



REPORT

From the office of the...
Vice-President (Finance)

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Jessica Anderson, Vice-President (Finance)
SUBJECT: SRA 20H Report
DATE: October 18th 2020

Dear Members of the Assembly,

I hope you all have had a positive start to the semester and enjoyed your reading week! It's been five and a half months since I've started this role and so much has been changing monthly, weekly and even daily given the events of this year. While no one could have predicted how this year would turn out, I am proud of the work we have done up until this point, and I look forward to all of the things we will accomplish in the months to come! Thank you to each and every one of you for being willing and able to adapt to a constantly changing environment, it is greatly appreciated. With this being said, in this report I will encompass an overview of all the various tasks I have been working on that were both a part of my year plan, as well as a few additions, and plans for the upcoming months.

You will notice throughout this report, I have created a new 'Status' for some objectives that I have labeled as 'Changed'. This is referring to objectives that we originally on my year plan, but are no longer relevant in their original capacity, thus, I have highlighted how I have changed these objectives to better align with the news that both Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 will remain online.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns for me at all, please do not hesitate to email me vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca

Wishing you all the best,

Jess Anderson
Vice-President (Finance) & CFO
McMaster Students Union

Objective #1: Continue September and January Transparency Weeks

Status: Changed

Given my last report was back in July, prior to the Universities announcement about the Fall term being online, this objective has shifted direction slightly. I have begun working with Michael Wooder, Director of Marketing and Communications, Negar Asli, Marketing and Communications Assistant, Elisabetta Paiano, Communications Officer, and Adit Dixit, Media Production Coordinator, to plan out various take overs, videos and other ways to engage with student for a multi-day, financial transparency campaign on our social medias. As fees are currently being re-evaluated again given Winter 2021 has been announced to remain online, I am working to solidify the final reduction to our fees, to ensure the video we produce is the more accurate it can be and truly reflects the online Winter semester.

Objective #2: Explore Ways to Reduce Student Costs

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, I am happy to say that through reducing the MSU, CFMU, MUSC & HSR fee's we were able to provide students to a savings of over \$120 for the Fall 2020 semester. In light of the announcement from the University stating that Winter 2021 will remain online, I am keeping to my promise and currently working with our Director of Finance and General Manager to provide students with further reductions to their MSU fees for Winter 2021.

The MSU has also put forward another request to the HSR and City Council, requesting that given Winter 2021 will remain online, we believe the bus pass agreement should be suspended further until the end of April 2021. Along with this request, we have asked that City Council provide McMaster students that are still living in Hamilton a reduced monthly bus pass option. Given the fact that the Provincial & Federal governments are providing municipalities with additional bursaries and funding to help offset the loss of revenue due to COVID-19, we are hoping their will be willingness on the cities side to provide some kind of reduced pass that students may purchase.

The next component of this objective is continuing to advocate to the University to ensure they are adjusting their student fees to reflect the level of service they are providing. I will continue to have discussions with Giancarlo and university representatives to ensure student feels are actively being revaluated and lowered to align with the current limited service operations. As many folks know, the University reduced the Athletics & Recreation fee by 75% for the Fall semester given it was online, and we expect this reduction to continue into the online Winter semester.

Objective #3: Educate Students on Financial Aid Available

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, the initial plan was to highlight CERB and other avenues of financial aid that was available to students over the summer. Currently the point has changed to align with the Financial Transparency campaign that I am working on with the Comms department as I believe it will be helpful to include information regarding our fees, but also providing students with various options for financial aid. The focus will also need to switch from programs such as CERB, to the new CRB program that the government has created to help aid those that are unable to apply for EI but are in need of financial assistance as a result of losing their job due to COVID. In additional resources such as the MSU Emergency Bursary, The University Emergency COVID Relief Fund will also be highlighted.

Objective #4: Your Money/Financial Section of New Website

Status: In-Progress

This objective will coincide with the launch of the New MSU website that will be taking place within the next month. On the new website, I will ensure that the Your Money page is clear and easy for students to understand in an effort to eliminate any pre-existing financial literacy barriers that we previously in place on the old website. The new website is meant to be much less dynamic that the old website to ensure that archival information that is no longer relevant is not clogging up web pages and making it increasingly difficult for students to find and understand their finances relevant to the MSU.

Objective #5: Develop Service Sponsorship Policy & Packages

Status: In-Progress

For this objective I have already begun the conversations with and established our working group. This group will consist of the VP Admin, Michael Wooder, Paula Scott, Vlad Motorykin (Campus & Community Partnerships Coordinator), AVP Finance, and myself as well as including the VP Admin in relevant conversations as they oversee PTMs.

The group met about three weeks ago and began discussions surrounding first steps. AVP Finance, Chen and some members of the Finance committee have been helping to research other Universities to see if there are any that currently have a working policy or best practice regarding companies/groups they do and do not accept sponsorships from. While it appears, we will be one of the first with such a policy, our next steps are working with Vlad to understand how he currently goes about accepting and rejecting companies that reach out offering to sponsor. From here, the group will work to create a set of criteria around sponsors and bring it to discussion at Executive Board.

Objective #6: Adhere to Health & Safety Guidelines

Status: Ongoing

In the current climate of COVID-19, it is important that we are continuously assessing our operations and business units to ensure we are complying with the health and safety

guidelines put forth by public health Canada and the Canadian government. This continues to be an ongoing objective across all of our departments and units. I am happy to announce that since my last report, our food and beverage operations have undergone their health inspection and passed with flying colours 😊

Objective #7: Develop a Plan for the Long-Term Financial Stability of TwelvEighty

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, I recently had a consultation with Adit Dixit from the Commerce Caucus & a member of the Finance Committee, as he is currently enrolled in a course called Marketing Research (Commerce 3MA3). From this discussion, Adit asked if his group would be able to use TwelvEighty as the business they conduct their free marketing research for. This course asks that students get into groups, identify a problem within the business and provide recommendations based on market research on how to solve the issue. Through this arrangement, I will be working with the group to create a feedback survey about TwelvEighty to ensure any recommendations are based in analytics that are acquired through student surveys. I will continue to keep the assembly updated on this, but we are also going to be bringing in Stu, Gabby and Kornelia into this conversation to ensure we are getting a well-rounded picture of where we are, and where we hope to be in one, two, three, four and five years down the road.

Objective #8: Revamp Menu & Increase Plant Based Options

Status: Completed

I am happy to say this objective is complete and the new menu is amazing and includes an increase in the number of vegetarian and vegan options available. We have also created an online ordering tool for TwelvEighty to allow students, faculty and staff to order their food online to greatly reduce the amount of time they need to spend in the space!

Objective # 9: COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations & Shift to Take Out

Status: Ongoing

For this objective, we have 100% switched to offering take out only at all of our business units to limit the number of people within the restaurant at all times. Additionally, plexy glass has been placed around the entirety of the serving area at The Grind, and at the Checkout area of TwelvEighty to further aligns with Health and Safety Guidelines. All of our operational hours have been reduced, so The Grind is open Monday-Thursday 8am-2pm, TwelvEighty is open Monday-Thursday 11:00am-5:00pm and Union Market is open Monday-Thursday 10:00am-5:00pm and Fridays 10:00am-3:00pm. As we continue to evaluate the need for our various services, we will continue to monitor and adjust the operational hours on an as needed basis.

Objective #10: Student Staff & Student-Centered Culture

Status: Changed

This objective was originally meant to work to create a student culture within our business units to ensure students always feel welcome at The Grind, TwelvEighty and Union Market. Unfortunately, due to the nature of this year, this in person student culture is much more difficult to emulate and thus I have switched this priority to be more focused on our online/social platforms. Through working with the new TwelvEighty & Grind Promotions Coordinator, Salsa, and Restaurant Manager, Gabby, I hope to work to continue this welcoming culture on our social medias as we continue to engage with students and make them feel supported during these unique times.

Objective #11: Increase Sustainability Initiatives within TwelvEighty & The Grind

Status: Complete

For this objective, I have confirmed with our TwelvEighty Kitchen Manager, Stu, that our supplier is in fact able to source all biodegradable/compostable single use packaging (i.e. cups, lids, bags, takeout containers etc). Currently, we are working through our stock that we had on hand of the non-compostable items, as we felt that not utilizing these items in itself would be wasteful and not align with the sustainable practices we are trying to move towards. With this being said, I am labelling this objective as complete as we are ready to order the compostable items when we run out of our current stock. 😊

Objective #12: Implement Event Catering Packages

Status: Not Started

This objective will be started in the next month or so as although we are not currently able to hold events in person, I do believe it will be helpful to preemptively create these packages to offer once events are able to return to in-person.

Objective #13: Incentivize Students to Eat at TwelvEighty

Status: Changed

This objective will prove to be quite difficult to implement this year as we are trying to avoid encouraging students to come to campus due to the pandemic. With this being said, I will continue to work with our communications department to see if there are any type of incentives we can provide to students, staff and/or faculty that are required to be on campus for any reason. This is the only group that we are currently encouraging to attend our business units.

Objective #14: COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations – Union Market

Status: Ongoing

As Union Market is currently obtaining the highest level of engagement from across our business units (likely due to it's location), we are continuing to reevaluate the space and whether or not it is feasible to move the coffee/bagel station back up to UM, but ensuring a Customer Service Rep is the one handling all of the food/drinks. This would be a similar model to what is currently in place at La Piazza and it an option we are exploring.

Otherwise, Union Market is open from Monday-Thursday 10:00am-5:00pm and Fridays 10:00am-3:00pm. We have installed plexy glass to ensure our staff are safe when cashing people out, as well, we have placed floor decals to ensure anyone entering or exiting the space know the flow of traffic and where to stand when waiting in line.

Objective #15: Increase Video Promotion for Union Market

Status: Changed

For this objective there are two different ways that I can see it going given the current circumstances. The first, is collecting some videos of the space to highlight the safety precautions that have been implemented, and ensuring the target messaging behind the video is very much focused towards students are need to be on campus for class, or staff and faculty that are required to be on campus opposed to the general undergraduate population. This idea would highlight UM as a place where students can safely, and quickly come grab a snack, drink or a 'grab & go' item that is made at TwelvEighty daily

The other option for this, is to film some videos that can be utilized as promotional pieces once restrictions are lifted. This would allow for our communications department to have extra video content of the space, that they can edit and promote in the future. To decide which option I will be going forward with, I will continue to consult with the comms team and the rest of the board to ensure our messaging is clear and consistent.

Objective #16: COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations -The Underground

Status: In-Progress

While the front end of The Underground has remained closed for the past six months, the team has continued to operate and fulfill all orders they receive.

As there does not seem to be an overwhelming need for the service to students that are on campus, we plan to continue forward with operating our backend of the service, and fulfilling any requests that come their way!

Objective #17: Contract External Advertising and Sales Position

Status: Completed

Objective #18: Evaluate Potential of Establishing an Online Ordering System

Status: In-Progress

Additionally, the group has been working to build their own website that will be used to further their outreach and engagement into the Hamilton community. While the website is still being developed, the hope is that it will make our services more accessible, not only to students, staff & faculty, but also to more local Hamilton Businesses.

Objective #19: Build a Rapport with University Faculties & External Clientele

Status: On going

This objective will continue to be something that needs to be worked on over the course of the year. Building rapport is something that takes time and I am hoping to set up a conversation with Paula about what services we hope to highlight that we provide when having conversations with the university and external clientele.

Objective #20: Develop a Plan for the Long-term financial stability of the Underground

Status: Not Started

For this objective, I am planning to start it in November. The rationale behind this decision is that The Underground team has been leading the development of the new MSU website that is set to launch in the new few weeks and have been working intensely on this goal for the past few months. Come November, there should be more time to have dedicated conversations with the team about their vision for the future of the service.

Objective #21: Evaluate Purpose & Reimagine Compass Space

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, the progress thus far has been to pause compass operations. With the current restrictions that are in place due to COVID-19, there is not a pressing need to have the space open and operational, as there are essentially no students on campus to serve. With this being said, the 'help' feature of Compass will be redirected to our website through the incorporation of a widget that allows students to enter a chat to ask any questions they may have.

With second semester remaining online, I do not foresee any changes in the operations of Compass, however I will continue to work with John McGowan (General Manager) and Debbie Good (Compass Manager) to determine the future of the service and the space overall to ensure we are continuing to adapt and add value to the student experience.

Objective #22: Conduct a Review of the Silhouette

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, I brought up the review at the last Silhouette Board of Publication meeting we had on October 8th 2020. All parties seem excited to conduct the review to ensure that the service continues to align and adapt with the student needs. For this review, we are currently evaluating if it would be more beneficial to do the review internally via the AVP Services or put out a Request for Proposal (RFP), to external organizations to do a larger, more thorough review to eliminate any potential of bias. A direction has not been determined on this as of yet, but I will continue to update the assembly.

Objective #23: Increase Collaboration & Shared Resources between the Sil & CFMU

Status: Ongoing

While there continue to be some shared resources across The Sil & CFMU, I hope to continue conversations with both parties to evaluate the potential of continuing to increase the cross collaboration, especially given the difficult transition for both services to operate almost entirely online. We are in the process of hiring the Digital Media Specialist that is a shared, full time position shared between the two services, and with this role we are hoping the individual selected will have further ideas on how we can emulate more cohesion and collaboration amongst the services as well.

Objective #24: Create a Fund to Alleviate Financial Barriers to Attending Events

Status: Changed

As this year has had a tremendous impact on events, especially those that would normally take place in person; I have shifted my focus to evaluating other ways we can provide students with financial aid. Given the unique nature of this year, I believe that many students are experiencing a greater need of Financial Aid and thus, I am hoping to shift my focus to find ways of providing additional financial aid for the 2020-2021 year.

The way in which I am working on this objective is through SLEF (Student Life Enhancement Fund). Generally, SLEF is about \$100,000 that is provided by the University annually to help fund student ideas on how we can enhance student life on campus. While the normal timeline consists of idea submissions in October, vetting ideas in November, and voting on idea in and around February, most ideas are not actually implemented until the following academic year at the earliest. While many great ideas have come from this initiative, I believe that with the current challenge's students are facing, there is a more effective way to enhance student life, than planning for another improvement to campus. With this being said, I will be working with the SLEF Sub-Committee to brainstorm specific areas that students are experiencing financial difficulties in hopes of creating an application based, financial aid offering that will help many students that are struggling during these difficult times.

Objective #25: Assistant Accounting Department & Clubs Admin Through Internal Changes

Status: Complete/Ongoing

For this objective, I am labelling it as both ongoing & complete. While we have made it through the summer and have solidified how the clubs banking will work, we are continuously evaluating the system to ensure we are making the process as effective and easy as possible.

Objective #26: Work with VP Admin to advocate for reduced WW Levy, Levy Review & Implement NODA recommendations

Status: In-Progress

This objective has been going very well! After working with Andrijana (Financial Affairs), put forth a proposal that would reduce the WW Fee by about 19% to sit at \$100/student and it was accepted by WWAC. This fee included all of the virtual programming for the 2020 welcome week, and also allows for an allocation to put on an in-person event for the class of 2024 when it is deemed safe to do so. Welcome week was a huge success given its online nature.

As for the levy review, myself, and Andrijana have begun reviewing the Welcome Week related expenditures from all of the various departments/partners from the 2017/2018 up until present. This process will take several months to complete, but the hope to have a full report by the end of my term, and to have a direction for the fee in time for establishing the Welcome Week fee for the 2021-2022 year.

As for implementing the NODA Recommendations, this has been led by the VP Admin, but I will continue to provide support through my position on WWAC.

Objective 27: Develop and Run a General MSU Info Campaign

Status: Complete

This objective went SO WELL! With over 7k views across Instagram and Facebook, and 780+ comments I can happily say that I think this video was a huge success. The video does an amazing job at outlining and highlighting all the MSU has to offer, as well as breaking down our governmental structure for students to better understand. HUGE shoutout to our Comms team for their amazing work on the video!

Objective 28: Utilize Information and Recommendations from the Org Review

Status: On going

For this objective, I have put it as ongoing simply do to the nature of the review. There are many different areas that we can improve within our own organization, and I have already begun discussions with Giancarlo and the rest of the board to establish what our

main priorities are for this year, and what I should be included in the multi-year plan. As of right now, we are discussing what the priorities should be for this unique year as much of the work will need to be done virtually.

Objective 29: Oversee Implementation of New MSU Website

Status: Complete

This objective was passed along by the last VP Finance and is something that I have continued to help with to ensure its completion.

Paula & Steph from The Underground have been diligently working with MPS to ensure the website is up to par and will be ready to roll out in the coming weeks. I have put this objective as complete as there are only a few minor, finishing touches that still need to be done, but other than that we are working towards our official launch in the new few weeks! Once the website is launched, we will continue to monitor it to ensure it is accessible to all students.

Objective 30: Board of Directors Update Videos

Status: On Going

This is an ongoing objective for both myself and the rest of the board. So far, the update videos have been going very well and have really help us to connect with students on a more personal level outside of these more sporadic SRA reports. Even once we make it through this pandemic, I believe it will still be important to continue these update videos regularly as it is just another way that we are working to connect with students and share important & helpful information.

Objective 31: Increase Promotion of the Student Assistance Plan

Status: Complete/On-Going

If you have taken a look at our website for the past few weeks, we have included a rotating banner on the front page to include information regarding the Student Assistance Plan in a hope that more students will become aware of it and utilize it! Additionally, just last week, we have our SAP rep, takeover the MSU Instagram to explain what the Student Assistance Plan is, how it works, and how it can benefit students! This takeover was very successful and we saw a fair amount of engagement on the Instagram polls. The reason I marked this as also on-going, is simply that we can always continue to promote and outreach out services to students more.

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS:

1. Welcome Week Rep Appreciation

Over the past month I have been working with the Welcome Week Advisory Committee, the Welcome Week Faculty Coordinator and other partners to establish

a rep appreciation package for our roughly 800 reps that made Welcome Week 2020 possible. The Planners & Reps did an amazing job this at being flexible and able to adapt to the very unique year we are facing. As we were not able to provide reps with our annual rep appreciation dinner at TwelvEighty, I have been working with Maddie Raad (WWFC) to create Rep appreciation packages to express our sincerest gratitude for all the work they have done!

2. Clubs Financial Training

Another project I had been working on in August and into September was creating the Financial Section of Clubs Training alongside Noel, the Clubs Accounting Clerk. We have received a lot of positive feedback regarding Clubs training as a whole, especially regarding the financial section and I see this as a success! With everything having to be done remotely this year, we are actively working to create trainings that effectively articulate the information that various departments (Such as Clubs), need to know, and this is a resource that can be carried forward for years to come!

3. Clubs Manual

Over the past few months, I have also been assisting Jenna, The Clubs Admin in writing sections of the Clubs Manual. The manual is largely modelled off of the USC (Western) Clubs Manual and provide a lot of useful information to clubs on financial procedures, how to become a club, the ratification process & cycle, how to reapply for clubs status etc. We are just wrapping up the final edits of the Manual and plan to release it to clubs as a guide in the new few weeks.

4. Student Activity Building/ The Hub

Another project that I have been working on is reassessing the various needs of space within The Hub as it is set to open September 2021. I have had a few meeting with various campus groups to ensure they are able to voice their needs for the space as the initial plans were done back in 2017, we think it is important to gather updated information regarding various groups needs and how they may have changed.

5. Assisting PTMs with Finances

Again, as this is such a unique year, I am trying to ensure that PTMs and other budget managers feel as supported as possible with their finances and feel comfortable reaching out to me for any assistance. Given the restrictions currently in place, our PTMs have had to be quite creative in how they will show their volunteers that they are appreciated, and how they will host events. With this being said, I am ensuring I am a resource that they are able to reach out to for any questions as well as trying to offer alternatives that work with their budgets, if the need arises.

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

- Continue to negotiate with HSR for Winter 2021 operations
- Continue to reevaluate MSU Fees for Winter 2021
- Continue to work with Comms to great Financial Transparency graphics & videos to ensure students know how their money is being spent

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The largest challenge I am currently facing is managing the plans I had coming into this role and adapting them to be feasible within the current state of the world. As you may have noticed, within this report there are a handful of objectives that I have 'changed' to better fit the environment we are currently in, as the initial idea is no longer viable, or just doesn't make sense. To overcome this challenge, I find it super helpful to review my year plan, and critically evaluate my key priorities and any 'new' projects that have come up due to the uniqueness of this year. Additionally, having conversations with other staff, and students is super valuable as I am able to better understand not only what my priorities are, but what areas other students are hoping the board will focus on or address. If you ever have a suggestion of something you would like me to look into, please do not hesitate to reach out!

CLOSING REMARKS:

Overall the year so far has been quite different than I had originally anticipated (I feel like I can include this in ever report as new challenges and unexpected turns continue to arise). Having said that, I feel that the challenges that are being presented to the MSU as an organization, are highlight new areas of improvement, and are pushing us to adapt, and implement new and effective ways to engage students in this online world.

As always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns for me, please do not hesitate to reach out 😊

Best,



Jess Anderson

Vice-President (Finance) & CFO

McMaster Students Union

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