

Executive Summary

In December 2014, female students in Dalhousie University's Faculty of Dentistry filed complaints under the University's Sexual Harassment Policy after they became aware some of their male colleagues had posted offensive material about them in a private Facebook group. The select materials revealed from the Facebook group reflected misogynistic, sexist and homophobic attitudes. At the complainants' request, the University began a restorative justice process to investigate the matter, address the harms it caused and examine the climate and culture within the Faculty that may have influenced the offensive nature of the Facebook group's content. Twenty-nine students from the class of DDS2015 (out of 38 in the core four-year program) participated in the restorative justice process. This included 12 of the 13 men identified as members of the Facebook group when the offensive material was discovered. Fourteen women and three other men from the DDS2015 class also participated in the process over the last five months.

This report gives an account of the restorative justice process, including:

- ◆ **Statements from all participants in the process, including male and female students, the Faculty of Dentistry, the University, the Nova Scotia Dental Association and members of the community.**
- ◆ **A timeline of the restorative process, highlighting actions and outcomes from December 2014 to May 2015.**
- ◆ **An account of the investigation into the Facebook group and the actions of its members, including the investigation's interaction with the Academic Standards Class Committee with respect to issues of professionalism and patient safety.**
- ◆ **An examination of the climate and culture at the Faculty of Dentistry.**
- ◆ **Ideas and commitments that have emerged from the restorative justice process aimed at creating a safer, healthier and more inclusive environment for all students and faculty.**

The restorative process found that the men's Facebook group began as a bonding activity but became a place to vent frustrations, often in unhealthy and at times extremely offensive ways. Members sought to "one up" each other in ways that were frequently crude in nature and aimed at shock value. While the offensive content in the Facebook group is inexcusable, the restorative process revealed that similar attitudes and behaviours existed within the competitive climate of the Faculty of Dentistry. In extensive interviews, workshops and group sessions with students,

faculty and staff, process participants described a culture in which standards for professionalism were inconsistently applied; rumours of favouritism and inappropriate relationships circulated; sexist, misogynistic, racist and/or homophobic behaviours were at times perceived to be inadequately dealt with; and mechanisms for addressing these issues were poorly communicated and sometimes frustrating to pursue.

This culture and climate in no way excuses the actions of the Facebook group, nor is such behaviour by any means unique to the Faculty of Dentistry or Dalhousie University. The men involved have accepted responsibility for their actions, undergone extensive learning and committed to hold themselves to higher standards in the future, as will be outlined in this report. Through the restorative process they have each met the requirements of the Academic Standards Class Committee with respect to professionalism.

Process participants together have outlined five key areas that have a significant impact on climate and culture and require attention in order to create a healthier culture at the Faculty of Dentistry:

- i. **COMMUNITY BUILDING** – finding better and more supportive ways to build connections between and among students, faculty and staff
- ii. **INCLUSION AND EQUALITY** – supporting diversity and confronting accepted divisions along lines of gender, race, culture and religion
- iii. **PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS** – adapting a more integrated and principle-based approach to both personal and professional integrity with respect to patient care and safety
- iv. **CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM STRUCTURE** – addressing factors within the program and clinic structure that contribute to a competitive and stressful environment
- v. **REPORTING PROCESSES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION** – improving communication and transparency in order to create safer spaces to address and resolve issues

The student participants in restorative justice hosted a *Day of Learning* toward the end of the process in order to share their experiences and learning in connection with these five themes. The event actively engaged more than 80 stakeholders from the various parties involved in the restorative process in dialogue about the ways forward to support a more inclusive and respectful culture and climate in the Faculty of Dentistry, the University, and the profession. This report will share the ideas and commitments developed within the process to achieve this goal.

This report also addresses the challenges that participants and facilitators faced in working together in a restorative process. These challenges included significant pressures from individuals and groups both outside and within the university community who advocated for a more punitive approach without an informed understanding of what the restorative process entailed. Both male and female members of the dentistry class reported increased stress due to public debate that was at times aggressive, intrusive and erroneous. Female participants ultimately felt compelled to ask the Dalhousie Student Union, among others, to stop speaking *for* them without ever speaking *to* them, while male participants received threats of harm to them and their families via social media. The overwhelming public scrutiny and attempts to influence the process compounded the harms to those most affected, including the women who filed the original complaint.