

Dalhousie student faces disciplinary action over Canada 150 post

'We're going to do everything we can to let Dalhousie know that this is not OK,' Masuma Khan says

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Dalhousie University student Masuma Khan says she will be facing a disciplinary hearing about a Facebook post she made this summer. (CBC)

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A Dalhousie University student is facing disciplinary action over a post she made to Facebook in the summer about Canada 150 celebrations.

Masuma Khan said she was given the option to undergo counselling and write a reflective essay after the Halifax-based school conducted an investigation into a complaint about her online comments, but she says she refused.

"It was really offensive, to be honest, for the university to tell me that they're going to teach me how to talk about racism in a more collaborative way, when racism is very harsh ... there's no nice way to talk about it," the 22-year-old Muslim woman said.

"We're going to do everything we can to let Dalhousie know that this is not OK and it's not appropriate."

Post in response to DSU decision

Earlier this year, Khan, who is a vice-president of the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU), put forward a motion that [the group not participate in Canada 150 celebrations](#). The executive passed her motion, saying it wouldn't hold or endorse Canada Day events on campus, describing this year's events as an act of colonialism.

The student union faced a serious backlash over the decision and Khan took to social media in response, writing that "white fragility can kiss my ass. Your white tears aren't sacred, this land is."

The Facebook post has since been deleted.

It prompted graduate student Michael Smith to write [a scathing op-ed piece](#) in the National Post, which argued that DSU was censoring anyone opposed to its decision.

It has been reported that Smith was the one who filed the complaint against Khan.

Khan said she doesn't regret the online post, but recognizes that it may have hurt some people. That wasn't her intention, she said; she was simply trying to reflect her own experiences dealing with racism.

Lawyer 'surprised' by university's actions

Dalhousie's vice-provost of student affairs, Arig al Shaibah, found there was enough of a basis to the complaint to conduct an investigation, according to Khan's lawyer, Nasha Nijhawan, who has taken on the case pro-bono.

"It was the university's position that the complaint was founded and that Masuma's Facebook post constituted personal harassment under their policy, and that she should have known that her post would have been demeaning to people who identify as white," Nijhawan said.

The university moved to a formal discipline process after Khan rejected their informal resolution, Nijhawan said.



Lawyer Nasha Nijhawan has taken on the case pro-bono, saying free speech is an established, entrenched right on university campuses. (CBC)

"I'm surprised, I have to say, that a university is taking this position against a student considering how entrenched and really well-established the right to free speech — especially political speech — [is] on university campuses," she said.

"I don't think that there was anything offensive about what Masuma said — even if she did swear."

University won't comment

A Dalhousie spokesperson said the university could not comment on the specifics of any allegations, saying that the matter is "ongoing."

"There is not yet a decision by the university," Janet Bryson wrote in an email, noting that the school's code of conduct ensures students can raise concerns about actions they feel may disrupt their learning environment.

When complaints of this nature are received and there is sufficient information to suggest a potential violation of the code, "we engage in efforts to resolve issues through informal, educational and conversational means," she said.

If that doesn't work, Bryson said the matter is then referred to the university's senate discipline committee, which conducts hearings into all complaints or allegations of violations of academic integrity and non-academic misconduct.

'I'm not apologetic'

Nijhawan said they were told the fact that Masuma was a student leader was a factor in the investigation, but the lawyer was quick to point out that DSU is a separate organization, meaning that Khan does not occupy a formal position of leadership within the university

Last month, a fellow DSU councillor brought forward a motion to seeking to impeach Khan, but it was shot down.

"I'm not apologetic for voicing my opinion and using free speech to tell my support systems on my own social media how I feel," Khan said.

"There's a lot of folks that feel that racism doesn't exist anymore, but I think I'm here to be frank and say, 'Hey, that's not reality.'"

A date for the hearing has not yet been set, Khan said. She's familiar with the process as she was a student panellist on the discipline committee, before being removed once her case was brought forward.

"I'm very comfortable with how the process is going to be, but I am uncomfortable with the subject matter and the fact Dalhousie is legitimizing this claim," she said. "Dalhousie has failed to do so in other instances where there was a lot of violence being created by their students and they did nothing to rectify that.

"I'm not scared, and if anything I'm more motivated to get more things done," she said. "Sorry Dalhousie, that's what's happening."