- Our recommendations on international students would explicitly not reduce funding from the government for international students. We recommend that the funding provided based on international enrolment be tied to universities actually pursuing activities that support these students. See: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/international-students-and-the-future-of-nova-scotias-universities/>
- Our recommendation on international students would not lead to an increase in fees at Dalhousie in particular, no evidence for this assertion is given. We recommend that differential fees actually be reduced by 5%, though through eliminating the fees entirely for 5% of the international student body. It is difficult to calculate precisely the implications at Dalhousie, but together with our other recommendations on university funding and domestic tuition we estimate our tuition cap would approximate a real freeze for all other international students.
- The DSU's VP Academic and External was much more nuanced in his appraisal of the report at the Board of Directors of StudentsNS: "In my talks with international students, they were all really excited to see so many of the recommendations. I think that most international students don't feel appreciated, and they were really excited about it." <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-04-19-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>

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- The policy on redirecting funding from the Graduate Retention Rebate to grants was proposed by StudentsNS staff, although the choice was given to the Board between this and other alternatives. It is not true to say that the policy was included at the insistence of the DSU representatives, the entire Board agreed unanimously. This is outlined clearly in the minutes. See: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-10-26-BM-Minutes-JV.pdf>
- Initial drafts included the principle that “increasing access to PSE for students with high financial need takes priority over broad tuition reductions for all students”, not “students favour targeted needs-based assistance over broad tuition fee reductions”. This certainly did not express opposition to tuition reductions.
- ANSSA passed a policy recommending redirecting funding from the Graduate Retention Rebate to 2009. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tax-Credits.pdf>.

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- No sincere efforts at reforming StudentsNS were made in 2013-14, though we did make many significant changes in collaboration with the DSU President in 2012-13. The DSU representatives did not propose credible alternatives to StudentsNS policy proposals, preferring to show up at meetings on international students and tuition and fees and vote against without prior notice because about concerns about “tactics” – see <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-04-19-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>. Feedback was provided in advance on only two reports, as was generally related to items outside of the purview of the reports. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2013-04-Jamie-Arron-feedback-on-Fairness.docx> and <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2012-12-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>.
- StudentsNS staff are non-partisan, but the organization *legally* cannot stop its employees from expressing political opinions on their own time, especially when they do not link them to their work. People have the right to freedom of expression.
- The DSU representatives have not proposed alternative advocacy tactics this year except hosting an election debate where the politicians would not be invited, to show how they are all empty suits anyway (unminuted), see: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-06-18-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>. The DSU has not recommended that the organization undertake marches or any other initiatives. StudentsNS has made changes to improve engagement, including student assemblies, Mend the Gap (www.mendthegap.ca), MorethanYes (www.morethanyes.ca), Students Speak Out (www.studentspeakout.ca), push on universities to seek WageMark certification (<http://studentsns.ca/2013/08/nova-scotia-students-call-for-wage-fairness-certification-at-universities/>) and a boycott on anything that could be viewed as an ancillary fee consultation under the unclear current MOU (<http://studentsns.ca/2013/03/students-across-nova-scotia-unanimously-vote-to-boycott-all-university-consultations/>). The DSU representatives have supported student assemblies, Mend the Gap, the ancillary fee consultation boycott, WageMark certification and the sexual assault prevention campaign concept at the Board, but not implemented any of these initiatives in 2013-14 to our knowledge.
- StudentsNS released a positive statement following the 2013 budget because the Province implemented 90% of the expenditures requested in StudentsNS’ pre-budget

submission, which was approved by the DSU representatives. These represented the second largest new social policy investments in an austerity budget. We did point out how we were unhappy about tuition increases and the government's continued commitment to the Graduate Retention Rebate (this is before we passed our student assistance position paper): <http://studentsns.ca/2013/04/students-pleased-as-province-makes-significant-student-assistance-investment/>. StudentsNS had released a very harsh statement on university cuts when they were announced in October, calling them *reckless*. We have to be positive when government does what we want them to do, even if they have not done what we wanted in other places/times. See: <http://studentsns.ca/2012/10/nova-scotia-students-call-government-cuts-reckless-2/>. The DSU did not call on staff to include references to cuts, that decision was made by the StudentsNS Chair during a quick response to the budget. In subsequent discussions a DSU representative expressed some support for the CFS' statement which had indicated that the Province had done 'nothing' to address student debt, contradicting StudentsNS' support for student assistance investments. StudentsNS staff did express frustration to the Board that the CFS was undermining our ability to make wins through an exclusively negative response, even when government had made new investments for students.

- The DSU and StudentsNS have been lobbying for the Graduate Retention Rebate to be reallocated to the NS Student Assistance Program since 2009. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tax-Credits.pdf>. Comments related to the Graduate Retention Rebate on this page are flat out mistruths and among the most offensive in the whole report.
- The paraphrase is a terrible mistruth with reference to a proposed principle "increasing access to PSE for students with high financial need takes priority over broad tuition reductions for all students". We removed this principle from the report in any case. At no point has StudentsNS opposed tuition reductions, in fact we successfully supported them leading to the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary and 2008 tuition freeze, see: <http://studentsns.ca/2008/03/an-investment-in-nova-scotias-future-but-students-say-more-needs-to-be-done/> and <http://www.trurodaily.com/Education/2008-03-07/article-349346/MacDonald-refuses-to-reaffirm-tuition-reduction-promise-students/1>.

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- The DSU's representative supported the grading in the platforms. The DSU representatives did not oppose this platform or express subsequent concerns with it, they simply chose not to implement it. See: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2013-09-20-BM-Minutes-JV.pdf>
- The staff did not choose to disregard the DSU's representatives, the Board of Directors made the decision and the DSU's representatives were part of that decision. StudentsNS chose to identify parties with the advantage in certain categories instead of providing letter grades because we had concern that any letter grades would be very contentious and either too low or very likely too high considering the parties' weak commitments. StudentsNS' presser expressed our disappointment with respect to party platforms: <http://studentsns.ca/2013/09/studentsns-releases-assessment-provincial-parties-promises-students/>. We felt, however, that ultimately those were the choices that students had and we should provide them at least a little information.

- The Board of Directors, including the DSU representative, gave the NDP the edge in three of four categories. See: <http://nsstudentsvote.ca/>. The Liberals received the edge in the other category. The explanations were clear at the time and articulated in the StudentsNS information sheets. The decision was made to support the NDP on student financial assistance because the Liberals' commitment to eliminate interest on student loans was basically the least they could do, worth just \$2.5 million in the first year then just \$1 million in subsequent years. The NDP, on the other hand, had almost doubled the program's budget in just three years, adding \$22 million. We did secure a commitment to keep investing on the same path outside the NDP through direct follow-up. Although the Liberal's commitment was clearer, it was not sufficient enough to outweigh the NDP's established commitment to this program. This decision was also partially made in an effort to recognize the DSU representatives' preference for grant increases over eliminating interest, as expressed when deciding on platform asks in advance of the election and priorities for the 2013 pre-budget submission. We did get the Liberals the edge on funding and tuition due to their commitment to graduate scholarships, and because we followed up with them directly and they clarified their position on tuition fees.
- StudentsNS has not refused to criticize policies that increased hardship for students. We responded very strongly to announcements about tuition increases and funding cuts, but we are willing to say good things when we win investments. See critical commentary:
 - <http://studentsns.ca/2012/10/nova-scotia-students-call-government-cuts-reckless-2/>
 - <http://studentsns.ca/2012/10/nova-scotia-students-disheartened-by-rising-cost-of-education/>
 - <http://studentsns.ca/2013/09/students-reiterate-call-for-tuition-freeze-in-nova-scotia/>
- Why is the DSU executive cited in the review document supposedly prepared and approved by the review committee (but never was)?
- Staff proposals to fight other students? The Board of Directors approved a proposal to share legal fees to a very limited extent in cases where members are pursued in court in contravention of StudentsNS' principles and values. The CFS has pursued legal activities against two StudentsNS members in violation of the organization's values, notably Student Voice, costing those member associations in excess of \$50,000. This discussion took place in camera, so why is it being commented on, however inaccurately, in a public document? The DSU representative did vote against the motion, one of only two opposing votes in 2013-14, but no resources have been allocated at this point because no student union has brought forward a request for sharing of legal fees, the policy must be applied on a case-by-case basis. See: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-10-26-BM-Minutes-JV.pdf>
- This is one of the most blatant mistruths in the report. Redirecting the graduate retention tax rebate into grants has been StudentsNS policy since 2009, see <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tax-Credits.pdf>. StudentsNS staff have never criticized the DSU's representative for this position, as it has also been our policy. If the DSU's representatives have concerns with the behavior of StudentsNS staff why have these not been brought forward to the organization's

Chair? There have been no attempts to contact the Chair in either 2012-13 or 2013-14 regarding the behavior or performance of any staff member. The StudentsNS staff are supervised by the Board of Directors, of which the DSU's representatives are a part, and that is where the DSU's representatives are expected to bring forward any concerns along these lines. See: <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/4-Board-Executive-Director-Relationship-2012-11-04-BoD.pdf>

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- Possibly the biggest misrepresentation in the report is that “the DSU had made vigorous and sincere efforts to bring StudentsNS and CASA more in line with the needs of Dalhousie students without success. An organizational culture opposed to engaging rank-and-file students and public campaigns, as well as highly problematic opposition to lowering student debt and tuition fees are barriers to internal reform.” StudentsNS has never opposed lowering student debt and tuition fees, nor engaging students and public campaigns. Why wasn't StudentsNS sincerely consulted in this cloak-and-dagger review process? How many proposals have the DSU representatives brought forward for changes? How many efforts have the DSU representatives proposed to engage students and undertake public campaigns? They haven't participated in an election campaign aimed at informing students, Mend the Gap, a sexual assault prevention campaign that has received international attention, etc?

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- Based on our understanding from government officials, DSU representatives are only able to secure meetings with the Labour and Advanced Education Minister on their own through deception. StudentsNS was informed by government officials that the Minister met with Aaron Beale and John Hutton in 2012-13 because they requested a meeting as New Democratic Party members to discuss resolutions passed at the party's convention, but once in the room had an advocacy meeting on behalf of the DSU, which government staff said would not occur again. StudentsNS has been informed multiple times by government representatives over more than a year that they will not meet with individual student unions, only with StudentsNS and the CFS with our members. How many times have government officials informed DSU executives that they will not be granted independent meetings? To date, what proportion of meeting requests to government have been granted to DSU representatives, not as members of a political party? Should these fundamental questions not have been addressed in the section of the report on independent advocacy? These questions should be answered before the DSU Council is convinced to pursue advocacy on their own.

P. 44-45

- The proposed salaries are 10%-20% lower than at StudentsNS when accounting for payroll taxes, CPP and other benefits. StudentsNS research has received national recognition. The assertion that the DSU will be able to secure just as good or better researchers than StudentsNS is intensely questionable.

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- Definitely not a scientific opinion poll. After 50 results, the researchers modified the survey to compare students' values with StudentsNS and CASA, what were those results? Why aren't they reported?

P. 50-51

- These could be interesting numbers on awareness of StudentsNS if the sample was remotely representative, which there is now way to measure. The organization has only existed for just over four academic semesters with its current branding and structure, during two of which DSU executives have blocked almost every effort to engage Dal students. It is not difficult to see how students might not know about us. Saying we are low profile is quite something though. Check out some of our media coverage: <http://studentsns.ca/category/in-the-media/>
- The Advocacy Review Committee Town Hall had poor attendance? How representative were the attendees? Was any objective representation of StudentsNS' work and activities provided?

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- According to DAGS representatives, graduate students have strongly supported staying with StudentsNS and CASA. Unfortunately this is not mentioned.
- StudentsNS actually does run campaigns, only they have all been blocked on the DSU campus by the DSU executives. StudentsNS has existed with its current brand and structure for only a year and a half, and has prioritized building stronger campaigns systematically this year with significant success. StudentsNS has a very high public profile, with approximately 100 media hits per year and 11 television appearances in January alone – see <http://studentsns.ca/category/in-the-media/>. StudentsNS' sexual assault prevention campaign has received international attention, notably in the US Huffington Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/12/more-than-yes_n_4774615.html?utm_hp_ref=college
- StudentsNS has advocated for reduced tuition fees in the past, currently supports a real tuition reduction, and systematically advocates for changes that lower the overall cost of education for lower-income students more dramatically than can be achieved through tuition reductions spread across the entire student population.
- All the information presenting StudentsNS' activities and achievements, including obviously this report, has been so biased that it is difficult to imagine what students are being told before their opinion is being asked.

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- We always advocate for more affordable education. This assertion is ridiculous and dishonest. We have simply prioritized targeted financial assistance first ahead of tuition reductions because we believe that meeting the needs of low-income students has to come first.
- StudentsNS rebuilt its entire internal governance last year, with the DSU representatives voting in favour of the new Bylaws, Governing Policies, Vision, Values, Mission, Mandate, Board-Staff Relationship Policies, strategic plan. We have entirely reformed and the DSU representatives have supported those reforms. It's all our membership that makes the decisions. All these documents are available on our website at: <http://studentsns.ca/about/approach/> and <http://studentsns.ca/about/budget-plans/>
- StudentsNS has avoided coordinating with CASA out of concern when the DSU began a disaffiliation process with CASA. It is ironic to then be criticized for failing to coordinate. We would very likely be criticized if we did coordinate, just as we are being criticized for not coordinating.

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- This document is living proof that the DSU's representatives have not attempted to work in good faith to get Students Nova Scotia to better reflect Dalhousie students' priorities in 2013-14. There is plenty of other proof though...

Key Points on DSU representatives' participation at the Board:

- The DSU representatives have failed to attend the entirety of a single in-person StudentsNS board meeting in 2013-14, constantly leaving meetings partway through. Student representatives from across the province have expressed special frustration with the DSU representatives' failure to attend board meetings in Halifax, which many members must travel between 2-10 hours to attend.
- The DSU VP Academic and External failed to attend 62% of StudentsNS board meetings in 2012-13. Based on policies that the DSU supported, the Chair of StudentsNS should have requested that a new DSU representative be appointed.
- The DSU representatives have failed to exercise a vote in 30% of motions at the Board in 2013-14, up from 17% in 2012-13. The most frequently provided reason for abstaining votes is lack of preparation.
- The DSU representatives have proposed few ideas for the organization to pursue, or new policy initiatives. The ideas that they have proposed have often been sarcastic. This includes the DSU VP Academic and External's proposal to host an election debate in which none of the candidates are actually invited to symbolize that politicians' commitments are not worth listening to anyway.
- In some cases, the DSU representatives have expressed valuable concerns with proposals that have led to improvements. This includes concerns with the StudentsNS Mend the Gap Campaign, supporting women's participation in student politics, which led StudentsNS to develop its new engagement approach whereby projects like this are directed by a formal steering committee including students with direct experience and expertise. The Mend the Gap steering committee includes candidates for student union leadership from this year and last, a women's centre representative and an equity officer.
- Frequently, the DSU representatives have only expressed their concerns on issues at the Board in the context of this Advocacy Review and not at the StudentsNS Board of Directors. For example, the DSU President abstained on a vote to approve StudentsNS' report on off-campus housing because he had not spoken to the Dalhousie Council, then argued that Council should not support the report for reasons that he had not raised in the board discussion at StudentsNS. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-01-09-BM-Minutes-JV.pdf> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mchbs6NhzJM> (Minute 2:26:00). The DSU VP Academic and External even criticized the StudentsNS report in the media for the same concerns that were not raised at StudentsNS' board, in violation of StudentsNS' governance policies that DSU representatives approved, which require a mandate from council for board members to openly oppose StudentsNS policy in the media:

<http://dalgazette.com/news/campus/studentsns-report-wants-better-student-housing-standards/>

DSU votes at the Board of Directors:

- When the DSU representatives have exercised a vote at the Board of Directors, they have supported 92% of motions since May 2012 (this number does not include standard motions approving agendas, minutes, moving in-camera, recess, etc.).
- The DSU representatives helped to create StudentsNS' 2013-16 Strategic Plan and voted in favour of this plan, setting the long-term direction and goals for the organization. It is bizarre that the DSU representatives are suggesting leaving StudentsNS just one year into the Strategic Plan that they approved (the DSU's VP Academic and External exercised the vote in favour).
- The DSU representatives voted in favour of StudentsNS' 2012-13 Annual Report. This report is the tool for evaluating the organization's performance. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2012-13-Annual-Report-KP.pdf>
- The DSU representatives supported fundamental reforms to StudentsNS in 2012-13, including the complete review of the organization's internal governance (<http://studentsns.ca/about/approach/>):
 - Vision, Values, Mission, Mandate
 - Bylaws
 - Governing Policies
 - Board-Executive Director Relationship Policies
 - Operations Policies
- The DSU representatives have only voted against six motions since May 2012. Every other member voted in favour of these motions, Dalhousie's representatives failed to convince anyone else of their concerns. Each of these motions is worth discussing individually:
 - Position Paper: "Getting the Most from our Universities: A New Approach to System Planning and Funding".
 - DSU President expressed support in spirit for the report, which is recorded in the Minutes, but basically wanted release to be delayed to address further concerns that went beyond the purview of the report in the estimation of StudentsNS' Board. <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2012-12-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>
 - Feedback to make improvements to the report was provided and discussed at the Board, but not provided with the week's notice required in StudentsNS' Governing Policies. See <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2012-12-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>.
 - Position Paper: "International Students and the Future of Nova Scotia's Universities". <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-04-19-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>

- No feedback was provided in advance of the meeting to make amendments to the report.
 - The DSU's VP Academic and External: "In my talks with international students, they were all really excited to see so many of the recommendations. I think that most international students don't feel appreciated, and they were really excited about it."
- Position Paper: "Fairness in Student Fees and System Funding: Who Pays and How Much?" <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-04-19-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>
 - Feedback to make improvements to the report was provided but not raised by DSU representatives at the Board, though not provided with the week's notice required in StudentsNS' Governing Policies. This feedback is at <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2013-04-Jamie-Arron-feedback-on-Fairness.docx>.
 - StudentsNS was not given an opportunity to present on the report and the vast majority of DSU Councilors felt unprepared to have an opinion on the report or the DSU's proposed amendments: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn9vsdx1R4M&list=PLEayUyoIJA BHLJ2mN6jXXrQBkzEGgp8aa> (Minute 3:22:00).
 - Amendments were made pursuant to concerns raised by members, including the DSU. We shifted the emphasis of our tuition fee recommendation towards the norm being a 0% nominal freeze, and an inflationary freeze when youth unemployment is very much higher. We also indicated that there should be a review as to whether certain services are the responsibilities of universities or should be funded through different mechanisms than the operating grant, different ministries than LAE, which was a specific concern raised in Jamie Arron's document.
- Honoraria for Board Officers <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2013-04-19-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>
 - DSU representative opposed an amendment that would increase maximum honoraria for board officers to \$700 for the Chair and \$350 for the Vice Chair and Treasurer.
 - Honoraria to apply only when Officers agreed to stay in their positions until the StudentsNS AGM in July, after they have left their roles as executives of their student unions.
- Amendment to StudentsNS election campaign platform to request that parties introduce a youth employment strategy <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2013-08-20-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>
 - The only available poll suggests employment is, broadly speaking, the top priority for NS students by a considerable margin: <http://www.springtidecollective.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Nova-Scotia-Youth-Poll-Final-Print-.pdf>
 - DSU representative was concerned that the details of the strategy were too vague. Members preferred to include the request and subsequently evaluate parties' proposals. In fairness, during the election StudentsNS'

members ultimately felt unprepared to evaluate party commitments on youth unemployment. StudentsNS is preparing a Position Paper on employment at this time.

- Amendment to StudentsNS Governing Policies allowing StudentsNS to share member legal fees to a maximum of \$2500, in cases where the Board judges that legal action is being pursued against a member in violation of StudentsNS' values or principles.
 - This policy was discussed in-camera.
 - Policy would have to be applied by the Board on a case-by-case basis. Approval of the policy does not currently impact on any expenditures as no proposals for expenditures have been approved.
- Many of Jamie Arron's concerns about StudentsNS position papers were considered outside the purview of those reports but are issues that StudentsNS is committed to working more closely on through future reports on Education Quality, Student Success or Social Determinants of Access to Post-Secondary Education, or were discussed in more detail in StudentsNS' report on the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program: <http://studentsns.ca/research-policy/studentsns-position-papers/from-worst-to-first/>. Losing Dalhousie as a member would severely undercut StudentsNS' ability to work on these critically important issues.

DSU representatives block StudentsNS engagement with DSU students

- StudentsNS also has requested opportunities to meet with the Council of the Dalhousie Student Union every single month since September. Such opportunities have not been provided until now. StudentsNS developed its newsletter largely so that the organization could have some means to communicate with the Dalhousie Council and others when being obstructed by the DSU executives.
- After supporting the initiatives at the StudentsNS Board, the DSU representatives failed to appoint active steering committee members for StudentsNS' Sexual Assault Prevention Project and Mend the Gap – Women in Student Politics Campaign. The DSU representatives expressed concerns about the direction of these projects, but then failed to appoint any DSU representatives to help ensure that the projects were well designed.
- After supporting the initiatives at the StudentsNS Board, the DSU representatives failed to appoint coordinators for student assemblies or Mend the Gap on Dalhousie campus. StudentsNS was offering a total of \$1200 in honoraria for Dalhousie students to implement these initiatives, which the DSU representatives expressed support for. Hiring these coordinators was an important step towards ensuring that StudentsNS engagement activities took place at Dalhousie campus without overly taxing DSU resources. It is very difficult for StudentsNS to explain to funders how the DSU representatives agree to participate but then does not follow through on implementation.

- In the end, DAGS hosted a student assembly, but none has been hosted by the DSU in general. This is a shame because former DSU President Jamie Arron directly inspired the student assembly mode. Mend the Gap has not been implemented on the Dalhousie campus either.

DSU representatives block action on sexual violence and safe alcohol consumption

- StudentsNS secured funding from the Provincial Government, student unions and Cape Breton University to undertake two reviews of student union policies and practices around preventing sexual violence and promoting safe alcohol consumption. The DSU was offered funding to participate in both reviews free of cost. Without consulting with the DSU Executive or Council, the DSU President decided not to participate in either review.
- The DSU President repeatedly provided different explanations for his choice not to participate in the Reviews. To the StudentsNS board, he indicated that the DSU could not participate because the DSU held the liquor license for the whole university and he was not sure the university would be comfortable being involved. <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-07-09-BM-Minutes-AZ.pdf>. StudentsNS became aware that he had told university administrators that the DSU was not participating because Dalhousie would have to contribute more money towards the cost of the reviews than all the other student unions and he was not confident StudentsNS would work proactively with women's organizations and sexual assault response organizations. The correspondence is at <http://studentsns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-02-25-Sagar-Jha-correspondence.pdf>. The first comment is absolutely a mistruth because we had secured government funding, as the DSU President was well aware. With respect to the second, the project's author had experience working with Women Unlimited and Nova Scotia Status of Women and had built consultation with the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre into the review, among other organizations. The steering committee members were:
 - Amy Brierley, StudentsNS Chair, StFX Students' Union VP Union Services, former StFX Students' Union Equity Officer.
 - Annie Chau, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre Preventing Violence Against Women at StFX Project Coordinator
 - Jessica Compagnon, DASA VP Internal
 - Zach Gallant, MSVU Students' Union President
 - Callie Lathem, Acadia Students' Union Equity Officer
 - Staci Simpson, SMU Women's Centre Coordinator
 - Samantha White, Cape Breton University Sexual Diversity Centre Coordinator
- StudentsNS also developed a consent campaign, online at www.morethanyes.ca. The campaign has been received very positively, including in international media (the Huffington Post, AdWeek, BuzzFeed). StudentsNS has received overwhelming

support from Nova Scotia's feminist community on social media. Multiple P-12 schools have asked to use the campaign materials. The DSU had agreed to participate in the consent campaign, yet the DSU's VP Academic and External made the decision not to implement the campaign, informing StudentsNS on the day of the campaign's launch even though repeated emails had been sent over the previous week asking members to implement the project.

- The DSU representatives refusal to participate in these initiatives, worth approximately \$50,000, means Dalhousie students benefit substantially less from work that StudentsNS is doing on these fundamentally important issues. It's \$50,000 worth of initiatives on issues that matter to students that the DSU cannot benefit from to the same extent as others, and into which DSU students could not provide any input.

Bylaw amendments regarding disaffiliation

- The recent bylaw amendment brought forward by this review's authors eliminates any governance policy around the process for disaffiliation or downgrading status within StudentsNS:
 - "The Union shall not renounce its full membership within an external advocacy group unless the appropriate process consistent with that organization's bylaws is followed."
- The following was the DSU President's justification for the bylaw change to Council:
 - "If you want to exit an organization, you do it based on their rules. That's what our legal advised us to do. We know how external advocacy organizations like to pursue legal action. We don't want to leave our union susceptible to that. It's a waste of our time, money and resources, so that's it. It's simple. It's a very legal thing that I'm hoping to build into the constitution so that we can ensure that the union is safe."
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mchbs6NhzJM> (Minute 3:01:00).
- StudentsNS' relevant bylaw has been:
 - "A Member may withdraw from Full Membership to Associate Membership status by resolving to do so in accordance with its own By-Laws and by informing the Chair in writing no later than March 1st of the fiscal year."
 - This does not actually discuss disaffiliation. StudentsNS has no bylaw on disaffiliation. We would assume that the spirit of our bylaws requires that we be noticed of a change of status by March 1st.
- It is very difficult to credit the DSU President's arguments that their lawyers advised the DSU to create this circular reference as a means to clarify the process for the DSU to disaffiliate from its external advocacy organizations. He notes that external advocacy organizations have a habit of suing their members on this issue, so the DSU would be better off simply referring to the external organization's bylaws for disaffiliation to help protect the DSU from being sued for following its own process. Yet, our previous bylaw directly referenced members' own processes. As well, StudentsNS (nor CASA) have never pursued legal action against a member, only the

Canadian Federation of Students has done so widely. StudentsNS has many different governance structures respecting member autonomy that are fundamentally designed to avoid this kind of chicanery. This bylaw change is most likely an effort to weaken student control over decisions on external affiliation, which is in keeping with the travesty of an advocacy review document.

- Considering the author's review document is so contemptuous of students' rights to make an informed decision on how advocacy is conducted, including perhaps most notably the fact that it neglects to mention anywhere that DSU students supported increased fees to StudentsNS less than two years ago, StudentsNS' members felt it was absolutely necessary to ensure a policy was in place somewhere respecting the process for disaffiliation from StudentsNS, if not in the member's own governance policies, then in StudentsNS'. StudentsNS' new bylaw will only apply to members who have not outlined a process in their own bylaws, and require that they follow the same process as was used to establish their current status with StudentsNS.
- The notice of the bylaw change has not been submitted to the Registry of Joint Stock Companies and therefore will not affect any DSU decision on February 26, 2014.