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Political Studies

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Women in the House: Does gender equity require electoral reform? *by Dr. Meredith Ralston*



(from left to right) Dr. Alexa McDonough, Carolyn Bolivar Getson, Diana Whalen, Megan Leslie and Elizabeth May listen to questions from the floor during the panel discussion.

In October 2009, the department co-sponsored a panel on gender equity, along with Equal Voice and Fair Vote Nova Scotia. An audience of almost 160, we heard from four distinguished speakers as well as our own Interim President, Dr. Alexa McDonough. While women have made dramatic advances in elected public office in Canada, the fact remains that women hold only 23% of the seats in the Nova Scotia legislature and the federal Parliament. The questions addressed in this panel discussion were: What will it take to change this picture? And would electoral reform help to get more women in the House?

Dr. McDonough introduced the session and made a few remarks about her own experience as the lone woman in the legislature. Carolyn Bolivar Getson, former MLA who served as Minister of Human Resources, Environment

and Labour, and Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, spoke about the barriers to women in politics and how her work in the voluntary sector had helped pave the way for her involvement in mainstream politics.

The second speaker was Megan Leslie, current NDP Member of Parliament for Halifax. Ms. Leslie is critic for Housing and Homelessness and Deputy Critic for Justice, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Affairs. She also spoke about her extensive community service and how her social work background has been put to good use in constituency work. She spoke about the need for electoral reform and particularly the need for proportional representation to ensure that equity in all its forms is established in Parliament.

The third speaker was Elizabeth May, an environmentalist, writer, activist, lawyer, and leader of the Green Party of Canada. Her remarks were almost entirely about the need for proportional representation and she listed many reasons why the PR system is better for the election of

more women and minorities. She talked about the various types of PR and how we could have a hybrid system that contains the best of both the PR and Single Member Plurality system.

The fourth and final speaker was Diana Whalen, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Halifax Clayton Park, first elected in 2003. Ms. Whalen has twice won re-election. She began her political career as a HRM Councilor for District 16 and has also done extensive community service. She spoke about barriers to women in politics and how important it is for a critical mass of women to be in the legislature before changes are made.

The speakers answered spirited questions from the audience and a reception followed at Vinnie's Pub. We hope to make this an annual event and the next panel (of four currently-elected alumni of the Mount) is tentatively scheduled for October 2010.

The View from the Floor *by Steven Byers*



A view from the gallery of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

(photo courtesy of Communications Nova Scotia)

There's nothing quite like it – being on the floor of the Legislative Assembly as the budget is tabled or when Question Period becomes more show business than politics. There are only three ways of being there: get elected, be appointed Sergeant-at-Arms, or become a Legislative Page. I took the easy route. I became a Page.

Starting in September 2008, I have had the distinct pleasure of working for the Speaker's Office in a position that allows you to put the books aside and experience politics as it is practiced, not as it is theorized. You not only get close to the action, but are actually in the middle of it.

I was on the floor of the Assembly Chamber the day the MacDonald government was defeated, in the Speaker's Gal-

lery as the Speech from the Throne was read to inaugurate Nova Scotia's first NDP government, and have met and talked with political insiders, members of the media and departmental representatives from both provincial and federal politics. One particular highlight was meeting Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice McLachlin was in town for a ceremony congratulating newly invested Justice Thomas Cromwell, a Nova Scotian and husband of MSVU's own Dr. Della Stanley.

But aside from meeting fascinating people, there is work to be done. Incredibly, that work consists of being involved in the legislative process as it happens, supporting legislators and their aides to do their jobs of running the province. On good days, it is a fast-paced,

challenging and engaging environment. On bad days, it's even better.

My time as a page is nearing its end. The new session of the House that opens on March 25th will be my last. However, as the session continues into September and the fall, it can be your first! Applications are being accepted to become a Page for 2010-11 right now. Contact Michael Laffin (laffinmg@gov.ns.ca) or Peter Theriault (theriapa@gov.ns.ca) at Province House for more information. Otherwise, you can pick up an application form outside of Dr. MacMillan's office, Seton 520. This is an incredible opportunity for anyone interested in government to take part in the legislative process and to put some of your theoretical knowledge to work. Trust me, there's just nothing quite like it.

Adventures of a Non-Traveler *by Noelle Peach*

It was a cold day on January 24th and I found myself totally seasick and panicking slightly in the midst of a crowd of people speaking something utterly incomprehensible. I was in Tallinn, Estonia. After a week travelling, I was so tired that for the first day I couldn't register any of my surroundings. Not to mention that it was -25.

That was almost a month ago and I can certainly say that things have improved dramatically. For the first week, I tried to get situated as best I could and to familiarize myself with basic Estonian pleasantries.

Living in a former Soviet state has been quite an adventure. Forty percent of people living in Estonia speak Russian, many of the buildings built outside of Old Town have a distinct Soviet flavour, and people are still gaining bits and pieces of their culture and economy back. However, having joined NATO and the EU in 2004, Estonia offers every comfort a person could expect as well as food, fun and sights steeped in history. The views from the top of Toompea Hill are spectacular, the locals friendly, and the cobbled streets are easy to navigate.

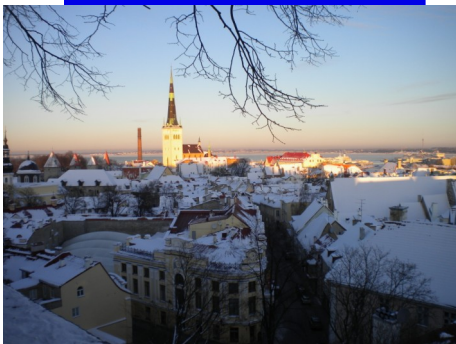
If a different European experience is what you're looking

for, Estonia certainly offers that. Its central location makes out of country travel easy and if it's Russia you're interested in, well, that's right next door.

I left uncertain of what this journey would bring me but I can say that so far it's been worth every bit of effort it has taken to get here. So, if you're looking for an exchange destination to add to your educational experience, I would definitely suggest Tallinn, Estonia.

To learn more about Noelle's experience, please visit her blog at adventuresofanon-traveler.blogspot.com.

This is the view from Toompea Hill looking out over the city of Tallinn, Estonia.



Debate Night *by Jonathan Arnold*

On the evening of February 3rd, 2010, the MSVU Political Studies Society rang in the new academic school year with a bang—hosting the first ever Student-Professor Debate as a fundraiser for the Autism Society. Held at Vinnie’s Pub, five students and four professors squared off in an epic, no-holds-barred, linguistic crossfire. This battle of wits engaged the crowd and made for a very successful and relaxing evening filled with great entertainment.

Was Harper Right?

In the first round, myself and fellow public policy major, Steve Byers, were pitted against Dr. Jeffrey MacLeod (Political Studies/Public Policy) and Dr. Janet Chute (Canadian Studies), arguing the resolution: “Be it resolved that it was appropriate for Prime Minister Harper to prorogue Parliament on Dec 30th, 2009.” With Steve and I defending the Prime Minister’s Office, and Dr. Macleod and Dr. Chute defending democracy, the 10-minute back-and-forth style debate covered all the major aspects of the hot-topic issue. Arguments involving legitimacy, political power, constitutional monarchy, and democracy were used from both sides, in what seemed (bias included), a well balanced debate.



Dr. MacLeod and Dr. Chute prepare for their rebuttal during the prorogation themed debate.

Has the information age killed democracy?

For the second bout of cerebrally-stimulating discussion, students Christina Harris, Geoff Solomon, and Colin O’Neil squared off against Dr. James Sawler (Economics), Dr. Janet Chute, and Dr. Nargess Kayhani (Economics). The resolution set before the six debaters was: “The advent of the Information Age has helped the practice of politics in Canada and around the world,” where the professors held down the affirmative position. A lively discussion ensued, questioning such concepts as journalistic integrity, voter apathy, political education, social networking, technology in developing nations, and instantaneous information. Truly, both sides did an excellent job in arguing the most critical

points regarding such a pervasive, and global, phenomenon.

Does Sarah Palin need a geography lesson?

While the first two rounds of debate followed a fairly standard debate format, the last round was a free-for-all style where students, professors, and audience members alike openly engaged one another. Fished from the bottom of a hat, topics such as electoral reform, the speculated 2012 apocalypse, and Sarah Palin’s geography skills, were drawn and debated. With participation spanning the disciplinary spectrum, this round featured a great mixture of enriched discussion with comical quips.

All in all, the first ever Student-Professor Debate turned out to be a huge success. In raising \$72 for the Autism Society, thanks go out to the students of the Society who organized the event, the professors who graciously lent their time, Vinnie’s Pub, the Students’ Union, and of course, to the audience and participants. We look forward to holding another debate before the end of the winter term.

I write, therefore I am! *by Dr. Michael MacMillan*

The Political Studies faculty have been actively involved in research this year and in organizing their projects for the coming year.

Dr. Jeff MacLeod will be on a year long sabbatical starting this July, during which he will explore the themes of imagery, metaphor and leadership. He has been awarded an internal research grant to support this endeavour.

Dr. Michael MacMillan is completing his analysis of the participants in the citizen consultation process on Nova Scotia natural resources, and will be presenting the results at the national

political science meetings in June.

Dr. Meredith Ralston has been awarded a three year SSHRC creation grant to work on her new film, *Selling Sex Globally*.

Congratulations are in order for Dr. Reg Stuart who has published another book, entitled *Civil-Military Relations During the War of 1812..* He is co-editor of a forth-coming book on Canadian-American Transnationalism, and will be on sabbatical next Winter working on the topic “Varieties of Canadian Anti-Americanism”.



Debate Night Participants

Top Row (l-r): Christina Harris, Dr. Nargess Kayhani, Steven Byers, Dr. James Sawler, Ashley Lowe and Zachary Eden. Bottom Row (l-r): Dr. Jeffrey MacLeod, Dr. Janet Chute, Jonathan Arnold, Colin O’Neil, Mairibeth Reilly and Geoff Solomon.

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Political and Canadian Studies Department

Visit our department online at www.msvu.ca

Calling All Political Studies Supporters!

Would you like to help assist the department to support special events and student activities? If so, you can make a contribution to our Political Studies Enhancement Fund. This is a special fund which can be used to financially support special activities, such as student travel to conferences, invited speakers and other special events. No amount is too small! If you would like to contribute, just send your contribution to the Political Studies Enhancement Fund, c/o Dr. Michael MacMillan, Chair/ Department of Political & Canadian Studies/ 166 Bedford Hwy./ Halifax NS/ B3M 2J6. Your support will be gratefully acknowledged!

Learning the Keys to Success *by Bridget Ebsary*

For three days in October, I had the opportunity to work with an incredible group of talented individuals when I attended the Nova Scotia Campaign School for Women. This program was created by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and hosted at our own Mount Saint Vincent University.

There were approximately thirty women who participated in the program, myself being the youngest. Over an intense three day period, we learned the essentials of how to run for office. On the first day, we looked at the process of becoming an electoral candidate and the team each candidate needs in order to be successful.

Day two started bright and early with

information about fundraising in the campaign. We then had an excellent guest speaker talk to us. Halina St. James coached us on how to become better public speakers as well as how to deal with the media.

The afternoon sessions were for putting our new knowledge to work. The participants were split into small groups and we went through several different exercises, including public speaking, interviews and door-to-door campaigning. Then in the evening, the real fun began. In small groups, we had to complete a mock campaign. With some basic instructions, we had to create a leader, campaign strategy and prepare a presentation for the next day, all within three hours.

This was by far one of the most chal-

lenging and enjoyable workshops I have ever done. The Advisory Council did such an incredible job with this campaign school and I know that all of the women got so much out of the program.

For any woman who is considering running for office someday, I strongly recommend participating in this campaign school. You learn so much from women who have successfully been elected. It is a great first step for a future in politics!

For more information about the Campaign School for Women, please visit the Advisory Council's website at:
women.gov.ns.ca