



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## **Associate Vice- President University Affairs**

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TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly  
FROM: Brittany Williams, AVP University Affairs  
SUBJECT: SRA 20H Report  
DATE: October 18, 2020

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Hello everyone,

I hope you've had a great break and are excited to be back for the latter half of the fall semester. This year has been an interesting one, and though it has brought with it many challenges, it has created many opportunities for positive change. This is the perspective that I have taken into my role this year. There have been a few unforeseen happenings this semester, so that I will outline progress on both those as well as my planned activities.

### **PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN**

- Health and Wellness & Mental Health
  - Mental health and Resilience course: Currently working on creating a pitch to the University for a Mental Health and Resilience course. I should have more information for you by my next update. The course would aim to take a proactive approach to some of the mental health challenges facing students on Campus with a view to equipping students to identify, treat with or refer someone to the appropriate support mechanism.
  - Online booking system: Currently looking at infrastructure that other universities have in place. We will be setting up meetings with the University to see how McMaster can implement a similar system at the Student Wellness Centre. This system can cut down wait times, protect student privacy, and improve overall efficiency.
- Anti- Racism Report
  - The University will be conducting a climate survey examining student interactions with university services. We have been in talks with the Equity and Inclusion Office since the summer about how best to ensure that this survey is as effective as possible in reaching the relevant students and gathering the essential information required to combat racism on Campus. We are currently examining ways to partner with the University on this. Aside from the University's survey, however, the UA Committee will independently be garnering feedback from students. I have already begun some one-on-one consultation with students and student leaders. However, I am still examining the best strategy for

information gathering. This student feedback will be integrated into a year-end report, which will outline recommendations to the University.

- Security Services
  - We continue to persist with our security services advocacy. One of my focuses is lobbying the University to improve its transparency surrounding data collected by security services. It is challenging to lobby the University on this issue when the very data we need to aid in our lobbying efforts is currently unavailable. In our meetings with the Equity and Inclusion Office, there appears to be support for this. There were concerns raised about the logistics surrounding data collection, but we will continue talking with them on this in early November.
  
- Improved International Student Support
  - This year I will be publishing an International Student Report highlighting current concerns and challenges international students face, alongside our recommendations. I have begun talks with international students and international student groups to understand the broad areas to which we will need to direct our focus. Many of the concerns highlighted thus far are Covid related. They include a need for better mental health support, online access and accessibility problems and, testing and examination concerns. We will continue some research within the UA committee this semester, laying the groundwork for our survey, focus groups and consultations in the upcoming semester.
  
  - Additionally, I am working with the MSU President, Giancarlo, to create an MSU International Student Committee to focus on current international student concerns. We hope to do this through the various faculties' societies. The aim is that a permanent University International Student Advisory Committee can supersede this one.

#### Other

- Review of University Policies Due to Covid-19: There are currently a few sections of University policies that have been rendered redundant or are inapplicable to students due to Covid-19. Many of these surround accessibility and examinations. We have begun highlighting these areas and are meeting with relevant university parties to see what changes can be made on the ground to ensure that students are best supported at this time.
  
- Online Access for International Students: Coming into the semester, many international students, especially those in China, were facing many issues accessing the required websites they needed for school. We worked with the University and Students in China to improve some of these accessibility issues. There are still many online access and accessibility issues facing international students and the broader student community. I am continuing to lobby the University on this front.

#### **PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Sustainability
  - Many of my sustainability plans have taken a back seat, given many of the changing needs this semester. However, in my role as AVP UA, I sit on the Sustainability Education Committee. Last week Adeola of SRA Art Sci and Christy of SRA Science and I successfully wrapped up our SoBi campaign. This Campaign aimed to highlight

the importance of SoBi as a service, promote its use to the McMaster community, and encourage support for sustainable means of transportation. Be sure to give our Silhouette op-ed a read!

### **UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Tuition
  - This year, our goal has been to equip student leaders and students with the tools needed to advocate for changes to Tuition increases. A memo was released to the SRA earlier this year to aid in their advocacy efforts. Additionally, my committee will be working with the Provincial and Federal Committee to run a letter writing Campaign focused on international tuition fees, tuition breakdown and future increases to Domestic tuition. The AVP Provincial Affairs and I are currently working on the broader logistics of this Campaign.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

- One of the current challenges I've faced is the difficulty in scheduling meetings with relevant parties. In general, things take much longer than expected, but I think I have gotten a handle on it and have been able to adjust my expectations and timeline a bit. It has been challenging balancing things I had planned for the year, and many of the unforeseen and unplanned needs that demand my attention. However, I have recently made adjustments to my year plan to integrate some of these changing student needs.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

- My UA committee members are eager and excited to get started. We have had two meetings thus far. At our second meeting, I had intended for us to launch into our projects for the year, but many members were, unfortunately, unable to attend that meeting. This semester, members will be focused on creating info/advocacy packs, preparing for the MacTalks conference, and working on the International Student and Anti-Racism reports. Members have also shown a keen interest in lobbying and consultations, and I am excited to have them along with me on some of these meetings.

### **SUCSESSES**

- We were successfully able to highlight to the University and rectify some of the online access issues faced by international students.
- UA committee meetings are off to a great start!
- Many of my consultations with the University have been productive thus far.

Best,



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