

## **Aggressive Religious Groups at Dalhousie: What to Expect, What to Accept, and What to Avoid**

The religious and cultural diversity of campus life offers the possibility of furthering your religious and ethical beliefs, along with the opportunity to investigate other perspectives. Exploring one's own faith, discovering other people's ways of life, beliefs, and practices — even if you disagree with them — can help foster a spirit of understanding.

If you're new to Halifax or Canada and to the university, you may be looking for organizations to join. It's a good feeling to be wanted. And it's flattering to be asked to join a group. Among the clubs and organizations on campus, you'll find many religious groups. Some are well organized and some are very informal. Some rely on your free choice and personal motivation for joining, while others use persistent recruiting efforts to win you over.

Choosing to belong to various groups while attending university is an important decision. We want to offer you some information that will help you make an informed and free choice about such groups.

### **Choosing a group**

Besides considering your own tradition, you have the option to look for groups that:

- Encourage relationships with family and friends outside the group
- Help you through some of life's inevitable crises
- Invite open and thoughtful investigation of beliefs
- Encourage you to take responsibility for being a contributing member of the greater community
- Offer a reasonable and credible belief system upon which to structure your life

### **How can I identify the high pressure groups?**

Observe the group's responses to you and how you feel. If you can answer 'yes' to three or more of these statements, you should seriously reconsider your involvement.

- The group seems to be perfect. Everyone agrees and follows all orders cheerfully.
- They claim to have 'all the answers' to your problems.
- The group offers 'instant friendship.' They will not take 'no' for an answer; invitations are impossible to refuse without feeling guilty and/or ungrateful.
- You are asked to recruit new members soon after joining.
- The group insists on total obedience to their leaders and discourages questions or doubts as signs of weak faith. You may be rejected or shunned if you persist with questions.
- Your parents and friends are described as being 'unable to understand or help you' with religious matters.
- The group encourages you to put their meetings and activities before all other commitments, including studying.
- The group puts down your past religious, social, or political affiliation.

### **Why are they harmful?**

- They do not respect the pursuit of learning and truth in a free and open environment.
- They isolate you from family, friends, and other groups.

- They ask you to give up control of your thoughts and decisions.
- They fill you with guilt and shame.
- They may promote crises with your studies, your friendships, or your relationships.
- They may frighten you to the point that you stop making decisions and asking questions for yourself.

**You are most vulnerable to high-pressure groups when:**

You are lonely . . . . .

*You are new to this area or this country and you are homesick for familiar friends and places.*

You are hurting . . . . .

*You've had a disagreement with your family or someone important to you.*

*You've suffered a loss of a person or a relationship.*

*You are experiencing stress or perhaps a "faith crisis."*

You are having a difficult time socially . . . . .

*You haven't made any friends yet.*

*You don't know how to become part of the university community.*

*It's the same dull routine of dinner, homework, bed.*

You aren't doing well academically . . . . .

*You are under great pressure to do well.*

*You feel like a failure because your grades are lower than you've ever had before.*

**Why are these groups allowed on campus?**

Dalhousie University has a policy of freedom of speech and association which allows all students to form groups and to meet on campus for any legal activity. As a result you may find such groups meeting on campuses at places like the Student Union Building. Giving a group space does not mean endorsing their beliefs, their activities, or the ways they operate.

This means that you need to protect yourself by asking questions and seeking advice from any of the many representatives of Student Services or the Students Union who are informed and available to help you. Even if you have concerns about off campus groups, there are people on campus who will listen to your concerns.

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**How might I deal with high-pressure groups?**

Any of the chaplains in the Dalhousie Multifaith Centre will help you connect with your own or another faith community in Halifax. Their website lists *Places of Worship and Prayer At or Near Dalhousie*.

You may check on the recognized Religious Societies of the Dalhousie Student Union by contacting the Vice President, Internal, of the Union or at the DSU Societies site. If you have any questions you would like to ask, contact one of the chaplains.

Dalhousie Multifaith Centre  
1321 Edward Street 494.2287

Dalhousie Security  
FASS (Basement Level) 494.6400

Dalhousie Student Union  
Student Union Building 494.1106

International Student Advisor  
Killam Library (Ground Level) 494.1735