## YEAR PLAN 2021-2022

### MSU SRA Science

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OFFICE OF THE SCIENCE CAUCUS LEADER INTRODUCTION

Hello! Our names are Aiman and Nima and we’re both very excited to be joining the SRA this year as co-leaders of the SRA Science caucus. We know that the past year has not been easy for any of us, and that things are still uncertain as we move into the 2021-2022 school year. It is with the complexity and dynamic nature of the upcoming year in mind that we have worked as a caucus to develop this year plan.

As you will see throughout this document, there are several goals that we hope to work towards this year, both individually as members and as a collective. In particular, we are emphasizing the need to support students as McMaster makes a gradual transition back to the in-person learning model, as well as ensuring that incoming second years receive the support and opportunities that they require and deserve as a result of their first year being fully online. Additionally, we are focusing on increasing student engagement with the caucus to ensure that students know their voices are valued and heard even in the most uncertain of times, as well as carrying over many of the initiatives of the previous science caucus.

Our goal is to ensure that students know that their feedback is crucial and valuable to their representatives, and to amplify voices that may be underrepresented within the McMaster community. Furthermore, we would like to make informed decisions regarding the goals that we have set out while continually seeking student feedback and modifying our goals as we progress. We are confident in our ability as a caucus and a community to adapt to variable situations and ensure that the needs of students are being advocated for and addressed in the best way possible.

We would like to sincerely thank everyone for their continued support of our ideas and initiatives and are looking forward to what we are confident will be a successful and productive year.

Best Regards,

Aiman Dhiloon & Nima Behravan

SRA Science Co-Caucus Leaders 2021-2022

GOALS

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| **Objective 1** | **Advocating for the Creation of a Selling/Renting Textbook Platform** |
| Description | A big concern many students face is the financial burden of purchasing new course material for classes. With a full course load, textbook fees can accumulate to substantial amounts. By introducing a platform to sell or rent used textbooks, we can make learning more accessible for everyone. Currently, there is no standardized program where this can occur. |
| Benefits | * Alleviates financial stress for students that are purchasing new textbooks and courseware, especially during the difficult times caused by COVID-19 * Can help students profit from old materials they no longer require * Reusing old textbooks has a positive impact on the environment as we are ensuring less books go to waste |
| Difficulties | * Would require the implementation of a new site or app, which would require new marketing, programming, etc. which may be costly * May face restrictions due to unwillingness of McMaster staff to implement our ideas |
| Long-term implications | Ensures required material needed for learning is available to everyone at reasonable prices, supporting all students academically and financially. In addition, reusing textbooks promotes long-term sustainable changes. |
| How? | * Inquire about the feasibility and logistics of the project with the partners listed below * Brainstorm the potential timeline (as permitted by pandemic restrictions and variability of partner availability) * Conduct a survey with the students at McMaster to determine the demand for an initiative such as this one * Set up meetings with staff at the library and various MSU committees to discuss future directions, benefits and if there would be any institutional support * Reach out to similar initiatives and other partners in the community to collaborate or support the project |
| Partners | * Jannie Balt, the Library Financial Coordinator * University Bookstore Committee * McMaster Student Union Vice-President Finance * Science Academic Office * Maureen J. MacDonald, Dean of Science * Kathleen Blackwood, Director, Finance & Administration |

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| **Objective 2** | **Reducing Food Waste Initiative** |
| Description | Food waste and food security is a prominent issue across Canada and McMaster is no exception. Distributing excess food by donating unopened/leftover food from the campus food courts/restaurants or hosting food drives ensures that people living in poverty have access to food and limits the food waste of our university. Workshops may also be held to increase awareness of this important issue. This initiative is to discover potential ways to better distribute excess food rather than discard it. |
| Benefits | * Distributing extra food to students allows for better health and overall quality of life for those who are struggling financially * Eliminates a factor contributing to the waste produced by our university * Distributing extra food to the communities around us fosters a better environment to learn and helps form stronger connections * Inspire students to be aware of the large amounts of food waste they may be contributing to and strive to decrease the amount of excess food |
| Difficulties | * There may be a number of policies from Hospitality Services that may constrict the ideas of this project * Collaboration of many different services and stores is required which may be difficult to manage * Potential concerns arise surrounding safety due to the current COVID-19 pandemic |
| Long-term implications | Reducing food waste diminishes the environmental impact of McMaster University, as well as saving the resources that went into producing said food. Feeding those who may not have access to food supports our communities and can also decrease living expenses for many students. |
| How? | * Conduct research on which stores/restaurants have excess food and on average how much at the end of the day * Set up meetings with Hospitality Services to discuss potential solutions and feasibility   + Learn more about the policies enforced by Hospitality * Conduct surveys to determine the amount of food security students on campus may face and the expenses spent on food * Collaborate with various initiatives and charities found on and off campus with similar goals and ideas * Host workshops to initiate conversation about food waste and discuss potential ideas to combat this issue |
| Partners | * MSU Sustainability Education Committee * Liana Bontempo, Manager of Wellness & Sustainability at Hospitality Services * Hamilton Food Share * Chris Roberts, Director of Hospitality Services * Organizations such as NoLunchMoney and Mac Bread Bin |

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| **Objective 3** | **Expand & Improve the Availability of Career Mentorship Opportunities** |
| Description | Advocating and expanding career mentorship opportunities between alumni and undergrad science students. Allowing for students to be paired with mentors in their respective fields to gain insight and connections. |
| Benefits | * The competition for placement/research is a real issue in the faculty of science, there are more students than positions to allow for career exploration * With more programs dedicated to matching students with professors/alumni, upper year students can feel equipped * More standardized thesis opportunities that allow upper year science students to have a fair chance at securing thesis supervisors |
| Difficulties | * Unclear about current alumni mentorship program * Limited in-person interaction due to the pandemic   Allocating funds for creating Research Fair and incentives for alumni to provide opportunities for undergrad students |
| Long-term implications | * Increased satisfaction from students * Less stressful search for upper year students for thesis positions/placement opportunities * Making sure that students have equal opportunities to succeed (contributes to the advancement of equity, diversity and inclusion in the McMaster community) |
| How? | * Hosting more workshops and Q&A sessions as well as info sessions on grad programs specifically with alumni * Better academic guidance/support. Expanding the current alumni mentorship to make it more accessible, and connect students who want to shadow or volunteer in certain career fields with alumni who are willing to be a mentor   + Reach out to alumni association; have alumni come in and get the involved * More research opportunities that directly connect students with professors   + Hosting a “research fair” similar to “career fair” for students who are interested in pursuing a thesis, or simply wanting to volunteer in a lab to get more experience. * Connecting with VP education of MSU and President of MSU AVP UA (associate vice president) → push to talk about ideas when they attend meetings with university staff; get policy paper written for the long term for MSU’s future goals to work on (planting the seed) |
| Partners | Connecting with respective program societies to invite professors who are interested in “research fair” to match with students who meet the qualifications |

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| **Objective 4** | **Boost Student Engagement with the Science Caucus (on Online Platforms)** |
| Description | As the McMaster community has shifted to operate virtually, online engagement of students has become more crucial than ever. As the shift back to in-person learning is still uncertain, we are choosing to focus largely on continuing online engagement for the coming year, with the hope that we will eventually be able to shift the focus of this goal to in-person engagement. As it currently stands, we hope to increase our follower count by at least 200 units and increase online engagement statistics by 25%. |
| Benefits | * Allows the student body to be more informed of what the SRA is doing, thereby allowing us to better represent student voices through feedback we receive * More opportunities for students to give feedback and ask questions * Helps the student body feel more engaged and contributes to the McMaster community |
| Difficulties | * It can be hard to get people to follow * Not all students use Instagram and Facebook, or other social media platforms * There is a general lack of motivation for online engagement, especially by upper years, who miss the feel of in-person engagement |
| Long-term implications | Having a larger social media platform will allow us to connect better with our student body and possibly encourage students to join the SRA as well as other platforms of the MSU. |
| How? | * Post about the pages on the SRA members personal pages, to ensure we are reaching the proper demographic and maximize potential following |
| Partners | SRA Science Members  MSU Underground |

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| **Objective 5** | **Boost Student Engagement with the MSU/SRA** |
| Description | There is very low student engagement with the SRA. We would like to inform the purpose of the SRA and improve our methods used to collect student feedback. |
| Benefits | * Finding new efficient ways of obtaining feedback as well as working with students * Elevate the students voice in the university decisions * Advocacy for the MacSci Community and its needs |
| Difficulties | **Challenges due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic**   * Limits the possibilities of in-person interaction with students (class talks, in-person office hours)   **Lack of incentive for participating in the surveys**   * Could be resolved by setting up giveaways and doing raffles for students who participate |
| Long-term implications | * Increased satisfaction from the accomplishments of the assembly * Making sure student values and opinions are heard |
| How? | **Increasing the Social Media Presence**   * Caucus member (Kaitlyn Fleming) will be in charge of the online platforms * Introduce the SRAs to the MacSci Community * Remake the MSU SRA Assembly 101 Videos, introducing the incoming SRA members * Create an SRA Science Reddit and possibly a Discord (dependant on student need) * Advertising the available peripheral opportunities in the assembly (eg. seats on various MSU committees) * Posting the meeting recaps (starting in September) and continuing to share the link for watching   **Conducting Surveys**   * Determining the best way to reach out to students * Assessing satisfaction with the current MSU services and welcome feedback   **Creating a Suggestion Form**  Either a Microsoft Form or Survey Monkey |
| Partners | VP Administration, MSU Underground, other SRA caucuses |

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| **Objective 6** | **Advocating for Issues in McMaster Academics (Course Selection Issues, Examination Policy Issues, Inconsistencies in Course Outline Development and Dates, and Beyond).** |
| Description | There are a great deal of existing academic issues at McMaster University. Students continue to struggle with issues in course selection, delivery, examination policies and more. Some issues include:  1.     Students only have one week to declare a personal interest course (PIC) not having the chance to understand how well they can perform in the course.  2.     Developing a standard rubric for all assessments of certain courses that students struggle with most. Many writing-based courses offered at McMaster are very subjectively marked by a TA, and in these specific courses, I aim to create a standard policy of a certain minimum level of detail and transparency that these rubrics should have.  3.     For certain courses, course outlines are not posted until the first day of classes. Students experience difficulty in understanding if the course is truly for them, whether it will affect their GPA as they could not perform well, as well as to understand if any of the course assessments will interfere with their other courses. I aim to reach out to department coordinators and advocate for a fixed deadline for course outlines to be posted.  4.     Students need to have a direct means of filing complaints with regards to their courses during the school year and for action to be taken during the same semester. As of right now, almost all complaints about courses/professors are almost given the same generic answer: “fill in the course survey”. The issue with this is that the students actually in the semester do not have any of their problems resolved, and rather the next cohort of students will only benefit from these changes.  These are only some of my many goals in solving existing academic issues that McMaster students are experiencing. To achieve each of these goals, I aim to first conduct a survey (simple research) in the format of a petition and Google form to get an understanding of how many students relate with these academic issues. By having a petition with sufficiently large supporters, McMaster academic offices are much more likely to take a tangible action forward towards reducing these issues. |
| Benefits | * Solving academic issues that have existed for years at McMaster University which many students feel that their voices aren’t heard for and that they cannot change unfair policies that affect their future * Changes in these academic policies can be long-term and permanent, benefiting many generations of students to come to McMaster! * Enthusiastic students whose academic performance is important for their future career will greatly benefit as these advocacies will allow them to improve their academic performance (GPA) by solving existing unfair problems. * By reducing the stressful academic issues, student mental health and wellness will also improve, and students will feel more optimistic about their education and their future! |
| Difficulties | * It is much easier to communicate with individuals and advocate for change in person. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forces most of our communications to be online, which are less effective than reaching out to department coordinators in-person. * There is a possibility of professors/coordinators to overlook our advocacies and concerns because they view themselves in a higher position of authority and they could resist change, even though it is for the better interest of students. * For certain advocacy goals, there isn’t a clear, paved path for how to pursue, ratify and change them. Because many of the issues mentioned above have not been advocated for, there is a lesser number of people I can find who have previously advocated for academic issues and seek mentorship form. * The need to conduct regular research, surveys and petitions to ensure that students view the advocacy platforms as issues they identify with. |
| Long-term implications | * Reduced unfairness in academics, education and courses offered at McMaster * Significant improvement in the mental health and well-being of students as they are rest-assured that they have a voice and the existing issues can be resolved if advocated for properly * Reducing the hierarchy and gap existing between professors/department coordinators and students, creating more responsibility for professors to understand that student input is valuable, and must be considered. |
| How? | * Creation of surveys, petitions and simple primary research (for example on Google Forms) to obtain an understanding of how much students identify with an existing academic unfairness issue * Creating a formalized document including the data about the surveys, number of signees, and more. This will serve as proof that the existing academic issue has a high demand and will encourage change further. * Reaching out to offices of associate dean, department coordinators, course coordinators and professors (through email and preferably, through hosting Zoom calls for a more meaningful conversation) to speak about each of the relevant academic issues, and solving the issues step-by-step. * Collaborating with VP education of MSU and President of the MSU to present ideas and advocacies and develop a concrete plan of what goals can be brought up during meetings with university officials and to incorporate academic fairness issues in policies and advocacies. |
| Partners | This advocacy project will involve partnering with students (for petitions and to receive student input), office of the associate dean (academic) of science, department-specific coordinators, course coordinators as well as professors (to propose new policies and advocate for change in existing issues), VP education and the MSU president to use their experience on how academic policies can be advocated for and be subjected to change, previous SRA members who have advocated for academics, as well as fellow SRA members who are willing to assist the caucus in achieving our goals. |
| **Objective 7** | **Support & Advocate for Students as McMaster Returns to In-Person Learning** |
| Description | Many things changed as a result of COVID-19 – students who are now in upper years made the transition to online learning abruptly and uncertainly. The class of 2024 endured a first-year experience that was completely virtual, which not only hindered the beginning of the “university experience” but left many students isolated and unmotivated. Overall, students have many hopes for what a return to campus will look like, and the science caucus is committed to ensuring that we make the transition as smooth as possible while making sure that student wants, and needs are observed. |
| Benefits | * Ensuring that student needs are supported and advocated for would allow the sense of community at McMaster to grow, in a time where many students feel that it is sorely lacking * Supporting the desires of students during the transition will have a positive impact on mental-health, student engagement and motivation, as well as academic success |
| Difficulties | **Challenges due to uncertainty of the situation**  While we are hopeful that Winter 2022 will be mostly in-person, there really is not a concrete way to determine if this will be the case. As such, our desire to support an on-campus return is hindered by the possible lack of a return at all.  **Variability of Planning**  As McMaster transitions, there are countless groups, classes, and partners who will each have their own way of “returning to normal”. It may be very difficult, perhaps even impossible to coordinate with this many people to ensure that there is a consistent system for students as we return to campus.  **Financial Restraint**  As much as we would like to make it so that the incoming year could bring a plethora of in-person events, activities, programming and course delivery, we must also consider that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the financial capabilities of McMaster to provide such events |
| Long-term implications | Our actions now will impact the coming years as students progress through their university journey. In particular, the mental health and academic success of all students (especially first and second years) will be impacted by the efficacy, support, and constancy of this transition. |
| How? | **Increasing Availability of In-Person Courses and planning of in-person events**   * Meet with key members of the McMaster community to better understand the plan for the fall and winter terms and advocate for students to return to campus in the highest degree possible   **Ensuring that Safe Options Exist For Students**   * While many students are looking forward to returning in person, many are worried about the safety of the situation * Ensure that when course return in-person, distance learning options are still available to students (livestreams of lectures, recordings, etc.)   **Ensure that incoming first and second years are supported**   * Frequent mental health check-ins * Increased academic support, especially for second years * Increase availability of academic skills preparation in response to circumstances * Advocate for more in-person events/for students to have a chance to attend events they missed out on in first year |
| Partners | SRA, Student Body, Faculty, MSU Organizations, Kim Dej, and many others who are involved in facilitating the return to campus. |

**Long-term planning**

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| **Overarching Vision 1** | ***Support for Students Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic*** |
| Description | The COVID-19 pandemic has detrimental effects on the entire world. At McMaster, many students have reported feeling isolated, undergoing major mental health and financial struggles, and a detrimental academic/career-based impact. It is our responsibility and wish to ensure that as things return to normal, these students receive the support that they need. |
| Benefits | * Emphasizes student mental health, which has suffered greatly over the past year * Allows students to gain back the feeling of belonging to a community that is committed to upholding them |
| Year 1 | * Promote and continue to implement and improve mental health supports for all students (including the possibility of mental health check ins, support programs, etc.) * Ensure that incoming second years feel supported in their academic endeavors (as a result of not having a comparable first-year experience to other years) * Ensure that incoming first years have a smooth and supported transition into university life, no matte how that may look * Explore the ways that McMaster is hoping to support students and emphasize that while the university has gone through financial burden as a result of the pandemic, students need to be supported in all ways, including financially * As the situation allows, push for McMaster to allow for in-person events and gatherings that bring students together and give the feeling of a university experience * Talk to students to better understand what kind of supports they feel are needed, and communicate these needs to staff, professors, etc. |
| Year 2 | * Continue the planning of in-person engagement events and betterment of mental health, academic and financial support platforms and services * Gather student feedback on support services in a post-pandemic environment |
| Year 3 | * Implement necessary changes as a result of student feedback |
| Partners | Refer to Objective 6. |

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| **Overarching Vision 2** | ***Increased MSU/SRA engagement*** |
| Description | Social media engagement has increased marginally over the past year, which we believe is largely due to McMaster’s shift to an online community. This increase in engagement with the MSU/SRA is something we would like to keep up and expand as the university returns to in-person delivery. |
| Benefits | * Increased engagement allows the SRA to work more efficiently, effectively and actively engage the student body * Refer to Objective 4 and 5 * Allows us to better represent the student voices |
| Year 1 | * Developing a consistent and growth-based posting schedule for social media platforms * Creation of a Reddit for the SRA Science Caucus * Introduce the SRA members, how to reach them, and their platforms/ideas * Continue posting meeting recaps * Research effective methods and avenues for collecting feedback * More accessible meeting minutes |
| Year 2 | * Changing the way that MSU committees are promoted, and alter the elections process so that MSU members can more easily join (in a less intimidating way to generate student interest) |
| Year 3 | * Increased opportunities for students to get involved and obtain a job through the MSU |
| Partners | Refer to Objectives 4 and 5. |

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| **Overarching Vision 3** | ***Improve Educational Opportunities for Students at McMaster*** |
| Description | The general goal of this vision is to improve the quality of education at McMaster as we undergo shifts in course delivery methods, in order to best support student academic needs and expectations and create a more sustainability-oriented curriculum with plentiful experiential opportunities. It may be noted that this objective has been carried through from last year’s science caucus year plan. |
| Benefits | Refer to Objective 6. |
| Year 1 | * Reaching out to community partners/professors/researchers/ hospitals in the Hamilton area to consult on educational opportunities that can be implemented in current courses * Planning phase for modification of current courses * Consultations for creation of new courses with educational opportunities * Planning phase for the new courses |
| Year 2 | * First year in which modified current courses are held * Finalizing plans for newly created courses and modifications to existing programs. * Feedback would be taken from students regarding success. |
| Year 3 | * Modified courses would be held * Feedback regarding success would be collected from students |
| Partners | Refer to Objective 6. |

GOALS to strive for

List 5 things that you would like to have prepared for the beginning of September

* Increase follower count by at least 30 combined on Instagram & Facebook
* Increase social media engagement by at least 10% on Instagram
* Develop an effective posting schedule for the fall term
* Have all caucus members be introduced to the McMaster science community via our social media platforms, and present our ideas for the year to invite student feedback
* Update the MSS page with information about the SRA Science Caucus and our initiatives

List 5 things you would like to have completed during the fall term (1st)

* Hold a giveaway for top followers & engagers
* Creation and use of an SRA Science reddit page
* Research into current career support systems, textbook delivery methods, academic policies, and food waste at McMaster (in line with this year’s objectives, specifically objectives 2, 3, and 6).
* Conduct surveys/other methods of feedback collection to see what students want for Winter 2022 (hopeful return to campus, in alignment with objective 7)
* Ensure that mental health and academic support systems are working functionally and are being promoted to students consistently

List 5 things you would like to have completed during the winter term (2nd)

* Reach 1000 followers on the SRA Science Instagram page & reach 2000 likes on Facebook
* Maximize the safe number of in-person classes, events and activities for all years
* Have modified our yearly goals as needed in response to the evolving situation at McMaster
* Meet with the key stakeholders and partners in initiatives 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7
* Have liaised with the relevant partners and developed a solid plan to address the academic issues outlined in objective 6 and begin to implement the step-by-step procedure to solve them

**Master Summary**

Due to the still evolving nature of the upcoming year as a result of complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SRA science caucus felt that providing a month-by-month breakdown of the year plan would not be possible (nor productive). As we gain a better understanding of what the year will look like, we hope to work from the goals that we have laid out in order to best adapt to the dynamic circumstances we face.