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| MSU logo.jpg. | **REPORT**  *From the…*  **Office of the MSU President** |
| TO: | Student Representative Assembly |
| FROM: | Giancarlo Da-Ré, President |
| SUBJECT: | SRA 20Q President Final Report |
| DATE: | March 21st 2021 |

Dear members of the assembly,

It is my pleasure to submit this final report from the office of the president for the 20/21 year. This year has not been what I expected at all, but it has definitely been memorable. During a year when the world stopped, I am proud to say that the MSU did not. We marched forward on every priority, and we made true progress in ever sector that mattered to students. I am grateful for everyone who has supported me this past year, especially the Board. There was no book on how to work through a pandemic year but like to think we left a pretty decent first draft of the next team.

None of the items below were completed or progressed upon by me alone; everything was a team effort. Almost everything will require follow-up and next steps by the next team. I look forward to transitioning in the next team and ensuring that the MSU is ready for another successful year after I am gone at the end of April. Thank you to the MSU for the memories, laughs, headaches, and tears.

It was my honour to be the first pandemic president.

Cheers,

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Giancarlo Da-Ré

President & CEO 20/21

McMaster Students Union

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### Accessible Academics

#### Access to Technology & Internet

In a predominantly online academic year, there have been major challenges with regard to differential access to both internet and technology. We advocated for these concerns to be incorporated into the planning of fall- and winter- term course delivery, especially after the University said on multiple occasions that quality of education would not be lowered due to an online term. Our advocacy to demand that the University prioritize students who are living in rural or other locations with poor internet connection was met with a number of wins. Internet boosting devices were brought to some rural areas, and HCS included poor internet access by way of CRTC mapping as one of the criteria for on-campus housing. Students were able to access the McMaster COVID-19 Bursary for payments related to unstable internet or lack of available technology, as these would both be categorized as exacerbated challenges due to the pandemic. The Government of Canada also announced a $2-billion internet investment plan to bring 98% of Canadians to high-speed internet by 2026. While there were some wins, many students faced challenges to meet the needs of a virtual year due to unstable internet access or lack of available technological resources needed to thrive in the virtual academic setting. This advocacy will need to continue next year, especially if students are studying remotely again.

#### Course Waitlist Concerns

There have been a number of concerns over recent years regarding course waitlists. Many McMaster courses do not have a waitlist option, meaning students do not know when a seat is open for courses. Not to mention, when there is a seat available for a course that a student is interested in, there is no way for that student to be notified of the seat availability. This is understandably frustrating for students and these concerns have been voiced to a number of senior student and university leaders over past years. While the course waitlist pilot initiative in 2018 was deemed unsuccessful, it is important to continue pushing for this priority so that it is fair for students to who wish to fill seats once they become available, and so that mental stress can be alleviated from students when they are waiting to see if a seat will open for a course that they are interested in. I have had conversations with the Dean of Students as well as the Vice-Provost (Faculty) regarding these concerns, and I worked with the Vice-Provost (Faculty) to try to find a long-term solution for this in the teaching & learning strategy. Students should be able to access a course if they are eligible to take it, and so ideally in the future, there is no need for a waitlist option because there is room in the course for anyone who wishes to take it. This may need to be a priority of the incoming AVP UA to continue pushing for short-term solutions that include a waitlist option given that these waitlists are common at other universities already.

#### Digital Learning Strategy

While online courses have existed for decades before the onset of COVID-19, McMaster has never experienced such a large shift to the online teaching and learning environment in such a short amount of time. While we applaud the university for acting so quickly to transition everything online, it should also be fair to say that much of this year we were all in survival mode to work in a virtual environment. It is clear that there are numerous benefits to the online teaching and learning environment—hence my platform point surrounding increased use of Echo360 in courses—but there have also been numerous challenges. As we come to the end of this academic year, it is important to reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of the online world so that we can move forward. It is impossible at this moment in time to accurately predict what the teaching and learning environment will look like next year, but it is safe to say online learning will not be completely eradicated. The benefits and challenges of this past year has necessitated a Digital Learning Strategy for the university, to guide the future of hybrid and hyflex learning environments. While we tried to push for most of this work to happen in the Winter term, it seems that due to logistical and timing complications of other higher ed initiatives, this work will primarily occur between April-August. The new MSU team should be highly involved in this process, and I have faith that this new strategy will point us in the right direction.

#### Digital Technology Accessibility Strategy

There has been a huge focus this year to ensure that our online learning spaces are accessible. Unfortunately, there has been no guiding university document to outline how we can accomplish this. That said, there has been a great deal of work, via teams such as the McMaster Accessibility Council, to implement AODA standards into teaching and learning. This university should be applauded for these efforts that have kept us ahead of many other universities. To advance this work, there have been discussions surrounding a Digital Technology Accessibility Strategy to be created alongside the Digital Learning Strategy. This document will aid our digital learning to ensure that the working, teaching, and learning environment at McMaster is accessible and in line with AODA standards/best practices. This will likely be similar timeline as the Digital Learning Strategy, and the MSU should be highly involved in this work.

#### Respondus Proctoring Software

Students have been very vocal about their concerns regarding the proctoring software, Respondus. The MSU has been very involved in these discussions with the Office of the CTO, Office of the Provost, MI, and Privacy Office. Answers to student questions have been slow to roll out, primarily due to the numerous sets of eyes that have been required to review documents before their public publishing. We worked with the university to release two FAQ documents and build a dynamic website with information regarding Respondus. There exists a false dichotomy between academic integrity and privacy concerns, and both can be protected with the advancement of alternative modes of assessment. I urge future MSU teams to work with other students’ unions in Canada to learn their strategies to combat proctoring concerns, and to maintain strong communication with the Office of the Provost on this issue. The current contract will be up at the end of August, and then there will need to be a decision on whether they will renew the contract or not. There have been very few (basically zero) cases of academic integrity from exams that use Respondus, while there has been a record number of academic integrity violations from students using websites like Chegg. My recommendation for future teams is to start conversations with the Privacy Office early to build trust and communication lines between the university and students.

#### Teaching & Learning Strategy

For an institution that is highly regarded in teaching and learning, there is a lot of work to be done to address longstanding issues that students have with their academic experience. I sat on the Teaching & Learning Strategy Steering Committee that worked to build the university’s long-term strategy for Teaching & Learning at McMaster. This project was being spearheaded by the Vice-Provost (Faculty) and Director of the MacPherson Institute. We were able to bring the student voice to the table in multiple ways, and amplified concerns primarily around decolonization of course material, digital fluency of instructors, re-evaluation of assessment styles, traditional program structures not fitting the needs of students, the redevelopment of course evaluations and increases to experiential, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary program and course offerings, amongst others. This visionary document should be finished in early Summer and will act as a guiding document for Faculties to use. It will then be up to each Faculty to determine how they will fit their own plans into this larger visionary document. I urge the next MSU team to work with Faculty Societies and SRA to push Faculties to incorporate the important themes that come out of the Teaching & Learning Strategy into their own action plans. If action plans do not reflect the direction of the T&L Strategy, these concerns will continue to be unaddressed.

#### Virtual Teaching & Learning Task Force

In the Fall term, the VP Ed and I sat on the Virtual Teaching & Learning Task Force. The mandate of the TF was to collect feedback from students and instructors regarding the online teaching and learning experience to inform recommendations to improve the experience for winter 2021. The findings were informed by the experiences and insights of 30+ members drawn from across the university, as well as various surveys commissioned to assess various aspects of the students and instructor experience in this unique environment. As the TF undertook its work, its findings helped inform some early recommendations that were forwarded to university leaders as their timely implementation was important for students and instructors. These included the need for a focused look at mental health and supports for well-being. While there are many existing supports and programs, McMaster’s Okanagan Charter Group, which looks at the health and well-bring of the overall campus, was asked to take on this challenge. The TF also recommended a delayed start to classes in the second term. This was supported by university leaders and the delayed class start was announced on November 19th. The final report with short-, medium-, and long-term change recommendations can be found [here](https://www.mcmaster.ca/vpacademic/documents/Taskforce/Fall_VLT_Final_Recommendations_Report.pdf).

#### Provincial Advocacy

One of our provincial advocacy priorities has been quality of education. There are primarily three recommendations tied to this priority:

1. The provincial government should task eCampus Ontario and Contact North with consulting experts and faculty with developing a framework for the development of quality online courses
2. The Ontario University Council on Quality Assurance should expand institutional Quality Assurance Processes IQAPs requirements to include program delivery criteria for online courses and include an assessment of online learning in its Final Assessment Report.
   1. I did a significant amount of research on this item specifically, which led to some very fruitful conversations with the Director of MI as well as the Vice-Provost Faculty.
3. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on the effectiveness and fairness of final examinations practices and establish a best practice framework for final examination pedagogy.

### Campus Infrastructure

#### MUSC Accessibility Audit Implementation of Recommendations

One of the items on my presidential campaign platform was to conduct an accessibility audit of MUSC by Sterling Frazer Associates. Little did I know—nor did the past MSU president or Manager of MUSC—this was completed in November 2019. The goal of the audit was to evaluate the level of accessibility for persons with disabilities (students, staff, visitors) as they interact the various services throughout the selected buildings. Findings of the audit have been compared with the updated Ontario Building Code (OBC) [effective January 1, 2015] and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act – Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Design of Public Spaces (DOPS). These two documents (OBC and DOPS) form the legal requirements for accessibility in the province of Ontario. However, under the current legislation, existing facilities are not required to pro-actively modify the built environment to meet these new standards. Only at a time when renovations or significant modifications to the space will they be required to comply. Therefore, while SFA identifies shortcomings in accessibility, the University is not under any legal requirements to modify the existing spaces. The document includes recommendations, building access, path of travel, vertical transitions, wayfinding, retail shops, service counters, washrooms, and drinking fountains. While there were some frustrations given that nobody was consulted prior to the initiation and completion of this audit, the document is a great starting step to determine was small and large changes should be made to make the MUSC environment more accessible.

#### MUSC Third Floor Enclosure Feasibility Study

MUSC is our main student space on campus, with students utilizing the space 24/7. There have been very few large renovations over the past 20 years that MUSC has existed, and we need a feasibility study of the third-floor terrace to identify options for how we can better utilize the space for student needs. This has been a project that has spanned a few presidencies, and unfortunately was not completed this past year either. Much of the conversation was just trying to fill gaps in historical knowledge on the purpose of the study and what money was available for the study. There should be about $15 000 from SLEF funding for this feasibility study from previous year allocation, and the consensus is clearer now that this study should look at just the terrace and not the whole third floor. This will have to be completed by the next president and should be completed in Summer 2021.

#### Space Allocation & Audit Work

Every three (3) years, the Space Allocation & Audit Committee (SpAAC) convenes to review the use of space throughout the McMaster Students Union (MSU). SpAAC operates as a specialized audit group out of the Executive Board to ensure all MSU assets are used to their fullest potential. In a normal year, SpAAC would have the opportunity to survey staff and spaces with a similar level of scrutiny. However, given the limitations of COVID-19, no in-person space audits were conducted as would be required for a thorough report. As well, the vast majority of staff members were required to reflect on their experiences within MSU spaces that were either (1) dependent on their most recent memories of the space, months prior to the submission of their responses or (2) limited to whatever minimal experiences they’ve had in their workspaces prior to their employment or the onset of the pandemic.

With this in mind, the committee took a very selective approach to the areas under review with the hope that those chosen would receive sufficient analysis to prove useful upon the return to campus. this year’s SpAAC targeted three (3) specific areas of the organization based on perceived needs of the MSU in the coming years:

1. Clubs Department
2. MSU Main Office
3. Student-Led Service Space

All staff involved with the above 3 areas were mandated to complete, though all staff were given the option to provide input of their own accord.

After leaving the SpAAC survey open over the course of several weeks, we collected responses from thirty-three (33) staff from Part-Time Manager (PTM), Part-Time Non-Supervisory, Student Opportunity Position (SOP), Full-Time (FT) Supervisory, and FT Non-Supervisory staff classifications, receiving feedback from close to every employee within each of the three (3) identified areas of focus along with staff from a few other areas of the MSU. Summaries of the results and recommendations are available in the document that was submitted to EB on March 11th, 2021.

#### Strategic Accessibility Planning & Management AODA Compliance Reporting Tool

This year, I sat on the McMaster Accessibility Council, where they worked to create the Strategic Accessibility Planning & Management AODA Compliance Reporting Tool. This work was primarily spearheaded by the EIO, and I am excited about this direction by the University. The project falls on the premise that, in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA 2005, S.O. 2005, c.11) and the McMaster University Policy on Accessibility Policy (2021 draft), McMaster must submit annual internal reports to the University Senate and Board of Governors and biennial external reports to the Provincial Government, outlining progress in meeting the University’s Multi- Year Accessibility Plan (2012-2025) (undergoing review) and describing progress toward achieving AODA compliance goals established by the Government. This AODA Compliance Reporting Tool has been developed to support the strategic planning and management of accessibility initiatives required to meet AODA compliance and to progress towards aspirational accessibility goals beyond compliance. The tool should be completed by the early Summer 2021. The MSU should work with the MAC to complete this tool and work to advance this work as best we can.

### Equity & Anti-Racism Work

#### Census & Student Experience Survey

Since the beginning of my term, I have been working with the EIO on these two projects: a campus census and student experience survey. The past MSU team before us worked with the EIO on what questions would be asked in the census, and we then continued to work with them on the planning and implementation of the tool. Essentially, the census tool will be a voluntary tool on Mosaic for all students to share their self-identification information. This will also be dynamic since aspects of one’s identity can change over time.

This has been a huge step forward for McMaster, particularly since a 2017 study showed that 63/76 Canadian universities said they couldn't answer the question on racial demographics because they don't ask students to provide information about their racial identity. It is incredibly challenging for universities to address demographic-related concerns on their campuses when they don’t even know the demographic makeup of their campus. This new census tool, spearheaded by Arig al Shaibah, is connected to student numbers, and the information is housed by McMaster’s Institutional Research & Analysis (IRS) team. Since the tool is connected to student numbers, any future or past surveys that asked for a student number can now be tied to demographic information from this census. The census will need to be re-advertised each September when new cohorts begin their studies, so that we continue to have the information of new students. I am very happy with this step forward by McMaster.

The Student Experience survey project was another project that was meant to understand the demographic trends of students regarding their experiences with a number of campus services, supports, resources, and offices—including various services and departments of the MSU. This information will be critical in guiding the future MSU administration towards improving services to adapt to the needs of our students. The results of this survey will also help to highlight where additional research is needed; if one service shows that there is a large difference in the experiences of students of different identities, there will need to be further research into why that is and what needs to change. This includes the MSU.

While we originally worked on these two projects separately, they ended up bring combined into one survey that was launched in late January 2021. As of the time I am writing this report, there are roughly 7000 responses, which is incredibly. The next step is to look at the results of the survey and determine where future efforts should be directed.

#### Internal Equity Strategic Planning

There have been evolving conversations throughout the year on how we can build a more equitable organization in the future. This has included various specific examples, such as intentional language in operating policies surrounding anti-racism and anti-oppressive frameworks; equitable hiring practices; improved anti-racist and anti-oppressive trainings for full-time and part-time staff; best practices regarding consultation processes; and metrics of equity work for our organization. The fact that these initiatives are so uncoordinated necessitates a larger organizational equity strategy. It is believed that some of this work will fall under the Director of HR & Admin—who will hopefully be hired in next year—but a more fulsome strategy is needed. The university has great resources for this, and other students’ unions are ahead of us in other aspects of internal equity work. This needs to be a priority of future teams.

#### Provincial Advocacy

One of our provincial advocacy priorities has been racial equity. There are primarily three recommendations tied to this priority:

1. The provincial government should mandate universities establish a baseline, minimum standard level of training to provide faculty and student-facing staff with inclusive educational tools and sensitivity training and principles
2. The provincial government should develop a common standard for universities to collect demographic data for the purposes of furthering the goals of a comprehensive access strategy
3. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research on the effectiveness of police on campus and their effect on 2STLGBQIA+ students as well as racialized students.

There are also items of our provincial advocacy on mental health resources that integrate with this priority. OUSA helped push this priority in at least 50 provincial stakeholder meetings, excluding our own MSU meetings where this was identified as a priority.

### Federal Advocacy

#### Incorporation of Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU)

The MSU has been an informal member of UCRU for roughly five years, as the organization has never been formally incorporated. This year, the top priority of UCRU was to become a formally incorporated entity. This included significant work by the UCRU Board and Governance Committee, both of which I am a member of. It has been a very long process, but we have learned lots about not-for-profit corporations in the process, and we are very proud of the work we have done to get as far as we have this year. There are still a few weeks left, and we hope to finish the process before we all leave! Future teams will have to have discussions surrounding fees for full-time staff, as this is the eventual goal for UCRU. We pushed hard to not have many of these conversations this year since the focus from many organizations has been to decrease fees in the pandemic, not increase them. Future MSU teams will have to figure out how we want to navigate this.

#### UCRU Brand Recognition & Communications Strategy

One of the challenges of UCRU is that not many people know about it. Brand recognition is really important, especially as we hope to build a reputation and strong long-standing relationship with MPs and Ministers in the government of Canada. As the Social Media & Comms Coordinator this year, my job was essentially to build that reputation through website, social media, and front-facing comms work. I am happy to say that from our efforts on social media platforms, we increased our IG followers by 125%, and we now have a LinkedIn & Facebook page. I was also in charge of any press releases, engagement pieces, and blog posts, and often had to respond quickly to the changes of the federal government. This was not always my priority as I was focusing on MSU work first and foremost, but I am happy that I was able to advance the brand recognition significantly for UCRU through this work. I’m looking forward to seeing the future of this work.

#### UCRU Strategic Long-Term Planning

Part of the UCRU Governance Committee’s work this year was to develop a UCRU Strategic Plan. The purpose of this plan is to be a guiding document for where we want UCRU to go, and then to give future Boards the autonomy and freedom to decide how to get there. This has also been an interesting experience, because we want to ensure that UCRU follows the values that are important to it as an organization, but we did not want to be too prescriptive with the language of the plan. There are 10 core values, 4 core functions, and 5 strategic priorities in the plan. This document will aid future Boards to improve the work of UCRU and continue building upon the foundation of the organization without feeling too constrained by the vocabulary in the document.

### Financial Aid

#### Advocating for Extension of CESB

The Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) was introduced by the federal government to provide financial support to postsecondary students who are unable to find work during COVID-19. This benefit was specifically for students who do not qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance (EI) and was valid from May – August 2020. CESB provided eligible individuals with $1250/4-week period or $2000 for 4-week period if you have dependents or a disability. While the government announced that CERB was extended by 8 weeks, there was never an announcement to extend CESB. We advocated heavily via UCRU to try to have CESB expanded by 8 weeks like CERB, especially since this year has been unprecedented in the need by students for increased financial support. These efforts unfortunately were to no avail.

#### Advocating for Reduced Ancillary Fees

The MSU advocated early to the university for the reduction of ancillary fees during the 2020/21 year. This was for two main reasons: 1. Students desperately needed financial assistance, and 2. Some of the services were could not feasibly transition their resources and supports to the online environment, so students should not be paying the same amount as past years. It was decided through the Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC) that the only fee to be reduced would be for Athletics & Recreation. The A&R fee was reduced by 75% for each term that was online, and students were rebated the summer portion of the fee. These rebates will be given back to students at the end of the term, and the MSU expects that 75% of both the Fall and Winter fee will be returned to students.

#### Financial Aid Education

One of my platform points surrounded financial aid education and promotion to students during the pandemic. This platform point was primarily completed by the Board in the summer with the help of the Comms team, and also by the VP Finance via her Financial Transparency Week in the Fall. I recommend future teams to try to think of creative ways to improve these advertising strategies to students so that they are aware of all of the financial support options available to them. One of the ways this can happen is through better collaboration with the university’s financial aid office, student success centre, and office of the registrar.

#### Internal Fee Reductions

We were able to reduce a number of fees for students that we were in control of . These are displayed below:

* 25% reduction of MSU Operating fee
* 25% reduction of CFMU fee
* 25% reduction of MUSC fee

#### HSR Fee & Negotiations

We had many conversations between August and November with City Transit and with the university on our HSR contract. It was decided after long deliberation and negotiation that we would suspend the Fall bus pass, and then that we would bring back the bus pass for the Winter and Spring/Summer terms at an even greater discount to students. The overall fee savings for students on the bus pass was roughly 75% of what they would pay in a normal year. Communications with students on these decisions was challenging because none of our ideal outcomes were able to be accomplished. City Transit did not allow for any kind of opt-out or opt-in options that we pushed strongly for and were only interested in all or nothing approaches. Ultimately after months of negotiations, we came to the agreements of suspending the pass in the Fall 2020 and bringing it back in the Winter/Spring/Summer 2021.

#### Provincial Advocacy

One of our provincial advocacy priorities has been financial aid. There were six recommendations tied to this priority:

To ensure students have financial support they need, the provincial government should:

1. Eliminate expected parental, spousal, and individual contributions in OSAP calculations
2. Increase OSAP grants for students who need additional financial assistance to start or continue post-secondary education
3. Review its student financial aid program for the 2020=2021 year to assess opportunities for temporary spending towards students with greater financial need.

To ensure recent graduates are able to repay their OSAP loans, the provincial government should:

1. Reimplement the moratorium on OSAP loans payments and interest until September 2022
2. Implement a two-year, interest-free grace period after graduation
3. Set the interest rate on OSAP loans to the government’s borrowing rate, Canada’s prime rate, or an average inflationary adjustment—whichever is lowest.

#### Federal Advocacy

One of our federal advocacy priorities has been financial aid. There were two recommendations tied to this priority:

To ensure students have financial support they need, the federal government should:

1. Invest $230-million per year to implement a 2-year grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates
2. Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grants by $1200 per student for the 2021 federal budget

### Communications

#### LinkedIn Presence

While the MSU has strong media presence on multiple platforms, LinkedIn has not been one we have strongly utilized in past years. We took steps this year to start posting more on LinkedIn, and I look forward to seeing how future MSU media/comms strategies better utilize LinkedIn to improve our engagements with students and community members.

#### MSU Info Campaign

Due to the nature of 1-year MSU positions, our organization relies heavily on an efficient and sustainable transition strategy. A significant number of students at McMaster do not know what the MSU is, what resources, services and benefits we provide, how we operate or how they can get involved. To ensure that students are aware of MSU operations and can gain a baseline understanding of what the MSU is, I worked with the Vice-President (Finance) and Media & Production Coordinator to launch a campaign at the beginning of the academic year with a video that explains how what the MSU is and how it operates. The video can be re-posted in future years when we have surges of students each September, and I am incredibly proud of this work. The video is on our socials and remains the background video on our new website. It looks amazing!!

#### Online BoD Presence & Communications

Early in the Summer, the BoD made an effort to move our communications presence away from “a logo” and more towards “people” and “community”. This was heavily supported by our comms team, and this turned into the BoD video updates that students have been able to watch on our socials all year. These video updates have heavily increased our engagement with students, I hope that students have begun to see our organization more as a group that brings people together and that is built of people, as opposed to just our strong brand recognition via graphics and or logo that we have relied on in some past years. I hope that the next BoD continues these efforts, as I think building a brand around people will be more inviting to students and will increase our engagement. Huge shoutout to our comms team for pushing us to do this and then supporting us throughout the year. It required additional effort at times, but it was definitely worth it.

#### Presidents’ Council

I made a big effort this year to better use the Presidents Council as a resource and tool for all members. Our first meeting was in the early Summer, unlike the year before which was in October, and I think that made a huge difference for team dynamics and for us to all get on the same page for campus projects and strategies. I also saw the need early on for quick communication between student leaders, and this became a platform to do that. I have to shoutout all of the members of Presidents Council who attended some late evening meetings, especially when I didn’t have all the answers. That said, I was always honest about what the MSU was doing and what I was hearing from the university. PC became an incredibly resource not only to bounce ideas around and vent about how challenging the year has been, but also to clear up miscommunications that spread around the virtual environment in such a fast-changing year. I have already begun supporting the transition of my successor to better use the Presidents Council during his year, and I think it will be an incredible resource for him to use. We also created communication groups that will continue year after year, to ensure that there is not a gap in the use of this council one year due to poor transition.

### International Student Support

#### Advocacy for International Students during COVID

One of our federal advocacy priorities has been international students. There were three recommendations tied to this priority:

To ensure students have financial support they need, the federal government should:

1. Make $20-million dollars available to support Student Work Placement Program opportunities for both international and domestic students
2. Include international students in the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy
3. Prioritize international students in Canada’s Immigration Levels Plan

#### International Student Task Force

One of my platform points was to develop the foundational work for an international students advisory committee at McMaster. The purpose of this advisory committee would be to bring broad representation from international students at McMaster to the table for topical conversations on the student experience. With the help of Ana Pereira from SSC and our own AVP University Affairs, Brittany Williams, we have built an international student task force this year as the first step in this plan. The TF would exist to inform university decisions as we plan for Fall 2021, and act as a sounding board for university administration on how their decisions may impact international students. The goal is for this group to turn into an advisory committee next year, and eventually for this work to be solidified by an MOU between the MSU and the SSC. We have also identified the important role that our Clubs Department plays in the international student experience, and so we have decided to bring our Clubs Administrator into these conversations. It is my hope that the Clubs Administrator sits on this ISAC in the future, and that it is co-chaired by our AVP UA and by the SSC’s International Students Coordinator. There should be broad representation from Faculty Societies—ideally at least one representative that is on the society and one that is not. This group will then work in parallel with Presidents Council, and information will flow between the two groups by the president and AVP UA.

#### International Student Tuition Advocacy

There have been many conversations over the summer months regarding tuition concerns, specifically the increasing costs of tuition for international students. This is a complex issue that requires advocacy efforts at the faculty, university and provincial levels. In order to maximize our advocacy efforts, I worked with the first Vice-President (Education) and AVP UA to create a document that would provide context to these increasing costs of tuition. The document would also provide recommendations on how SRA can work with Faculty Societies so that all of our advocacy efforts are complimentary. While this is a long-term goal, it will be very helpful to have everyone aware of the background context for these tuition increases so that we can all work together to cap increases to international tuition. This document was circulated to all SRA members as well as Faculty Society Presidents. It should be reviewed prior to re-circulation in the new fiscal year if the new team wants to continue this as a priority.

### Mental Health Support

#### Mental Health & Wellbeing Task Force

The Okanagan Mental Health and Wellbeing Task Force, which convened for its first meeting in January 2021, was tasked to explore ways to help students, staff and faculty address the additional stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic and remote learning. The Okanagan Mental Health and Wellbeing Task Force was launched as part of the [recommendations made by the Virtual Learning Task Force](https://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/articles/new-campus-wide-task-force-to-explore-challenges-and-best-practices-in-virtual-learning/) and is made up of faculty, students and staff from across the university. It is being led by Dr. Catharine Munn, associate clinical professor in Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, reporting to Dr. Paul O’Byrne, dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and chair of the McMaster Okanagan Committee. The task force consists of an oversight committee of 10 representatives (including myself) and two sub-committees:

* A Workplace and Educational Environment Sub-committee with 18 members examining systemic issues influencing mental health and potential solutions; and
* A Mental Health Education and Promotion Sub-committee with 18 members, identifying the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by individuals and groups, as well as potential solutions.

The task force has been working fast to provide updates and interim recommendations that have been shared on the [Okanagan Charter](https://okanagan.mcmaster.ca/) website over the term. There will be a final report delivered to the provost in June 2021.

There was also no MSU presence on the Okanagan Committee until this year when I joined.

#### Provincial Advocacy

One of our provincial advocacy priorities has been mental health. There are primarily three recommendations tied to this priority:

1. The provincial government should communicate the respective responsibilities of each ministry that has a role in meeting the mental health needs of post-secondary students, ensuring there are no service gaps
2. The provincial government should provide dedicated funding for community-based mental health providers to supply culturally relevant and diverse counselling on campuses
3. The provincial government should through the ministry of education, develop a mandatory K-12 curriculum that emphasizes resilience and coping skills, ensuring that students will have an understanding of mental health concerns and the resources to effectively deal with them.

#### SAP Improvements

The MSU Student Assistance Plan is a free and confidential online platform available to all MSU members and their immediate family members that offers psychological counselling and academic-life services, including legal, financial and nutrition consultation. However, resources are only available during the normal academic year between 8am-8pm with extended hours during exams to 10pm, and many students are unaware of this plan. Students need access to these resources outside of the hours of 8am-8pm beyond just exam time, and we need to improve our promotional strategies for the Student Assistance Plan. There is also an issue that some counsellors in Ontario are unable to accept new clients outside of Canada, introducing a barrier to accessing mental health resources for our international students. This was a challenge for the predominantly online academic year.

Most of our work on this was to gain data on how the SAP was being used, and to try to come up with unique ways to advertise the plan to students. The data has been helpful, but this is the first year we have it, so we do not have a non-pandemic year to compare the data with. Future teams will be able to compare future data with the data of this year to see if more students are using the services. Additionally, I have tried to work with Okanagan Committee to find new ways to advertise the services. Info on the SAP is now available on the Okanagan website as part of its mass directory for mental health resources.

#### Culturally Relevant & Competent Mental Health Support

One of the major concerns that has been exacerbated by the pandemic is the lack of culturally relevant and competent support for Black students, Indigenous students, racialized students, and 2SLGBTQIA+ students. This problem was also highlighted in the Systemic Review of the Black Student-Athlete Experience and the McMaster Athletics Climate. While there are racialized counsellors on our campus, this cannot be the whole solution to this gap in resources. There has to be a stronger plan from the university to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of Black students, Indigenous students, racialized students, and 2SLGBTQIA+ students on campus. I have begun these conversations with Clare Warner, the new Senior Advisor to the Dean of Students on Anti-Racism, Equity, & Inclusion. It is clear however that there is a lot of work to be done and hiring more racialized counsellors is not a systemic solution. The next MSU team needs to work with student affairs to improve these supports for students.

### Ombuds

#### Additional Support

The Ombudsperson needs more support. Without additional personnel in the office, there is no time to write annual reports, update the website and improve promotions and visibility of the office while also handling all cases submitted to the office. Annual reports from the Ombuds office are common across Canada, though they have never been produced from our office at McMaster. These annual reports are vital in summarizing the work of the office over the year and providing recommendations to other offices and departments at the University, as well as direction with policies. Many other Ombuds offices across Canada also have an online intake form for students to fill out, though this is not something we currently offer. We need to hire an additional staff member to assist the Ombudsperson with these valuable tasks and improvements to the office. The steps this year to do this have stopped at creating a Job Description for the assistant role. The JD needs to be approved by the university so that it can undergo a wage grade process and then they can open hiring for the role. It is our hope that this can all happen in the Summer, but we recognize there will be challenges trying to onboard a new staff member in the online environment, and so this might be delayed depending on the state of the pandemic.

#### Advisory Committee

McMaster Ombuds has traditionally had a management committee consisting of the VP Education and Dean of Students, with ultimate oversight by the MSU President and President of the University. The structure of the management team has not been productive or helpful for the office and is in need of changing. It is common for Ombuds offices across Canada to have advisory committees consisting of both student and University representation, and the past MSU President started much of the groundwork for a shift in this direction. I continued this work and formalized the advisory committee this year. This advisory committee will provide advice and guidance to Ombuds, act as a sounding board, make recommendations to the MSU President and President of the University related to finance and resource requirements and assist the Ombudsperson in accessing relevant individuals and information as necessary to fulfill the mandate of the Ombuds Office. They will also organize and oversee regular reviews of the office, investigate complaints, assist with promoting and enhancing visibility of the office and provide feedback on annual reports from the office.

I spearheaded a new Terms of Reference for Ombuds that included an Advisory Committee, which was approved by SRA, Senate, and BoG. The first meetings of the Advisory Committee have already begun, and I have heard great feedback from the Ombudsperson that she has never felt more supported than she does now with this new team

#### Change of Location

There have been many conversations regarding the addition of a staff member to the Ombuds office and the office space changes that would be needed to accommodate an additional staff member. There are also challenges with the current visibility of the Ombuds office at McMaster, and many students either do not know what kinds of support can be provided by the Ombuds office or they do not know the office exists as all. It is not obvious at the moment where this new space will be, if it is not just an expansion of the current office space. The plans for office changes will have to be finalized in the Summer so that we can move forward with any necessary renovation via MUSC BOM before the Fall 2021.

### Operations & Strategic Planning

#### CFMU & Silhouette Merger Planning

The BoD has been working closely with the GM, CFMU, and Sil on what a future of closer collaborations can look like. There are multiple reasons for this, including a need for better full-time support for the Silhouette Editor in Chief. I doubt there will be final decisions on what a staffing structure will look like for at least the next year, but the first steps are to transfer assets over from MSU Inc. to CFMU Inc. We hope to do this at SRA 20Q. The plan is that this will then be a phased approach over three years. We will be transitioning the next Board on these plans to ensure next steps are taken carefully, and that the spirits, licenses, and mandates of both CFMU and Sil are not compromised in the process. I am very excited that the MSU is taking this direction, and it is exciting that we are able to stay ahead with regard to multi-media operations. This will be the first of its kind in Canada—true trailblazers.

#### Clubs Department Improvements

Our Clubs Department underwent massive changes this past year. Some of the new changes were not well received by students, including the 25-person minimum and the $5 fee minimum for clubs to charge their members. We immediately waved both of these requirements and began working closely with clubs to adopt new changes that would better suit our needs. Through close collaboration with the Clubs Administrator, Assistant Clubs Administration, Clubs Advisory Council, VP Finance, and Clubs Accounting Clerk, we enacted a number of changes at the last SRA meeting to resolve these problems. The changes are outlined below.

Operating Policy- Clubs Status

* New membership minimum- 20 members including executive team (MSU club application requires minimum 4 executive members at the time of application, meaning clubs will require 16 general members)
* If a club applies with less than 20 members including their club executive, there will be an opportunity in the application to provide justification for why they were unable to hit this minimum. This will be reviewed by the Clubs Advisory Council (CAC) who will make a decision on whether or not to ratify the club based on the information provided
* The clubs department will require that all club members sign up for their respective club on the MSU clubs website. Each club member/student must submit their name, McMaster email and student number. Club membership tracking will allow the Clubs Department to verify that clubs have hit the 20-member minimum. Club membership data will **not** be wildly broadcasted or posted to ensure members privacy is upheld
* Club membership tracking through the website will reset every year on May 1st, returning club members will have to register each year for their club

Operating Policy- Clubs Financial Procedures

* New proposed $0 membership fee minimum, however clubs can increase their membership fee to whatever they choose
* Clubs will be encouraged to charge a membership fee during the financial portion of clubs training as an additional source of income, however charging a fee will not be mandatory
* If a club chooses to have a membership minimum, it will be reflected on the MSU clubs' website where club members can register and pay for their membership fee
* Membership fees paid through the website would be deposited directly into the respective club's bank account, for the club to use as an additional source of income

#### Health & Dental Insurance Coverage

Another challenge this year was for OOP and out of country students who could not use the benefits of our insurance plans. This is due to the fact that many of the benefits are not available outside the country. This necessitated an opt-out process for students who were OOP or out of country. We were very adamant on this change and we hope it helped our many students not living in Ontario. We are also planning for the possibility that some of our international students who opted out may return to campus in the Winter if it was decided that classes were back in person. In anticipation of this, we created an opt-in option specifically available for international students who opt-ed out and who would be able to use the benefits of the plan in the Winter and Summer. The university did not decide to have in person classes in the Winter, and so this opt-in process was not required even though we prepared for it.

This kind of strategy might be needed again next year depending on what Fall 2021 looks like, but it will not be available in years after when we reach herd immunity.

#### Organizational Review Implementation of Recommendations

Led by expert consultants from KPMG, the MSU concluded a wide-ranging review of the organization’s structure and functions in Winter 2020. The goal of the project was to examine the service delivery, capacity, reporting relationships, and staffing structures across the MSU’s array of operations. Specific objectives of the review were the following:

* Identify structural inefficiencies and areas of resource duplication
* Highlight savings and revenue generating opportunities
* Streamline roles and responsibilities
* Identify any staffing gaps and/or leading practices in operating policies and job descriptions

The project was broken up into multiple phases. The first of which included stakeholder feedback sessions. The consultants conducted one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and a survey to articulate staff concerns, and better understand the scope of issues present within the MSU. Specifically, KPMG conducted approximately two dozen one-on-one interviews with folks from both McMaster and the MSU. Additionally, KPMG provided multiple focus group opportunities to both full- and part-time staff. Lastly, the consultants generated an anonymous survey, accessible to all staff members of the MSU. Nearly 100 people provided responses, focusing on themes of service delivery, organizational structure, decision authority, and risk elements.   
  
 Following the information gathering phase of the review, the consultants from KPMG provided analysis along with more than a dozen recommendations for the MSU. Some priority recommendations which will be prioritized first, include:

* Improve and update the organization’s “core capability” resources, (website, social media, vendor management, student feedback collection/analytics, e-commerce, etc.) in order to create a more connected organization.
* Explore ways to leverage opportunities to better share resources across departments and more proactively manage turnover and vacancies.
* Develop short instructional videos and leverage LinkedIn learning modules to accelerate onboarding processes and manage the natural turnover of student positions.
* Conduct a deeper dive into the marketing and communications areas of the MSU to ensure we are creating a “Connected Student Experience” to drive change and ensure we are adequately serving student needs.
* Leverage the prime location of Compass to increase students’ awareness of all services and activities available to them through the MSU. Explore the idea of installing self-service kiosks for a visually appealing, eCommerce experience.
* Gain a better understanding of the HR and IT activity that is performed within the MSU by conducting activity surveys and use the data gathered to identify the required capacity and skills to support the HR and IT needs of the organization.

We have been able to make progress on a number of these items, as displayed below:

* Partnership with HCS to build core competencies into our hiring practices
* Begin taking steps towards better collaborations between CFMU and The Silhouette
* New LinkedIn learning modules to improve onboarding and training processes for all full-time staff
* Begun research on self-service kiosks for the Compass location in the future, and planning for what the Compass space can be used for in the future.
* Expansion of IT team with addition of Junior IT Tech & Senior IT Tech. JDs should have finished going through wage review this month and should be hired for May 1st start date
* Working through a draft of the JD for Director of Admin & HR

#### Supporting Our Full-Time Staff through COVID-19

It has been an incredibly challenging year for the MSU, particularly for our employees. We have tried to facilitate environments where it is okay for staff to find new productivity levels that accommodate the challenges of this unique year. I have worked with our GM and BoD to provide a number of recommendations for our staff to consider, relating to workload, schedules, Use of Meeting Time, and Reimbursements.

#### The Hub Construction & Planning

The Hub timeline has been pushed back as a result of the pandemic and because of a change in the management of the project. It appears that The Hub will not be completed until April 2022 at the earliest. The next BoD will be more involved with furniture choices and will have to figure out the details of funding and management of The Hub. Some conversations have looked at moving aspects of Campus Events & Avtek to the new building, but these will ultimately be the decisions of the next team. There may also be opportunities to find a location for Diversity Services to use in The Hub since they are planning to transition into a peer support service next year. I look forward to the next 12 months of planning for The Hub and am excited for students to hopefully be able to use the centre in the Spring/Summer 2022 term!

#### The Lotus Initiative

As we work through the tumultuous years of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for a post-pandemic world, we are reminded of the power of collective efforts in supporting our communities through challenges. This brings us back to the purpose of student leaders; each student leader plays a unique role at McMaster in supporting the changing needs of students. Collectively, our synergistic efforts have continued to enhance the undergraduate experience across campus. While the mandates of our teams may differ in scope and details, we often share similar goals that align with the needs of students today

In order to be most effective in our synergistic efforts, we need a mechanism to determine what the changing needs of students are, so that we can collectively work to prioritize them. When student leadership works to tackle similar priorities across campus, we are able to make stronger progress than when our priorities are aligned. This is not to be interpreted as restricting the work of future teams to a centralized plan; it is to ensure that student leadership are merely aware of the largest priorities of students so that we can work to make progress on them.

There is a need for stronger due diligence in determining what the changing needs of students are. These will naturally shift every couple of years, and so this process needs to be one that can be replicated by our successors’ successors. The results of this process also need to be publicly available to the student body and broader McMaster community. A public-facing document will also allow for new student leaders to focus their platforms or leadership applications on priorities that have been through a due diligence process and which are widely accepted by the campus community.

I have been working with my successor to develop a term of reference for this project in consultation with incoming and outgoing faculty society presidents. I hope to complete the first draft of this document before I go, and then to pass it off to my successor so that he can use it how he wishes. I have no doubt the processes in the draft will shift and change to fit the vision of the project.

#### Virtual AGM

This document was submitted before the MSU 2021 AGM, but I will provide some basic information here to preserve institutional knowledge. We decided to use Zoom for this event even though SRA took a stance against Zoom, since it was the only available platform that we identified that could accommodate the quorum for our AGM. There are over 100 people currently registered for the event and five motions will be coming forward at the meeting. If we do not hit quorum and any motions pass, they will be added to the last SRA meeting of this 20/21 assembly.

#### Website

One of my platform priorities was to create a new MSU website before January 1st, 2021. Thanks to the immense efforts of multiple team members within the MSU, the new website went live in the Fall of 2020, and it looks fantastic. This new website definitely brings a revitalized look to the MSU and has already increased student engagement with website information. There have naturally been some challenges that we have had to work through with the new website, but it is primarily finished. The new website is meant to be much more static than the last website, and there are very few dynamic pages. This means there are also very few people who will need access to the website, since there won’t be much that needs to be changed year after year. This should ensure we do not forget to update information, minimizing outdated information on the website.

### Student Safety

#### Advocacy for On-Campus Testing & Vaccination

The closest COVID testing location to campus is currently at the Main Street West Urgent Care Centre. Their website mentions that both an appointment and referral are required; while both of these requirements can be secured by students, they increase the difficulty of students going to get a COVID test. In prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of surrounding neighborhoods to campus, I have voiced my support throughout the year for a COVID-19 testing center on or adjacent to campus. 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. There are now also plans to potentially have McMaster be a central location for vaccinations in the near future. These will ultimately be the decisions of public health, but I hope that McMaster is able to become a testing and vaccination centre over the next few months.

#### Student Safety during the Pandemic

This is a very unprecedented year where the safety of our students and communities are threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The University closed campus and planned for a predominantly online year in the interest of the safety of the community. As the University decides whether or not to slowly open up again in different capacities for the next year, there are complex coordinated efforts to ensure all decisions are keeping the safety of the community in mind. Return-To-Work meetings allow representatives from different pockets of campus to come together and discuss what they are working on and how they can assist each other in the campus planning as it relates to the pandemic. I attended these meetings to throughout the year to provide the student perspective on the University’s proposed plans and solutions, as well as to give MSU updates. These meetings were critical as coordinated efforts will ensure we are all keeping safety of the community as our top priority. The MSU also needs to continue working with Hamilton Public Health to ensure we are promoting social distancing information to our students. There may be a third wave and we must be continuing to promote the importance of social distancing and proper mask-wearing. While all of these efforts are quite coordinated currently, it will be imperative to continue this coordination as we begin the Spring/Summer term. It is quite unknown what the next year will, and the MSU must work closely with the University to ensure we are matching our messaging and are complimenting each other’s efforts to ensure the safety of our students and the community.

#### Re-Imagined Campus Safety Plan

Defunding police systems has been an advocacy priority this year for the MSU at different levels of government. At the university level, we have continued to have conversations with members of senior administration regarding McMaster’s campus safety plan. More specifically, I have had numerous conversations with Arig al Shaibah (AVP E&I) as well as David Farrar (President) regarding these concerns. We also have had conversations with leadership at the GSA and CUPE 3906 to ensure that our advocacy is as strong as possible. At the municipal level, outgoing Vice- President (Education) and I have had conversations with Maureen Wilson regarding the defunding of HPS, and we have also sent in a letter of delegation on behalf of the MSU to Mayor Eisenberg and members of City Council voicing our support for the defunding of HPS. We also hosted a panel event that included Leo Johnson, Maureen Wilson, Shawn Hercules, Fawziyah Isah and me to discuss BLM and Defunding Police Systems. At the provincial level, the MSU signed on to a letter to Premier Ford calling on the Government of Ontario to 1. allocate funding to community-led public safety measures to make non-criminal incidental response the default to non-violent community calls in Ontario, and 2. to fund upstream, community-driven programs to reduce the need for incident response services and build healthier, safer communities in the first place.

David Farrar has also said to Board of Governors that he will be conducting a review of the campus community safety & security needs, to better understand the gaps in the current safety model for our campus. We did some planning on the MSU side to compliment these efforts by starting to research various safety models that are used by other universities in Canada, so that we could then consult with BIPoC and 2SLGBTQIA+ students on these alternative models. Much of this work will need to be conducted by the incoming teams, and we will have to keep up the pressure on the university to get this work done ASAP.

The MSU must continue to push for change at each level of government regarding security and police systems. This advocacy will undoubtedly continue past my term as President, and so I will ensure that we are setting up Boards after us to continue this advocacy in a way that is effective and that includes the voices of students. I want to thank all of the students and community members who have advocated for a future campus that is safer for everyone, and I look forward to seeing the developments of this advocacy over the next few years.

#### Return to McMaster Planning

As we look towards the Fall of 2021, and the expected gradual return to campus as the community receives vaccinations and the pandemic eases, it is important that we pause to consider the lessons learned from remote work, teaching and research over the past several months as well as the experience of those whose remained on campus. These lessons can be both constructive and challenging and will help us reimagine the activities of the university to help create a more dynamic, supportive and effective community.

The mandate of the Return to McMaster Oversight, Advisory and Working Committees (together, the Return to McMaster Group) is to consider the remote experiences of 2020/21 and emerging public health guidelines and research to guide planning as we deliver on the university’s academic and research mission. The collective efforts of the Return to McMaster Group will work towards the following goals:

* Determine planning scenarios to be used for the upcoming 2021/22 academic year.
* Submit a final report to the President and Vice-President (PVP) group outlining key findings, recommendations, and best practices to best inform how we reimagine the future of McMaster.
* Monitor the implementation of planning scenarios over the course of the 2021/22 academic year by providing updates on implementation, impacts and challenges.

The Return to McMaster Group includes broad representation with health and safety, excellence, innovation, productivity, technology, space planning and infrastructure needs expected to be common themes. The Group has also considered issues of accessibility, equity and inclusion in their work and recommendations. Both the VP Ed and I have been working hard on both the Oversight Committee & the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Working Committee to ensure that the student perspective is front and centre in this planning process.

### Sustainability

#### Campus Waste Management During COVID-19

In addition to reductions in generated waste by our campus, we need to improve our waste diversion programs so that we are above the provincial objective of 60% outlined by the MECP. As we are in an unprecedented year, there are changes to waste management strategies on our campus. This includes the temporary removal of satellite composting bins, leaving only bins in the MUSC. There will need to be a plan to not only re-open waste bins across campus but to improve our waste management strategy afterwards. Students have been asking for improved composting efforts for a long time, and the McMaster’s 2019 Solid Non-Hazardous Waste Audit shows that organics were 51.9% of all campus waste diversion, yet the capture rate for organics was only 72.3%. Cross-contamination is a large issue that needs creative solutions and commitment from upper administration for the implementation of large-scale change. While there were some initial conversations about this, those conversations took place when we thought it was possible to come back to campus for the Winter or Spring/Summer terms. When it became clear that we would not be returning to campus at those times, those conversations stopped happening. They need to continue during the Summer, as the university is optimistic that if they cannot bring many people back in the Fall, they will definitely try in the Winter 2022 term.

#### Climate Emergency National Polling

One of my projects this year has been a national poll of undergraduates to gauge their opinions on the climate emergency and the prospect of a Green New Deal. I have been working primarily with UCRU on this project. The survey was modeled after a 2019 national poll from Abacus by Seth Klein to see how Canadians feel about climate change and the prospect of a GND. This undergraduate audience version will be compared to the national poll by Abacus to understand where students fit among those national views. This survey has been created via Qualtrics, with an English and French version. The survey was open for 6 weeks, and the last update I received mentioned that there were over 2500 responses. This survey information will provide both the MSU and UCRU with data to support our climate justice advocacy efforts now and in the future. Future MSU teams will be able to use this data to support McMaster-specific advocacy initiatives that related to the climate emergency. We will also gain province-specific data, which will be interesting when comparing provinces that are more progressive like BC with provinces that depend more on fossil fuels like Alberta. This is an urgent matter of national security, and it is necessary that we mobilize quickly, and all do our part.

#### McMaster Sustainability End-of-Year Report

I am also on a committee to develop the end-of-year campus sustainability report. This is a massive project, and the university has hired an independent consulting team to assist with the process. I have been pushing for this report to include goals of the campus community and metrics to achieve those goals. I think this will be tremendously helpful to provide direction for all the passionate students who want to engage in climate justice on campus. There isn’t any direction or clear goals that students can work towards that will advance our campus community in the fight against the climate crisis. One of the larger challenges recently with this committee has been that we do not have a campus definition for sustainability, and it is not currently clear what the purpose is of this report. This has led to debate and frustrations from multiple parties, and it seems like a good lesson for why we should take our time to ensure at the beginning of projects that all relevant parties are on the same page as to why something is happening and what the purpose is. I hope that the committee can pull together a report in the next month or so that tells a story of sustainability on our campus, and that we can start to build some better foundational structure on our campus for sustainability work. There is lots of room to improve the coordination of these sustainability efforts.

#### McMaster Sustainability Office

McMaster’s Office of Sustainability is not really an office; it is basically a few individuals who are already operating at capacity and who have broad portfolios—sustainability is just one of their priorities. An office used to exist, but then the Manager built an Academic Sustainability Programs (ASP) office, and the university did not replace that role for the general office. As it stands, 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. I really hope that we can get some momentum on this over the next four months. My greatest concern is that in the next few months we will also have a new VP Administration for the university, meaning the VP Amin, provost, and president will all be less than a year into their positions. Gaps in institutional knowledge might be harmful for the future of sustainability work, and I worry budgets will be cut when they are already so underfunded and under resourced. I urge future teams to push for better governance models and structural support to advance sustainability work at McMaster.

#### Sustainability Advisory Committee

This committee has been really exciting at times and challenging at others. The main challenge is that it is not clear what the purpose of the committee is. I tried to re-write the terms of reference late in the Summer, but nothing was approved because the team thought it best to wait until David Farrar released his sustainability plans and wanted to ensure we were in line with that plan. This means the team is unsure if it is supposed to be project based or advisory based, and not a lot has happened after a year on the committee. My recommendation for future years is to solidify the purpose of the committee, finish the terms of reference, add one or two faculty members to the committee, and create a pot of funds that student groups can apply for to advance their own sustainability projects on campus. I think this would be a really great next step for the committee.

#### Sustainability Network for Students

The McMaster community is home to many students passionate about climate action and sustainable development goals, though there does not currently exist an infrastructure for students to get involved and grow their passions. This can make it difficult for students to understand what projects have already been done, the progress of current sustainability projects on campus, barriers to advancement of climate action work on campus and lack of experience regarding how students can push forward their own climate action projects on campus. We need to develop a network for students passionate about climate action to get involved on our campus. I have had conversations with sustainability folks in facilities and academics on campus, and I think a great first step towards this, in addition to ASP’s SSAP, would be to create a Student Sustainability Advisory Team (SSAT). This team could be co-chaired by the Manager of ASP and by someone from the MSU and could be used to bring students to conversations regarding university plans on sustainability. Examples include reviewing the university’s sustainability report, collaborating with groups like McMaster Energy Conference, and expanding the network of sustainability-minded students and community members at the university.

#### Sustainability Operating Policies

I have been working on a Sustainability Policy with our AVP Internal Governance, Michelle Brown, for the past few of months. We have decided to split this work into two policies and hope to introduce them to the SRA before the end of my term. The final steps are consultations with staff members and campus stakeholders to ensure everyone is in agreement and on board with the language in the policy. This project has had two purposes: to combine outdated policies and to root MSU work in Sustainable Development Goals. This is only the first step towards aligning MSU work with SDGs, and we will need to continue that work over the next few years. I look forward to seeing the completion of this project hopefully before the end of my term, and the next steps taken by my successor to align the MSU with SDGs.

#### Water Access & Plastic Reduction

According to the most recent Times Higher Education Impact Ratings, McMaster has ranked 17th in the world and #1 in Canada for Good Health and Well Being and Decent Work & Economic Growth. As a globally recognized research-leading institution, we have a responsibility to do our part when it comes to climate action. One step that we are behind the ball with is water access and plastic reduction on campus. There are currently plans for a Canada-wide ban on harmful single-use plastics to be legislated as early as 2021, and so if we do not get on board with large-scale single-use plastic reduction, current federal plans may make that decision for us. If this happens, we must be ready to adapt our campus. Beyond the need to prepare for federal legislation that bans single-use plastics, we must improve our waste diversion rate. The waste diversion rate through existing programs at McMaster University was determined to be approximately 52% last year, which is lower than the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation & Parks (MECP) 60% provincial objective. According to the McMaster University 2019 Solid Non-Hazardous Waste Audit, mixed containers, which include plastic bottles, are the second most diverted material behind cardboard from landfills. However, out of all of the divertible waste materials, mixed containers had the second lowest capture rate on our campus last year: 39.7%. This means that only 39.7% of mixed containers generated were successfully diverted from disposal last year.

While there is a clear need to improve our waste diversion programs on campus, it is also common sense that by reducing the amount of divertible waste that our campus generates, we are ultimately reducing the amount of waste that goes through our diversion programs. Plastic water bottle sales are banned at 14 other Canadian Universities, including Queen’s, Ryerson, UoT and McGill. Currently, plastic bottled drinks are sold in many locations on our campus including various Hospitality Services locations, Union Market and other 3rd party locations such as Starbucks in the MUSC. The high majority of plastic bottle sales are from Hospitality Services on campus, of which only 37% are water bottles. We must move towards eliminating the sales of plastic bottles on our campus, but we must also recognize that this environmental sustainability issue is also a water access issue. Bottle-filling stations are not available in all of our residences, nor are they on all floors of all of our buildings. Any campus solution that involves the reduction of plastic bottles on our campus must include addressing our water access issue.

This project has been a roller coaster throughout the year, and it is obvious that a wide-scale ban is not going to happen on our campus within this year. University administration wants more research to be conducted before we make a decision, and Coke has offered to work with our campus to improve our waste reduction sustainability strategies. My suggestions were that Coke, with their net worth of $80.83 billion, help us in two main areas: promotions and research. When we have larger social media campaigns over the next year and after, we will need to reach students where they spend the most time: social media. Instagram and Facebook ads are pretty cheap, and I suggest we get Coke to put money into those ads to make sure we are reaching as many students as possible. With regard to research, I think it would be most productive to have Coke pay for our research costs, rather than conduct research for us. This would allow more students to engage in research efforts, support faculty who are doing plastic-related research, and ensure we are able to hire consultants and pay for platforms like Qualtrics when we need to.

The other question in this project is: what is the ultimate goal? Is it to reduce CO2e? Is it to preserve biodiversity? Is it to reduce waste from our campus? It’s honestly not clear, and this needs to be answered. Ambiguity around why we do what we do has been a common theme among university committees this year, and I recommend that future MSU teams really try to push committees and councils to think critically about why we are doing something. This will help to guide what we should do and how we get there.