

the PRESIDENT'S PAGE

MSU Driving Results Through Advocacy



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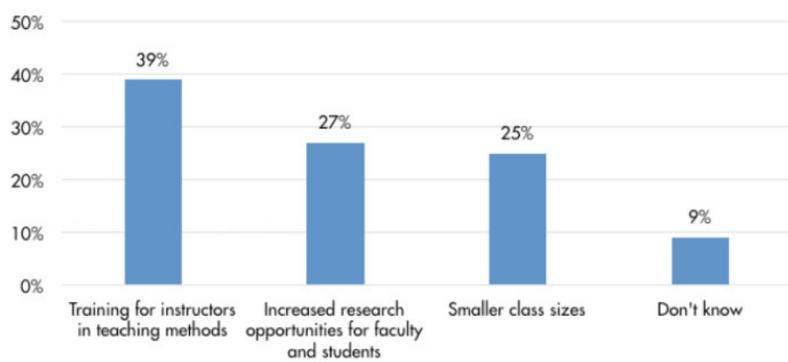
As the year comes to a close, I would like to highlight how the MSU and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) continue to bring value to undergraduates, as we advocate on behalf of McMaster students. Together, OUSA and the MSU are continuing to pursue a shift from tuition tax credits to up-front grants for students. Ontario's current system of tax credits disadvantages those who need financial assistance the most. The province has an obligation to reduce staggering student debt and ensure that no student in Ontario has unmet needs throughout the year. OUSA continues to inform the provincial government that it's time to reallocate the \$340M spent annually on tax credits, into up-front, needs-based grants programs.

Just last week, we made our position on tax credits abundantly clear at the OUSA roundtable on Student Financial Assistance. Hosted by the Brock University Students Union (BUSU), our roundtable brought university and college students together with Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities staff and financial aid administrators to talk about the current state of financial assistance in Ontario. We brought up the fact that thousands of students are not given enough assistance to afford tuition, rent (especially in urban areas), and food. Furthermore, we highlighted that the OSAP appeal process is arduous and ineffective for students who are struggling to even meet their basic needs.

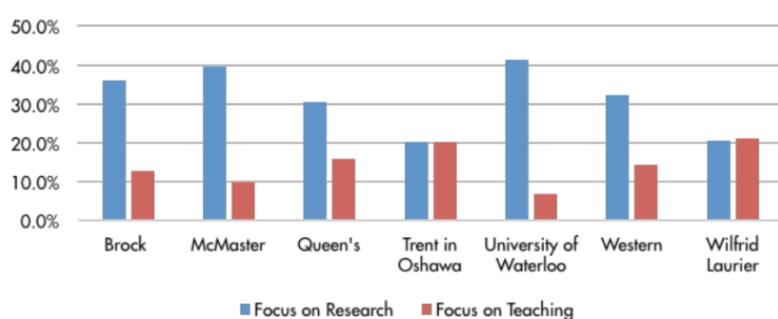
Student Financial Assistance at Brock was only one of three roundtables I participated in last week. At the roundtable on Youth Employment at Wilfred Laurier University, I spoke to the importance of experiential learning and emphasized that universities should be accelerating toward this goal. The MSU also hosted a highly successful roundtable on Teaching & Learning at McMaster, which gave students the opportunity to share thoughts on instructor preparation, online education, and addressing the scarce resources that are a result of underfunded universities.

OUSA's work continues outside of meetings and roundtables. Our daily blogs at OUSA are highly read across the post-secondary sector. In the past few weeks, our members have written about the lack of bilingual programming at Ontario universities, analyzing gender inequalities in PSE, as well as the First Nations Education Act (FNSEA). I wrote a critique of the university rankings published by Maclean's and Time. Our blogs are incredibly good reads; I highly recommend you check them out at ousa.ca, and follow @OUSA on Twitter to stay up-to-date.

Remember the OUSA Student Survey you filled out last semester? Last week, we published a report using the results entitled *Beyond the Traditional Classroom: Teaching & Learning in Contemporary Higher Education*. Among many other things, the report shows that the vast majority of students want more active learning elements inside the classroom, and that training for instructors is critically important. McMaster students also reported that the imbalance between teaching and research still exists.



Choice of Initiative in Which to Direct Resources (Source: OUSA)



Focus on Research or Teaching by University (Source: OUSA)

In a similar vein, having our voices heard by our federal government is just as imperative as work done on the provincial level. It is important that students have input on issues and programs such as the Canada Student Grants/Loans Program, the Canada Social Transfer to the provinces for education, or the federal government's responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. You may have heard that the MSU is considering a drop down to Associate Membership in the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). The Student Representative Assembly (SRA) will be discussing and deciding on this action at our March 30th meeting, and it's important that students understand why.

CASA is currently the best student federal lobbying association, but it has significant shortcomings in effectiveness. Year after year, students see little government action on our priorities, and we seem to repeat history by asking for the same things. As such, we're concerned about the value that CASA currently provides to McMaster students. We want to give ourselves the flexibility to explore alternative ways of undertaking federal advocacy, while signalling a growing discontent with CASA's status quo.

Other CASA members have noticed this too, and together we've identified key areas of improvement for the organization. These include fairer voting/representation of students, policy reform, a greater presence in the public sphere, and the flexibility of CASA leadership. As Associate Members, the MSU would be advancing many of these changes from within the organization, while also watching with a keen eye to monitor progress and results for students. As the MSU is a fee-paying member of CASA, it's our responsibility to ensure that students are getting value from membership within the organization. Moving forward, advocacy at all levels of government will continue to be a top priority of the McMaster Students Union.



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