



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*  
**MSU President**

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TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly  
FROM: Jovan Popovic, President  
SUBJECT: They see me rolling  
DATE: June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## **Progress on Year Plan**

### Missing SLEF Courts

In the midst of a project with parking services, I took a walk out to parking lot H, on the north end of campus. On a fence boarding the lot, I would come across the following sign:



As seen in the picture, the volleyball courts, paid for by the student life enhancement fund, are nowhere to be found. After some research and consultation, I found that the courts were erected in 2017, only to be removed less than a year later to create “temporary” parking. The parking lot no longer appears temporary, six years later.

It appears that tens of thousands of student dollars were wasted, while students were burned out of getting a new facility. I want this money back and new facilities built.

I’ve spent significant amounts of time learning the history of this so that I can build a compelling case to present towards university administration and have already started

reaching out to many and scheduling meetings for the month upcoming. Students deserve better than this.

### Artificial Intelligence in Education

As a member of the teaching and learning committee, the first meeting of the year was quite a surprise for me. The most prominent of the discussed subjects was generative AI, and its future at the school. There were significant discussions around banning its use, which in my opinion, would've been catastrophic, setting McMaster students back compared to all others.

I advocated heavily to this group around the benefits of using AI in the classroom, as well as how far students would've been set back without it. When we graduate, we have to prove to employers now that we are \$70k, \$80k, \$90k, etc. more valuable than AI, who can probably complete the same jobs in far less time. We need to learn how to work alongside AI, rather than sticking our heads in the sand.

The response to this was very positive and well received, and it sparked what appeared to be a successful debate in keeping AI at McMaster. As a result of these discussions, I was also invited to join the Generative AI Task Force, which is specifically designed to determine the place of AI at McMaster. I missed the first meeting due to the CASA conference in Ottawa but should be available to make the next three as the university seeks a decision and a direction before the start of the school term.

### Inspire Course Design

Following some discussions with the Vice Provost of Teaching & Learning about my leadership experiences, my involvement with A&R, as well as my desire to shift away from standardized educational systems, I've been invited to join a course design committee for a new Inspire course. Meetings have not yet started and will take place over the remainder of the summer, but the opportunity to aid in the design of a course is rather significant for the future, even should it only be a micro credit today.

### Athletics & Recreation Discussions

A major pillar of my platform focused on athletics and recreation. I offered two primary focuses, (1) providing a voice for athletes as an underrepresented group, and (2) coordinate more involvement between A&R and other groups on campus to create better entertainment options for students on campus. Thus far, discussions on both fronts have gone well, and the department has been very receptive in working with the MSU.

Regarding athlete advocacy, there have been several fronts where I've been able to make progress. In August, when athletes return to campus for training camp, they have difficulty parking because the transponders don't kick in until September. This forced them to either pay the extremely costly \$20 a day rate, or park over in Westdale where they are disturbing our neighbors while collecting parking tickets, typically 2-4 per individual according to some athletes that stepped forth to raise this concern. I worked with parking services to create a far more reasonable option where student athletes can purchase transponders for only \$51 (lot M monthly price), and they will be provided access to lot H, the closest lot to their facilities. Unrelated to A&R, a similar deal is being negotiated for welcome week volunteers as well.

Furthermore, A&R has reassured me that for the first time in recent history, all teams should have full head shots posted and media day privileges. Beyond this, I've also stemmed several inquiries on several individual team concerns that have since been addressed or are actively being addressed.

It is important to provide this outlet for student athletes because they have nowhere else to go, and nobody to represent them. After all, they are still students. That's who we are here to represent.

Shifting to event coordination, I've also had several talks with A&R on a media plan, while also coordinating A&R based events with Campus Events. There are plans in the works for opening day festivities, as well as a potential homecoming game, and sports nights at 1280. Students will be offered improved, and consistent event programming within the sports community, shifting to an entertainment-based focus so that you don't have to be a fan of McMaster sports to enjoy the games.

### CASA Conference

From May 14<sup>th</sup> to May 20<sup>th</sup>, Abby (VP Education) and I attended a conference for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations in Ottawa. The organization is a federal advocacy group featuring approximately 25 schools. The week was used both as an orientation week for all the newly elected student leaders, while also functioning as a week to determine priorities for the year through discussion and debate.

The MSU is currently an observing member of CASA, not a voting member. We get to participate in discussion, voicing our priorities, but do not currently have a vote. Our purpose for attending these conferences is (1) to get the priorities across in representing McMaster students at the federal level, but also (2) to determine if we want to join this organization as a full voting member. The entry fee for the MSU would be \$63,000 annually. For comparisons sake, the cost of OUSA, the provincial advocacy group which we are a voting member for, costs approximately \$90,000 annually. Observer ship status in CASA is \$300 annually – we joined in observer ship under the previous board. A decision will be made before the end of the term for this year's BoD.

In attending the conference, the MSU, alongside UofT and Western (who are also observers) were loud in voicing housing as a top priority of CASA, while it wasn't nearly such a priority before the Ontario schools banded together to communicate this message. By the end of the conference, it became a top priority for the group over the upcoming year.

As for the outlook of joining the group, we acknowledge the upside they are able to offer. This is a group that has a clear voice in Parliament. Last year they had one-on-one meetings with 11 different ministers, including the Prime Minister. All major Canadian political parties acknowledge the organization and seem to respect the organization. If we want a voice on the federal level, this seems like a good way to do it.

On the flip side, the concern thus far with CASA is the complete lack of Ontario representation, and the one member, one vote policy. We are concerned that our voice would get drowned out amongst the many other schools out west and out east. The only other Ontario university that is currently a member is Trent Durham. It may not be worth

the investment if our priorities are overlooked because of the differentiating priorities of other regions. Without other observers joining alongside us, such as UofT and Western, it may not be worth it without a larger presence.

### OUA Conference

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, Abby and I attended an Ontario University Athletics conference at Queens Park in Toronto, by invitation of Keenan Jeppesen from McMaster's A&R department, and the President and CEO of the OUA. While Keenan spent time meeting with individuals from other A&R departments, Abby and I spent time meeting with MPPs in attendance, as well as with the OUA commissioner. We attempted to develop relationships with these individuals, while also expressing our concerns for athletes at our school.

We established connections with Gord Grace, the OUA President, Jill Dunlop, MPP and Minister of Universities and Colleges, as well as Neil Lumsden, MPP and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sports. Grace thanked us many times for coming and being the only student union in attendance, calling student union involvement critical for university athletics in Ontario.

### Parking Services Discussions

I have spent significant amounts of time with parking services thus far. I won't repeat what was already mentioned with athletes, so please see section "athletics and recreation discussions" to read more about that.

A large part of my platform discussed inadequate parking offerings at McMaster, and a hope to work with Parking Services to improve the situation. In my many meetings with them, they've been very receptive to student feedback, acknowledging students as their number one customer and top priority. They were on the same page about the subpar lot M and understood the frustrations of students.

They discussed wanted to increase general maintenance of the lot, which in and of itself is significant. As well, they plan to remove much of the storage on the sides of the exit ramp to make for a more convenient (and less of an eye soar...) pathway for students. There were also early discussions, albeit far from any agreements, about repaving the lot in the next year to year and a half. This would be a massive win for such a lot quality and poorly maintained lot.

Frustrations of students were also aired about the high costs of parking on campus, and the open willingness to risk parking tickets rather than park in McMaster's lots. They were surprised to hear about this and were concerned with so many students feeling that they have to take this risk. They are openly evaluating potential solutions for overnight parking for those living around the school, as well as potential solutions for commuters who prefer to park in Westdale. One solution is on its way and should be announced within the next couple weeks (they've asked me not to share yet).

### Homecoming

Homecoming at McMaster died with the pandemic. McMaster chose not to host it, but students disagreed, and unfortunately in the process of unsanctioned events, it turned

into and dangerous and destructive event, in large part due to students from other schools attending the event now that it was off campus.

In recent discussions with university administrators, I've continued echoing the message of the previous board, explaining the importance of hosting sanctioned events in homecoming to create a safer and less destructive environment, while also offering students a more enjoyable option on campus. I've been lobbying to bring it back, finally, and talks have been going well.

I've also been working with campus events, while connecting them to athletics and recreation, to ensure that students will be provided with an enjoyable day of events on campus.

### Connections & Relations

Much of my first month has been spent fostering connections and relationships. Within the university, I've gotten the opportunity to meet several significant individuals, including but not nearly limited to the President, several Vice Provosts, several AVPs, departments heads, and more. Within the MSU I've done my best to begin creating relationships with full time staff to ensure they feel a greater sense of connection and are more willing to come to me with anything that may be of concern. Lastly, I've spent a bulk of my time meeting with external individuals who could be of great service. I've gotten to know student union executives from UofT, Waterloo, Brock, Western, and others. We've even already scheduled a visit to Western to better learn how their student union operates to find ways to improve our operations here at the MSU. These relationships will all be highly impactful in one way or another during my tenure as MSU President.

### **Upcoming Priorities**

#### Welcome Week

Welcome week planning is a priority for Campus Events, McMaster, and the MSU every single year over the summer, especially as we get closer and closer to August. Campus events has already started looping in the BoD in terms of out involvement and planning as the event nears.

While welcome week hasn't begun taking up a bulk of our time yet, that will likely change heavily before the next SRA meeting.

#### Athletics & Recreation Event Coordination

To offer students a good product, A&R has to hit the ground running right at the beginning of the school year. Starting with a bang during move in day with the football game, continuing through the school year with consistent coordination with campus events, and hosting large scale events like homecoming through the fall term, there is a lot of coordination that needs to happen. With unprecedented involvement between A&R and Campus Events (as well as other potential clubs and services), there needs to be a middle person to keep coordination high, and that's what I am here to facilitate.

#### SLEF Court Replacement

As discussed above with the unwarranted removal of the SLEF volleyball courts, we hope to get a replacement up and running before the beginning of the school year in September. We are actively pushing university administration to find a solution. We are preparing to ask for a volleyball court, basketball court, tennis court and green space to replace what has now become an unused “temporary” parking lot to make up for the wasted student funds.

Individuals from A&R have informed me of this being a long-time vision of theirs, but not having enough of a voice to create change. They believe that with the respect and connectivity the MSU has, that we will be able to push this project through.

Best,

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