



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

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**TO:** Members of the Student Representative Assembly  
**FROM:** Simranjeet Singh, President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO)  
**SUBJECT:** SRA 22N Report  
**DATE:** Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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### INTRODUCTION

Hello everyone, I hope you are well. As we enter 2023, I have begun reflecting on the accomplishments thus far, but also the limited amount of time remaining to finish projects in this role. While sobering to see the tasks which lay ahead, it has also been a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the many positive impacts had on the student body as a part of this process. In this report I will outline my activities, events I have taken part in, tasks completed, and the scope of my role since November when I had last reported. This will then be followed by a summary of events planned in the upcoming weeks. I hope this report is a window into not only the work that has been completed, but the progress made on goals, the evolution of my goals, and how I have adapted to changing circumstances. This report will discuss a myriad of topics, including projects led by myself and those in which I have collaborated closely with others within the MSU, McMaster, and the greater Hamilton community.

### PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS, ACTIVITIES, & SUCCESSES

This section summarizes the main events, projects, activities, and successes which have been completed. Smaller or less long-term tasks are excluded for brevity. Nonetheless, if there are specific queries about events unmentioned in this report but discussed in Executive Board or in public MSU statements, I would be more than happy to speak to them.

#### Provincial Lobby Week

In mid-November of 2022, Vice-President (Education) Elizabeth Wong and I went to Toronto for one week to advocate for student concerns at the provincial level in collaboration with our provincial-level advocacy body, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). This opportunity allowed us to advocate to Member of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) on how the Provincial government can better support the academic, professional, and overall societal success of students. There were four main topics we advocated it on, specifically Affordability, Gender-Based and Sexual Violence, Sector Sustainability, and Rural & Northern Students, the latter of which specifically focusing on how to better bolster Health & Transit supports. Through this lobby week, OUSA met with well over 30 MPPs across the province, with me specifically having more than 6 meetings mainly with GTA and Hamilton area MPPs. Not only were we able to learn about the intricacies of lobbying, but also apply our knowledge in a direct avenue with politicians. This opportunity has also allowed us to develop new collaborations and potential links with those in government which I feel will further foster positive outcomes for students and can be used by our successors to further advocate for student concerns. Overall, OUSA's Student Advocacy Conference was a wonderful avenue in which we were able to share student perspectives and lay the groundwork for positive change at one of the highest levels.

#### Charity Ball Fundraising

An additional fundraising piece I took part in was for Charity Ball. Charity Ball, which took place a couple weeks prior, is one of the largest formal events in the McMaster community. The event also supports individuals who may be facing food insecurity, by raising money for Hamilton Food Share. To help gain interest for the student body and raise funds for Charity, Vice-President (Finance) Sarpina Chui and I dressed up as Santa Claus on two days in mid-November, after which students, staff, and faculty had the opportunity to take pictures after making a small donation. This experience was a fun, and truly one-of-a-kind opportunity to take time away from my workday, interact with those in our community, and do so all for a positive cause.

#### Holiday Market

Taking place near the end of November and beginning of December, the Holiday Market was a wonderful initiative which I supported in collaboration with Campus Events and the Vice-President (Finance) Sarpina Chui. This event was a beautiful showcase of unique and local Hamilton vendors, allowed for students to listen to live music, and have fun social interactions just before the stressful period of exams. While I was unable to take part in the Holiday Market myself as I was in Ottawa for Federal Lobbying, by all accounts, it

was a wonderful success and I am happy to have supported in aspects of the background, specifically in searching for sponsorships. The success of the Holiday Market is a testament to the MSU's strong working relationship with McMaster University as well as community partners, so I look forward to seeing it become a recurring, annual event moving forward.

### Federal Lobby Week

The same week as the Holiday Market, near the end of November and the beginning of December, VP (Education) Elizabeth Wong and I were on Ottawa to lobby the Federal government regarding student advocacy goals. This was a collaborative event done with the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-intensive Universities (UCRU), an organization representing eight student unions of U15 universities. Collectively, UCRU met with an excess of 20 different Members of Parliament (MPs), with me personally meeting with about 4 MPs. Through this advocacy, UCRU and the MSU shared student concerns and request further investment in the realm of Student Financial Aid, Student Employment, Mental Health, and Indigenous Student Education. This advocacy had a significant focus on international student concerns as well, and overall allows us to share valuable perspectives with elected representatives from across Canada. Nonetheless, the areas of concern with UCRU have led the MSU to investigate CASA membership, a task which is ongoing.

### Innovations in Education Conference

On December 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, I took part in two separate panel discussions as a part of the Innovations in Education Conference (IEC). IEC is an event organized by the MacPherson Institute to highlight success in pedagogy, advancements in teaching technology, and allow for the development of new collaborations between educators. As part of this conference, I was invited to take part in the opening keynote, which was a conversation regarding Education Technology. Being invited to take part in a keynote was a wonderful opportunity, as I not only was able to share student perspectives, but also was able to do so in a setting filled with leading educators and administrators at McMaster. Secondly, I also organized a panel discussion entitled *Open Educational Excellence*, a panel in which numerous leaders in FYC, SRA, and other student groups attended. Through this panel, I as well as four prominent leaders in Open Educational Resource development at McMaster were able to take part in a discussion to highlight the success of OERs, the utility they have for the future evolution of education, and how OERs can be more directly incorporated into the fabric of education at McMaster moving forward. While the task of organizing a panel discussion, including all relevant research, planning, promotion, and other items was certainly a complicated affair, it was also rewarding as a result of the success I experienced.

### MSU + HCS Off-Campus Housing Feedback Sessions

In mid-January, the MSU collaborated with Housing and Conference Services (HCS) to have an off-campus housing feedback session. As part of this event, HCS and the MSU collected feedback via one-to-one testimonials of students. More than 35 students came to the event and shared their experience living in off-campus housing around McMaster as well as the successes and difficulties faced throughout the process of finding housing. The event was attended by numerous SRA members, FYC members, and general students within the McMaster community. The information gained has already been very valuable, as insights were shared into Municipal level advocacy that will be discussed later. I look forward to continuing to use such student insights to better understand the state of the rental market around McMaster and to develop useful solutions that can better alleviate student concerns.

### Thrive Week: Mindfulness Pottery Painting

As you may recall from my earlier report, the MSU has a close collaboration with the McMaster Okanagan Committee. This is a body which plans events and initiatives that exist to improve general well-being within the McMaster community. In my November report, I discussed MacMoves Week, which was a collaboration aimed at physical wellness. Since then, another collaboration has taken place, known as Thrive Week, an initiative aimed at improving mental health. As part of this collaboration, the MSU organized *Mindfulness Pottery Painting*, an event which would be an opportunity for students to step away from the stressors of school, work, and extracurriculars to engage in a couple hours of pottery painting as a means of relaxation and mindfulness. To say the least, this event was a rousing success. There were approximately 60 pottery pieces in total, a number which was completed exhausted by attendees in less than half an hour of the two hour event. The entire event was marked by need for more resources, whether they be pottery, paintbrushes, or cleaning utensils. Not only did I have to purchase more supplies during the event, I had to improvise by giving attendees card stock paper on which to paint after the pottery was exhausted. Overall, more than 100 people likely attended the two-hour event and made fabulous artwork on either pottery or card stock, all which were taken as mementos to a wonderful experience by attendees. By attendance, Mindfulness Pottery Painting was by far the most successful event of Thrive Week, replicating the MSU's success during MacMoves Week at an even greater scale. When reflecting on the success of the event, it clearly displayed the wonderful passion students have when engaging in fun, mindfulness-oriented activities. As a result, the event will inform future planning as the MSU looks to hold similar mental health-themed initiatives in the greater community.

### Visit by members of the Queen's University Alma Mater Society

In late January, Tina Hu, the Vice-President (Operations) of the Queen's University AMS and the AMS' Operations Officer (Dom Conacher) made a visit to McMaster to learn more of the MSU's food and beverage units, 1280 and The Grind. The experience allowed us to share perspectives regarding different practises at other student unions, share insights about how food and beverage practises may be improved, and allowed the AMS to learn significantly of how the MSU has worked with partners such as Compass-Chartwells to deliver a unique food and beverage offering to students. I was also able to gain further understanding of how different practises result in unique

developments in campus culture, outlook of student leaders, and modes of operations. I look forward to continuing to be in conversation with the AMS to allow both parties to learn from each other's insights.

#### Delegation to Minister of the Economic Development of Southern Ontario Filomena Tassi

In early February, the MSU, Mohawk Student Association, and Redeemer College's student association were invited to a delegation with Filomena Tassi, MP for Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas and the Minister of the Economic Development of Southern Ontario. Here, Associate Vice-President (Provincial and Federal Affairs) Kiran Bassi, Vice-President (Education) Elizabeth Wong, Vice-President (Finance) Sarphina Chui, and I attended a discussion wherein we shared updates about student life at McMaster as well as student advocacy goals. This delegation was part of the pre-budget consultations done by the Minister as part of planning for the 2023-2024 federal budget. The information we shared was in-line with the UCRU brief that was the basis of advocacy during UCRU's federal lobbying week. Even so, the opportunity was a positive avenue through which we learned of the perspectives of other student leaders, the views of a federal Minister, and we were able to understand our shared goals had. Furthermore, we were able to answer questions and clarify concerns of the Minister on a variety of student-related topics, an aspect which we feel will result in long-lasting collaboration. As part of the process, the MSU worked to create an addendum to the UCRU brief, an addendum containing clarifying points and further information about how the federal government can work with universities and the provinces to better support education, how it can lead more sustainable city planning, and how it can create more support for affordable housing development. The brief with the addendum was submitted formally, so we are hopeful it is taken into consideration as part of budget planning.

#### Municipal Lobbying

In the prior several weeks, Vice-President (Education Elizabeth Wong) worked with community partners and students to create a list of advocacy goals to the City of Hamilton. We selected three main advocacy goals each with multiple sub-points, specifically regarding Affordable Housing, Sustainability and Waste Management, as well as Public Spaces and Infrastructure. Additionally, we also shared student perspectives regarding the Nuisance Party Bylaw, and its negative impacts on student wellbeing. These goals were created by collating student concerns and conducting research to develop recommendations for how the municipal government can work to improve Hamilton to allow for the success of students in the future. The lobbying in many ways was modelled of the provincial and federal level work. To summarize, the meetings with the City were a wonderful success, as the MSU was able to meet with more than 10 of the 15 City Councillors, the Mayor of Hamilton Andrea Horwath, and was also able to delegate to City Council as a whole during pre-budget deliberations. These conversations allowed for the development of multiple touch points for future collaboration, as many newly elected representatives have progressive social, economic, and political views generally aligned with student needs. We look forward to following-up with multiple councillors and the Mayor regarding our shared goals, as there are many avenues for continued advocacy.

## **ONGOING EVENTS, PROJECTS, AND ACTIVITIES**

This section summarizes the main events, projects, activities, and successes which are ongoing. Smaller or less long-term tasks are excluded for brevity. Nonetheless, if there are specific queries about events unmentioned in this report but discussed in Executive Board or in public MSU statements, I would be more than happy to speak to them.

#### LinkedIn Learning Collaborations

As has been occurring throughout my term, I am continuing to collaborate with Jeannie An to develop steps to better promote existing resources. LinkedIn Learning adoption has risen notably since the past report, with approximately 45% of students having activated their accounts. Nonetheless, we hope to see this figure rise as all students pay for the service through ancillary fees, yet it is still a minority who have accessed it. The monthly initiatives to promote LinkedIn Learning are still ongoing, with a current focus on approximately 42 items that LinkedIn has highlighted as these topics has more robust content in the application. We are currently investigating the success/impact of this new orientation to monthly initiatives, and will use it to inform later work. Additionally, I am in the process of reaching out to the Faculty of Business, - which has been a leader in LinkedIn Learning, to understand how the steps used in that faculty to embed the resource into courses, can be replicated throughout McMaster. It is my hope that LinkedIn Learning uptake can continue to climb moving forward.

#### Open Educational Resources Pilot Project

I am happy to report that significant progress has been made relating to my flagship goal, the increased promotion and uptake of Open Educational Resources (OERs). OERs are tools by which researchers can collaborate, but also allow for the development of free or at least more affordable supplementary course resources for students. The aim of this proposal is to request faculties as well as central McMaster units to bring forth significantly increased funding for OERs and allow for there to be paid student research assistant positions to support in the development of these resources. Ideally, this will allow access to a far greater number of accessible, high quality OERs, increase awareness of them amongst students, faculty, and staff, while also allowing for prominent leadership and professional development opportunities for students. As shared previously, I had completed a proposal for greater OER promotion and adoption and began the process of circulation to the various faculties and central McMaster units. Previous feedback had asked that I modify the proposal to make institutional support and budgetary factors more concrete. The modified proposal includes specifics as to what proportion of funds will go to a specific staff member who can be hired, the nature of their salary, scope of their role, and how other

funds will be used to plan for conferences, promotional materials, and other items to support OER development. As an additional point, an arrangement whereby money is requested from each faculty on a basis proportional to the number of faculty members was also created to ensure each division is providing funds in a fashion equivalent to its capacity to contribute.

As has been a marker of this project, for every two steps forward, it appears that we also must take one step back. This was made apparent after the modified proposal was shared with a few select allies in the MacPherson Institute and McMaster Libraries. The most recent feedback resulted in a recommendation to remove some specifics, reduce depth of the piece, and apply through the Strategic Alignment Fund (SAF). The SAF is a fund created under the Office of the Provost which allows for applications for funding and new initiatives in line with major strategic priorities of McMaster. As the OER Pilot Project is directly aligned with the Partnered in Teaching and Learning Strategy, I was advised that applying through the SAF will be a more straightforward way to get endorsement of the project. I have deferred to the leadership and knowledge of campus allies who have years of experience and have successfully applied for SAF grants in the past, and thus will be applying through the SAF for this project's endorsement. The application deadline for the SAF is February 28<sup>th</sup>, so I look forward to receiving indication of whether the OER Project has been successfully accepted in March of 2023. If successful, this project will also be the basis to understand how to institutionalize OERs long-term in the McMaster community. The progress on this goal was the direct result of support from the MacPherson Institute, McMaster Libraries, and Vice-Provost (Teaching & Learning), so I wanted to recognize their contributions.

#### Student-involvement in Course Design

As also mentioned in my previous report, I submitted a proposal for a student-proposed assignment in BIOMEDDC 3C09, a course I took in my undergrad and one through which I am collaborating with a former professor, Dr. Felicia Vulcu. As mentioned in previous reports, the aim of this is for there to be a model formed in which former students can directly contribute to the development of a course and modify/enhance it. I was grateful to receive very positive feedback from Dr. Vulcu with whom I will be collaborating to running the assignment. The presentations and assignment during BIOMEDDC 3C09 will take place in a couple weeks time, in the classes directly after reading week. I look forward to using the feedback received to create a template that can be proposed to central McMaster leadership as a mechanism that will allow students to have a direct role in modifying courses to improve their content and delivery. Similar to OERs, the aspect of direct student engagement within courses is a key tenet of McMaster's Partnered Teaching and Learning Strategy. Therefore, by championing this project, it will allow for greater student agency as well as influence in our education.

#### Hamiltonians for Affordable and Manageable Rents

As mentioned in previous reports, I have had a positive collaboration with the Hamiltonians for Housing at Manageable Rents (HAMR). This is a group of wonderful community leaders who brought forth a proposal for modular, inexpensive, mini-apartment/townhouse-style housing units which could be implemented within Hamilton in the coming years. This proposal offers the opportunity to have easily produced, inexpensive, and low environmental impact housing that can make renting significantly more affordable in Hamilton for both students and community members. The group has formalized more of their operations, including by applying for formal non-for-profit status. Nonetheless, they also have significant progress to make, an aspect I am supporting by facilitating their building of partnerships with many of the MSU's collaborators. As part of Municipal lobbying, we were able to share the progress of this group with Hamilton City Councillors. I look forward to seeing how this project evolves as it aims to create greater access to affordable housing for Hamiltonians.

#### Smart Commute Hamilton

Beginning in November of 2022, I have connected with Juby Lee of Smart Commute Hamilton. This connection has been a prominent avenue through which I have better understood the work done by non-for-profits that are established in the Hamilton community, and allowed for me to discover multiple new potential projects. Currently, I am in the phase of understanding how the Smart Commute app, - a tool that can be used by individuals to plan carpooling, bike sharing, public transit use, and other methods of sustainable transport, can be more successfully promoted to students. Additionally, I am working with Juby to lay the groundwork for student engagement in future events Smart Commute is planning. Specifically, Smart Commute hopes to promote walkability of Hamilton public spaces and reduction of automobile-centric design, a factor in which I believe it is key for students to be involved.

#### FYC + SRA Collaborations

I have had the pleasure of connecting with numerous FYC and SRA members to learn of their perspectives and goals. While these conversations are still ongoing, they have been a useful window into the passion for leadership had within the MSU's elected representatives. I look forward to collaborating on projects that are currently in planning stages and sharing updates on items in which I have been requested to support.

#### Rental Housing Financial and Institutional Support Initiative

I had the opportunity to learn from multiple SRA members regarding the difficulties they experience as renters, the difficulties in looking for rental housing, and the further barriers faced by international students specifically. This has led to the creation of an idea to create a new fund or additional support for students, - potentially international students specifically, regarding rental housing. I have an upcoming conversation with Elizabeth Way of Student Aids and Awards to plan for a potential project/proposal that can make a positive impact on the student body.

### Lab Sustainability Initiative

While this is a project that has been deprioritized, I am grateful that I was able to make progress recently. As mentioned in previous reports, this initiative focuses on promoting more sustainable nitrile glove options in the McMaster community. These gloves have the same functionality as traditional nitrile gloves, but have more rapidly biodegradable formulation, making them less impactful on the ecosphere. The purpose of this project is to see the gloves' utility, determine if they are a viable alternative to traditional nitrile gloves, and if so, how I must embark on a strategy to promote them. As mentioned in a previous report, I hoped to have already completed this project at this time, but delays in responses from those I am collaborating with, combined with my prioritization of other goals have slowed progress on this project. I am currently about to begin distribution of a more sustainable nitrile glove option with Dr. Felicia Vulcu, as a project parallel to the student-involvement in course design project. I will then see if other labs I hoped to collaborate with are also able to take part in the near term. If successful, I am hopeful that this project can be the first step in allowing more sustainable environmental practices to be promoted in scientific research, thereby providing undergraduate students exposure to less environmentally impactful methods of conducting research.

### MSU Organizational Structure Review

As mentioned in previous reports, there is a long-term project regarding the restructuring of the MSU's internal structure. As part of this, I am working closely with the MSU General Manager John McGowan and the Director of Human Resources Renee McIntosh to review the internal structure and Human Resources practices of the MSU. There is a sense that the MSU internal structure is overly flat, thus we feel these changes may help in creating a more pyramid-shaped hierarchy which will allow for employees to progress up the organization as they gain experience and seniority. In addition, we want to investigate how resources of different units can be better re-organized to allow for more internal efficiency. These changes in-keeping with best business practices and we hope it will create a stronger, more sustainable organizational structure which may also unveil new student work and volunteering opportunities. I look forward to collating the progress made by Renee, John and I and in the next month so it can result in clear outcomes by the end of my term.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS, AND ACTIVITIES**

This section summarizes the main events, projects, activities, and successes which are upcoming. Smaller or less long-term tasks are excluded for brevity. Nonetheless, if there are specific queries about upcoming events unmentioned in this report, I would be more than happy to speak to them.

### Light Up The Night Planning

I am happy to share that Light Up The Night (LUTN) is returning for the first time since 2019. LUTN is one of the largest annual events that takes place in the McMaster community, and is a celebration of amazing student performers, community members, and artists who show their wonderful talents in a fun and engaging environment. Students are able to take part in amusement park rides, eat from a selection of diverse foods, and play unique games offered by a diverse selection of vendors. I have worked with multiple partners in the MSU and McMaster to assist in the organization of this event and have specifically focused on collecting sponsorship opportunities. I look forward to seeing the wonderful memories that will be created within the McMaster community when LUTN is held.

### Ecosia Browser in the MSU and MSU Clubs

In collaboration with Zero Waste McMaster, I hope to promote Ecosia more widely in the McMaster community. Ecosia is a search engine, just as Bing or Google. The main aspect is that for every 45 searches done, Ecosia plants 1 tree. Ecosia is free to use just as other search engines, can function via Bing and/or Google's advanced search algorithms, and has similar terms of use. Overall, it appears to be a straightforward approach that can be used to plant trees, - thereby having a positive environmental impact, with no cost and basically no change in the everyday practises of individuals. The progress on this project has been delayed by other endeavours, but I hope to work with the MSU's Director of Information Technology, Pauline Taggart, and Clubs Administrator, Nardos Tedros, to institute the search engine more broadly within the MSU and promote it to clubs as well. My hope is that in the near future, many more individuals can use this no cost, low barrier to entry alternative which will result in a positive impact on the environment.

### Transition to compostable container options in 1280, The Grind, and Union Market

After multiple conversations with McMaster's Office of Sustainability, Dr. Kate Whalen, and Associate Vice-President (University Affairs), Simran Dhindsa, I have begun a pursuit to make the MSU's business units more sustainable. The MSU's business units currently sell an assortment of food and beverages in containers, some of which are recyclable, some compostable, and some neither. I am currently in the process of investigating how we can prioritize compostable and recyclable cutlery and container options, and also how composting can more prominently be showcased as an option for disposal when community members use the spaces within the business units.

### MIRA-iGEN Study Collaboration

In late December, I was reached out to by researchers at McMaster Institute for Research on Aging (MIRA) to collaborate on their Intergenerational Study (iGEN). The purpose of this is to study the impacts of an aging population on society, on wellbeing of

individuals, and whether social connections and family bonds can be leveraged to not only increase societal cohesion, but also health of individuals. While primarily focused on the elderly, this study will also focus on all age groups, including those of University age to see interrelations of factors that impact health as well as social bonds. As this study has the opportunity to unveil factors that can benefit or disadvantage a variety of students of diverse cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds, I feel there is significant opportunity for the MSU to learn information that can be used for future advocacy. Thus, I will be embarking on a collaboration and look forward to not only learning more information, but also laying the group work for a long-term collaboration that will give the MSU access to more granular and analytical data about how culture, disability, ethnicity, wealth, gender, sexuality, and other factors can impact the lives of students.

#### Deepening of Community Collaborations after consultations with City of Hamilton

As a follow-up piece to many of the insights taken from meetings with Hamilton City Councillors, I look forward to reconnecting with some community groups, and making new collaborations which will further the interests of students in Hamilton. Workforce Planning Hamilton, Hamilton Ontario Youth, Smart Commute Hamilton, and ACORN Hamilton are four of multiple prominent groups with whom we hope to re-establish or strengthen communication moving forward. Working with these groups is vital to further student interests in relation to rental housing rights, waste management, connecting students to work opportunities, and building a sense of belonging.

#### **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

No major challenges currently.

#### **CONCLUSION**

I would like to thank the other Board of Directors, General Manager John McGowan, Administrative Services Coordinator Victoria Scott, Director of Information Technology Pauline Taggart, Human Resources Generalist Renee McIntosh, Executive Assistant Daniela Stajcer, Clubs Administrator Nardos Tedros, Director of Marketing and Communications Michael Wooder, as well as all the other full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff of the MSU for their support. In addition, I would like to thank all McMaster University, Hamilton community, and other more wide-ranging partners for their willingness to collaborate and assist in my initiatives. Thank you for reading my Presidential Report! Feel free to ask me questions via email or in the SRA meeting.

Best regards,



Simranjeet Singh, President & Chief Executive Officer (CEO)  
McMaster Students' Union  
[president@msu.mcmaster.ca](mailto:president@msu.mcmaster.ca)