



REPORT

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

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Elizabeth Wong, Vice-President (Education) & Corporate Officer
SUBJECT: SRA 22Q Year-end Report
DATE: March 22, 2023

Dear Members of the Assembly,

I cannot believe that almost one year has passed. I remember the excitement I felt while preparing my year plan right after we got elected. It felt strange going back and reading my year plan to prepare this report, but it was amazing to see what we accomplished in just one year. It has been such an honour serving as the Vice-President (Education).

My year-end report consists of all the exact topics I laid out in my year-plan and whether or not the project is completed, ongoing, incomplete, or moved portfolios. If there any questions around any topics listed here or on any other report, I would be happy to address them.

At the time of my election, I had no idea what an adventure this role would bring, and I am eternally grateful to the SRA for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to serve this community. I have enjoyed meeting and working with each one of you. I am so grateful to have met you all and I hope to hear from you in the future. It is with bittersweet emotions that I bring forth my year-end report to the SRA.

University Affairs Priorities

Hyflex Classrooms and Accessibility

Ongoing: This has been an ongoing project of mine that I have worked on through the Teaching and Learning Committee. The Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee is comprised of the Vice-Provost of Teaching and Learning, VP Education, Faculty Members, and students from the MSU. In these meetings, we have identified the need for universal design within classrooms and that all students should be able to have access to classes without fear of losing marks for being sick. We have worked in this committee to contribute to the new digital learning strategy that prioritizes increasing accessibility. This is also a topic that I covered on the provincial level as well. AVP Provincial and Federal Affairs and I authored OUSA's Student Accessibility and Disability Inclusion paper which also covers areas around increasing accessibility and flexible classrooms.

Collaboration with the Privacy Office

Ongoing: This was an interesting collaboration that Sim and I took on this year. We recognized that there was a need to be prepared and understand the implications of privacy laws with digital learning and hybrid learning. We continued to have reoccurring meetings with Trudi Wright from the Privacy Office. We also invited Trudi to give a presentation to SRA on any questions and concerns students may have around privacy. This was beneficial for external meetings as it educated me on best practices. I would say that this collaboration should continue but maybe on a less frequent basis.

Return to Campus and Prioritizing Safety

Complete/Ongoing: While most-all restrictions have been lifted, there are still challenges around accommodation for students who may fall ill during the year. We continue to address these concerns in the teaching and learning advisory committee as well as on the provincial level through OUSA. While most areas of advocacy around COVID have been completed, the work around accessibility and accommodations are ongoing. The area above describing hyflex classrooms also covers work from this area of my year plan.

International Student Support

Ongoing: I did not get as much done on the university side for international student support. The ISS office already does a lot of the advocacy work that I had mentioned in my yearplan on the university side. I did more work on the provincial and federal side around support for international student support. During UCRU's federal lobby week, the theme of lack of international student support was used as an identified area of concern. We focused on how international students pay high tuition on top of all the expensive fees associated with being a student. We lobbied for a removal of the working hours cap on international students and to expand various areas within Canada Student Jobs to allow international students to have access to these programs.

Support for Indigenous Students

Ongoing: It has been exciting to work with our Indigenous partners on campus, especially with Indigenous Student Services. I have had conversations with Indigenous Student Services on issues around housing and transportation. We continue to have conversations about how we can reduce barriers for students. I am also apart of JIACG which is the Indigenous Strategy Group that is Chaired by the Provost. In this group, we work on campus wide support for Indigenous students. I was directly involved in conversations around grants for Indigenous students.

Collaboration with the Sustainability Office

Ongoing: I did not work very closely with the sustainability office. I did have a few meetings at the beginning of my term, but Sim took on collaboration with sustainability. On the MSU side, my team is currently working on the MSU sustainability paper that will be coming to policy con before end of year.

Open Education Resources

Moved portfolio/ongoing: Sim took this initiative and has been working with the university. As Sim took this portfolio piece on, I do not have much of a role unless there is a need for collaboration.

Provincial and Federal Affairs Priorities

OUSA Delegate Hiring

Completed: Our first in person GA's back since COVID brought about many new and forgotten challenges. I decided to change the hiring process to be less intimidating and inclusive. Since many students were not aware of what OUSA is I decided to get rid of the supplementary application and reduce the amount of interview questions asked in round 2. This proved to be quite successful as we were able to get a good number of candidates for both GA's. We were able to choose from a diverse pool of candidates and had a group of delegates for each GA. I was very excited to have gotten students from across different programs and years. We had more first year delegates than any other schools who attended OUSA's GA's. I am confident that these students will end up in leadership capacities in the MSU in the future. There are still some concerns around some faculty being more accommodating towards students going to conferences, but I will be noting this in my transition report.

Provincial Lobby Week (OUSA)

Completed: In November, Sim and I participated in OUSA's Student Advocacy Conference (provincial lobby week). We spent one week in Toronto at Queen's Park where we met with MPPs and lobbied for different issues affecting post-secondary students. Our lobbying priorities were gender-based and sexual violence, affordability, sector sustainability, and rural & northern students (health & transit). I had 8 meetings with MPPs, and Sim had 6 meetings. In my meetings, I got the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Colleges and Universities, Jill Dunlop. We also got the opportunity to give feedback on Bill-26, Strengthening Post-Secondary Institutions and Students Act, 2022. We were able to get some of these MPPs to bring up issues during question period, write letters to the Minister, give Member statements, and to bring up issues to their caucus. I also tried running social media engagement where I took students along for lobby week. Overall, it was a very successful week and gave us a good foundation to continue conversations with politicians.

OUSA Policy Paper

Ongoing/Completed: For the fall GA, I was an editor for the Student Entrepreneurship, Employment & Employability paper. This paper was released in the winter after it was approved at GA. For the Spring GA, I was an author on the Student Accessibility and Disability Inclusion paper. I am happy to say that our paper was passed at OUSA's Spring GA. The reason why this item is not completed is because we are still working on body text and the overall paper has not been officially released yet.

OUSA Fall General Assembly

Completed: In October, I brought 9 delegates to Laurentian University in Sudbury to participate in OUSA's Fall GA. We passed three policy papers: Tuition, Student Entrepreneurship, Employment, & Employability; and Ancillary & Incidental Fees. While there were some hiccups, our delegates were very engaged and expressed interest in applying again.

OUSA Spring General Assembly

Ongoing/Completed: In March, I brought 9 delegates to Queen's University in Kingston to participate in OUSA's Spring GA. We passed two policy papers: Student Accessibility and Disability Inclusion and Teaching & Assessment. The last paper, Two-Spirit LGBTQIA+ was not passed yet as plenary was paused to be continued at a later date. We have extended plenary coming up where we will go through the last edits and then will pass the paper. I was an author on Student Accessibility and Disability Inclusion, so I was thrilled to have the paper passed at GA.

Federal Lobby Week (UCRU)

Completed: In November, Sim and I went to Parliament Hill for a week to participate in UCRU's Federal Lobbying Week. Our four priorities were Student Employment, Financial Aid, Mental Health, and Indigenous Education. I had meetings with 6 MPs and got support for boosting economic prosperity and supporting international students. We were also able to thank the government for the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness. While this did not happen during lobby week, the federal government also released a one-time housing benefit.

Municipal Affairs Priorities

Municipal Elections Awareness and Education Campaign

Completed: We ran various municipal elections campaign awareness events to get students engaged around the municipal election. The MacVotes campaign ran for several weeks prior to the election. This campaign was on social media and provided students information on who could vote, when to vote, where to vote, why to vote and how to vote. We also amplified graphics from the city. I also filmed an elections awareness video. We also had a ballot on demand polling station on campus on the third floor of MUSC which allowed students to vote regardless of where they lived in the city. We also had students who were engaging with students and encouraging them to go and vote. We also ran a small elections awareness event with the city where city staff engaged with students. Our biggest event for municipal elections awareness was the mayoral debate on campus. We hosted the debate in MUSC and got a lot of foot traffic coming through MUSC.

City of Hamilton – Rental Housing Licensing Pilot Program

Ongoing: During our municipal pre-budget submission consultations/conversations we met with 11 councillors. Our pre-budget submission document had an area that asked for more support around the rental housing licensing pilot program. During our discussions, it seemed that councillors were quite receptive to putting more resources into this area. There were some offices who offered to work with us to act as a liaison to get information and statistics on the program as well. There of course needs to be continuing advocacy on the program but we are optimistic that the new councillors will continue to be supportive of this program and adding more resources to it as well.

Tenant Rights Awareness

Completed: We ran a social media campaign on renting rights and connecting students to resources if they needed help in navigating dealing with shady landlord. We did a

social media post with a set of graphics that laid out different facts and renters rights. There was also information for info to legal clinic and other McMaster resources. This was posted on the main MSU account and the MSU advocacy account. We also had this graphics adapted to raver cards that we distributed to general students when we did sock and mitten giveaways. We tabled to students and talked to them about how they can access resources and what they should look out for when signing a lease. We also planned a joint event with SWHAT called Housing Hinge where we helped first years find roommates for next year. At this event, we also distributed these ravers. We will also be running another campaign around tenant rights awareness and lease sign tips as well.

Community Engagement

Ongoing: I wish I had worked more on the community engagement side but took the opportunity to achieve this through our pre-budget submission consultations with councillors. There are many amazing local groups in Hamilton that work on advocacy such as SACHA and ACORN. I will be encouraging my successor to collaborate more with the community.

Board Priorities & MSU Priorities

Reviewing the Education Team

Ongoing/paused: This has been an ongoing process throughout the year. I have been creating notes to pass onto my predecessor on what my vision for the team should look like but I also recognize that I am almost done my term. I don't want to impose a whole new structure and leave the next VP ED to "figure it out." My ideas around the education team are to create a more pyramid structure of delegation that better utilizes the AVPs and Research Assistants. I believe the roles are too broad and ambiguous and need specific projects to help to guide the roles so that the committees can be better utilized as well. I also think that the way we do policy papers is not the most effective and should be a project of AVPs and their committees as well. Overall, the resources and tools are there but there is a lack of cohesion across the team.

Development of a Full-Time Staff Position for the Education Team

On pause: I decided not to move forward with creating the full-time research position for the education team. I do think there is an opportunity for a full-time member of the team but I'm not sold on creating the position strictly around research. I think there is an opportunity for a full-time continuing staff support that can support the VP ED in all aspects of the job. The VP Ed is the only VP that does not have direct staff support and it in all honesty the VP role that can often be overlooked due to the external nature of the role. The VP Ed would be able to take on exec roles in external organizations if there was more support for the VP Ed.

Improving Outreach with University

Ongoing: Working with the university this year has been such a pleasure. The university has been very receptive to collaborating with the MSU and we have been involved in many conversations regarding changes and the future of McMaster. On the advocacy side, I have had a lot of involvement with the university in working with the Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee and the Indigenous Strategy Meeting Group (JIACG). We have also been involved in conversations around the Campus Master Plan and were able to consult with the partners involved in that long-term project. I set this objective as

ongoing as outreach is constant and the relationship with the university is quite dynamic as well.

Mental Health Advocacy

Ongoing: This was an ongoing theme for advocacy this year. I had large focuses in mental health on the provincial, federal and university level. On the provincial level, we weaved in mental health priorities under the rural and northern students briefing document. On the federal level, one of our main lobbying priorities this year was mental health, namely around investing more into digital mental health resources and overall resources into the sector. On the university level, we continued to advocate for more digital resources and the expansion of counsellors availability for students. While we were met with resistance, we continue to advocate for more resources at universities and that students deserve open access to any resources they may require. I tagged this as ongoing as this is a project that should continue even after I am out the position.

Go Transit

Ongoing/completed: This was an interesting area of my year plan to complete because a lot of the work was ongoing when I came into the role. Sim and I had meetings in the summer with GO and our main objectives were understanding what metrics they would be using to assess how they add buses and choose timing. Our summer conversations were based around Welcome Week and ensuring that there was bussing for students who may want to participate in the late Welcome Week events. We also discussed bringing back express buses back to the McMaster terminal. Overall, this was successful and were able to get extended bussing for Welcome Week as well as the re-introduction of express buses on campus.

MSU on Avenue

Not completed/unknown: We had a lot of discussions around MSU on Avenue when we first started in our roles but after the summer, we didn't hear much around this project. I believe I was dropped from the discussion and it was passed to more of the internal portfolios.

Connecting with SRA

Ongoing/completed: While I wish I was able to connect even more with SRA this year, it is quite difficult while constantly traveling and handling external matters. I wish I had more time to connect with the members who were elected after the by-election. I had a few opportunities to help some caucuses with advocacy initiatives but there is definitely room for more opportunity to collaborate. I also got the opportunity to help some SRA members who organized an elections awareness event as well.

Signing off

This brings me to the end of my report. While this doesn't cover my whole year, it was interesting to look back and see how my initial year plan came to fruition. It was a tough year but filled with so much fun. I will never regret taking on this position, and I will always be grateful for my election.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has played a role in supporting me within my role. Biggest thank you to all our full-time staff, especially Wooder, John, and Daniela for all the support they have given me these past few months. I want to thank my team Simran, Kiran, Shrey, Albi, Amelia, and Jasmeet for being the

most amazing team despite all the challenges we had to face this year. Thank you to OUSA's SC and Home Office for being my second family this year. Finally, I want to give the biggest thank you to Sarphina, Mitchell, and Sim for being the most amazing team, I wouldn't have wanted to ride this loopy ride without you.

With gratitude, I thank you all for being on this journey with me. While I did not find work-life balance in this role, I found friendship, community, and family. It is an absolute bittersweet time but I am grateful to all of you and for this experience. Signing off for the last time, I bring forth my final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Wong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Elizabeth Wong
Vice-President (Education) & Corporate Officer
McMaster Students Union
Vped@msu.mcmaster.ca