Report

From the office of the…

Vice-President (Administration)

To: Members of the Student Representative Assembly (SRA)

From: Graeme Noble, Vice-President (Administration)

Subject: Year-End Report

Date: March 21, 2021

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# Introduction

To whoever reads this,

Honestly, I’m surprised you exist at all. I intend to keep this brief, for both our sakes, and only highlight items that were of particular interest to me.

# Report Breakdown

As with all of my previous reports, I’ve broken this document into four (4) categories:

1. Training & Transition
2. Governance
3. Supervision
4. Operations

## Training & Transition

*“A society grows great when the old plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.”*

The MSU’s institutional memory is a flagship of its dysfunctional infrastructure. Every year, new students join the ranks of others who struggle their way through the convolution of the falsely dichotomous MSU culture machine. I made it my mission to change that, but I know that I have only made an incremental dent in the colossal scrap heap which is the MSU’s failing transitional systems and unsatisfactory training methodologies. While I often like to think I’ve made a significant positive difference here, only time will tell and I may never come to know whether it was successful. Perhaps that’s the feeling that comes from working on long-term projects rather than just 1-year ones. Or perhaps it’s just a reflection of the uncertainty that accompanies coming into an authority role with absolutely no training and an insufficient transition. Anyways, here are the highlights.

### Modernize Training

#### Background

A Learning Management System (LMS), like Brightspace (i.e., Avenue to Learn), allows for the MSU to expand the standardization, distribution, and quality control of training on a level the organization has never witnessed. This meant that we could increase accessibility through asynchronous videos, reduce workload for facilitators with recycled materials, and ensure a standardized learning program from year-to-year with the potential for simple and easy modifications to modules where appropriate. This platform also allows for the use of simple assessments to ensure training has been completed to a certain standard before work begins. Given the flexibility of modular training infrastructure, this new system allows for the MSU to easily collaborate within and across Services/Department to reduce redundancies both in time and space. And for free, might I add.

#### Current Status

For the first time in MSU history, all Service volunteers were presented with training in Accessibility & Disability Inclusion, Anti-Oppressive Practices, and Sexual Violence. While this was admittedly a bit of a mess this year (since I organized the training over the course of the month that I was also transitioning into my role), it sets a precedent for the level of training the MSU should come to expect for its staff at any level of the organization and serve as a reminder that if our volunteers can reach that standard, no paid staff has any excuse not to dedicate their time to learning about these important concepts.

Over the year, I’ve worked with the HR Generalist & Clubs Support, as well as the Administrative Team Research Assistant to devise a comprehensive curriculum for all Part-Time Managers (PTMs). As we wrap up a number of other projects, we’ll continue to develop training materials to suit the needs for the completion of the framework. Previous materials have been reviewed and are currently being adapted. At this point, I’m unsure how much of this curriculum will actually be implemented, but at least the framework is in place now should any remaining items fall to my successor.

As well, the Administrative Services Coordinator, Executive Assistant, Speaker, and I are working to develop training materials for the incoming SRA and EB to improve on older systems and identify opportunities for a blended educational approach. There’s currently a stellar line-up of topics and items to share with the incoming SRA and I just hope it doesn’t become another one of those cases of recursive temporal sabotage where it gets rushed this year and next year and the year after and nothing ever gets better. I often lament that the current structure of the MSU intentionally keeps the SRA in the dark so that its staff can run it as they see fit without the nuisance of students who dare to participate in their own union, but then I remember that the MSU is much too dysfunctional to have that sort of malicious vision, so who am I to say for certain.

One part of training that I’m particularly proud of comes from the work I’ve done with the Clubs Administrator. Jenna Courage, after only one year in her role as a permanent full-time staff member in that position, took all my rushed educational suggestions in her stride back in September and has truly set an example for every other Department of the MSU on how training needs to be done. I am genuinely thrilled to see where she takes the Clubs Department in the future as she pioneers new ways to empower students to pursue their passions with likeminded individuals.

Here are some of the non-MSU partners I’ve worked with so far:

* McMaster University Equity & Inclusion Office
* Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health
* Hamilton AIDS Network
* BodyBrave
* Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

#### Future Goals

It’s difficult to determine how much I’ll have the time and energy to finish with training by the end of my term. I sincerely hope that I can at least lay the groundwork for everyone to carry this on without me.

After engaging in training conversations with multiple potential partners, the MSU is still without 2STLGBQIA+ Competency training. I’d love for this to be a swift priority of my successor to ensure this gap is addressed.

### Centralize Training

#### Background

Welcome Week (WW) reps and planners are historically required to receive a new round of training materials every year, often with only slight alterations, before they attend WW. Such procedures are often time-ineffective, redundant, inaccessible, and lack annual standardization. As part of the recommendations proposed by the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA) and approved by the Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC), WW stakeholders were tasked with moving towards centralized training systems for all reps and planners. This item plays into this goal.

#### Current Status

I now meet weekly with a working group of folks from the Student Success Centre (SSC) and Housing & Conference Services (HCS) to work on organizing a training program for this year’s reps and planners, as well as working to create a comprehensive framework for rep and planner training that aligns with McMaster’s Leadership Competencies and any additional core competency criteria that meets the needs of community.

WWAC intends to completely redesign it’s use of strategic themes and priorities to create fewer more general categories. Those principals are as follows:

1. Indigeneity, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility
2. Academic Preparedness
3. Physical & Mental Wellness

#### Future Goals

Further consultation is required, but the beginnings of a framework will be in the works for next year or so. However, by the end of my term, a new curriculum will be in place for this round of planners and reps, including our very own MSU Maroons and Welcome Week Faculty Coordinator.

This learning framework has the potential to become so large and wide-spread that it encompasses all of the MSU’s and University’s HR infrastructure within a single multi-dimensional model for hiring and training, but that’s yet to be seen.

#### Background

Body empowerment has been a priority for MSU Diversity Services and the MSU Student Health Education Centre (SHEC) for several years. That said, policies and educational materials that directly concern this content are not updated or available to students.

#### Current Status

The module was approved by all parties and is currently in development.

#### Future Goals

The final module and assessment portion will be integrated by the end of my term.

### Lengthen Transition

#### Background

Services love to start early. Well, I think we can all recognize that PTMs, more often than not, will begin work in their roles immediately after being hired. Of course, this creates a huge influx of uncontrolled overtime hours that sets a poor precedent for the rest of their employment and those of their successors, so I hoped to address that issue and that of inadequate transition, poor transition timing, and many other issues related to the transition process. Transition is generally a weak spot for our organization. Often transition packages are completely recycled or never completed, things are lost in translation, or folks disappear at the ends of their terms as they move on to the next stage in their lives, leaving incoming staff feeling confused and flustered. While this transitional error requires significant review across the MSU, PTMs experience this struggle to a similar level as do members of the BoD, but with much less full-time staff support and no paid overlap period during which transition can take place.

Our full-time staff transition requirements lack definition and structure. This inevitably leads to the loss of information and incredibly long adjustment periods, depending on how long one’s successor has worked in the organization and how useful their orientation was. Of course, this contributes to an overall cost-centre for the MSU, as new employees are paid their regular salaries to fumble around their positions with little to no guidance depending on the previous commitments of their supervisors. Overall, this system is inadequate for an organization of the MSU’s size and must be addressed as soon as possible.

#### Current Status

All PTM transition periods and procedures have been drastically improved to include paid positional overlap, heavy reductions in unpaid work periods, increased transition report standards, and vastly superior training practices. All of this has been approved at the EB level for all Service Coordinators and Directors. Incoming PTMs will now phase gradually into their complete hour allocation to be fully inaugurated in their positions by April 1st. During the two weeks prior, they will begin their on-boarding process in collaboration with the outgoing PTM, to get a better feel for their roles.

Discussions have been had with the General Manager to identify opportunities for general job reflections or summaries to instil the same sentiment of a transition package while also making it more into a learning exercise.

#### Future Goals

Now that I spent 8 months fumbling through the implementation of PTM transition options and potential timelines within a period of already-significant uncertainty, I hope that my successor will take a hard look at what does and doesn’t work with this system and leverage my failures to make the transition period work.

As for the discussions about full-time staff, I’m sure it’s already been forgotten, and it will be years before someone even tries to address how awful our full-time staff transition process is. Transition never seems to be a priority for anyone until the MSU pays out staff for going over hours trying to figure out the basics of their roles or when no one applies/runs for the positions because they know they could do similar work elsewhere with way less stress and way better wages.

## Governance

As the previous Associate Vice-President (Internal Governance), I noticed a lot of resounding errors in the policies and procedures that govern the MSU. I only have a few projects in the works that fit within this domain, but they’re not exactly small ones either.

### Adopt Policies

#### Background

Charitable donations from WW have historically been redirected to the Shinerama fundraising initiative for Cystic Fibrosis. However, as WW has evolved, many felt that this approach didn’t allow for an equitable allocation of funds to other initiatives of similar importance that could also use the funds to support a charitable cause. Since Shinerama was rescinded, these charitable donations took on a new system that allowed for the reallocation of funds to various charities throughout WW. However, since this haphazard approach didn’t have the combined power of the unified approach, WW stakeholders will now propose a single charity whom WW charity events will redirect donations towards to create a holistic target for all WW participants and organizers.

#### Current Status

Here are all of the new policies this year, as of this meeting:

* Bylaw 8 – Policy Approval Process
* Operating Policy – MSU Teaching Awards
* Operating Policy – Welcome Week Charitable Giving

#### Future Goals

### Amend Policies

#### Background

While the most recent review of this Employment Policy was conducted in 2018, many considerations were overlooked that impacted the accessibility, clarity, and general effectiveness of the document. Namely, such considerations relate to rewards for employment milestones (i.e., years of service), health and wellness benefits, and updates to position titles.

#### Current Status

I now meet biweekly with the Executive Assistant, Human Resources & Clubs Support, General Manager, and VP (Finance) to discuss potential revisions to the current Employment Policy. Overall, the progress so far has been excellent and I’m looking forward to seeing how things go.

#### Future Goals

I hope to approve this Employment Policy at the BoD level by the end of my term to increase support for full-time staff.

### Recreate Accessibility Workplace Document

#### Background

Our Employment Policy for accessibility has never been all that great. Its primary function has always been to abide by provincial legislation for customer service, rather than employee support. Of course, even with a customer service framework, there needs to be a system where folks can provide feedback or complaints when things aren’t done well. As well, there should be a set of guidelines to clearly articulate with external vendors what sort of standards we expect when taking student accessibility into consideration when we structure events, offer services, or do anything that involves the consumption of information, services, or goods in one way or another.

#### Current Status

This policy has now become two policies: one Operating Policy and one Employment Policy. The former hopes to tackle any accessibility standards as it relates to customer service and how the MSU interacts with external parties while the latter focuses more on what approach the MSU will take to provide accommodations for its volunteers and staff. The Employment Policy is in the final stages of review while the Operating Policy is slightly behind that.

#### Future Goals

I hope to finalize both of these documents by the end of my term.

### Recreate Policy Document Organizational Structure

#### Background

Our policy organizational structure and categories have historically made very little sense. As mentioned in my previous memo on this topic, I’ve been working with the AVP (Internal Governance) to propose a new system for document naming, approval, and organization that will clarify a lot of inconsistencies without our current structure.

#### Current Status

Done.

### Recreate Sexual Violence Workplace Document

#### Background

For two years now (at least), VP (Administration)s have been working on the consultation and development required for the implementation of a new Employment Policy that addresses instances of sexual violence and harassment in the MSU. Now, after multiple meetings with EIO and external HR firms, after countless hours of research and development, the document is almost ready for approval.

#### Current Status

After creating and finalizing the MSU’s Employment Policy, the University agreed to write up a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MSU to formalize the collaborative nature of the new sexual violence response protocol. We’ve since met with the University’s legal team, as well as key administrative stakeholders in Student Affairs, EIO, and Case Management.

#### Future Goals

We’re now waiting on feedback about the status of MOUs at other universities before we get started with the drafting process. I hope to have the Employment Policy approved by the end of my term and the MOU in at least the rough stages of development.

### Recreate VP (Administration) JD

#### Background

This task is fundamental to my work, as it relates to the glaring idiosyncrasies within my JD and involves collaboration with all members of the BoD to complete properly. There are lots of issues with the current position as its written, many of which are simple fixes to do with the actual amount of work that the VP (Administration) does each year. I have lots of gripes with how this role is structured and the burden is places on everyone that passes through it. Let’s hope I’m the last VP (Administration) to deal with the fallout of the misleading JD.

#### Current Status

*No updates to report.*

#### Future Goals

I plan to finish this goal by the end of my term and will not settle for anything less. This might have been complicated by the fact that I completely changed the new JD template, but the goal remains the same.

### Organize Documents

#### Background

The MSU server is an absolute mess of files that are both inaccessible and useless in their current state. This means that even the BoD, whom ought to know where previous archives, contracts, and other important documents are, often haven’t the slight clue as to where they might even begin to look for them. This creates a clear transitional problem that frequently leads to, among other things, the duplication of proposals, misinformed approaches to work, and complete reliance on the use of full-time staff guides to acquire any information that they have every right to access and reference of their own volition without permission from those whom they supervise. Even despite the obvious potential for conflicts of interest and informational cherry picking, this is a broken system in need of a comprehensive long-term solution.

#### Current Status

For months now, I have met biweekly with the Human Resources Generalist & Clubs Support, the Administrative Services Coordinator, the Network Administrator, the Executive Assistant, and the VP (Finance) to help relocate all updated drafts of administrative documents to a new and improved filing system within the OneDrive. Progress has been excellent so far, though I understand that this side project requires full-time support from an IT team and the help of staff that aren’t currently employed due to COVID-19 (e.g., Office Clerks) for the project to really take off. However, I’m very excited with how things have gone and the potential for the future. We’ve recently incorporated the Accounting and Education & Advocacy Departments into the conversation.

#### Future Goals

I plan to have all updated administrative documents from this year (e.g., JDs, minutes, agendas, memos, policies, etc.) on the OneDrive as part of this new system by the end of my term. I will then pass it along to my successor with the hope that they will work with full-time staff to fix this ongoing problem. I also hope to have a rough outline for the operations of this system in writing with relation to naming conventions and organization by the end of my term, but no promises on updating **Operating Policy – Document Management** since it may be too soon to do that appropriately.

### Reconfigure Awards Committee Structure

#### Background

Currently, the awards committee structures and responsibilities have involved the Speaker for quite some time. However, award committee processes would be better off delegated to members of the BoD since they already interact with these people on a regular basis, making it much simpler to strike the committees.

#### Current Status

Recent Service Reviews have brought interesting possibilities to light that may address major issues with our current system in several clever ways.

#### Future Goals

I’ve proposed the new system as a redesign of MSU Macademics, so please refer to those polices where appropriate.

## Supervision

As a supervisor for the majority of the MSU’s part-time supervisory staff, I’ve noted a few key tasks that I’ve been working on that relate specifically to the redesign of many of the supervisory components of VP (Administration) role. While I’ve omitted a large portion of the day-to-day operations, I included a few noteworthy projects that are less typical of the role.

### Reimagine Services

#### Background

Job descriptions (JDs) across the MSU require some serious updates. It would then come as no surprise that folks who don’t have accurate JDs often experience occupational drift, wherein they take on whatever responsibilities they feel best suit their skills and interests rather than those that the position was made for and the duties they’re expected to fulfill. Of course, this has a tremendous impact on organizational functioning, policy accuracy, and workload management, particularly for PTMs.

For many years, the PTM hour overage issue has plagued PTM workloads and often resulted in a large sum of work hours that haven’t received any form of authorization or compensation. Of course, this long-standing system is obviously broken and must be fixed. So, naturally, I took a stab at it.

#### Current Status

The vast majority of PTM JDs have been updated and approved, with new Assistant Directors added for all the Peer-Support Services and MSU Spark (to supplement the rescindment of MSU Horizons).

Hour tracking systems have been beta-tested this year, but clearly lack the sophistication and optimization that multiple years of review may lead to. However, after further investigation, I’ve come to realize that the hour approval system across the entirety of the MSU lacks structure, consistency, and clarity—despite the clear need for a better system that encapsulates the diversity of roles and fluctuating hours that its employees work.

#### Future Goals

All JD reviews will likely see subsequent reviews next year as they start their trial phases.

The MSU sorely needs to hire additional staff particularly focused on making this system better, as well as our other HR inadequacies, in a meaningful way. It would be completely unrealistic for anyone in the VP (Administration) role to accomplish this goal without extensive help, so I would not expect my successor to do this alone.

## Operations

The operations of the MSU, in a normal year, exist in a state of stagnation and imbalance, powered by the passion of students and the will to incrementally move forward. I decided to take the opportunity within my role to completely revamp a few of the traditional methods by which we do things in an attempt to throw off the constant recycling of outdated approaches.

### Update Organizational Chart

#### Background

Our organizational chart has never been up to date ever since it was created for the first time (to my knowledge) last year. Since this serves as such a simple and helpful tool for organizational review and subsequent reform, I felt it necessary to update.

#### Current Status

Done.

#### Future Goals

I have been in conversations with the Underground to make org charts clearly available on the MSU website for individual Services and as part of a holistic graphic.

### Redesign Templates

#### Background

Documents within the MSU are often put together in haphazard, nonuniform, and creative ways. Unfortunately, this leads to the unintended consequence that our memos, reports, transition documents, and various other professional articles are not as accessible, engaging, or effective as they could be. However, there’s no possible way that we could address this issue and actually improve these documents without an updated template that demands a standardized approach and allows for continuous development.

#### Current Status

So far, I’ve worked with others in the MSU to create templates for:

* Job Descriptions
* Service Reports & Year-End Reports
* Hour Trackers
* Budget Trackers
* Social Media Trackers
* Service Reviews
* Service Transition Reports
* Memos

I’m currently working on making templates for:

* SRA Reports & Year-End Reports

If you have any ideas, please let me know so I can incorporate them into the designs.

#### Future Goals

I hope to have all templates ready for the end of my term. Considering there isn’t much left to do with this, I feel this timeline is still appropriate.

### Renovate Job Description Core Competencies

#### Background

Core competencies are the backbone of any group, department, or organization. They guide all aspects of Human Resources from hiring to transition to performance reviews. That’s why a highly subjective set of core competencies can cripple an organization into stagnation, where the strategic vision can’t effectively translate into the practices of each employee and biases seep into the hiring process. The MSU’s core competencies were decided through market research but lack a metrical structure with which to implement them. As such, they don’t function as core competencies and rather as general adjectives to look for in applicants, which, I feel, misses the point entirely.

#### Current Status

The Core Abilities Working Group (CAWG) has been doing an excellent job working with the materials provided to create a robust rough outline of what core competencies the MSU should use to really lay the groundwork for all our HR functions and the direction of the organization. So far, we’ve been having discussions about how different departments and roles require unique competencies, how ours might compare to the University’s, and the core attributes of all MSU staff. We’ve recently moved on to evaluating job descriptions to see how well the competency framework aligns with diverse positions across the MSU.

#### Future Goals

The CAWG will work to decide on which core attributes best align with the MSU’s mandates and how that will translate to a multi-level rubric for hiring. I’ve helped to create and adapt a set of hiring practices with the SSC and HCS for MSU use and have been slowly moulding it to suit our organization’s needs and integrate feedback from hiring boards and new hires. I hope to have the rough structural work done for the CAWG to ensure a smooth transition to next year’s CAWG.

### Overhaul Welcome Week

#### Background

The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (formerly known as NODA) recently conducted a review of our WW structure. Since then, they provided 6 key recommendations for how we should proceed in the development of a more centralized, streamlined, and equitable first-year experience through high-level administrative changes by WW 2022.

#### Current Status

There’s honestly too much to report to get into any real detail. All the recommendations are in effect in one way or another, far ahead of the scheduled timelines, with various working groups operating on a regular basis to ensure all work is done in collaboration with all affected parties. Regular communication has been established with Faculties, Faculty Societies, and various key stakeholders to ensure everything goes according to plan. There have been some broken lines of communication within Faculty Societies that have led to issues with the dissemination of materials. As well, Faculty Planners aren’t all selected yet, which is months behind typical scheduling, largely due to lack of interest in filling the roles.

#### Future Goals

As I will never see the entirety of this project come to life, I can’t wait to pass these things off to my successor. Definitely something that I’m proud of that I’m sure the continuing staff will transition my successor on quite nicely. I hope that the coming Welcome Week experience will serve as an opportunity for further development in how we understand and improve the first-year experience.

### Review PTM Transition Period

#### Background

Transition is generally a weak spot for our organization. Often transition packages are completely recycled or never completed, things are lost in translation, or folks disappear at the ends of their terms as they move on to the next stage in their lives, leaving incoming staff feeling confused and flustered. While this transitional error requires significant review across the MSU, PTMs experience this struggle to a similar level as do members of the BoD, but with much less full-time staff support and no paid overlap period during which transition can take place.

#### Current Status

All PTM transition periods and procedures have been drastically improved to include paid positional overlap, heavy reductions in unpaid work periods, increased transition report standards, and vastly superior training practices. All of this has been approved at the EB level for all Service Coordinators and Directors.

#### Future Goals

The few incoming PTMs that have been hired were thrilled to hear about the amount of support and structure that the new process adds to the equation.

### Review HR Department Restructure

#### Background

The MSU’s Human Resources Department consists of a single staff member. Believe it or not, this role didn’t even exist 2 years ago, despite the size of our organization perhaps demanding several HR staff members to cover all the needs of a team that incurs such drastic employment cycles as we do on an annual basis.

#### Current Status

The MSU’s HR systems currently struggle to meet demands and lack clarity of responsibilities.

#### Future Goals

I have been assured that, should the Director of Administration & Human Resources JD be completed within a timely manner, the position’s wage will be decided upon before May 1st and it will be ready to hire.

### Invigorate IT Department

#### Background

Our IT Department, as many staff members have noted, is hardly a Department. Just like our HR team, our IT consists of a single staff member who runs the whole show. Organizations of our magnitude often have multiple staff members to help advise on IT capital purchases, mange software, and provide a catered level of internal technical support. The MSU has no such luxury.

#### Current Status

All JDs have been given the go-ahead by the Network Administrator and the Board of Directors and are now under wage review.

#### Future Goals

The positions will be hired by May 1st.

Best wishes,



**Graeme Noble**

Vice-President (Administration) &

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Good luck.