

Nova Scotia Agricultural College and Dalhousie University Merger Discussions

NSAC Employee Questions and Answers May 20, 2011

General Questions

Will NSAC be merging with Dal?

Dalhousie and NSAC are starting a formal process to discuss merger – to build on the strengths of both institutions. This is a discussion between two interested parties – both with a great deal to offer.

The discussions are based on the premise that there will continue to be a strong agricultural academic program and research and development capacity in Bible Hill.

This is consistent with Dr. Tim O'Neill's recommendation in the Report on the University System in Nova Scotia (September, 2010): "Consider integrating Nova Scotia Agricultural College into Dalhousie University as the college ceases as a government entity."

Why is a merger preferable to the original Crown model?

Merging with Dalhousie has always been a strong possibility, as there is already a close relationship between the two institutions. Dal already grants NSAC degrees and NSAC is represented on the Dal senate.

Together, Dal and NSAC will be able to offer students a broader choice of interdisciplinary programs of study and the two institutions will be better positioned to compete nationally and internationally.

We believe Dalhousie is the best match for a number of reasons. It offers exciting potential to build and enhance programs at both campuses. At the same time, this won't rule out ongoing partnerships and other joint activities with other post-secondary institutions such as Acadia.

Do you expect to save any money?

All universities need to look at ways to improve their financial positions in the years ahead. This won't save money in the short term --- and some transition costs can be expected – but we believe there may be efficiencies that will keep costs down in the long run.

Students and Programs

What does this mean for students?

Dalhousie and NSAC academic programs are already closely linked. Together, there is potential to expand and enhance their academic offerings – which will be of great interest to students and faculty from Nova Scotia and around the world.

We are a long way from any decisions on future program changes. There is a lot for NSAC and Dal to consider and explore together. In the meantime, there will be no changes for the next school year as a result of this discussion. The fall calendars for both universities are already set.

Will my tuition go up?

All Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions are increasing tuitions this year, as a way to cover the cost of good quality educational programs for students.

Government has capped tuition increases to 3 per cent – to ensure post-secondary education continues to be affordable.

We don't know what will happen to tuition rates in future. However, we understand that students choose their institution and programs in part based on expectations about tuition levels throughout their degree.

Jobs and Staff

What will happen to staff?

It's business as usual for NSAC staff. Everyone can expect to continue as they normally would for at least the next school year.

Processes related to the NSAC Act, including designations, are on hold for now while we pursue the Dal merger. There will be no decisions on designation until that process is over.

As we move along, if there is any chance that anyone's work responsibilities will change, will have a full process to deal with that, including consulting with those involved. The terms of the collective agreement will apply.

Will there be jobs lost?

There are always normal changes in any academic institution's staff complement due to factors such as scheduled program changes. However, there are no plans to reduce jobs as a result of these merger discussions.

Having said that, there are sure to be opportunities to do business differently in future – and we will be looking to staff to help us explore those – to make sure we are making the best use of the revenues we have.

What about my collective agreement?

Employees will continue to be covered by NSAC's collective agreements with all the rights and privileges they contain. We will be consulting with the union in an ongoing way to ensure they are kept up to date on the progress of merger discussions.

If there is any need to consider changes to collective agreements at either Dal or NSAC, formal processes will be used to guide those discussions.

Economic and Industry concerns

How would a merger affect the Truro/Colchester area?

NSAC already plays an important role in promoting the agriculture sector as an engine of economic growth for Nova Scotia, as outlined in the government's strategy for the sector: Homegrown Success. Dal's participation will augment this role.

We see this as a positive development for Truro/Colchester, potentially opening up new opportunities for the community. This process is based on the premise that there will continue to be a strong agricultural academic program and research and development capacity in Bible Hill.

We also see it as a positive for the Valley, where the college has close connections with the farming community as well as research facilities.

What does this mean for research?

Dalhousie and NSAC both have very active and successful research programs and many collaborative activities exist now.

As a merged institution, we think NSAC and Dal can truly become a centre of excellence in Canada for research and innovation in agriculture, agri-food, and bioresource research.

A Dal-NSAC institution can help stimulate research activities in many partner agencies not only in Truro but also in the Valley. The Kentville Research Station, where NSAC has some research chairs, is a good example.

What will happen to Department of Agriculture organizations such as Agrapoint?

It is understood that the Department of Agriculture's programs and services are closely linked with NSAC, including service delivery agents such as Agrapoint. The Department -- and its services and programs -- will continue to work with any new NSAC entity to advance industry development.

About the NSAC-Dal Discussions**What form will the NSAC-Dal discussions take?**

Details of the negotiation process are being worked out now. We estimate the process will take about 12 months.

We will announce details of the process as soon as they are available. We are committed to consulting with staff – as well as the union -- throughout the process.

What happened to the NSAC Governance Transition Project and its activities?

There were tentative plans to activate certain aspects of the NSAC's legislation on target dates this spring, but these plans were cancelled to allow time for the Dal-NSAC merger negotiations.

Until a new date is set, the college's operations will continue as usual, following the Department of Agriculture's policies and processes for finance, human resources, payroll, benefits, etc. The hiring of a new president is also on hold.

New legislation will be required if NSAC merges with Dalhousie. It will replace the NSAC Act of 2008.

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