**REPORT**

. **Office of the MSU President**

*From the…*

TO: Student Representative Assembly

FROM: Giancarlo Da-Ré, President

SUBJECT: SRA 20J President Report

DATE: November 15th 2020

Dear Members of the Assembly,

It is hard to believe that I am now in the second half of my term, but as I recount the first 6 months of my term in office, I am quite proud of the work we are able to present before you. What the campus community has been able to do in 6 months would take 5 years under alternative circumstances. It is a true testament to the team effort and determination of the students, staff and faculty at McMaster who are working to fight common causes. That said, we have a long way to go; students are still struggling with the online learning environment; students still do not feel safe on campus with the current safety plan on campus; students are becoming increasingly concerned about the climate crisis; international student tuition continues to rise at extraordinary rates; mental health challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic; the campus infrastructure does not currently meet the needs of students. These are all problems that must be addressed, and I will do everything I can to work towards solutions for each of these themes during the last 6 months of my term.

Below, please find an update on my work since my last report in September. If you have questions regarding my work within this document or outside this document, please feel free to prompt me and I will happily explain in greater detail.

# Winter Term Planning

Since my last report, the University has decided that the Winter term will remain largely online, similar to the Fall term. While we are still finalizing plans for how MSU operations may be affected by the online Winter Term, there will not be many major changes to the Winter term from what students see currently. MSU services will continue to operate online, CFMU will continue to operate as it has been, and our business units will almost certainly continue to operate at reduced capacity. That said, there will be more students on campus in the Winter term than in the Fall term. This is because there are more courses that have been deemed essential for the Winter term than the Fall term. While these numbers are not finalized yet, this may have an impact on our front facing services and on campus social distancing safety measures.

# Advocating for On-Campus COVID Testing

After working with the University to advocate for an on-campus testing center, there were ultimately plans to do this, but the project was paused by Public Health. I’ve been told that if Public Health gives the green light, the University will be ready to get things in motion quickly.

# Board of Directors Turnover

We now have a full Board of Directors and everyone is largely transitioned into their roles. This is a huge weight off my shoulders that everyone not only understands their positions but has fully launched into their work. Both Graeme and Ryan have impressed me with their dedication to both advocacy initiatives and the enhancement of student life. They have both accomplish a great amount in their roles so far and I look forward to continuing work with them and seeing everything they do during their terms.

# Sustainability Work

This remains a large focus for me. After 6 months of working on decentralized sustainability projects, initiatives and campaigns on campus, I have begun to understand the barriers to this work within our community. One major barrier being that there is no **high-authority figure** at the University who directly oversees sustainability work. (like an AVP Sustainability) This is significant for two reasons; 1. There must be an individual at the University who can take an idea and bring it forward to the VP Administration so that it has approval of the University President & Vice- Presidents. Without this, many ideas are simply base-level and may not be fully engrained in the work of the campus. 2. There needs to be an individual who can dedicate 100% of their time to creating a campus response to the climate crisis, and then actually execute that plan. There is currently no campus overall plan for sustainability. There is actually not even a consistent definition for sustainability at McMaster. We need all of these things, but it is important to balance organizing the work and keeping the work decentralized. With too many levels of approval, it will be difficult to make anything happen. I have been working directly with President Farrar to try and push this idea forward. He understands the magnitude of the impacts of the climate crisis, so I look forward to seeing how he plans to tackle it within our community.

Here are a few other areas of this work that I have been dedicating time to:

* I have also been working to transform our own policies to better align with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The policies we do have that are related to sustainability are outdated and inconsistent. I am currently working to combine a few MSU documents into one Sustainability Operating Policy. I will be working with the AVP IG to make this happen, and it should be coming to SRA shortly for approval so we can put it on the new website.
* Drafted edits for the McMaster Sustainability Advisory Council terms of reference that anchor the work of the council in Sustainable Development Goals. The AVP Facilities has

agreed to all of the proposed changes, but we are waiting for further direction from President Farrar before finalizing the ToR

* Formalized the work of the SRA Sustainability Education Committee so that there is a structure that can continue for years, operating under the Governance & Education portfolio of the MSU. There are two subcommittees that together, have planned a campaign and an event that were both largely successful. These were the SoBi campaign and McMaster Earth Week. The committee is organizing for research and initiatives in 2nd term and will be producing a report for SRA at the end of the year.
* Pushing forward conversations regarding water access on campus and campus plastic bottle bans, as well as improved recycling plans.
  + Residence bottle filling stations renovations are almost complete
  + The status of the ban has shifted again. Research is inconclusive on whether a ban of water bottles on campus will lead to increased purchases of sugary drinks. The University is planning to develop a research strategy associated with some kind of pilot project to turn our campus into a living lab, to move forward with the project while collecting research along the way. I will continue to update on the status of this project.
  + We need to improve our waste diversion rate, and the University is looking to partner with 3rd party teams to assist in our future strategies. This work and the partnerships are to be determined. I will update as this continues or changes. Some of this work may be funded by Okanagan Committee, which I also sit on.
* OUSA recently passed an Environmental Sustainability policy paper at the Fall GA. I challenged other delegations to set more ambitious advocacy goals, and we ultimately won. The most exciting was that we will now advocate for the provincial government to incentivize through the use of SMAs for Universities to begin the process of divestment immediately and to fully divest by 2026.
* Divestment at McMaster continues to be a pressing issue. I am currently in discussions with President Farrar to understand the barriers to this action so that we can work through them.

# Campus Safety Plan

Through my continued conversations with President Farrar regarding campus safety concerns, he has let me know that the campus will be re-evaluating the campus safety plan over the next year. Specifically, he has said that this will include evaluating the needs of students, staff and faculty on campus, and consequently re-evaluating how our campus safety plan is set up to meet those needs. This was also told to the Board of Governors, and since there is no timeline on this proposed solution, we will be holding the University accountable to that commitment. We will also be pushing forward everything we have committed to so far, including divesting from Campus Security and re-investing into racially and culturally diverse mental health resources, survivor-centric resources, food & housing resources and a renewed campus safety plan, as these resources are under-funded and greatly needed on our campus. We also continue to call on the University to remove Glenn De Caire from his position as Director of Parking & Security services.

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You will have seen in Ryan’s most recent report that we are working with the University to roll- out a Campus Census and Campus Climate Survey. The results of this census and survey will be extraordinarily helpful in our advocacy initiatives, to not only have an idea of students’ perceptions and experiences with various campus services, but also how these perceptions and experiences may differ depending on the identity of the student. They are both planned to launch in the early new year.

# Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities

UCRU has made a lot of progress this year in terms of formalization and developing a brand. We are on all major social media platforms and are in the middle of our #DebtFreeDegree campaign. We also have sent our bylaws to a team of lawyers to assist with the formalization and incorporation of UCRU, and this is projected to be completed within the coming months. This is a huge milestone for UCRU, which has remained informal for the past 5 years of its existence. With all of this work happening during our term, Ryan and I are confident that the incoming Board will have a lot of groundwork from which to build our federal lobbying efforts. We look forward to Federal lobby week happening at the end of November.

# MSU Clubs Concerns

There have been consistent concerns from leaders of MSU Clubs about the $5 baseline membership fee and the 25-person minimum for clubs. We hear the concerns and have addressed them for the short term by waving both of these requirements from the operating policy for this year. We are also working with CAC and the Clubs Department to analyze how these changes will affect our clubs beyond this year, so that the Clubs Department can make an informed recommendation for SRA before the year is up. Recognizing that the next ratification cycle is coming up in early December, we are working to ensure that these are not barriers to club ratification.

# Ombuds Work

There has been tremendous progress with Ombuds over the course of the 6 months that I have been in office. The new Ombuds Terms of Reference have been approved by Senate Executive Committee and is going to Senate for November 11th for approval. After that it will go to Board of Governors for December. I am also bringing it to SRA for approval at this meeting so that these approvals can happen simultaneously. The major changes to the Terms of Reference are outlined in the memo I submitted.

Aside from that, there are still conversations about hiring an additional Ombuds staff person, and about what necessary renovations might need to happen to accommodate this additional staff person. These conversations are ongoing.

# Teaching & Learning Task Force

Both Ryan and I sit on the Teaching & Learning Task Force, which has had three meetings so far this term. There is representation from each Faculty on the task force, including communications staff from each Faculty. The purpose of the task force is to identify the major barriers to a positive online teaching and learning experience, and to provide recommendations to the Provost by the end of the term to address those barriers for the beginning of 2nd term. The task force also recommended to the Provost to create an additional task force solely to create recommendations that would alleviate some of the exacerbated mental health challenges that are sitting on the shoulders of McMaster community members. The kind of changes we need go beyond additional counselors; we need to reevaluate the definition of a full workload in coordination with graduate programs and professional schools across the country. We also need to challenge the norm of having all these courses only available in the Fall and Winter term rather than in the Summer term. These are large conversations that are happening now, which we have been very vocal about. I hope to see large-scale infrastructural change that addresses problems deeper than merely the number of platforms our instructors are using to teach online material. (Which also needs to change immediately) There was a massive survey conducted in October by the task force in collaboration with MacPherson Institute with over 3000 respondents, both students and teaching staff, that has been evaluated for consolidated concerns. The task force is working through the concerns to create the list of recommendations for the Provost.

# International Students Task Force

I have been working closely with our AVP University Affairs, Brittany, to solidify a plan for international student advocacy in the second term. We will be creating an international student task force with representation from each faculty. This task force will be chaired by the AVP UA to assist her with an international student advocacy priorities document, as well as to provide insight and recommendations on how the MSU and all Faculty Societies can better support international students. We are also reaching out to SSC to see if they will partner with us on this project, given that they already have a great channel of communication with international students and are well aware of the concerns and barriers facing these students. The task force will meet monthly, with takeaways from each meeting being directly passed along to the Presidents Council meetings happening that month. The task force will primarily be looking at how to better support international students during the pandemic. We will be looking to then turn this task force into an International Student Advisory Committee, formalized by the SRA. This will allow a form of consistent international student perspective on current events and campus conversations. This kind of international student advocacy infrastructure is overdue, and we look forward to getting the task force together in January.

# Closing

As always, if anyone has any questions or concerns with anything I have presented here or with anything related to MSU work outside of this document, please feel free to reach out to me. We

are working our way through this year together and I am happy to help with any projects folks think will be beneficial to students during such a difficult year. Thanks again for all you are doing.

Before closing this report, it is with a very heavy heart that I want to take a moment to remember a member of our community who was taken far too early. Adam Chiaravalle passed away earlier this month at the young age of 26, working for McMaster facilities department. He was one of the most passionate members of the McMaster community that I have ever had the pleasure of working with. I worked with Adam on my very first project as MSU President back in May, and he has consistently pushed me to better represent the students of McMaster and to push forward sustainability projects across our community. Adam also had a huge impact on the MSU, having worked a few years ago on many MSU projects to launch forward sustainability work on campus, and working with MSU Board of Directors diligently for the past several years. I know that if Adam were still here today, he would want us to continue every sustainability project possible and to never feel that we were being too ambitious in our advocacy objectives or goals. Whether it’s a tree planting initiative on campus, a community garden project or an advocacy priority, Adam would have filled the room with his support, excitement and passion. All of my efforts toward sustainability on campus and within the McMaster community will be with Adam’s spirit in mind, and I look forward to trying to make him proud of the work we can accomplish as a community.

With a heavy heart,

Giancarlo Da-Ré

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