

the PRESIDENT'S PAGE



Spencer Graham
VP Education

vped@msu.mcmaster.ca
ext. 24017

MSU Advocacy: Making Student Voices Heard

Universities and government are intrinsically linked with one another. Many aspects of student life are impacted by government decisions, such as the cost of tuition, the quality of education, and financial aid. The MSU advocates on behalf of students through two lobbying organizations, OUSA (*Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*) and CASA (*Canadian Alliance of Student Associations*).

To ensure that the priorities of OUSA and CASA are aligned with student needs, every issue and position is decided by students at general meetings. November is a busy month for advocacy and government relations, with OUSA General Assembly (GA) wrapping up last week and CASA Advocacy Week starting this coming Monday in Ottawa.

At OUSA GA, we debate and discuss policy on a semi-annual basis. On the weekend of October 31 – November 3, the MSU brought seven student delegates to Western University for OUSA's Fall GA. By Sunday afternoon, delegates voted to pass each policy with a bunch of fresh new ideas regarding ancillary fees, student success, and access to university.

OUSA's updated *Ancillary Fees* policy takes new stances against universities being exempt from the *Ancillary Fees Protocol* in the cases of system-wide fees and vendor exemptions. Our policy also expresses strong concerns about Access Copyright, in the wake of recent Supreme Court rulings on fair dealing of copyrighted material. Another notable addition to OUSA's *Ancillary Fees* policy is recommending more proactive oversight of unfair ancillary fees levied to students within individual courses.

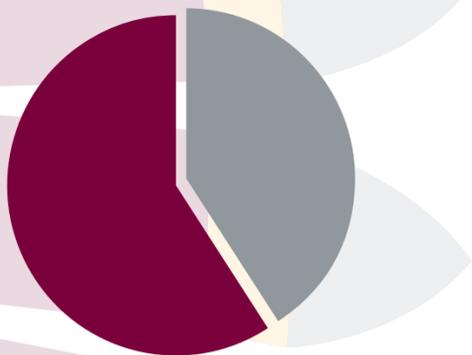
Student Success was the policy that I co-authored, and is the cornerstone of OUSA's lobbying on quality of education. It provides a vision of the optimal university learning experience. A notable addition to the policy was expanding our expectations for university/government support of the broader learning environment (e.g. for-credit experiential education, undergraduate research, and service learning). OUSA also adopted a stance on increased resources and support for TA training and new faculty members.

Finally, OUSA GA adopted another highly important policy, a *Comprehensive Access Strategy*. There can be significant barriers to enrolling and completing post-secondary education, particularly for underrepresented groups such as Aboriginal or low-income individuals. One of the most significant policy additions at GA was the recommendation to eliminate high-school streaming into academic/university and applied/college courses, as this sorting of students currently has major negative effects on university attainment rates for many groups.

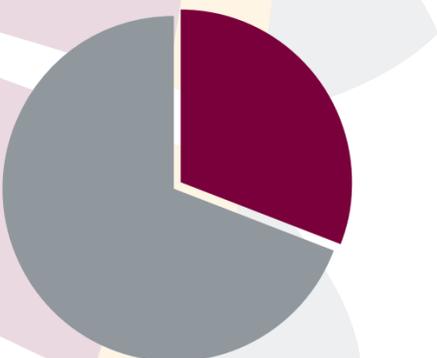
Switching gears from policy to advocacy, David Campbell and I will be heading up to Parliament Hill next week for CASA Advocacy Week. Advocacy Week gives student representatives the opportunity to speak directly with federal decision-makers. The narrative for Advocacy Week 2013 is *'Setting the Access Agenda'*. Students will be making recommendations to the federal government on supporting student loans, grants, and helping to cover additional costs of learning.

For example, did you know that the maximum weekly loan limit for students hasn't changed since 2004 (almost 10 years ago)? Student grants haven't kept up with inflation either. Tuition and costs of living have increased dramatically in this time, yet students have received proportionally less each year. Making sure that students can cover their living expenses is a chief priority for the MSU and CASA, and this will only be achieved by modernizing grant and loan allocations for students. We will make sure that MPs, ministers, senators, and federal bureaucrats hear student concerns, and inspire action for change at CASA Advocacy Week.

Your voice matters when it comes to advocating on student issues. If you have any questions about the MSU's lobbying efforts or government relations, please contact me via email at vped@msu.mcmaster.ca or call me at **905-525-9140 x24017**.



59% of students cannot rely on government assistance alone to finance their education.



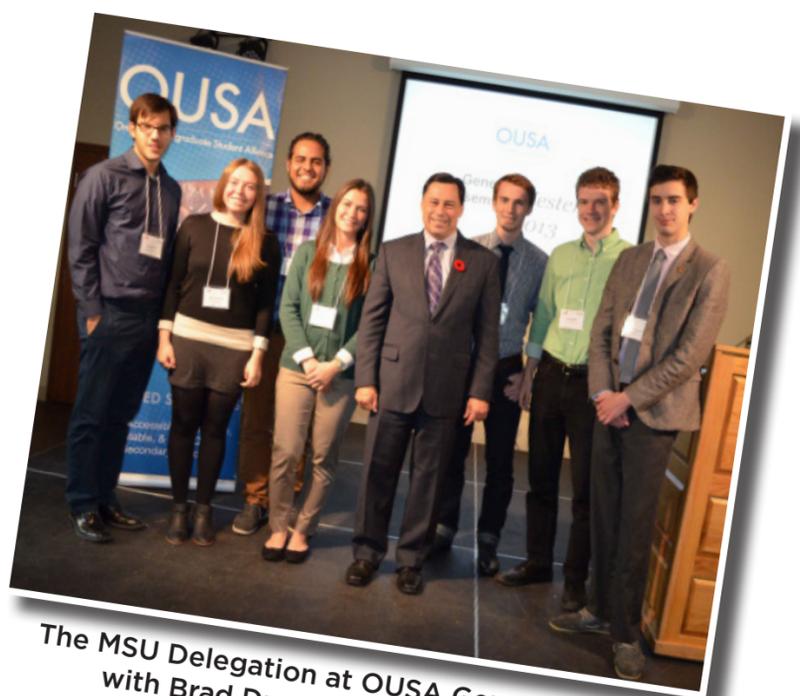
33% of students graduate with more than \$20,000 in debt.

17.5%

The amount that the cost of living has increased since 2004.

0.00%

The amount that the weekly loan limit of the Canada Student Loans Program has increased since 2004.



The MSU Delegation at OUSA General Assembly with Brad Duguid, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities



Spencer Graham
VP (Education)

David Campbell
President

Anna D'Angela
VP (Administration)

Jeff Doucet
VP (Finance)



The President's Page is sponsored by the McMaster Students Union. It is a space used to communicate with the student body about the projects, goals and agenda of the MSU Board of Directors.

www.msumcmaster.ca