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My first exposure to Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) was both abrupt and abrasive.

Two years ago, as a student in my third year at McMaster, I strolled through the Student Centre and was met with flag waving, community members and students yelling at each other, along with security and police involvement in what I thought was suppose to be a discussion. That supposed dialogue quickly descended into conflict and intimidation. Although circumstances on this campus have since changed, I felt a combination of confusion and intrigue surrounding the complexities of IAW. The unfortunate truth however, is that those who are genuinely interested in educating themselves on the issues of Middle Eastern politics still feel intimidated in seeking out this information at IAW events.

Last week, after a meeting of the President's Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC), a University body charged with upholding and promoting the values of inclusivity, an information session was held by the office of Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES). The purpose of the presentation was to help clarify the University's stance on the IAW and provide some guidance for the events to come. The fallout I witnessed drew parallels to that day in the Student Centre two years ago. The positive and non-judgmental presentation was spoiled by members of the audience and as a result, soon became a cold and closed session. Credit goes to the students at that table that day, as in my eyes they were the most understanding, and were willing to move on and continue with their events, rather than rehash old rhetoric.

My experience in watching this unfold made me reconsider going to any event during IAW, regardless of how open and inclusive the advertising appeared to be. On this campus, IAW is supposed to be a week where students,

staff and faculty can meet and share opinions and information to help understand the politics and policies surrounding the Government of Israel and the Palestine. Instead, people witnessed what I witnessed when I first encountered Israel Apartheid Week - polarized discussion by established camps where the only people who are attending the events are the ones who are personally involved in the discussion.

As you can imagine, the type and tenor of the discourse occurring doesn't present an inviting environment for those who wish to learn. I personally support dialogue on the issue of government and policy, but I feel as though I can't attend any event out of fear of being labeled "anti-Semitic" or "Islamophobic". I am not alone in this opinion. Many students feel intimidated for the same reasons, when all they want is to educate themselves on the plurality of issues IAW presents. The general campus does not have the privilege of knowledge that the well-established ideological camps have, and that's problematic when trying to administer a week of discourse and dialogue.

My intention in writing this piece is not to demonize the events of this week in any way, or take sides in this debate. Let me be very clear - I fully support *all* MSU Clubs and their initiatives, as well as freedom of speech more generally and encourage this week of discussion. I write this piece in the spirit of education and in pursuit of this end, I encourage the student body to pay close attention to the events and issues involved. We must understand these forums are for learning and debate, and that using IAW as leverage to vilify a religion and/or ethnicity is simply wrong. I have immense faith in the community of McMaster University. I trust we can maintain an environment conducive to engagement and education, lest we forget the events in the Student Centre two years ago.

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DIALOGUE OR DRAMA?

Israel Apartheid Week returns to campus and Vish calls for constructive debate

DODGE!

FOR A GOOD CAUSE!

TO HELP RAISE MONEY FOR CAMP TRILLIUM

WHAT. MSU Charity Dodgeball Tournament
WHERE. DBAC Sport Hall
WHEN. Sat, March 13th, 2010 at 1:30pm

INFORMATION.

Teams of 5 or 10 players
Fee of \$10 per player
Come as a house team, a club exec, etc.

Registration forms will be available on the MSU website: www.msu.mcmaster.ca as well as in DBAC and the MSU office. Forms are due March 10th, 2010 at 5pm

REGISTER NOW!

Do you have what it takes?

Get nominated to be your faculty's valedictorian!



The Valedictorian selection process is administered collaboratively between the MSU and the various faculties. Both students and faculty members sit on the selection committees. Having gone through the process before, I can tell you concretely that we don't just look at marks when considering Valedictorians.

To be Valedictorian, we're looking for a student that is the best fit to represent the qualities of the graduating class. Now, what you do in the classroom makes a difference, as you have to provide at least one academic letter of reference. Take note of the fact though, that we do not require a copy of your transcript. We only require proof that you hold a 7.0 cumulative average across your years of study.

The reason for this is simple, there are so many more ways to make a difference at McMaster than doing well on essays and tests. The selection committees will be looking for evidence that you've been involved in campus life, have public speaking skills and most importantly, have demonstrated leadership in your time at McMaster. At

a school with so many leaders, its lucky that there are multiple valedictorian spots available. Each faculty selects a Valedictorian, with the exception of Social Science and Science, who select two.

To run, you'll need to find an undergraduate student to nominate you, as well as one faculty member, dean, associate dean, student of your graduating class, or the Vice-President (Academic) of the University. You'll need to submit an academic and a work or volunteer-related reference letter, as well as your CV.

It sounds like a lot I know, but it's important to keep in mind that we want to know what kind of person are you. Valedictorian isn't just an award, it's a responsibility. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Nomination forms are available on the MSU website (msu.mcmaster.ca > Student Government > Board of Directors > VP Education), or in hard copy in the MSU office, MUSC 201. Nomination packages are due in your faculty office by Friday, March 12th at 5pm.

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