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Wade Hemsworth Thu Aug 19 2010 04:30:00 Be the first to Comment

She builds by consensus
Student union CEO new to politics

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

(Aug 19, 2010)

Mary Koziol had spent less than six months in student politics before she ran for -- and won -- the top job in McMaster's student government.

Since May, she has been president and CEO of the McMaster Students Union, a 20,000-member corporation with an annual budget of \$6 million.

That's a steep climb from last October, when she had first dipped her toe into the political pool to represent her program on the student assembly.

Her victory over four other candidates in February's presidential elections made her only the third woman to be elected to the top student job since women became eligible to run in 1959.

"I've always had lot of trouble with people who think that certain jobs or activities are for girls or for guys," Koziol said. "I love being in this position and seeing that there really isn't anything that, as a female, prevents me from doing the job to my full capacity the same as a male would."

Three months into her one-year term, she is nearing the end of the quiet phase of the job -- the learning and

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planning before the students come back for the fall term.

Already comfortable and composed in her work, she is tackling the responsibility with a sensible blend of idealism and pragmatism, mindful that she wants to set achievable goals and leave her successor a stable, functioning organization.

"I try to gather consensus. That requires a lot of compromise on behalf of a lot of different people. My leadership style is listening to different opinions and using those to construct my own."

In her election campaign, Koziol had promised not so much to change the MSU as to improve it in sustainable ways, such as bolstering communications with students and getting better financial performance out of 1280, the student-run pub and restaurant.

She is hoping to introduce a Thursday produce stand to campus this fall to help students eat better and learn about local food.

Koziol took office after a campaign that had made effective use of the Internet and social media, including a Glee-style YouTube video.

She is a vegetarian, an avid reader, an aspiring triathlete and a volunteer who has worked on development projects in India and Thailand. She plans to go back to school after her presidency and hopes to become a physician -- possibly a health economist.

She's an Ottawa native who loves Hamilton and is thinking of settling here permanently, and she believes more McMaster graduates should do the same.

She is 22, worldly but fresh, rereading Craig Kielburger to remind herself of the importance of dreaming big. And she is working hard to keep her eye on the details of her job without losing the horizon.

Her arts and science degree, complete but for a half-course in physics, has fostered her interdisciplinary thinking and intellectual curiosity. She says she likes politics because it demands that all reasonable viewpoints be considered.

"One thing you constantly have to do in this position is not to shut down any perspective," she said, "but to understand why that might be a valid perspective."

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Mary Koziol has been Mac's student union CEO since May.

Cathie Coward, the Hamilton Spectator

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