



REPORT

From the office of the...

Vice President (Education)

TO: Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Spencer Nestico-Semianiw, Vice-President (Education)
SUBJECT: Tuition Task Force Update
DATE: March 1, 2016

Dear Assembly,

Please find below the summary of the Tuition Task Force's work for the 2015-2016 year. I am extremely happy to announce that all 8 of the objectives set forth during the summer term have been accomplished this year, with many of these priorities being exceeded on the provincial side. I am proud to say that this year's advocacy has led to the most effective and tangible advocacy that the MSU has ever known related to financial aid and accessibility, and has led to numerous changes, both McMaster-specific and provincially, that will benefit students for years to come. Please find below the updates on each Tuition Task Force objective, as well as the group's recommendations for next year's team.

1) Tuition Policy Paper - Done

This policy paper, officially titled Tuition & Post-Secondary Affordability, was completed and approved by the SRA last semester, and is currently available for review on the MSU website at: <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/governance/bylaws-policies/general-policies> and specifically here: https://msu-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/assets/attachments/9506/original_Tuition___PSE___Maroon_Paper.pdf. The policy also includes the Maroon Paper at the beginning that summarizes the Principles, Concerns, and Recommendations outlined in the full paper.

2) MSU Bursary - Done

The MSU's VP (Finance), along with the Board of Directors and General Manager, have had extensive discussions about the continuation of the MSU Bursary for the 2016-2017 academic year. As discussed at Executive Board and SRA meetings, there were several concerns with the bursary this year as it was difficult to measure financial need and the money was depleted very early in first term. To mitigate these issues, the MSU will most likely provide the 10,000 in bursary funding to the university to use in its needs-based bursary program, as the university currently uses intensive processes to verify financial need. The MSU is confident that this will ensure the money is being used most effectively to help students in need.

3) Student Financial Assistance - Done

The MSU has completed several tasks related to student financial assistance both on-campus and in the province as a whole. These are listed as follows:

a. Financial aid promotional material

The Vice-President (Education) has worked with the Student Success Centre to develop promotional and informational graphics to be shared over social media related to financial aid timelines for students. These have been shared to ensure students know important dates in OSAP and institutional aid timelines, and will be included in my transition report for next year.

b. MSU Website Updates

The MSU now has a section on the website dedicated towards financial aid. This can be found under the Info tab, titled Student Financial Assistance, and is located here: <https://www.msumcmaster.ca/info/student-financial-assistance>

c. Mac Money Centre Updates

The Vice-President (Education) has identified and compiled financial aid resources specific to vulnerable groups (Indigenous students, students with disabilities, Crown wards) and these are now located on McMaster's Mac Money Centre website, which is an excellent comprehensive financial resource for students. The link to this website is also included on the Student Financial Assistance section of the MSU website.

d. Provincial Budget Changes

The Vice-President (Education), through work with OUSA, were instrumental in bringing about changes to the 2016 provincial budget regarding financial aid. The changes, specifically advocated for by OUSA, are listed below:

- i. Elimination of tuition and education tax credits and transition of savings into upfront grants and student supports
- ii. Decrease in parental contribution for financial aid calculations
- iii. Decrease in spousal contribution for financial aid calculations
- iv. Development of Ontario Student Grant, which more equitably assigns financial aid based on family income, leading to students from families of under 50,000 income receiving grants in excess of average tuition, as well as a majority of students from families of under 83,000 receiving grants in excess of average tuition
- v. Removal of eligibility for OSAP being contingent on attending PSE directly after high school
- vi. Removal of eligibility for OSAP being contingent on consecutive years of PSE attendance
- vii. 97 million investment in supports and outreach for Indigenous students to attend post-secondary education
- viii. OSAP debt cap of 10,000 for higher-income families

To drive home the gravity of these changes, this provincial budget was easily the largest sector win that OUSA has ever had, and has been what many perceive to be one of the most comprehensive and positive changes to Ontario's financial aid system in decades. It's incredibly exciting to see this change introduced after a year of direct OUSA lobbying.

4) & 5) Tuition 101 and Letter-Writing Campaign - Done

These two campaign concepts were amalgamated into OUSA's January 2016 campaign asking for a fully funded tuition freeze. This campaign included several different components related to student engagement, awareness, and advocacy. Each OUSA campus received multiple gloves and laptop stickers with the 'Time Out Tuition' logo to hand out to students, as well as briefs for students to learn more about the campaign. In addition, McMaster's campus used the Advocacy Street Team to engage with students, and the MSU's Street Team, External Affairs, University Affairs, and Education Team shared information and promotional material for the campaign on social media. Lastly, the MSU spearheaded an initiative to have students sign letters addressed to the Premier, Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, and Ministry of Finance, advocating for a fully funded tuition freeze for the upcoming tuition framework. The MSU collected over 1,100 letters in the span of 5 days, and all OUSA schools collected over 3,000 collectively. As a result of the recent budget announcements, OUSA's Steering Committee will be meeting in mid-March to discuss how best to use the letters to advocate successfully during the upcoming tuition framework consultations.

In addition, the OUSA campaign was also successful for the pick-up it received by both local, provincial, and national media. The MSU's Vice-President (Education) was quoted in the Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, and CBC, and participated on-air in CP24. These articles received wide coverage, and were positively received by government officials and students. OUSA's Steering Committee also participated in over a dozen local news stations and campus newspapers. The MSU's Silhouette also made the campaign its front page story. Finally, the campaign received feedback from Ministry and Premier's Office officials to work towards our goals, demonstrating that the campaign effectively voiced student concerns to decision-makers in the province.

6) Needs-based Scholarships - Done

The MSU has made needs-based scholarships and the elimination of interest on deferral tuition payments a priority this year. Regarding needs-based scholarships, the Board of Directors has met with financial aid, the AVP (Students), and the university Registrar to transition merit-based in-course awards, such as the Hooker and Senate scholarships, to McMaster's needs-based bursary program. OUSA has also collected data and research on the benefit to provided needs-based over merit-based aid, which will be used to ensure the faculty Deans are supportive of this change. Moving forward, the MSU is optimistic that approximately 2 million in merit-based aid will be transitioned into the bursary program for next year.

In regards to the interest on deferral tuition payments, the MSU has advocated strongly to ensure fees do not go up. Currently the university is attempting to raise the fee of 35 dollars for two-term billing to 100 dollars, which the MSU has strongly condemned and advocated against. We have brought this issue up to the Provost, the university comptroller, and in meetings with McMaster's President, VPs, and AVPs. We are hopefully that through attendance and advocacy at the Board of Governors we can make sure this fee is not increased.

Lastly, the MSU has included all of these changes in the MSU's first budget submission, which was received extremely positively by the McMaster administration. This has caused the administration to become very interested in providing more needs-based aid, and supporting low-income students.

7) Board of Governors Advocacy - Done

As mentioned in the last Tuition Task Force Update, the MSU's Vice-President (Education) and President presented to the McMaster Board of Governors last semester regarding the MSU's advocacy priorities for the year on tuition, financial aid, and affordability. Below is the summary I included in the previous Tuition Task Force Report:

"The presentation had three parts to it. First, we discussed the context of tuition in Ontario, with particular attention to the ever-increasing burden on students and ever-decreasing contribution from the government. Second, we discussed what the MSU has done around tuition this year, especially with our upcoming tuition campaigns, tuition task force work, and student financial assistance supports. Lastly, and most important, we provided four key steps for the university to take. First, we wanted to see renewed collaboration between the MSU (through the VP Education) and McMaster (through Patrick Deane) on advocating for a fully funded freeze in the next tuition framework. This is because Patrick Deane and I are the Chair and President of COU and OUSA respectively, and can make significant headway if our organizations collaborate. Second, we asked for McMaster to implement an activity-based funding model which makes how tuition is used by the university more transparent to students. Third, we asked for McMaster to eliminate interest on deferral tuition payments, as it provides an additional barrier to students who are already finding it difficult to amass the necessary funds to pay for their education. Lastly, we asked for the university to transition a portion of its funding for merit-based scholarships into needs-based scholarships to provide financial aid on the basis of need and not merit, which is inequitable in its distribution. Overall our presentation was extremely well received, with many Board members commenting on the comprehensiveness of the presentation. Our next steps will now be to meet with the CFO to discuss implementing these changes. "

8) Tuition Research - Done

The MSU is currently developing a report on tuition and financial aid at McMaster that will be released to the wider student body and placed on the MSU website. The report is being developed by the MSU's Provincial and Federal Research Assistant, and will focus on tuition trends at McMaster, financial aid changes such as scholarships and bursaries, student costs including ancillary fees, interest, and two-term billing fees, and impacts of the provincial budget and financial landscape on McMaster students. This report will be an important advocacy piece for incoming student executives, an important informative piece for the student population, and a good research piece for members of the McMaster and broader Ontario environment.

Future of the Tuition Task Force

At the most recent Tuition Task Force meeting the group engaged in a discussion around the future of the task force, and about how to improve upon its work this year. The group decided to recommend to continue the Task Force for the ensuing year, but to limit the group to 3 as opposed to 5 SRA members and 3 as opposed to 5 MSU members. The group believes this change will ensure those elected are more invested in the Task Force and its work and will attend more meetings. The group also would like to include the Advocacy Street Team Coordinator as an official member of the Task Force. In addition, the group suggests that for the incoming Task Force there should be a meeting early in May to plan long-term and broader strategies that the MSU executive will then take on, and in September for projects to be distributed to members to work on. We hope these changes reflect the experience of the current group and will provide even more positive outcomes moving forward.

As always, if you have questions around any of these priorities or other aspects of tuition you would like to see the MSU advocate for, please feel free to reach out before, during, or after the meeting.

Best,

Spencer Nestico-Semianiw
Vice-President (Education)