

Religious group raises concerns on Dalhousie campus

HALIFAX (CUP) -- A number of students at Dalhousie University have complained about on-campus soliciting by a fringe religious group, raising questions about what role the university can play in regulating faith.

At least one student has complained to the university's student union, alleging he was harassed by someone from a branch of the International Church of Christ.

And several other students have complained about the same group, saying they were uncomfortable with the way they were approached, says Brian Kellow, executive vice-president of Dalhousie's student union.

"I've had about a half a dozen students who came to me who said they'd been approached," Kellow said.

One student said he was called repeatedly at home. And the family of another student who was approached called police over the matter, said Kellow.

But the issue is a sensitive one, he warns.

"It's a tricky business. You don't want to stifle any legitimate religion on campus, and we don't want to be deciding who's legitimate," he said.

"The group's beliefs have nothing to do with our actions. It's their methods we disagree with," added Kellow.

But the university's chief of security says as far as he knows, the Halifax-Dartmouth Church of Christ, which has been soliciting students on-campus and around the city for the past year, hasn't done anything wrong.

"As long as everyone acts appropriately there is no need for intervention (on the part of campus security)," said Sandy MacDonald.

The university says the issue is not clear-cut.

"There are certain im-

portant freedoms on both sides," said Eric McKee, Dalhousie's vice-president of student services. "There's the right to hold and advance views and the right to peace and quiet and to be left alone."

"The campus is an open place, but it's not legally public. The right to advance views and ideas is guarded."

Kevin Robins, the minister for the Halifax-Dartmouth branch, says he's upset by allegations church members were harassing students.

He also says the allegations are ridiculous because forceful recruitment techniques go against the basic beliefs of the church. If members of his congregation are using such tactics, Robins knows nothing about it, he says.

"I disagree it [harassment] happened here at Dalhousie," Robins said. "I find it very hard to believe."

"If it really was harassment an arrest can be made and it's never been done. A lot of people just don't like being invited to church. I don't think there's a harassment issue on campus. I think there's an invitation issue on campus," he said.

Church of Christ members feel it's their responsibility to invite others to attend their church services if there's any chance they may want to attend, Robins explained.

"We don't know who might be interested," he said. "It's too bad everyone who is interested couldn't wear a green shirt or something, but they can't."

One church member was told he wasn't allowed back into Dalhousie's student union building because of complaints, added Robins, who said he advised the member not to return to the school.

Dalhousie isn't the first Canadian campus where the Church of Christ has attempted

to recruit new members.

"We've had people complain that they were approached and harassed, and people were calling their home," said Pam Persaud, of York University's student affairs office in Toronto.

"They usually approach this time of year, to first year students and new Canadians

who look lost or alone," she said of the group.

In response to those complaints, York University used an old student harassment regulation to try to limit the group's behaviour.

Applied to solicitation practices of the Church of Christ, York defined harass-

ment as continuing contact after a student has refused to attend a meeting.

If the person doing the soliciting is a student, he or she can be asked to stop or punished under the regulation. If the solicitor isn't a student, he or she can be removed from campus.

UBC to teach alternative therapies to medical students

BY JAMIE WOODS

VANCOUVER (CUP) -- Medical students at the University of British Columbia will soon be able to learn how to treat patients with acupuncture as well as Tylenol.

Beginning in January, the university will become the first in Canada to offer its medical school students a course in alternative therapies. The fourth-year class will introduce students to techniques such as acupuncture, ayurveda, homeopathy, orthomolecular medicine, shen therapy, Native American spiritual healing and therapeutic touch.

Students who elect to take the class will also spend a month studying one or more of those fields with a certified practitioner.

The course, which will operate on a trial basis from January to May, will go one step further than an existing class that outlines the concepts of alternative, or complementary, medicine.

Dr. Nazmudein Merali, a general practitioner who proposed the course to the faculty, says UBC needs to integrate alternative therapies into its teaching if it wants to keep up with the times.

"People are asking ques-

tions about complementary medicine and if we turn around and say, 'look this doesn't exist,' then we are only fooling ourselves," she said.

An Angus Reid poll conducted in October 1997 revealed 7 in 10 Canadians think provincial health care plans should cover alternative medicine costs, and 56 per cent of British Columbians now use alternative medicine.

The widespread use of alternative therapies is the reason UBC's faculty of medicine is introducing the course, says Andrew Chalmers, associate dean of the faculty's undergraduate program.

"Students need to understand what people are doing, they need to understand what kinds of potential problems there are, as some complementary medicines react very nastily with some of our traditional therapies," he said. "They also need to understand that complementary therapies have a therapeutic effect."

But Dr. Jim Lane, president of the British Columbia Medical Association, says while it's OK to make students aware of complementary medicine, he's skeptical about the scientific basis of alternative therapies.

"I'm a little surprised that [UBC is] putting the course on," he said. "I think that our major concern would be that we would always emphasize that medicine should be evidence based, and some alternative therapies are less than adequate in a scientific evidence base."

Chris Lam, a doctor and acupuncturist who proposed the course along with Merali, says there are weaknesses in every medical tradition that an integrative approach could help offset.

"The weakness in traditional Chinese medicine is in the aggressive surgical areas, acute medical conditions like trauma," said Lam.

"Conversely, the shortcomings of western medicine, such as mind-body conditions, chronic conditions, can be dealt with much better by traditional Chinese medicine."

Megan Corcoran, a first-year medical student, says she'll consider taking the course.

"I'm not a strong believer in that stuff, but I'd take the course to be aware of it so I know what's out there and what it's all about," she said.