



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## SRA Science Caucus

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TO:	Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM:	Kobina Baiden, Caucus Leader
SUBJECT:	SRA 16M Report
DATE:	March 21st, 2017

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Dear Assembly Members,

On behalf of the entire SRA Science Caucus, we would like to thank each MSU member for taking the time to read our last report of the year. It has been a very rewarding year overall for the science caucus and we have nearly completed every project we've started. Being an SRA member is hard but it is an incredibly important responsibility and I'd like to thank every single SRA member on the science caucus for facing adversity and continuing to improve the lives of science students through the governance side of the MSU. In our final report, I'll be making some highlights as to everything we have accomplished in our terms on the SRA as well as talking about our next steps where transition is concerned and making recommendation to the next caucus on the continuation of some of our projects.

### **PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN**

As a collective this year, we chose to focus on 4 inaugural themes. Academics, student outreach, increasing diversity in governance and working effectively with the McMaster Science Society (MSS). Through efforts like advocating for accessible blended learning, a more teaching focused faculty, and more inquiry based courses we hoped to help science students get more out of their education here at McMaster by making it more enjoyable. We also hoped to improve our social media presence this year by addressing the different student issues within the faculty and reaching out for feedback from students through our partnership with the MSS. Finally, the six of us worked on our own individual projects aside from our caucus platform. We will discuss the progress of each point from our year plan as well as provide recommendations for next year's caucus.

#### **Theme 1: Academics (Working toward Completion)**

We've taken some major leaps toward accomplishing our entire academic pillar. The overall goal was to give students the chance at a more enjoyable classroom experience. These are the academic platform points we worked on during the year:

### Blended Learning (Working toward Completion)

Through working with Joe Kim and the other professors within the departments in the faculty that handle the blended learning components, we've set up a workshop over the summer where these educators will be getting together and discussing the feedback we've gathered from the surveys and events we've held this year to share best practices involving blended learning. The survey we have been working on will be coming out this week and students will be able to fill it out and give us feedback.

*Recommendations:* After the workshop, follow up with the instructors on the changes that will be implemented in their courses for the following year.

### Inquiry Courses (Completed)

There are 3 inquiry courses being developed within specializations for the Life Sciences program hosted in the school of interdisciplinary science. Planned and facilitated a forum over the summer with school's admin in subplan brainstorming. Also, introduced transdisciplinary learning at their Faculty Development workshops.

*Recommendations:* Work with other faculty administration in creating a supplementary application for enrolment within Inquiry Courses across faculties.

### Teaching Focused Education (Completed)

We are waiting to hear back from the dean on how many teaching professors have been hired for next year given the campaign we ran in tandem with the MSS. We hoped to gain an extra teaching staff for each department within the faculty.

*Recommendations:* Work with the MSS and the Faculty again to keep fighting for more teaching staff within the faculty through campaigns, student feedback, and advocacy reports.

### Podcasted Courses (Working toward Completion)

Both Aquino and Ryan made sizable strides on this project earlier in the year, but have since let much of the remaining work fall to the wayside. The primary issue seems to be the lack of knowledge / want from professors to offer this to students. They either a) don't know it exists, or b) don't know how easy it is to set up for their classes, or c) Don't want to use it for privacy and or attendance issues in lecture. As it stands now this issue has been brought up at the Faculty meeting by Mic, and such all the faculty heads know of the ability for courses to be podcasted.

*Recommendations:* Next steps identified by Mic are that we reach out to professors directly regarding this issue. Would most likely want to create a package / letter with evidence based literature on why podcasting is beneficial and why teachers should do it, as well as directing them to Otto to set it up.

### Program on Degree (Not Completed)

After talking with Blake Oliver, the VP Education and Mic Ferguson Associate dean this is a project that will not be able to happen this year because it is not in the jurisdiction of the SRA to accomplish and needs to come from the VP Academics.

*Recommendations:* Work with the New VP Academic as well as the incoming Academic Council to see if there is an interest in this and then advocate to the respective departments within the university.

### **Theme 2: Diversity/Representation in Governance (Completed)**

Over the course of the year we worked with the newly renamed Governance & You on this platform point by hosting the MSU How to workshop weekend. We also tried emphasizing the importance of diversity in governance online as well through social media.

#### MSU: A How to

Through this event as well as the online campaign we addressed the barriers students faced during elections and encouraged as many science students as we could to run for SRA despite these barriers. This conference is something we hope to see happen again next year on a larger scale to allow students the understanding of the internal working of the MSU and how they can get involved with student governance.

*Recommendations:* We believe this conference is something that should be run again next year through Governance & You as well as keeping up the online promotional campaign on raising awareness to barriers students face in MSU politics and other elections on campus.

### **Theme 3: Outreach (Completed)**

This year we worked on improving our outreach through a vast amount of avenues and ideas. Here are some of the plans we worked on this year as well as recommendations for next year's team.

#### SRA Science Newsletter

Each month the Science caucus had planned to release a newsletter informing students of what's going on within the MSU, what we have been up to in terms of platform points, and what they can look forward to with regards to the SRA meetings. As part of our outreach pillar we worked with the MSS Graphic Designer to create these pages for us and released our first one in term one.

*Recommendations:* Although this is a project that wasn't able to be carried through due to caucus retention the template is still available and the components of what should go in the contents of the newsletter are outlined in our year plans and meeting minutes. I would strongly encourage the incoming science caucus to continue this project as a way of capturing the attention of students.

#### Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

Our social media outreach has greatly improved since the start of the term and we are working on a new/better promotional strategy for future SRA members to have. We are also in the process of discussing how our outreach hours will be structured next term since we are not seeing their value at this point.

*Recommendations:* I would suggest having contests involving a snack of some sort (i.e. like our page and get a free coffee or cupcake) a promotional event that has students able to see more of the SRA or even sponsoring our facebook posts is something we should consider that wouldn't be too expensive and increase our outreach to students as well.

#### Open Meetings

This year we hoped to get students more involved with SRA Science by having open meetings. These meetings were set to take place an hour before our caucus meetings and during a time science students would be available. We would be discussing platform points, things student want to see from the SRA, their opinions on our discussion topics for the week in SRA meetings and assisting in the implementation of platform points of their interest.

*Recommendations:* Although this was a project we attempted to start at the beginning of the term, doing it closer to when the SRA elections were coming was a much better time for it due to student retention with SRA. I think in the future this could be something that happens and engages a lot of science students interested in governance in good discussions but SRA needs to work on building it repor with science students so they are willing to attend. We should also be taking a more critical look at outreach hours and seeing if we can make a better use of them. My recommendation would be to get rid of them and find other creative ways to engage with science students by working with the MSS.

#### **Theme 4: Working with the MSS (Completed)**

This year, our working relationship with the McMaster Science Society was done through a variety of different avenues and we attended as many MSS events as we could to reach out to students and let them know who their SRA representatives were (i.e General Assembly).

#### Dean Meetings

In working with the MSS President, Patricia Kousoulas, we were able to sit in on meetings with the Dean and the Associate Dean of Science and really advocate to them on behalf of science students as well as work on a lot of our academic oriented platforms.

*Recommendations:* This is something I highly recommend for next year although it is a discussion to have with the President Elect Connor MacLean on whether or not he feels the entire caucus should be present. My compromise would be to allow only the caucus leader then to sit in on the dean meetings and discuss the academic platforms on behalf of the science caucus.

## Campaigns

We ran multiple science based campaigns alongside the MSS this year (i.e Teaching Focused Campaign, Course Evals, What it Means to Be a Science Student Today)

*Recommendations:* My hope is that next year these campaigns continue as a collaboration with the VP Academic and the MSS President.

## Working with the President & VP Academic

As the caucus leader, I had biweekly meeting with both the President and the VP Academic separately. In the case of the president, we would talk about issues from the science student perspective and discuss what would best benefit science students coming from the governance side and with the VP Academic it was to collaborate on academic platform points. We also worked with the communications team to have our own website on the MSS page with all our information and platforms since their website gets more traction than ours does.

*Recommendations:* My hope is that the incoming caucus leader with continue these relationships for the following year. I feel as though the SRA doesn't always ask nor do they value student input and feedback as much as they should on the issues we vote on. As well as update our webpage on the MSS website for next year

## **PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

Over the course of the year, the science caucus has worked diligently toward increasing our social media presence to allow more science students to engage with the SRA. We found that our media strategies via online videos and pictures was a very powerful way to get the attention of our constituents. We worked with different groups on campus such as Governance & You, University Affairs Committee, Operations Committee, and Macademics for a lot of our personal platform points that were separate from the caucus ones. We also held an information session for student interested in running for the SRA to ask us any questions. We also worked with the MSS on most of our academic platforms. Most recently, we've completed the blended learning survey and will be sending it out to science students this week to gather their feedback for this summer's workshop.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

### Transition for incoming SRA

I have read through each of the incoming SRA Science members platforms and will be meeting up with them individually to discuss tangibility and how they can go about these ideas throughout the summer and during the year. I'll be working with them to create their own projected timelines. We are hoping to have a transition meeting with the entire caucus (old and new) to discuss what it means to be an SRA member and what the year will look like as well as how to overcome some of the challenges they may face. I'm currently working on a caucus transition report that will combine all of these things that we will be discussing in our meeting to be completed sometime before

the first meeting.

#### Blended Learning

As mentioned earlier, we'll be working with Joe Kim to host a summer workshop on sharing best practices involved blended learning and improving the models for each of the courses that are blended learning focused in science. We will be gathering feedback through the survey we have created this week.

### CHALLENGES OVERALL

#### Caucus Retention

This year due to the schedules and responsibilities of our caucus members, it was difficult to not only find a suitable time that worked for everyone to meet up but to also stay active on project that were continual like the Newsletter and the video posts. We started out very well but closer to the end of term 1 and the start of term 2 it was harder to schedule meetings.

#### Accountability

In tandem with caucus retention, this year we faced some challenges where accountability of our members was difficult to deal with at time due to personal life situations or school commitments.

*Recommendations:* The school year can get quite busy and hard at times there's no doubt about it but I think it's important to work as a team and be able to rely and depend on other members of the caucus when something cannot be completed in a timely manner. There are somethings that are unavoidable but I believe they are scenarios and unforeseen things that should be discussed about in the first couple of meetings for next year so everyone has a sort of protocol to refer back to when these challenges do become an issue.

### SUCSESSES

In this section of the report I'll be making reference to this year's highlights as a whole which include:

#### *Opening of the new Science Lounge*

The MSS opened its Brand New Lounge on the 3rd floor of BSB!

#### *Extended Thode Hours*

Meg and the UA committee along with our caucus members are working on grants for next year to extend Thode library hours to 3am!

#### *Faculty Connection through MSS*

This was the first year SRA got to sit in on the MSS meetings with the dean and advocate directly to the faculty on behalf of science students and introduce them to the SRA!

*Welcome Week Representation*

This year SRA Science was included as part of welcome week during faculty day!

*Blended Learning Summer Workshop*

This summer we are hosting a workshop alongside Joe Kim to improve blended learning in science!

*Podcasted Courses*

After a lot of work and research there are going to be some courses that are podcasted for next year!

*More Teaching Stream Faculty*

Although we are not sure of the numbers, the faculty is hiring more teaching staff and is well aware of the issue of teaching stream professors.

*Improved Outreach*

We've reached a bit over 1000 likes on our facebook page! As well as saw the most diversity ever in this year's SRA Science election and its caucus.

**OTHER**

Being an SRA member is hard but rewarding. It takes a great amount of courage to run a campaign and then work on a bunch of platform points throughout the year. This year has definitely been a challenging but successful year for the science caucus. We have overcome many barriers this year and I'm grateful to have worked with such dedicated and critical caucus members who've allowed me to grow and change so much over the course of the year. Although we may not always agree on everything we foster an environment for real discussion and having the input and ideas of everyone on this caucus is what makes science such a successful caucus every year. I'd like to thank everyone for taking the time to read our last report and I want to congratulate the incoming science caucus: Aqeel, Sabrin, Rabeena, Sinthu, Alex, and Sabra. I'm excited for you to represent science students in the best way possible. I'd also like to congratulate and thank this year's candidates as a whole and I highly encourage them to get involved as voting members on the Standing Committees we all sit on. The Student Representative Assembly- Science Caucus will always be a place for any science student to voice their concerns and have their voice heard. I wish the incoming caucus the best of luck with the upcoming VP Elections.

Warmest Regards,

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