**Huzaifa outlines recent additions to the MSU’s policy bank**

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The MSU has a long standing tradition of research and policy intensive approach to looking at various post-secondary education issues. To continue that trend, following on election last year, I made it a priority to ensure our own internal policy bank to support the self-regulated approach our bodies work under the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). While most of the policies from these two groups are extensive in their scope and utilized by the MSU for our own internal and external lobbying efforts, each campus operate within their own unique environment that needs to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, there are many issues that don’t often make it into the limited number of projects worked upon by our external partners. For example, last year the MSU passed our own Tuition Policy, as well as a research report on Near Campus Neighborhoods that are now part of our own unique environment that needs to be acknowledged also need to be given maintenance for completion and the Current Replacement Value (CRV) of the building. The lower the CRV, the better the condition of the building or portfolio. McMaster has one of the highest CRV ratio in the province (79%). Thus, the actual overall deferred maintenance rate for the University is estimated to be around $150 million, of which $50 million is in critical phase, needing replacement within a year according to McMaster Facility Services.

Deferred maintenance is defined as maintenance that has been “deferred on a planned or unanticipated basis to a future budget cycle; or postponed until funds are available.” McMaster’s deferred maintenance backlog is quantified through the identification of maintenance deficiencies through formal facility inventory inspections. During these inspections, maintenance deficiencies are observed and identified; in some cases a priority rating is obtained. The commonly used priority rating index is called a Facility Condition Index (FCI) which is calculated as a ratio of the value of deficiencies deferred maintenance required for completion and the Current Replacement Value (CRV) of the building. The lower the FCI, the better the condition of the building or portfolio. McMaster has one of the highest FCI ratios in the province (79%). Similarly, deferred maintenance for campus buildings should be at $25.5 million. In 2011, Facility Services was only allocated total of $2.15 million for deferred maintenance, which represents just over 8% of the required industry-standard funding level. The paper officially recommended that the province and University continue their funding of approximately $12.65 million per year to allow Facility Services to focus on critical DSM requirements, while preventing the sadness of failure of building components. The paper has already been noticed by the province and University and will be pushing it to various autres.

Turning now to the paper on Aboriginal Students, the policy is particularly relevant in light of the recent McMaster social movement regarding Aboriginal rights. Via our membership with CASA, MSU delegates have highlighted on Aboriginal issues with MPs in Ottawa for the past few years. We have also held multiple focus groups to support OUSA’s 2011 Aboriginal Students policy paper. The paper recognizes that Aboriginal students face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation in higher education, which are addressed in a variety of recommendations and criticisms surrounding governmental funding, financial aid, institutional racism and student support services.

One of particular note is a major recommendation for the federal government to lift a 2% funding cap on post-secondary student support and expand the Aboriginal bursary program. On the provincial front, it calls on the government to modify the “30% OFF” ratio grant to be more accommodating towards Aboriginal students. As the McMaster leader, we believe that the University should allocate a long term plan for sustainable and reliable funding for necessary Aboriginal student support services, as the office is currently maximizing staffing levels and facilitating a number of activities with an uncertain future.

In the upcoming months we hope to further expand the bank by adding a response to the Forward with Integrity project. Ancillary fees, mental health and more. Feel free to contact us if you would like to get involved in any of these projects.