Hello and welcome to our student lounge!

We are happy you are here today so we can show you the changes we have been working on for the last couple of years.

As we look back over our journey, we realize that what started as a difficult and upsetting experience has become a very exciting time for us. We have made significant strides as a student society and as a faculty, and have anchored our changes in our values, which are: inclusivity, responsibility and accountability, safety, and transparency, all of which are depicted in our new mural.

Our primary goal as student leaders has been to try to build an inclusive and healthy community within our faculty and to reflect and increase the diversity of the students involved in our society and events. We have focused particularly on those students who may not have participated in the past: those with families or different faith traditions who may not be comfortable participating in events involving alcohol, and qualifying year students. We have also worked to strengthen the integration of dental hygiene and dentistry students.

We have not been working in isolation. We are very grateful to our allies and colleagues on campus and in the greater community, including the Alcohol Advisory Committee, the DSU, South House, the Law Student Society, as well as members of our patient and professional communities. Our collaboration with them will continue.

Making sustainable change was important to us, so that our values and commitments would live on. We held our first annual Leadership Summit in October 2016, which was well received by the students, and we are already working on planning the next Leadership Summit for September 2017. The aim of these summits is to train and better prepare student leaders for the conflicts and difficult conversations they may encounter in a position of leadership. There are many issues facing students, ranging from mental health to sexualized violence, and student leaders need the knowledge, skills, and
resources to talk about these issues constructively and direct students to sources for further support.

A major change we made this year was the transformation of our “Bar Reps” into “Social Reps”. Their obligation is to plan safe, inclusive social events, rather than just focus on serving alcohol. All Social Reps must attend the Leadership Summit and, in addition, they receive Social Hosting education, tailored to help them create welcoming, safe, and inclusive events for our community. They pay attention to those students who attend events and, importantly, those who do not. They reach out to those students in a supportive manner to find out if there are ways we can better meet their needs for community connection.

The changes we have made to our student society and the way we conduct our events is reflected in our student lounge. It has been renovated to be more open, transparent, and inclusive. The renovated space allows us to host events that are welcoming and inviting to our student community as a whole.

An important component of this renovation is the office space, which has been designed to be open and accessible. Trained student leaders will host office hours and students can come to voice any concerns about student governance or seek support for any issues, academic or personal. Thanks to their training, student leaders are equipped to address these concerns and to refer students to others for further assistance.

The final element of our renovation project is this mural, which reflects our values, learnings, and the changes we have made as a student society. We thought a lot about what was reflected on the walls of Facebook and our student bar room in 2015 and about how it came to be written. Changing the writing on the walls was a way of reflecting our commitments as a community. It also acknowledges our continued journey and ongoing learning, because we know that this work will never be done.

Our patients and community members are important stakeholders in our training. So an important part of the design process for the mural was community consultations at our outreach clinics, including
ISANS, Nelson Whynder School in North Preston, Harbour View Elementary School in Dartmouth, and the North End Community Health Centre. We commissioned a community artist, Tonya Paris, who reviewed the consultation material and worked with us to produce the mural that you see here today.

I will be graduating this year, but I am so fortunate to have been a part of this learning experience. I am confident that I am leaving this ongoing work in the good hands of my colleagues in the faculty. I have taken the lessons I learned and applied them to my professional development and patient care experience and will continue to do so as a practicing dentist. I am proud to be graduating from the Faculty of Dentistry at Dalhousie University and look forward to giving back to the faculty in the future.