



REPORT

From the office of the...
**SRA External Affairs
Commissioner**

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Victoria Liu, External Affairs Commissioner
SUBJECT: SRA 16H Report
DATE: October 16th, 2016

NOTE TO THE READER

This report is meant to outline the progress that the External Affairs committee has made throughout the first part of the year. Currently, we have a lot of projects underway, and are excited to start working on new projects, events and initiatives.

I hope that this report provides a comprehensive summary of our progress, but please do not hesitate to ask questions or find out more about the committee.

PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN

Objective 1: Policy Updates

Throughout the first term, the External Affairs Committee is working on the International Students Policy, a policy in progress from the 2015-2016 school year. A small group consisting of External Affairs members Angela Ma, Ezekiel Areghan, Aquino Inigo, and Ryan Deshpande, Annie Yu, representatives from 'The Research Shop', and Esra Bengizi, will be contributing to the policy this upcoming term. Ryan Deshpande will be assuming the role of Policy head this coming term to take on more of a leadership position, and help the team to set their own deadlines and expectations throughout the process. However, work within the team and the role of the policy leader will also be explored considering the dynamics of the group.

So far, the External Affairs Committee has hosted a 'Think Tank' to gather feedback on the existing work on the policy, and generate new ideas. This Think Tank was open to anyone who wanted to contribute ideas towards writing the new policy and was not limited to policy authors. At the think tank we also discussed the structure of policy and what was involved in writing policy to inform all authors, and attendees of what needed to be considered. The due dates involved in the policy writing structure have been discussed, and the team has set their own due dates and roles within the group. They will be revising the old sections of the policy as well as writing new principles, concerns and recommendation focused on acquiring cultural and religious support within the community and increasing the efficacy of internal programming within the university.

The PCR's for this policy paper will have been completed by the 15th of October, and the policy will be complete by October 29th and ready for feedback on November the 12th.

Training for policy writing was completed in partnership with University Affairs Commissioner Meg Hsu in the summer to provide the team with adequate resources to write policy. The authors will also be working in partnership with the research assistants on the education team to produce a well-researched policy paper.

In addition to the International Students Policy, I have been independently working on making small updates to the Access Copyright Policy. The changes are complete, but must be formatted in the existing policy documents, reviewed by the committee, and proposed to the SRA. Hopefully these processes will take place by the end of October so that updates can be made to the policy displayed on the McMaster Students Union website.

Objective 2: Student Housing in the Surrounding McMaster Community + Campaign

This year the External Affairs committee is working to increase positive relationships with the surrounding community. Our first step in this process was accomplished by achieving voting membership on the Ainslie-Wood Westdale Community Association (AWWCA). Alex Wilson, will be the member representing External Affairs at monthly meetings. Furthermore, Balie (Student Community Support Network (SCSN)) and I attended the first monthly meeting in September, and discussed neighbourhood concerns with the community members that were in attendance. This included discussing concerns from the community, and positives about the student-community relationship. Stemming off of these ideas, and long-lasting concerns of the student community, the External Affairs committee in partnership with SCSN, and Advocacy, have discussed preliminary ideas for a student housing campaign focused on neighbourhood relationships.

Preliminary ideas for the campaign include a selfie contest where participants will have the chance to introduce themselves to their neighbours, take a selfie, and be entered to win a prize from a draw. Draw prizes will be created in partnership with local businesses in hopes of involving the neighbourhood in the campaign as well.

I have started to confirm interest within the External Affairs Committee, and so far Alex Wilson, Showvik Saha, Aryan Pour-Bahreini and Baraa Aydan are interested in being involved in the planning. I hope that members can have a larger stake in the planning process to become more involved and invested in planning the campaign. Next steps in the campaign process involve planning further details, connecting with the community and working towards collecting community sponsors, researching into bylaws that contribute to a safer community atmosphere, and planning other activities for the campaign.

The date for the campaign will be the week of November 28th to December 2nd.

Objective 5: Working off of Change Camp Recommendations + Continuing Change Camp

This year plan objective is continuously evolving. Throughout the summer I have been involved in consultations with members of the Change Camp planning committee, and Dave Heidebrecht to discuss the evolving nature of change camp, and how External Affairs could be most involved in the events planned for the year.

The plans for Change Camp's change in structure were confirmed late in the summer, and thus, the plans for External Affairs involvement is also evolving. The goal of the committee's involvement in this initiative was to contribute to the continuous nature of Change Camp and work in a collaborative effort so that initiatives would be more powerful, rather than separate and disjoint.

To work on completing Change Camp recommendations McMaster will partner with the community in Change Camp workshops in the month of November. McMaster in partnership with Mohawk college will be organizing a workshop on Community Engagement and Healthy and safe communities to help to contribute to creating ideas in line with change camp, community and student goals. We are currently in the planning process for this event.

This involvement will help the External Affairs committee to accomplish Change Camp recommendations, as well as help McMaster students and community members to take on recommendations as well.

The idea of a community database was also discussed, in terms of its applicability and ability to be better than existing resources. In efforts to collaborate with existing organizations, and make use of existing resources, the idea of compiling resources or making them more easily accessible has been discussed, but will need further planning or investigation. This has been discussed as an alternative to creating a separate database that may ignore all other efforts of collaboration.

Objective 6: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) Blogs and OUSA Awareness

OUSA awareness is a project that will be focused on throughout the year. On Monday September 26th, the External Affairs Commissioner, Advocacy Director, VP Education, and Federal Provincial Research Assistant attended OUSA training and brought back ideas to share with other members working on related tasks within the McMaster Students Union.

One of the larger tasks that we will be engaging in throughout the year is publishing OUSA blogs. Currently, I have proposed the idea to all members interested in the committee, and have gathered interest from committee members who would like to write one in the future. At the present time, Baraa Aydan is working on writing a blog about accessible transportation to campus from the surrounding Hamilton Area.

The External Affairs committee also has a working and flexible relationship with OUSA communications director, Amanda. Open communication with OUSA allows for feedback on blog ideas, and the ability to post blogs at

variable times throughout the year, keeping in mind that students on the committee may have busy schedules, and would enjoy writing what they are passionate about, rather than having to meet a strict deadline.

SRA member Katie Pita will be working as OUSA blog coordinator in the next months to take on the role of providing feedback on blog ideas, possibly communicating with OUSA, and editing blogs to be posted.

This past week, OUSA general assembly (GA) applications were also reviewed and delegates were chosen. OUSA GA, taking place November 4th-6th will also be a good opportunity for McMaster to advocate for students with the help of a powerful provincial platform. We hope to bring student ideas, and represent the students of McMaster when reviewing policy on Sexual Violence Prevention and Response, Northern and Rural Students, and Ancillary fees.

Objective 7: Federal Advocacy: ADVOCAN

In hopes of attaining an appropriate platform for federal advocacy for the coming years, the External Affairs Committee has been keeping up to date with the decisions regarding federal advocacy.

In November, I will accompany Blake, Justin, and representatives from Laurier to lobby to MPs in Ottawa to make changes to benefit McMaster students.

Objective 8: Municipal Advocacy Week

During this first term, I have been involved in consultations with Labika, the community engagement coordinator, to determine the committee's involvement in Municipal advocacy week. Municipal advocacy week will be held from January 9th to 12th, but planning will take place throughout the first term. At the present, Labika has gathered a lot of research regarding the goals of certain organizations and stakeholders within the Hamilton community.

From the External Affairs point of view, interested individuals have been gathered, and will be helping to connect the dots by identifying objectives of the McMaster Students Union that may align with neighbouring organizations. The goal of this is to make partnerships and consultations during this week effective. Members will also be involved in consultations taking place in January.

Objective 9: Engaging Students (committee and MSU population)

This objective has been of the utmost priority throughout the summer and throughout the month of September as new members join the committee, and the general student population discovers more about the External Affairs.

Throughout the summer and the beginning of the year I have had one on one consultations or private messages with individuals on my committee (voting and nonvoting) to gather their top interests. Throughout the year, I use this information when forming smaller committees to work on projects. However, involvement on projects is not limited to this list, but is reopened to the rest of the committee if they have gathered new interests and would like to try working on new things. For example: from summer consultations, and opening

the opportunity up in meetings, I have gathered a hardworking team of authors for the international students policy: Angela Ma, Ryan Deshpande, Ezekiel Areghan, and Aquino Inigo. Aside from these individuals, the committee has been able to partner with other interested students through the International Students think tank, and students who have approached me to contribute to the paper, with interests that align with the goals of External Affairs including Ezra Bengizi, Annie Yu, and representatives from 'the Research Shop'. Involvement in this project has worked to engage students on the committee who are interested in the project so that their time on the committee is valued, but has also engaged some members of the student population who were not originally involved in External Affairs. Similarly, I have formed groups interested in working on municipal advocacy week, and the student housing campaign, and will soon be forming an interested group to contribute to Change Camp workshop planning.

To engage members within the External Affairs committee I have also worked to assign roles to have members engaged in leadership roles. Some roles that have been assigned so far are:

- Policy Head: Ryan Deshpande - works on editing and leading the subgroups working on policy
- Social Media coordinator: Aquino Inigo - works to engage the student population in External Affairs related activities
- Meeting minute recorders: Labika Ghani + Aquino Inigo (but not limited)
- Community Representative: Alex Wilson - A voting member on the Ainslie-Wood Westdale Community Association and reports to the committee
- OUSA blog coordinator: Katie Pita - Works to engage students in writing blogs to advocate on a provincial level

These roles are meant to help committee members find more value in the committee, and are based off of interests that I have gathered from consultations. They are not limited to voting members. Throughout this first month on the committee I have also tried to break down existing preconceptions that voting members will be more important or take on more of a role than volunteers. Volunteers are encouraged to engage in roles of equal importance and provide a significant contribution to the committee.

Outreach is also something that we have worked on throughout the first part of the year. To make External Affairs accessible to the general student population, the External Affairs page found at msumcmaster.ca is continuously updated and contains all meeting agendas and meeting minutes so that students can access them through their McMaster email. Furthermore, we try to encourage involvement on the committee. Aquino, our social media coordinator, works to update the SRA External Affairs Facebook page with External Affairs opportunities, as well as relevant subject matter. We hope to keep the general student population up to date with the progress of the committee.

This objective will be continuously worked on throughout the year.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

It is clear in the 'Progress on Year Plan' section that a lot of projects are well underway, or in the planning stages. During the summer, not many team projects were taken on due to the fact that it was hard to coordinate meetings with a lot of attendance throughout the break. Instead, the summer was used to prepare for projects to be taken on throughout the year.

Some notable events and projects that have occurred are:

International Students Think Tank

- Hosted Thursday September 29th
- Discussed ideas for International Students Policy with policy authors, representative from the research shop, and other interested students

OUSA General Assembly Interviews + Applications

- Interviews and applications reviewed from October 3rd - October 7th

Creating Edits for Access Copyright

- Completed during the summer
- Feedback throughout the month of September
- The committee will review and pass the changes by the end of October

Engaging the committee

- 1-on-1 messaging and consultations was completed for all members of the committee (including volunteers), and members were familiarized with the idea of OUSA blogs
- Significant roles were assigned to members based on interests

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

There are a few upcoming events, activities and projects that the External Affairs committee is currently planning for. I will outline these below, along with some challenges that we may have throughout the planning and organizational period.

International Students Policy

This policy is currently in progress. Some important dates include:

- October 15, 2016: PCRs completed
- October 29th, 2016: Policy draft complete
- November 12th, 2016: Policy conference for edits
- November 13th, 2016: Policy passing in SRA meeting

There are some challenges to writing this policy. The first, is that this policy is a very large undertaking with many principles, concerns and recommendations. Although work has been done on the policy in the previous year, it will be a challenge to revise the old sections, and ensure that all included material is extremely relevant and concise.

In the past, there has been a low feedback turnout for focus groups discussing the challenges and needs of International Students. Due to this, we have limited data collected, however, we do have data collected from past focus groups. The team has also come well equipped with knowledge on some barriers that International Students face at McMaster through experience, and involvement during welcome week.

The timeline for the policy is quite short, but the committee is organized and is currently working hard to meet all deadlines.

Change Camp Workshop

On Thursday November 17th, 2016 from 7-9pm at One James North, the MSU will be hosting a Change Camp workshop on community engagement and healthy and safe communities in collaboration with Mohawk Students Association and Change Camp.

This workshop will help the External Affairs Committee to accomplish its goals of connecting with the community, by directly involving the students and the community.

Some challenges that may arise throughout the planning period may include: difficulty coordinating meetings with such a diverse team of individuals from different student associations and difficulty with recruiting and following up with participants for the workshop.

To overcome these challenges, organization and communication will be essential so that all parties involved are aware of the planning process. In addition, the planning committee will have to think of new and innovative ways to capture the interest of the city, and the student population to make the workshops a success. This may include promotions through social media, connecting with the city to advertise, and more. The end goal of these workshops is to have participants collaborate to think of creative ways to address Change Camp recommendations from the previous year. It may be a challenge to follow up with participants to ensure that they are carrying out their ideas. To address this, we may need to discuss the role of the facilitator in table discussions, and if they will be following up with participants to encourage ideas to be carried out.

Student Housing Campaign

The Student Housing Campaign will be held during the week of November 28th, 2016 to December 2nd, 2016.

Throughout this campaign, the External Affairs Committee along with SCSN and Advocacy, will be aiming to strengthen relationships between McMaster Students and the surrounding community with 'get to know your neighbour' activities.

We may face a few challenges when organizing this campaign. The first is finding ways to get the community involved. A large part of the campaign is reaching out to the community and finding ways to be a good neighbour, thus it would be beneficial if the campaign was also well received by the

community. The planning committee will have to think of creative ways to engage the neighbourhoods surrounding McMaster. This may be done by partnering with the city of Hamilton, or stakeholders in the surrounding community.

Federal Advocacy

From November 14th, 2016 to November 17th, 2016, I will be accompanying Blake, Justin, and representatives from Laurier University to Ottawa to address student priorities including: students with disabilities, international students and indigenous students. We will be finalizing recommendations and preparing for our visit in the coming weeks.

The MSU has made the decision to advocate on behalf of Laurier and McMaster due to the fact that ADVOCAN would not be addressing what the MSU believes are important student priorities. Although this is the case, it may be a challenge to have the goals of the MSU stand apart from other advocacy initiatives occurring at the same time in Ottawa. To overcome this challenge, we will need to ensure that our asks are well researched, reasonable, and that we emphasize the fact that our institutions know what is best for students.

Municipal Advocacy Week

This event will be taking place from January 9th, 2017 to January 12th, 2017. During this week we hope to partner with the community and discuss similar priorities to form relationships and work towards common goals.

So far, the community engagement coordinator, Labika, has worked extremely hard gathering research and planning for this week in January. We hope to get the External Affairs Committee as involved as possible while doing any upcoming work.

One challenge that we will need to overcome is finding a way to have the committee members as involved as possible. During this week there will be many meetings, and ideally the community engagement coordinator, VP education, or I will attend. It may be difficult to ensure that volunteers get to come to a lot of these meetings based on schedules and the amount of vacant spots that we will have during meetings, so as not to overwhelm members of the community.

We hope that volunteers will be well trained and equipped to take on these meetings so that there is the possibility that new meeting arrangements can be made.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Often times, the role of External Affairs commissioner can be challenging due to the fact that the scope of 'External Affairs' is so vast. One major challenge is that the six hours a week pay that the External Affairs commissioner receives reflects a great underestimation of the responsibilities that the commissioner must take on throughout the year.

This is an issue that has been brought up in previous years from the External Affairs and University Affairs commissioner. This year, the average week (without a significant event) contains 4+ hours of meetings alone without taking on other responsibilities and planning involved in the role of External Affairs commissioner. This past week alone, I have worked upwards of 12 hours due to the presence of OUSA GA interviews. When there are significant events like this, the hours that the commissioner works far exceeds those that are allotted. However, these hours are unavoidable, as these activities are expected to be completed by the External Affairs Commissioner, but hours are not adjusted to reflect these roles.

I would urge the SRA and the Board to reconsider the job description and hours of work allotted to the External Affairs commissioner to keep in mind that those working within the McMaster Students Union are primarily students, and should be compensated for the work put in to benefit students.

Another challenge is finding a time to meet for all committee members. Due to the fact that the External Affairs committee is very large this year, it is often difficult to find a time for everyone to meet, and it has been difficult to keep all members updated and involved throughout this process. To overcome this challenge, meeting minutes have been made accessible to the student population, I often take up the responsibility of informing certain individuals of certain updates if relevant to their role on the committee, and smaller committee meeting times are arranged for projects so that more individuals can be involved.

VOLUNTEERS

Please see 'Progress on Year Plan' Objective 9 for more details on volunteer engagement.

In addition to what is written in the aforementioned section, working with the volunteers on the External Affairs Committee has been a valuable experience. I have made it a point to clarify that there is very little difference between the roles of MSU and SRA members, and volunteers on the committee, so they are offered the same opportunities in meetings.

Through volunteer consultations, I have discovered a little bit more about interests to appropriately place volunteers in positions where they would find the most value. I have also sent out feedback forms through google forms to learn more about interests, other team building opportunities that individuals may want to participate in, and if the team would like to have mid-year consultations to discuss their role on the committee. These questions were asked to try to build team morale, relationships, and ensure that members

have the ability to check in, if that is something that they would like to have the opportunity to take part in.

Overall, there have been no challenges in terms of volunteer dynamics, but I hope that this trend continues. So far the team is willing to contribute ideas, and team comfort is also increasing.

SUCSESSES

The External Affairs Committee has achieved a great number of successes that are clear within the 'Progress on Year Plan section'. I would applaud all committee members for being involved in this exciting process, and being eager to learn more about unfamiliar subjects.

OTHER

Thank you for taking the time to read about the progress that the External Affairs Committee has made thus far. We're excited to move forward with our ideas and initiatives.

If you are interested in finding out more about the committee, feel free to stop by our meetings in the MSU committee room boardroom (MUSC Rm 201) on Mondays from 5:30pm-6:20pm, and make sure to check out our Facebook page, 'SRA External Affairs Committee'.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Liu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Victoria Liu
SRA External Affairs Commissioner
McMaster Students Union
sraexternal@msu.mcmaster.ca