



REPORT

From the office of the...
President

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Ikram Farah, President
SUBJECT: SRA 18O Report
DATE: February 24th, 2019

In progress:

Outlets
Lighting on Campus

Supporting SAS:

SAS courtesy cards have been given to the department. However, support for this body will continue further from additionally supporting their incentives. I will be meeting with Michelle Barr who is the new Transition Program Coordinator for SAS and we will be discussing how the MSU and SAS can collaborate.

Extended Go Services:

I have been notified from our university stakeholders that Go transit has enhanced service and have made some time changes to our 407 services which include going through the trips going through Mac. Earlier in the year, members from Go came to McMaster and surveyed and assisted commuters. Our Maroon representatives were able to assist them in this process. As I wait to get further clarification on the *specific* changes, it was communicated to me that Go has added earlier morning and later evening service. One more notable change is that more express trips have been added and they have and will continue to work to improve the afternoon departure times. I am very excited about this and that Go for commuters will continue to be a priority even after my departure.

MSAF:

From my campaign, I wanted to address the MSAF in the following ways:

- Clarify the current policy which states that the MSAF can be used to cover work missed in the 3-day period. What we want to do is clarify that this is 3 business days as there are inconsistencies in the interpretation by instructors.
- In addition, Students have communicated that they would like to know prior to their submission of an MSAF, how much time they would be given.

While there are plenty of details towards the MSAF and the way it is administered. We will not only focus on those two despite it being the campaign highlights. We will be working with university stakeholders and evaluate this form as a whole as it has been a support for students. While we recognize and I have continued to express that the MSAF

is a part of a larger issue pertaining towards accessibility in post-secondary education, it is important that this tool is most effective to the students who use it.

The MSU will be represented at a panel this upcoming Wednesday with students and faculty and we will be addressing the student concerns on this matter. In addition, I will be working with Student Affairs to ensure that this is a priority with their continued strategies to improve mental health on campus and increase support for students. On that note...

Re-Examining Exams:

In addition to in-classroom support such as evaluating the MSAF, I have and will continue to work with the office of Student Affairs regarding the Re-Examining Exams objective. In my last report, I noted it under “Objectives to be Revisited” and this semester the Student Affairs team will be assessing in-classroom support for students. This will include but is not limited to, examinations and scheduling as well the MSAF. This is still in progress but I will be meeting with Catherine Munn, lead psychiatrist and assistant clinical professor to continue these objectives. Given that this is addressing a multitude of issues, I do not anticipate we will see exam schedules shuffled for the winter semester; however, I am confident that I will be leaving with a successful foundation for future executives of the MSU.

Earlier Bursaries

Bursaries came out earlier (well, some). First, I'd like to note and thank Tracie Long and the rest of her team in the office of Financial Aid. The bursaries that were let out earlier were the Student Access Grant(SAG). Approximately 8 million dollars on November 28th, 2018 were distributed to 3,000 undergraduate students. For more information on the SAG and who qualifies, take a look here:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-apply-osap#section-2>. In short, the SAG is typically for students in professional programs as (depending on their application), OSAP does not cover their full cost of the education as it is a more expensive program to run and attend. Logistically, it was communicated to me that SFAS processed payments to students a SAG requirement of \$100 or more, and who had completed their required OSAP income update. These are the students who received their funding in November. It was also noted that students who did not meet all the requirements payment for November, will be assessed in January through February, during the general bursary allocation process. I cannot take any credit for the money that was distributed earlier in November. While my objective was to release bursary funding earlier, during the campaign I focused on the February date. With that, I have been in constant communication with the folks from SFAS and whether them distributing their funds for the SAG students earlier would allow for an easier flow for the students to receive their funding in the second semester sooner than February. At this time, it was not as early as we expected as the timeline I was hoping for was closer to the beginning of the semester to ensure that students had the funds they needed to pay for their second-semester necessities.

In addition, I will be meeting with members of financial aid to discuss opportunities to make their website mobile friendly for easier access for students, automated matching for award eligibility (students to complete a profile with their background, involvement, etc.

and it will filter to match them to aware to increase awareness and applications) and much more. Special thanks to the University Affairs committee for bringing forward their ideas to me during my meetings. Their work is reflected and had influenced the agenda of this meeting and we will continue to prioritize it.

At this time, I have a follow-up chat with Tracie Long to determine what their team has determined moving forward. However, I am very pleased about the other successes our team has been able to achieve in conjunction with their office.

Supporting Student Accessibility Services:

Due to some logistical errors and coordination, we will be giving out SAS courtesy cards for the new year. While my intention was to give them out earlier, I am working with the office of Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to better promote these cards as incentives. For example, at the beginning of the year professors who would need a note-taker would just mention there is a note-taker needed. Often times the incentive of a reference letter is barely mentioned. This time, I will be working with SAS to ensure that the classes that need a note-taker will be provided with a slide that lists the incentives within the MSU courtesy cards in addition to the reference letters. This small change of plans can have a whirlwind of effects and I am grateful for this partnership.

Lighting off Campus:

I mentioned in my previous report that due to the election, the transition period of what was being worked on with Aidan and what we will continue to work on with Maureen would be a bit delayed. One area in specific is the lighting off campus objective. It was noted last time that I was waiting to hear back from the Senior Project Manager of Street Lighting and Electrical; fortunately, he was able to provide me with the following:

Based on the lighting areas that needed improvement that I brought forward, they went through a detailed analysis. Based on this analysis, they developed options and a plan. As of February 7th, 2019 they completed the upgrade of the lighting and a summary of what was completed is the following:

- Installed 21 new street lights across Thorndale, Leland, Bowman, Stroud and Cline. These new lights are in addition to the existing street lights, and infilled gaps in the lighting to improve sidewalk and roadway visibility.
- Examined the lighting concerns on Emerson and Haddon and determined that the existing lighting conditions are adequate. This decision was based on computer modelling and on-site light measurement and verification.
- They communicated to me that the concerns respecting lighting conditions on Sterling and Saunders are valid, however, to make improvements we need to undertake a larger planned process as existing infrastructure cannot easily support additional lighting. It was noted that they will engage with Councilor Wilson about this and develop some options for the future.

In addition, the MSU included lighting as a part of the budget submission and as a part of our advocacy, we will be able to specify that Sterling and Saunders are remained a priority, in addition to the areas that were not reviewed. More to be done but still a great success. If there are any comments for the future and any more improvements to be made, feel free to message me and I will direct them to the project manager.

Food on Campus:

Tax-Free Tuesdays/Cheaper Food Options

As you are aware, Tax-Free Tuesdays occurred in November at La Piazza. Chris Roberts and I had a follow-up meeting in the near year to determine the next steps of this initiative and moving from a pilot to have it permanently incorporated within hospitality services. While at the student level it was a success and there was overwhelmingly positive feedback towards this, financially, it was not the best for the department. As I continue my discussion with Chris Roberts there are still high hopes for this initiative to be engraved within hospitality services as there is a shared commitment to making food on campus more affordable for students and in these discussions we are brainstorming new initiatives to attack food prices on campus.

International Student Support

two objectives to address increased support was to address the cost of tuition and first-year transition. While I will highlight the cost of tuition piece below under challenges, I wanted to touch on the international student shuttle bus for orientation week objective. As the plans for next years, welcome week is slowly starting to develop in the coming months, this is perfect timing to circle back with this initiative. In addition to those objectives, I have made it a priority to connect with the students of MELD program (McMaster English Language Development Office) and we are setting up a series of meetings to discuss additional support the MSU can provide to this group.

Challenges:

The past couple of weeks have been quite difficult regarding the Provincial Governments announcement on January 17th to decrease funding to the OSAP program and their directive to student unions, specifically the Student Choice Initiative. The Board and I have and will continue to resist these changes. Over the past couple of weeks, we have been meeting and setting up meetings with Members of Provincial Parliament. In the coming weeks, we have several meetings as well. From a reporting standpoint, this leaves the two goals I had during the campaign completely up in the air.

Provincial Advocacy Goals:

1. Tuition for International Students
2. Program-Based OSAP (Professional Students Program Support)

The priority here regarding the OSAP changes is to support students who require financial aid as it provides not only access to post-secondary but predictability, inclusion and ease for students who rely on this program. These changes are dangerous and are targeted at those who need it the most. We as a Board are continuing to meet with concerned students and I invite each and every one of you to be a part of this process with us as well.

On the Students Choice Initiative (SCI), Scott, John and Maggie will be meeting with PTMs and Full-time staff of the MSU in the coming weeks to discuss their budgets. Faculty Societies are informed on their processes moving forward. We have also

coordinated communication with the University and these groups. Josephine and the club's department are continuing to field concerned student groups also.

Additional challenges are pertaining to the communication piece to students. Some students may not truly see this as something that will affect them and the impacts are ambiguous to the average student, with that in mind we are pushing messaging in ensuring that this dialogue is continuing and folks that are aware.

Another challenge is timeline. As our terms come to an end we are also diligently working towards successful transitions with the next elected leadership. At this time, we are working with our university partners to determine what is deemed an "essential" service and seeking further clarification on their autonomy to make these decisions.

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