



REPORT

From the office of the...
MSU President

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Jovan Popovic, President
SUBJECT: Presidents Report (Jovan's Version)
DATE: November 7th, 2023

Progress on Year Plan

Food & Beverage is Back!

TwelvEighty is open, The Grind is open, and Union Market is almost there! Following the termination of our contract with third party provider Compass Chartwells after a disappointing year last year, the MSU has officially returned to self-operation. Better food, better prices, better portion sizes, and hopefully as we progress forward, better campus culture and student life.

While the opening has come with some bumps along the way, the opening of such facilities was a substantial accomplishment in such a short time period. While there are still ways to go, I'm very proud of the many staff members that contributed to this.

The opening has also provided a return of various campus events staples, such as trivia nights, karaoke nights, and club nights, all on a regular/reoccurring basis.

SoBi Discussions

In the last few months, Mac Students For Bike Share have taken several meetings with me in an attempt to offer students the opportunity for a heavily reduced in price bike pass. Having sparked some conversations from the previous BoD, we've been trying to figure out the smoothest path to referendum. While an agreement is not yet in place, the MSU is working with the appropriate officials to work towards a potential MoU for a bike pass with an opt out. I have been taking weekly meetings in an effort to continue these efforts.

Student Union Visits

In an attempt to better understand how other student unions run in order to improve our processes, I've taken the time to schedule visits with a couple other student unions. I had an hour and a half long meeting with Sunday Ajak, the President of Western's University Students Council (USC), as well as long in-person visits with executives from the University of Toronto Students Union, and the Brock University Students Union.

In these visits, one of the most eye-opening realizations that has come is the inefficiency of the MSU. We are a very flat organization with lots of red tape, making timelines much longer and project completion much more difficult. While I don't yet have a solution to this, I've begun reviewing internal policy while continuing to schedule consultations with other student unions. I hope to meet with student union executives from Laurier and Waterloo next.

Generative AI Advocacy

This isn't a new topic; you've all seen me write about this in my previous SRA reports. Generative AI continues to be a troubling issue at McMaster University, given the restrictive nature of their new guidelines and policies. I've continued advocating internally, voicing my concerns to various university administrators, including David Farrar. While I've heard from a couple sources that there may be change coming, I have not yet heard anything concrete. I will continue to advocate heavily against the ban in the meantime.

The biggest concern is the decision to turn on Turn It In AI detection software, which according to several sources, is unreliable and inaccurate. The last thing I want to see is innocent students heading to the academic integrity office, but I'm very scared that this is what the future may hold should I be unable to change the mind of administrators.

New Service Evaluation

In wake of the decision to turn on AI detection software at McMaster, Adam (VP Admin) and I have spent time evaluating the potential for a new service centered around academic integrity policy protection. Inspired by a program at Dalhousie that I was made aware of through the legendary Craig Dawdy, we've been attempting to structure a service that provides students going through academic integrity cases a trained student representative who understands the process and policies to aid in defending the accused through their case.

There are still lots of building blocks to go, but we hope to pass this through the SRA within the term so that the service could start in the winter term, alongside the beginning of the AI detection software. Students will need help more than ever, and that's what we're urgently trying to do.

McMaster Master Plan

A couple weeks ago I had the opportunity to see the newly updated master plan, not yet released to the public (to my knowledge) but coming soon. While it was fascinating to see the many significant changes McMaster University hopes to implement in the years ahead, it brought significant concerns as a student leader at a campus known for being a commuter school. The situation for such students was rather bleak, with many on campus parking lots being completely removed, creating a far less accommodating environment. There were various other lesser concerns, but this was obviously the biggest of the bunch. This has become another recent advocacy topic in my many conversations with university administration.

Hiring – 1280, Bridges Coordinator

A large bulk of my time since my last SRA report has been taken for hiring. Hiring for TwelvEighty was critical, given its importance towards the ultimate success of my platform, and the expedited nature of the project in its entirety. Hiring will continue in the coming weeks, as we continue adding more staff in order to further extend hours.

More recently, the last week or so has been filled with interviews for new Bridges coordinators! The space has been closed down for a couple years in the midst of the pandemic. Now, as we look to relaunch the space, we have moved the position under the clubs department, looking to offer clubs a new event space while encouraging the promotion of equity and diversity.

Global Affairs

The sad and unfortunate international conflict in the middle east has casted great effects on the McMaster community. In attempting to understand what students have experienced, hours on hours have been spent of mine, and others in the office towards consulting various student groups. I have spent upwards of 15 hours in meetings in the last two weeks on this issue and this issue only, and that does not include the countless hours of work outside of meetings that has gone into this amongst my team and I.

I will refrain from speaking further on the matter as there will be more detail present under a separate agenda item in this meeting.

Upcoming Priorities

Food & Beverage

As proud of the team as I am for a successful opening, there are still issues that need to be addressed urgently. There are still long wait times, inconsistencies in parties looking to book the venue for private events, staffing issues, opening hour fluctuation and more. I am vigorously working to address these issues amongst the food and beverage team.

On top of this, we are pushing for an opening date of Nov. 13 for Union Market.

HOCO Advocacy

I cannot express my disappointment enough about no HOCO festivities this year after I said several times that it was happening. Following various difficulties with university administration, our announcement continued to be delayed. Eventually, the Instagram Canadian Party Life got to choosing a day before us, and ended up choosing September 30th. There was no football game scheduled for that date, making it incredibly difficult to draw people to campus, and on top of this, it was National Truth and Reconciliation Day, making a planned HOCO celebration inappropriate for us to host.

That said, I do not under any circumstances want to see this happen again next year. I've held several meetings with university administrators to make my stance very firm, and to work with all parties to ensure that an event does happen next year – and not just any event; I want a homecoming.

I am continuing to work with university admin to garner their support (technically we don't need it, but it makes our lives far easier), campus events to begin early planning stages, and external stakeholders such as Councilor Maureen Wilson, who I have a meeting with later this month.

Transparency Campaign(s)

I am a firm believer that the MSU provides great benefit to students. Unfortunately, they don't know that because they know next to nothing about it. It's not necessarily that we hide information – it's all public, anyone can go looking and find the information they want. They shouldn't have to, though. It's our job to clearly communicate this. Alongside the MSU avenue tab that I previously mentioned I would like to initiate, I've also started my own transparency campaign in the MUSC atrium, booking it out for a day at a time, several times in the month of November to provide the BoD members and I regular opportunities to converse with students and get their feedback. On top of this, I've also begun working with campus media, taking on interview opportunities with CFMU to help the student body get to know me, and passing important news along to the Silhouette so that they can make the student body aware of MSU and McMaster initiatives faster.

Presidential Recruitment

This one I'm ready to hit the panic alarm with. I'm of the strong belief that part of the job of the President is to find a good successor. While as of September I believed I had two, that number is currently down to zero. The election is two months away and I have zero candidates which I am aware of. This has me deeply, deeply concerned, and I'm not sure where to turn. I've put significant time into attempting to find someone, usually outside of work hours as well, and have had no luck. I'm very open to any feedback or suggestions, I really need help. The closer we get, the more time I expect to put into this.

Best,

Jovan Popovic

President & CEO

McMaster Students Union

president@msu.mcmaster.ca