

DALHOUSIE WOMEN'S CENTRE

CONSTITUTION (revised 2009)



Mission:

The Dalhousie Women's Centre exists in recognition of women's common and diverse needs. We at the Centre know that you cannot work for a society free of sexism and patriarchy without also working for a society free of all forms of oppression. We are here to support women and, by extension, all people dealing with oppression. We believe in working together for the creation of a society that is vibrant, life-giving, and safe for *people of all genders*.

Dalhousie Women's Centre Constitution

Preamble

Whereas we are *devoted to the promotion of feminist¹ principles*, these principles shall be considered in all matters of policy, programs, action and any and all decisions relating to the Dalhousie Women's Centre.

Whereas *inclusion is foremost amongst these principles*, all decision-making bodies within the Dalhousie Women's Centre will give weight to input from all members and users of the Dalhousie Women's Centre community.

Whereas we *operate in support of all women*, the Dalhousie Women's Centre works for a society free of oppression² on the basis of age, race, colour, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease, ethnic, national or aboriginal origin, family status, marital status, gender, source of income, or political belief or association.

Article 1: Name

The name of the society to which this constitution applies is "Dalhousie Women's Centre," hereinafter referred to as the "Centre."

Article 2: Mandate

The Centre exists in recognition of women's common and diverse needs. We at the Centre know that you cannot work for a society free of sexism and patriarchy without also working for a society free of all forms of oppression. We are here to support women and, by extension, all people dealing with oppression. We believe in working together for the creation of a society that is vibrant, life-giving, and safe for people of all genders.

The Centre is a student-funded, volunteer-driven resource centre that seeks to address and advocate for anti-oppression issues within a feminist framework. The Centre consciously recognizes that struggles against all forms of oppression (including racism, colonialism etc.) are "women's issues". We are first and foremost a resource centre which provides resources and support for students, faculty, staff, and community members on such "women's issues".

The Centre aims to provide resources and referrals to the University and broader Halifax community, as well as a safe space³ for women⁴ to organize. The Centre also offers free meeting space to woman-positive and anti-oppression groups at the discretion of the Board.

¹ The Centre's working definition of feminism is: the movement to create a society free of sexism and patriarchal oppression. As the DWC sees all forms of oppression as operating together, the movement to end sexism and patriarchy necessarily includes work to end racism, colonialism, capitalism, heterosexism, queerphobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of oppression. The DWC recognizes that people of all genders - who have committed themselves to eradicating sexism and patriarchal oppression and are active in anti-oppression work - can be feminists.

² The Centre's working definition of oppression is: the systematic privileging of one societal group's rights and needs to the detriment of all other societal groups' rights and needs. Example: racism is a form of oppression that involves the systematic privileging of white people in North American society to the detriment of Aboriginal peoples and people of colour.

³ The Centre defines "safe space" for women as being space that is free of sexism, patriarchal domination, and other forms of oppression. As women may come to the Centre dealing with any range of crises (including sexual or domestic abuse by men), "safe space" for women sometimes translates as meaning woman-only space. Woman-only space is useful for women coming

Article 3: Membership

The Centre is open for people of all genders and those who do not identify with a gender to volunteer. All volunteers must attend volunteer training sessions including anti-oppression workshops and crisis intervention training. Active volunteers must also commit to volunteering a minimum of 1 hour per week towards staffing the Centre and/or Centre or volunteer activities. People of all genders may use our resources, access our referral service, and participate in Centre events (unless otherwise indicated).

The priority of the Centre, however, is to offer a space for people who are oppressed in our patriarchal and sexist society to:

- access support and resources
- be a part of decision-making and community-building in a space that is not male-dominated.

For this reason, men are not allowed to volunteer at the Centre alone or answer the phone while in the Centre. Men are also not able to become Board members.⁵

Article 3a: Voting Rights

All present are allowed to vote at the Annual General Meeting.

Article 4: Board of Directors:

The Centre shall have a Board of Directors (hereinafter “the Board”). All positions on the Board will run for one year beginning in October. Terms can be renewed at the discretion of the Board, Director and the membership.

The Board shall be selected as per DWC Board Selection Policy (See Appendix B).

Opportunities for Board membership shall be advertised in such a way that a broad and diverse spectrum of women in the community are reached.

The Board shall consist of not less than six and not more than ten women.

The Board shall comprise of those who express interest in serving the Centre in that capacity. In choosing Board members, the Centre will ensure that women facing racist, ableist, classist, colonialist, and other forms of oppression have equal opportunity to partake in Board leadership and activities.

Article 4b: Purpose of Board

The Board oversees operations of the Centre and directs and supports the Director.

The Board assumes total liability for the activities of the Centre, and therefore holds ultimate discretion over the Centre’s activities.

together to support each other, to recover from sexism and patriarchy, to discuss issues they may not feel comfortable discussing around people who are not women, and to organize against sexism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression.

⁴ The Centre is a trans- and queer-positive space. We therefore include transgender and transsexual women in our definition of who constitutes a woman.

⁵ See Appendix: Working as Allies Against Sexism and Patriarchy.

Article 4c: Executive Officer

The position of Chair shall run for one year. It shall be the responsibility of the Chair to facilitate meetings, create and accept submissions to the agenda, and make the agenda available to the Centre membership 3 days prior to the Board meeting.

The position of Secretary shall operate on a rotating basis. It shall be the responsibility of the Secretary to take and distribute minutes to the membership.

Article 4d: Board Meetings

Meetings of the Board shall be held at least once a month and shall be attended by all members as well as the Director, who shall not have a vote.

Additional meetings may be called as needed, at the discretion of the Board, provided notice is communicated to all Board members and the Director.

The Board will strive to reach consensus on all of its decisions. Consensus will be reached when all members of the Board are comfortable with a decision. As a final resort, where consensus cannot be reached *and* all alternatives have been explored, a decision will be reached by at least 80% approval.

Quorum shall be 60%.

The Board shall be responsible for setting policy for the Centre. Policy decisions may be amended at Board meetings, and shall be effective immediately upon adoption by the Board.

The Board shall have the right to discuss employment matters *in camera*.

All community members are welcome at Board meetings and are welcome to share suggestions for Centre activities and operations at those meetings.

Article 4e: Recall from Board

A member of the Board may be recalled from their position if:

- The MOU is violated or not upheld (as per the Constitution).
- Breaching confidentiality of the Centre as per the Confidentiality Agreement.
- She fails to recognize, fulfill, or in anyway undermines the mission, mandate or spirit of the Centre (Article 2) OR utilizes the Centre and its resources for personal gain.
- There is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct (particularly Section C-e).
- They do not attend three consecutive Board meetings
- The rest of the Board has just cause for believing that the member is not fulfilling her responsibilities or is representing the Centre in a way inconsistent with the principles of the DWC Constitution.

Concerns regarding Board members shall be submitted in writing to the Chair, and shall be discussed at the next Board meeting. Explanations, responses and actions shall be written and attached to the minutes, as well as conveyed to the concerned party(ies) as soon as possible.

Article 5: Annual General Meeting

Annual General Meetings of the Centre shall be held no later than March of each year. A minimum of 10 days notice of an AGM must be given.

The following shall be addressed at the AGM:

- Annual Report, including:
 - i) report from the Board
 - ii) report on the Centre's financial standing
 - iii) report on the activities and undertakings of the Centre
 - iv) report from the Director of the Centre
- Approval of the following year's budget
- Other business as it arises

As per Article 3a, all Dalhousie students are able to attend and vote at the AGM.

An item shall be passed once consensus is reached. If consensus cannot be reached, and all alternatives have been explored, a 2/3 yes/no majority shall be required.

Article 6: Hours of Operation

Wherever possible, the Centre will be open Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hours are subject to change.

Article 7: Staff at the Women's Centre

All staff shall consistently represent the Centre in a manner consistent with the feminist principles articulated in the preamble of this Constitution.

The Board shall be responsible for the hiring of all staff of the Centre.

The Centre shall pursue the values and ideologies of employment equity.

Article 7(a): Director

When necessary, each year, the Board shall be responsible for the hiring of a Director.

This position will be funded by the proceeds from the student levy and administered by the Dalhousie Students' Union.

Any students wishing to opt out of the student levy shall do so as per the DWC opt-out policy (See Appendix C).

The term of employment for the Director shall be one year, with the provision for renewal at the discretion of the Board. A standard employment review will be completed in May of each year.

Article 7(b): Duties of Director

The Director at the Women's Centre will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Centre, including administrative duties, event and volunteer co-ordination and other tasks, at the discretion of the Board.

The Director is accountable to the Board and shall present a report to the Board at each Board meeting which includes:

- i) financial report
- ii) report of activities

The Director shall take direction from the Board and will sit on the Board as an ex-officio, non-voting member. The Director shall, however, be encouraged to bring amendments, policies, decisions, etc. forward and argue them to the Board.

The Director will be responsible for the Ratification of the Women's Centre with the Dalhousie Student Union. Ratification happens once a year and the Director will prepare and submit the Ratification documents in May of each year.

Article 7(c): Removal of Staff

The Board has the ability to remove staff if sufficient grounds exist. Grounds for removal of staff include, but are not limited to:

- i) absence at three consecutive meetings
- ii) failure to fulfill responsibilities

Concerns regarding staff shall be submitted in writing to the Board, and shall be discussed at the next Board meeting. Explanations, responses and actions shall be written and attached to the minutes, as well as conveyed to the concerned party(ies) as soon as possible.

Dismissal shall be preceded, where appropriate, by a verbal and written warning. In all cases, the employee shall have the right to answer to the concerns of the Board.

Article 8: Volunteers

Volunteers shall be recruited each year to assist the Director in the day-day-to-day operations of the Center, to assist in program planning and to help keep the Centre open during hours of operation.

Volunteers shall set their own hours in consultation with the Director.

The Director and the Board shall be responsible for the training of all new volunteers.

Refer to *Article 3: Membership* for policy surrounding volunteering.

Article 9: Finance

The Board shall be ultimately responsible for all finances of the Centre and shall prepare records for audit by the Dalhousie Students' Union.

The Director shall manage the day-to-day expenses of the Centre and shall be held accountable to the Board.

Signing officers shall include the Director and two members of the Board.

The fiscal period shall run from April 1 - March 31

Article 10: Constitution Amendment

The Constitution shall be amended at the AGM in accordance with the protocol articulated in Article 5.

Article 11: Policy and Procedure

The Board shall be responsible for setting policy for the Centre. Policy shall be amended and adopted at Board meetings in accordance with the protocols articulated in Article 4d. Policy decisions shall be effective immediately upon adoption by the Board.

Appendix: Working as Allies Against Sexism and Patriarchy

Section 1: History of the Dalhousie Women's Centre

Excerpt from "Dalhousie Women's Centre - Preliminary Vision" in Dalhousie Women's Centre Herstory: The Founding of the Centre:

Women's Centres are formed in recognition of women's common social, cultural, cognitive, and physiological needs in encouraging positive gender relations. Increasing reports of sexism, including violence against women in the community and on the Dalhousie Campus, have convinced a group of women that there is a need for education and action to address women's concerns. We feel that a Women's Centre would provide a place for women and men to explore ways to deal with these issues. As well as offering a communal space, the Women's Centre will have a safe space for women only. In this space women can share their experiences and support each other, free from the intimidation and harassment of society. This space will give women an opportunity to develop a positive self-image among other women.

The Centre was formed when a group of committed women joined together to articulate the need for a space (as described above) where women on campus could support each other, organize against sexism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression, experience woman-positive community in a safe space, and get the resources, education, and referrals they needed. The call for the creation of the Centre came partly in response to repeated incidents of sexual abuse, sexism, and male domination on and off campus.

As a space where women and people of all genders could come together to address oppression, the Centre was created to help ensure that Dalhousie University was a non-sexist and safe environment.

Some of the original principles of the Centre were:

- The Dalhousie Women’s Centre is a reflection of the needs and goals of the women involved.
- The Dalhousie Women’s Centre is designed to foster the development of all women students, women faculty, and women staff in the university environment.
- The Dalhousie Women’s Centre is a woman-positive environment that values the diversity and promotes the equality of all women in society.
- The Dalhousie Women’s Centre is a place where women can speak, be heard, and have their problems recognized in a communal manner.
- The Dalhousie Women’s Centre is a safe haven for all women.
- The Dalhousie Women’s centre is a space where women may meet to share their common and individual experiences with each other.

As part of their campaign to create a women’s centre on campus, the founding group solicited letters of support from university staff and community members. One such letter read (in part):

My daughter’s safety while attending [Dalhousie] university has always been a concern of mine and I would like to believe it is also a concern of the University’s. We are all too well aware of the issues women attending university must deal with on a daily basis including sexual harassment, threats to their physical safety, and the feeling of being “outsiders”.

I believe that a Women’s Centre at Dalhousie University would give my daughter and her sisterhood, a safe place to meet to discuss issues, plan events and help raise consciousness on the campus to work towards overcoming these obstacles to learning. I also believe that it is the university’s responsibility to provide women students with the proper facilities to accomplish their goals.

Unfortunately, the issues women faced on and off campus in 1993 continue to be relevant today. Incidents of sexual assault still occur on and off campus, many of Dalhousie’s courses and faculties are still male-dominated in terms of faculty, students, and curriculum, and women still encounter sexism within and without the Dalhousie campus. There therefore continues to be a need for woman-positive space on campus.

Section 2: Legal Provisions Under the Human Rights Act

The Human Rights act prohibits discrimination as per the following:

Prohibition of discrimination

5 (1) No person shall in respect of

- (a) the provision of or access to services or facilities;
- (b) accommodation;
- (c) the purchase or sale of property;
- (d) employment;
- (e) volunteer public service;
- (f) a publication, broadcast or advertisement;
- (g) membership in a professional association, business or trade association, employers organization or employees organization, discriminate against an individual or class of individuals on account of
- (h) age;
- (i) race;
- (j) colour;
- (k) religion;
- (l) creed;
- (m) sex;

- (n) sexual orientation;
- (o) physical disability or mental disability;
- (p) an irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease;
- (q) ethnic, national or aboriginal origin;
- (r) family status;
- (s) marital status;
- (t) source of income;
- (u) political belief, affiliation or activity;
- (v) that individuals association with another individual or class of individuals having characteristics referred to in clauses (h) to (u).

The DSU and all of its Societies are bound to operate in accordance with Section 5 of the Human Rights Act. The type of work the Centre is doing falls under Section 6(i) of the Act, which explains that in the case of people who are members of disadvantaged groups, there may be exceptions to Section 5.

Exceptions

6 Subsection (1) of Section 5 does not apply

(. . .)

(i) to preclude a law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or classes of individuals including those who are disadvantaged because of a characteristic referred to in clauses (h) to (v) of subsection (1) of Section 5. 1991, c. 12, s. 1.

Women continue to be listed among these disadvantaged groups.

Section 3: Working as Allies Against Sexism and Patriarchy

(a) Mandate:

The Dalhousie Women's Centre exists in recognition of women's common and diverse needs. We at the Centre know that you cannot work for a society free of sexism and patriarchy without also working for a society free of all forms of oppression. We are here to support women and, by extension, all people dealing with oppression. We believe in working together for the creation of a society that is vibrant, life-giving, and safe for people of all genders.

(b) Allyism:

The Centre is committed to working with allies⁶ to build a community that is free of sexist, patriarchal, and all other forms of oppression. People of any gender may support the Centre in the role of an ally by volunteering at the Centre, using our resource library or referral services, attending Board meetings and offering input on Centre activities, attending the majority of the programs the Centre offers, collaborating with the Centre to create new initiatives and programs, and committing to addressing oppression wherever it may arise.

(c) Men's role:

As the priority of the Centre is to offer a space for people who are oppressed in our patriarchal and sexist society to access support and resources and be a part of decision-making and community-building in a space that is not male-dominated, men are not allowed to volunteer at the Centre alone or answer the phone while in the Centre (DWC Constitution).

Notes:

⁶ The Centre defines Allies as being people who are dedicated to working across societal barriers to support members of historically disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Allies are committed to working against oppressive thoughts, behaviors, and systems within themselves and in their communities.

→ The reason why male volunteers may not answer the phone or volunteer alone at the Centre has primarily to do with the Centre's function of supporting people who call or visit the centre 'in crisis'. All Centre volunteers are trained in crisis intervention in order to effectively provide referrals to Dalhousie students and community members. Oftentimes women who are in crisis as a result of domestic or sexual abuse access the Centre's services. Unfortunately, sexual and domestic abuse against women continues to be predominately perpetrated by men. Therefore, the Centre believes in offering women who are survivors of such abuse a space to come, be listened to, and be assisted that is free from the threat that men can sometimes represent. Women also tend to feel far more comfortable discussing 'women's issues' (such as sexuality, relationships, menstruation, or even issues of sexism and oppression) in the company of other women.

Men are also not invited to become Board members, though they are welcome to attend and give input at Board meetings (DWC Constitution).

Notes:

→ Men are invited to attend Board meetings and give input and suggestions.

Reasons for this specification are as follows:

→ The Centre exists to work against sexism and male domination. As it works to advantage a historically disadvantaged group (women), it follows that women be in the position to make decisions governing the Centre.

→ As a patriarchal and sexist society, our community hosts a plethora of spaces that have historically been and continue to be 'safe spaces' for men to the exclusion of women. These include workplaces, universities, the streets, etc. The Centre exists to provide a space that is safe for women to work together for the benefit of women and other members of historically minoritized groups.

→ The Centre remains committed to working together with people of all genders to create a community that is safe for people of all genders.

(d) A note on Transgenderism, Transsexuality, and Queerness:

The Centre is a trans- and queer-positive space and therefore includes trans women in its definition of "woman". Trans women are welcome to join our Board and/or volunteer at the Centre. The Centre works on an ongoing basis to counteract transphobia and queerphobia in our society.

Appendix B: Board Selection Policy

The following policy was adopted at a General Meeting of the Members of the Dalhousie Women's Centre held on March 30th, 2008. It serves as the basis for policy on recruiting and electing Dalhousie Women's Centre Board member.

Section 1: Society Policy

- The DWC's executive is the Board of Directors.
- The Board shall be composed of union and non-union members who are elected onto the Board through a majority vote at the DWC's fall AGM.

Section 2: DWC Board Policy

- All women are welcome and encouraged to apply for Board positions.
- In choosing board members, the DWC will ensure that women facing racist, ableist, classist, colonialist and other forms of oppression have equal opportunity to partake in Board leadership and activities.
- The Board will operate under a horizontal, consensus-based decision-making framework.
- The Board Shall consist of not less than 6 and not more than 10 women

- DWC Volunteer Portfolio Positions are Board Positions; The Women's Community Rep position shall be a Board position; The Friday Shift Position shall be a Board position.
- DWC Volunteer Portfolio Positions include (but are not limited to) the Sexual Violence Portfolio, the Health Portfolio, and the Volunteer Management Portfolio
- DWC Volunteer Portfolio Positions, the Women's Community Rep and the Friday Shift Board Positions are considered Provisional Board Members and are exempt from the Board nomination process. They must be sanctioned at the next available AGM.

Section 3: Board Recruitment Timeline

- DWC Board recruitment will be an ongoing process.

Section 4: Board Nomination and Voting Process

- DWC members and volunteers are encouraged to nominate prospective Board members.
- Prospective Board members will be required to collect 10 signatures. Half of these signatures must be from active DWC members.
- Prospective Board members will also be required to present two supporting references to the DWC.
- Board nominees must be sanctioned by the membership at the AGM.
- Board nominees will provide a defense/speech at the AGM.
- All board nominees will be voted upon by those present at the AGM.
- Nominees will be elected to the Board by a majority yes/no vote.

Section 6: Filling Board Vacancies

- Board nominees must submit a resume to the current Board.
- Board nominees will be invited to attend the next available Board meeting.
- Board nominees will provide a defense/speech at the board meeting.
- Board nominees will be voted to the Board by a yes/no majority vote of current Board members.
- Upon sanction by the Board, the nominee is a provisional Board member until the AGM where they are formally sanctioned by the membership.
- Provisional Board members will provide a defense/speech at the AGM.
- Provisional Board members will be voted upon by those present at the AGM.
- Provisional Board members will be elected to the Board by a majority yes/no vote.

Appendix C: Levy Opt-Out Policy

The following draft policy was adopted at a General Meeting of the Members of the Dalhousie Women's Centre held on March 27th, 2009. It serves as the basis for policy on handling the refund of the student levy.

Section 1: From DSU Society Policy

- The Society must allow the levy to be refunded to each student who does not wish to contribute to the Society.
- **Binding Referendum Question: February 14, 1993 - Motion 292:93**

BIRT the DSU Council approve the following as a referendum question for the general 1993 General DSU elections:

“Do you support an annual levy of \$2.00 per full-time student and \$1.00 per part-time student to help maintain the new Dalhousie Women’s Centre, the objective of which include:

- a.) To maintain a resource centre open to all members of the public.
- b.) To promote public education and awareness of issues of particular importance to women
- c.) To provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for all women in the community.

The fee is refundable to students who do not wish to contribute. Result: Carried.

Referendum 1998

Whereas: The Dalhousie Women’s Centre has operated off a levy of \$2.00 from full-time students established in 1993.

Do you support the direct levy to the Dalhousie Women’s Centre be increased by \$0.35 per student? Yes / No

Result: Carried.

Section 2: DWC Levy Opt Out Policy

- All students can opt out of the student levy.
- To opt out, the student must come to the Dalhousie Women’s Centre, 6286 South Street.
- All students who opt out of the student levy may still access the Centre and our resources if and when they need it.
- The Centre will undertake to reasonably advertise the opt out period.

Section 3: Levy Opt Out Timeline

- A student can opt out at anytime during the month of March.
- A student can opt out only once per academic year.

Section 4: Levy Opt Out Procedure

Upon arrival to the Centre:

- The student shall receive a tour of the Centre.
- The student must fill out a DWC Opt Out form.
- The student shall receive their levy (\$2) in cash.