NOTE TO THE READER

This report outlines progress that the External Affairs committee has made throughout the last month (since the presentation of the last report on October 16th, 2016). Currently, we have completed some projects, have some projects in their preliminary stages, and have other projects well underway.

I hope that this report provides a comprehensive summary on our progress specifically in the last month. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or find out more about the committee.

PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN

Objective 1: Policy Updates

Since last SRA report, the International Students Policy has been completed and policy statements have been adopted by the SRA. Huge thanks to all of the authors and contributors on the policy who made this possible. The policy writing structure was quite rigorous this year, and involved many points of feedback and editing, contributing to an overall policy of good quality. One of the main changes within the policy process was the creation of Policy Con. Policy Con was a success, and provided a good chance for students to provide constructive criticism on the policy so that authors could make adjustments surrounding pieces of feedback or even topics that were overlooked.

Within committee meetings feedback was gathered on how to improve the policy writing process for next term’s Indigenous Students Policy. Due to the cramped timeline, we will hopefully be starting work and research on this policy during the next month. Deadlines for next terms policy will hopefully be more spaced out, allowing more time for committee feedback and editing after the main body text is written (within the committee).

The committee is currently gathering interest for the Indigenous Students Policy. We will also be consulting with McMaster Indigenous Students Community Alliance (MISCA), and other representatives of the Indigenous community in the near future.
Objective 2: Student Housing in the Surrounding McMaster Community + Campaign

The Student Housing Campaign or the Students in Neighbourhoods campaign, will be held this following week from November 28th, 2016 to December 2nd, 2016. The External Affairs Committee in partnership with the Student Community Support Network and the Advocacy Street Team, will be excited to host this campaign and have students reach out to the surrounding community.

The team has booked tables for the week of the Nov. 28th to Dec. 2nd to raise awareness about the campaign and provide refrigerator magnets outlining some of the key responsibilities that students often overlook – including minimizing noise, bringing in garbage bins before 7pm on pick up day, and shoveling sidewalks in the winter. This tabling will hopefully engage the student population and raise awareness of some key bylaws that students may overlook.

Promotional packages have also been ordered from underground, including posters describing the campaign, and advertising the selfie campaign that we will be focusing on. This selfie campaign encourages students to introduce themselves to their residential neighbour, and even discuss how they can be a good neighbour. With their neighbour's permission, they can take a selfie and tweet at, or Facebook Advocacy or SCSN with the hashtag: #howmacmetyourneighbour. We're hoping that this activity will not only engage the student population within McMaster affairs, but will also engage students within the community.

At the present, the team is in the process of gaining sponsors from the community to provide incentives for students to reach out to their neighbours. We will be contacting local organizations for contributions to the campaign, and each contribution will be matched with a purchase from the McMaster Students Union to keep with the theme of partnership between students and the community.

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

The Change Camp workshop on community engagement and healthy and safe communities was held on Thursday November 17th, 2016. Goals of the Change Camp X workshop included creating action plans for specific action recommendations, to give students, residents and community partners a chance to network, and to provide supports for participants to move forward with project ideas.

With collaboration from McMaster, Mohawk, Redeemer, and members of the community, this event was a success. The action recommendations that were discussed at the workshop at various tables were:

- Community Front Desk
- Connecting to Neighborhoods
- Interdisciplinary Opportunities for Networking
- Mentorship for Retirees, Students and Residents
• Hosting Events in Different Spaces
• Improving communication channels for community engagements opportunities
• Connect more course based opportunities to community and businesses
• Community Benefit Agreements
• Using existing networks to increase awareness of health and recreation programs
• Pathways for people experiencing marginalization

From discussion at the event, it sounded like some tables were able to come up with clear action plans that were attainable in the short run. Some tables came up with larger activities, while others engaged in discussion for some possible solutions that could be acted upon in the future. There will be two more Change Camp X workshops hosted on November 23rd and November 24th.

Thank you to all of the McMaster students who helped in facilitating and note taking for the day of.

**Objective 6: OUSA blogs and OUSA Awareness**

McMaster representatives had the chance to attend OUSA general assembly from November 4th to 6th. During this time, McMaster delegates were able to provide support and feedback on the following policy papers: Sexual Violence Prevention and Response, Ancillary Fees, and Northern and Rural Students.

In the past couple of months, a few blogs have been published through OUSA from McMaster Students. We are hoping to increase the number of blogs published to OUSA in the coming months. Katie Pita will be working on OUSA blog publicity.

**Objective 7: Federal Advocacy**

Since the MSU's decision leave CASA and stay separate from ADVOCAN, we have joined with the Wilfred Laurier University Students' Union (WLUSU) to advocate on behalf of students on a federal level.

From November 14th to November 16th, the VP education (Blake), MSU President (Justin), representatives from Wilfred Laurier and I had the chance to travel to Ottawa to talk to Members of Parliament (MPs) about issues concerning students. During this time, we focused on 3 major topics, which I will briefly describe.

**Indigenous Students:** The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) is a fund that supports Indigenous students within post-secondary education, however, in 1996 the government placed a 2% growth cap on the program. This cap limits the amount of funding available to Indigenous people seeking to achieve post-secondary education. Consistent with the liberal government's promise during the 2015 Federal Election, we recommended that the federal government remove the 2% funding cap from the PSSSP and contribute the 50 million that they had promised.
**International Students:** The Express Entry program was introduced in 2015 as a means to assist skilled foreign individuals into gaining permanent residence in Canada. However, this Express entry program places international students in direct competition with other skilled workers, resulting in difficulty gaining permanent residency. We recommended that the government amend the Express Entry program to separate international student applications from other applications.

**Students with Disabilities:** These asks focused mainly on providing more assistance to students with temporary disabilities. Our 2 recommendations addressing this were that the federal government should widen eligibility criteria for the Canada Student Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities, to include students with temporary disabilities, and the loan forgiveness benefits and repayment assistance plans offered for students should be extended to include students with temporary disabilities. In addition, we recommended that the government fully reimburse the cost of diagnostic assessment for students with disabilities over the age of 18 to ensure that students have access to diagnostic assessments in order to receive accommodations at their institutions.

Overall our recommendations were well received by MPs and hopefully will play a role in advising governmental decisions.

**Objective 8: Municipal Advocacy Week**

Hamilton Advocacy week will be held the week of January 9th to 12th. Labika, the community engagement coordinator, has currently been working on identifying and booking appointments with relevant stakeholders and politicians.

The committee has worked with Labika to provide feedback, and identify similar priorities of the MSU and the stakeholders identified to be a part of Hamilton Advocacy week.

Planning and discussion for this objective will continue, mostly in partnership with Labika.

**Objective 9: Engaging Students (committee and MSU population)**

Please see October 16th, 2016, SRA 16H Report for the steps that have been taken to engage students and volunteers.

In the next week the committee will be working on engaging the student population within the Students in Neighbourhoods campaign. This is described within Objective 2.

For the upcoming Indigenous Students Policy, I am excited to engage students and organizations from outside of the External Affairs Committee to ensure that this policy is representative of the Indigenous Student population.
PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

See SRA 16H Report for past activities that have been completed. Other past activities and events are described within the Progress on Year Plan section of this report.

Some notable events and projects that have occurred in the past month are:

Policy Con and the completion of the International Students Policy
- Hosted Saturday November 12th, 2016
- Provided feedback for the International Students Policy
- Policy Statements approved by the SRA during the November 13th meeting.

Change Camp X workshop: Community Engagement & Healthy and Safe Communities
- Hosted Thursday Nov. 17th, 2016
- Round table sessions to discuss action recommendations and feasible plans to carry out actions
- Many participants attended

Federal Advocacy Week
- November 14th - 16th, 2016
- Engaged in meetings with MPs in Ottawa
- Advocated on behalf of indigenous students, international students and students with disabilities
- Successful reception from MPs

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

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

Students in Neighbourhoods Campaign
- This campaign will be held from Nov. 28th - Dec. 2nd
- Please see objective 2 under Progress on Year Plan for more details about the campaign

Most of the campaign has been planned. Currently the team is looking into sponsors from the community so that we can offer incentives for students. We do anticipate that gaining student participation will be a challenge during the campaign, as it often is a challenge for many campaigns hosted by the McMaster Students Union. We hope to ensure that tabling will be effective during the campaign to capture student attention when discussing the importance of being a positive presence within the community. We hope to do great outreach through social media to ensure a successful campaign.
**Indigenous Students Policy**
- Body text for policy completed February 25th
- Next Policy Con March 11th

This policy is in the very initial stages which includes reaching out to organizations and students who represent the indigenous community. There are a couple of anticipated challenges for this policy in the coming term.

First, it is difficult to write an informed policy about a student group which a lot of students within the committee do not identify with. To overcome this challenge and ensure that our policy well represents the needs of indigenous students, we will be working with MISCA and Indigenous students who can represent the needs of the community.

Another challenge is that the timeline for writing policy is quite short. To ensure that we have ample time to write the Indigenous Students policy we will start work towards the end of this term, and ensure that we have organization within our policy process so that all timelines are met and that the policy process runs smoothly. We will also incorporate feedback from last policy cycle to ensure that authors have an easier time throughout the policy process.

**Municipal Advocacy Week**
- Please see objective 8 under Progress on Year Plan
- Held during the week of January 9th – 13th 2017

During Hamilton Advocacy Week we will need to find a way to make committee members as involved as possible with adequate training, etc. Labika has hosted a feedback meeting, and has gathered feedback in weekly meetings to get the committee as involved as possible.

Two upcoming campaigns to look out for in term 2 are the Tuition Campaign and the Sustainability Campaign.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES**

As previously mentioned in my last report to the SRA, the role of the External Affairs Commissioner can be challenging due to the vast scope of ‘External Affairs’. I am consistently working upwards of 12 hours per week due to the number of activities that fall under the External Affairs Commissioner job description. Please reference the October 16th SRA 16H report for an example.

I would again recommend to the SRA and the Board to reconsider the job description and the hours of work allotted to the External Affairs Commissioner, and to keep in mind that students should be paid a fair wage for the work that they are contributing, especially if it falls under the job description provided and is expected of the employee to complete. For the following year, I would suggest that the External Affairs role is split into 2 roles: Municipal Affairs and Federal/Provincial Affairs, to evenly split up the work load.

November is also a busy month for the External Affairs Committee. There have been many activities and events that have occurred within the last month.
With an upcoming student housing campaign, the activities will continue. It may be challenging to advertise for the campaign across such a large student population. We would love any support from the SRA in raising awareness about the campaign, so that we can get as many students as possible involved.

**VOLUNTEERS**

Please visit the October 16th SRA 16H report for more details on how volunteers are being engaged throughout the year. Also refer to Objective 9 within Progress on Year Plan for more information.

Volunteer engagement has been a challenge this past month due to the busy midterm season. Some students have not been free for events and some non-mandatory meetings (i.e. for sub-projects), which is understandable because a volunteer is primarily a student before they commit to their role within the External Affairs Committee. It is unfortunate that at this busy time, there are campaigns, projects and events scheduled. The ‘International Students Policy’ was also completed during this busy time, which provided a challenge to authors who had to complete edits and respond to feedback within such a tight timeframe. We will try to make changes to the policy process for next term to avoid such obstacles with volunteer engagement.

**SUCCESSES**

There are many successes that the External Affairs Committee has achieved in such a short time frame! I want to applaud all committee members for being involved in the committee and taking time out of their busy schedules to become engaged in projects. I would also like to congratulate the authors of the International Students Policy and all members (within EA, and outside of EA) who helped to edit, provide feedback, and make this policy a success.

**OTHER**

Thank you for taking the time to read about the progress of the External Affairs Committee. 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,

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