

---

## **2014 Transition Report**

### **Vice-President (Education)**

---

By Spencer Graham (VP Education 2013-14)  
For Rodrigo Narro Perez (VP Education 2014-15)

Rodrigo,

Welcome to what will be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of your life. You already know this, but there are very few opportunities that one gets to be at the helm of a multimillion dollar organization at the tender age of 21. You will learn so much this year and become an even better person at the end of it. Make the most of this year. Develop friendships, contacts, networks. Develop principles on things you haven't necessarily thought of before.

You will be the centre point for the organization's advocacy efforts, in conjunction with the president. It's about the direction that you steer the organization in and how you choose to use the MSU's influence to not only achieve specific advocacy wins, but also to determine stances, attitudes and ways of thinking on issues. These attitudes affect university-level and government-level decisions that you don't even see getting made. Never be afraid to be firm, but fair on what you believe in – you will be surprised at how far that can take your message.

You will be the knowledge source on not only postsecondary education, but also in multiple other ways: how other student unions are run/governed, how issues fit together in a broader way, and what government is saying/doing (and not just in PSE), so be a loudmouth. Well, not necessary in that negative way, but push your priorities relentlessly, with government, with the university, with student groups, with anyone who is willing to listen. Take every opportunity to be featured in the media – radio, television, newspapers, blogs, and anything else. Advocacy isn't just about convincing the person sitting across the table from you to do something. It's also about convincing everyone that your causes are important, and that can help your cause in so many ways that may be unseen right now.

You're also not limited to the world of postsecondary education (i.e. the 'pillars': accessibility, affordability, quality, accountability) in terms of what you can do. You have probably noticed that in board meetings, often times you will discuss things like full time staff issues, student group issues, or financial management of the organization. Never hesitate to jump into these discussions, even though they are outside your portfolio. Same goes with the SRA, or any other project that you, as a board, come up with. Municipal advocacy is another interesting issue – it's not PSE (for the most part) but there are definitely things that you could/should be doing to advocate on the municipal level. Plus there are also many issues that have overlap between PSE and the student experience – do not be shy about using your PSE knowledge to help with these types of issues.

Never be shy about sharing why OUSA and CASA are so important. You are the main avenue of communication between these organizations and the student body. This is one of the reasons why VP Eds get so sucked into government lobbying – the work is important, and if you're not talking about them, then no one is. Another other reason is that there are relatively few

people on the other end – Steering Committee and Home Office staff. That's not many people to keep the ship afloat, especially if you have some people on SC not pulling their weight, which can happen. So you need to realize that as a Board member for OUSA (or maybe CASA) there is a strong responsibility to pull your weight and be a team player.

VP Education is a job that attracts (and retains) workaholics. Often times you will be in the office long after everyone else has gone home. Moreover, some days you'll work and work, yet feel like you've accomplished absolutely nothing. Those days are hard, and more common than you may think. But there are always people to support you in your day to day advocacy work. The Board. The Administrative Assistants. Your Advocacy Coordinator and Comms Officer. Your commissioners. Hopefully the Researcher. OUSA and CASA Home Office Staff. Of course, Steering Committee.

You will learn A LOT this year. Why do we have a system of high tuition and grants and loans? How do government priorities trickle down into universities? What is the role of a postsecondary education, and why is it important? How do teaching and research intermingle with one another in the academy? What do the buzzwords of productivity, employment, or innovation mean to students? How the heck do politics work? These are questions you have to figure out yourself. Some of these questions will work themselves out easily, while others may never be fully answered. Being able to change your mind or perspective on things is also important, and will happen at some point or another this year. VP Ed is definitely a thinking-person's job – which is why I think you will excel in this role, Rodrigo.

Much love,

Spencer  
[Spencergraham.133@gmail.com](mailto:Spencergraham.133@gmail.com)

## CONTENTS

- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)
- Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)
- McMaster University Advocacy
  - o Key University Administrators
  - o Associate Deans
  - o General Tips
  - o Senate
  - o University Budget Timeline
- Academic Affairs Council (AAC)
- Advocacy Street Team
- Teaching Awards
- Policy Writing
- Media Tools
- President's Page
- Lobbying 101
- HPSAG/Satellite Lobbying
- Municipal Advocacy
- Office of the Ombuds

- Community Cleanup
- Valedictorian Selection
- Being a Corporate Officer
- Relationship with Full Time Staff
- Student Representative Assembly (SRA)
- Executive Board (EB)
- University Affairs & External Affairs Committees

### **Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)**

The work done with OUSA is incredible. You will soon begin to fully appreciate that OUSA is relied on as a top-notch student advocacy group and that we are able to wield great influence over the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. We've even expanded outwards, with specific lobbying initiatives aimed at the Ministries of Labour (unpaid internships), Education (access, early outreach, streaming), Health (student mental health), Economic Development (job market transition), and Research & Innovation (entrepreneurship). We do work not only with the current government, but also make our voice known to opposition parties – and we work with all of them. For example, we engaged strongly with former PC critic Rob Leone on teaching-stream faculty, and on NDP MPPs Peggy Sattler and Jonah Schein on their private members' bills to expand work-integrated learning and protect unpaid interns, respectively. We also engage with the civil service on more technical issues such as OSAP issues, funding, pensions, differentiation, and much more.

Make OUSA a priority. Students are so unaware of the government's role and thus are non-government facing in their advocacy (i.e. the entire rest of the MSU really, or faculty societies, clubs, etc.). This means you are kind of obligated to be there to support this important work, because no one else will be. OUSA is also one of two major connections that you, and only you, are responsible for (the other being CASA). I know I'm preaching to the choir when I say that government policy is critical because its effects trickle down McMaster and McMaster students, but it is certainly worth repeating time and time again. For tuition and OSAP, that link is pretty clear, but per-student funding to universities and labour policies around staffing have extremely important effects on quality of education and student life.

OUSA can be incredibly consuming. But you have to realize that you are a board member not only of the MSU, but also of OUSA. It's a big responsibility. Work to develop consensus with your Steering Committee counterparts when discussing initiatives, making organizational decisions, or choosing priorities for the year. Consensus makes OUSA strong, and you develop quite a great rapport with the rest of your SC people, which is a great support network for you.

Firstly, you will develop priorities for the year at Stratcon in July. Stratcon is a great team building experience, so enjoy it. Also, it would be wise to come prepared with issues and initiatives that you want to see OUSA work on this year. Whatever you think is most important for students – try to convince the others that it is politically salient and important for their students as well. If successful you will begin to see these priorities reflected in the ED's day-to-day lobbying and also what you will be lobbying on at Lobby Week and in the OUSA Budget submission.

Policy writing is actually pretty fun, especially with the amount of research support from Home Office. You should try to write policy every chance you get, because as an author, you wield a pretty massive amount of influence on what OUSA's position is. I snatched up Student

Success because I wanted to put in key points on online education, teacher training, TA training, and experiential education. I also worked on System Vision because I believed that rising costs were one of the most important issues that negatively affect students, and I knew the only way I could have strong input was to be a part of the brainstorming, writing, and editing process. So get ready to do some policy writing!

By the way, I am really excited about OUSA developing a municipal policy. You should try to be part of that if you can. Also try to bring others into the loop as well – your EA commissioner, or anyone on EA committee are good places to start. I did that with Anser this year and the international students policy ended up being really strong. He also took a lot of personal pride in it and strengthened himself as another good person to have on OUSA's side at the SRA.

General Assembly is interesting, as it's the main opportunity to see what other schools' students' views are on various issues. Something I prioritized was letting the delegates come up with their own principles and decisions. I think this is the true purpose of GA and so I wanted to encourage that, not stifle it. This means facilitating conversations as a group (not necessarily leading them), not telling delegates how to vote, letting them say their piece during breakout sessions, and encouraging delegates to make motions during plenary if they feel their issues have not been resolved throughout the weekend. I would encourage you to use the same mentality! One final note on GA – don't dilly dally on getting the delegates selected and registered early – nothing frustrates the Operations Coordinator like late registrations.

A great thing to continue is blogs and social media for OUSA. Get EA to start rolling up their sleeves and writing, because Brandon is always looking for new content. People in the sector READ these. STUDENTS read these. With social media nowadays, people are always hungry to read more original content and these have served as one of the most important advocacy tools we have. On the note of communications, OUSA is stronger with general communications and that is what we want to prioritize this year with constant social media presence. So for this year you should make it a goal (with Jess and Spencer II) to build up more student followers to the Advocacy FB/Twitter and the OUSA FB/Twitter. This will help you immensely.

Don't be afraid to share the nitty-gritty details of OUSA things at Board meetings. Even though it can get quite tiring to talk in length about your work during Board, SRA and EB meetings, the VP Ed usually has tons of detailed issues to talk about, so make sure you do it anyways to see if anyone is interested in providing a perspective. Which is interesting since while it might seem that a lot of what you talk about as VP Ed is heavily technical in nature, in reality it all filters down to tangible impacts and effects on all students. Yet, VP Ed's have always had a difficult time getting people excited about their work. A solution could be putting more emphasis on explaining the impact of your work to SRA members and students with varying degrees of technicality.

Lobbycon is in late November/early December, and gives you the important opportunity to get facetime with key decision makers at Queen's Park. You will have chosen your 2-4 priorities in the weeks beforehand, as a Steering Committee. Chances are, as a SC member, you will have to lead a lobby team throughout the week. Quarterback every lobby meeting, but allow them to speak as well. When not directly making the pitch myself, I also found it helpful to a) add broader details for context, or b) clarify/get back on track when others are going off-track, or c) step in, when appropriate, to help "sell" the idea in political speak.

For example, if lobbying an MPP on increasing grants for students, you could make the entire pitch yourself, or if someone else is making the pitch then you could help by a) if the politician looks confused, talk about the broader financial assistance system of provincial/federal loans/grants/tax credits and how they help students pay for tuition and cover costs of living b) guide the conversation back on track if the politician launches into a story about their children, or c) talk about how great the government would look by reducing student debt.

### **Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)**

The large majority of this section is confidential, and as such was included in the personal (non-EB) version of this document.

There are a few things that will be helpful to you about CASA this year:

- Policy & Strat is when you choose your lobbying priorities for the year. The conference this year will be at Acadia in Nova Scotia. Hopefully the board will have more influence in the process of developing our advocacy goals this year, as we found the process of committees voting and ‘pitting asks’ against each other lead to a suite of “priorities” that are way too broad, not strategic with government objectives, and ultimately very similar from year to year. Policy & Strat was when we first saw how poor process and procedure can get things off to a bad start for the year. Bring your EA commissioner.
- Lobby Week is in late November/early December and is pretty similar to OUSA’s. Do not be afraid to take the lead in meetings (aka ‘quarterback’) and guide the conversation accordingly. As a matter of principle, do not personally talk about any graduate student or polytechnic-specific issues in your meetings. If you’re teamed up with any of those students, let them cover those issues. Dress nicely, feel important, and do a kick-ass job. Bring the President and/or EA commissioner (if possible, but likely it will just be the Prez).
- CASA’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) is the time to have some serious conversations about CASA’s internal structure. You will have worked closely within the organization for almost a year at this point, so at this point you will have already made your decision to stay or go. Use the time to have productive conversations, air frustrations, and make change within the organization. Ontario raised hell this year at AGM – challenging everything from the budget, to internal processes, and even big ticket items such as proportional representation – which can be extremely awkward conversations since there is really no easy way to solve these problems and get buy-in from every member. Bring your EA commissioner.

### **McMaster University Advocacy**

You will have the most contact with a broad diversity of university staff and administration, which gives you a good scope of people to advocate to, a good knowledge of how the university operates, and experience in dealing with personalities. You have already begun to realize that university politics are indeed very real (and sometimes more frustrating than government politics). Mac, like other universities, deals with a massive multimillion dollar budget with tons of competing interests and priorities, and everyone wants more money for

something. Cap that off with restrictions, rules, regulations, and cost drivers, and you quickly realize that there are some very serious and high-level issues that drive forward issues of quality, affordability, accessibility, and the student experience. These issues are as follows:

- Faculty unions/TA unions
- Underfunding of universities
- Tenure
- An intense research agenda
- Incredibly decentralized nature of the university
- A general unwillingness to challenge the status quo.

Almost any university you can think of stems from one of the above (high tuition, large classes, poor quality of education, lack of experiential education, inaccessible campus, bureaucratic accommodation practices, lack of space, poor classroom design, poor teachers). It is useful to keep these challenges in mind to help inform your thinking on an issue, but always try to work around them when you are trying to achieve a specific end. And, precisely because these issues underlie every other issue, you should always do your best to challenge others' thinking on them, in order to make incremental progress towards fixing them. And while some issues require money to address, others don't.

**The following section on personal university administration is confidential, and as such, is contained in the personalized (non-EB) version of this document.**

Two critical Student Services Committee projects this year:

1. As VP Ed (not the entire board), put together a plan for Student Affairs' budget that prioritizes high-need service units like SWC, and make strategic cuts to Ath & Rec. Talk to the board about this idea, do the required work, go back to the Board and discuss, then discuss 1-on-1 with Sean, then bring to the Student Services committee (in that order). This requires that you go through the Ath & Rec, SWC, SSC, SAS budgets with a fine-tooth comb.
2. Figuring out how the SSC works with the faculty CCEs. My personal position on this is that the SSC should essentially divert all employment-related resources to co-op, and filling in the co-op gaps so that CCEs can focus on for-credit experiential education and career services. If you agree, you should set up an individual meeting with Sean to discuss this idea further, and decide how you can work as a team strategically to advance this idea. Your relationships with Lisa and Jeff will come in handy for this.

#### Associate Deans Group

The associate deans are your gateway into the faculties. I wasn't invited to Laura's group meetings this year (until the end of the year), so you should ask Laura to continue to invite you to them when she organizes them. Also, more official associate deans meetings are apparently held monthly (contact AVP Faculty office to find out when, or to be put on their agenda). Meeting with them individually is tough, time commitment wise. However, talk to them whenever possible, even if in passing - they will give you the micro of the story if you're looking to implement a program across campus, or need buy- in.

#### General Tips for University Advocacy:

- With staff (i.e. libraries, SWC, SAS), position yourself as an ally who is willing to go push the upper administration (Provost, President etc) to enable them to provide more service.
- Identify the long term goals of each department and the University as a whole (FWI + Board of Governors published a public job goals evaluation for each of the senior admin)

and see how you can frame your lobbying goals in that context.

- Taking your ideas and making them reality require persistence. Emails, meetings, phone calls, following up, writing briefing notes, getting buy-in from faculties, the SRA, administrators, politicians, and the media are just some of the tools.
- It's okay to get frustrated. Universities are prone to very very slow change since there are committees after committees, senate policies, bureaucracy and an extremely decentralized governance structure. It's hard to put down an effective magical solution on how to navigate this but this is something you'll have to figure out as it comes, aka seeing who all the relevant stakeholders are and what concerns if any they might have to your proposal.

### Senate

The University senate is responsible for determining academic policy and regulating the entire educational system at McMaster. This includes the introduction of new academic programs, changes in curriculum, standards for admission to the University, exam policy, academic regulations, conferring of degrees, criteria and procedures for granting tenure, and promotion of faculty. The MSU President has official observer status here and the meetings take place on the second Wednesday of every month. Decide between yourselves who will attend these meetings. Due to the million other things that the President has on their plate, I recommend you attend Senate, and Teddy go to Board of Governors, but you take a look at the agenda package as a second set of eyes like I did this year since Board of Governors also discuss various items that you might have seen or heard about at OUSA. Just make sure to update him in Board Meetings if significant things have happened at Senate Meetings. If you are to become the individual attending senate meetings you will need to inform the University Secretariat so you will have permission to remain in the room for closed session items.

Also, while it can be intimidating to speak at Senate, one thing to keep in mind is that YOU are the best-equipped person in that room to speak on behalf of students. As long as you don't say something completely off base, you will garner respect for your thoughts. Always a good thing to keep in your back pocket ☺

### University Budget Timeline

Something that this year's board thought of too late was having greater formal influence on McMaster's budget. This was mostly inspired by our government submission for the provincial budget, and essentially we figured – why not do the same for the university's budget? Since it was too late in the budget to do this, Jeff and I wrote a Prez Page on the university budget and how it should prioritize undergraduate-focused issues like experiential education, space, entrepreneurship, teaching-stream faculty, etc. So essentially what you guys should do (mainly you and the President, but VP Finance and Admin too, if they want to!) is borrow the same idea and pick 4-5 high priority items that require more money, and make the case for them, both through a formal submission in booklet form, but also through a formal presentation to PVPD.

Why is this important? Effective advocacy requires processes where we can repetitively hammer home our priorities and reach a large audience. With one presentation/submission will be able to simultaneously influence:

- The President's high-level priorities;
- The Provost's discretionary pool of funding for academics;
- The VP University Advancement's project/donations priorities;
- The VP Administration's priorities when it comes to food, space, the bookstore, printing, etc.

- PVPD's collective control over the University Fund;
- The deans' strategic priorities and departmental allocations.

Here is a timeline of how this could work:

- **August:** Begin to develop priorities and do research: Why is this important? How much is already being spent on this?
- **September:** Assemble the packages and presentation with your communications team. Woorder has now been through this with the government submission, so he will know what is expected.
- **(Late) October:** Have the board do your formal presentation to PVPD, and accompany this (timing-wise) with a public release and promotion of our pre-budget submission (advocacy campaign, prez page, social media, you know). This is around the time when various managers are beginning to assemble their budgets for approval in January and February. Spend no longer than 10-15 minutes presenting, and prepare for questions from the group. Demonstrate your understanding of how the university and the budget work. Be respectful, but don't let anyone on PVPD try to make you feel like you don't know what you're talking about.
- **(Early) November:** Follow up by sending along a 1-2 page letter to the next PVPD that thanks them for their time and subtly reminds them of our priorities.
- **December:** Seek out the students who sit on budget committee (the info should be online). Find them, bring them together for a meeting where you explain what the MSU is doing with the budget presentation/submission.
- **January:** Now, budget committee overlooks each department's expenditures. Get them to show you the budget and examine it with them as soon as they receive it. Remind them that they are accountable to students and to question the budgetary decisions - for example, if certain decisions were/weren't made, ask questions and hold the university accountable.
- **February:** Follow up with individual administrators who made interesting budgetary decisions (i.e. those who took our recommendations, or those who chose not to).
- **April/May:** Release a press release about the budget when it comes through Senate and Board of Governors. Praise good decisions. Be critical when the university missed opportunities. Let the Provost know what your messaging will be beforehand.

### **Academic Affairs Council**

AAC is something that most VP Eds struggle with, but I think I actually did a decent job with these meetings. However, there is definitely room for improvement! Meetings were every 2 weeks in previous years, but I moved them up to a once-per-week cycle, which I think is sustainable.

- If you are going to be away for a meeting, get your UA commissioner take the reigns and lead it.
- Use your most Rez-Lifey facilitation skills for discussions. As much as you want to, do not use AAC as an opportunity to dump information onto the VP Academics plates. Tips for this: give a brief spiel on the issue at hand, alternate between general questions and specific questions, embrace silence when no one is speaking, add commentary where needed, share the MSU's perspective on important matters to help clarify thinking where needed.
- You saw that scheduling that many people was a real challenge. Be proactive on scheduling, and get them into AAC right off the bat early in your year.
- Tell them that AAC is SUPER important and frame it as an essential component of their job (even when it may not technically be).
- Create a listserv and Facebook group for the AAC members.
- Set aside 15-20 minutes before every meeting to develop an agenda for the conversation.

- I tried State of Education as a group project. It was more hassle than it was truly worth, but the idea of getting VP Academics to proactively advocate still has merit. Instead of one big document this year, perhaps work with individual members to develop lobby documents instead of a massive undertaking. You also have your own ideas for getting faculty societies more involved, so think about how AAC ties into this.

### **Advocacy Street Team**

Your Advocacy coordinator essentially serves three functions: she coordinates campaigns in collaboration with the VP Ed, she oversees the Street Team, and also will assist you with general logistics of events and initiatives. Ensure a strong working relationship with your coordinator – you and her will go back and forth on a lot of things, so make yourself available and really try to prioritize responding to her emails, because they often work under somewhat of a time crunch, so respect her time.

A large part of your work with the Advocacy coordinator involves shaping the message, and how you want campaigns to take place. Don't necessarily criticize if they're making mistakes, but learn to problem solve and utilize your resources and influence as a board member to get them out of tricky situations or people giving them trouble over bookings (for example I pulled some strings on MUSC bookings in a time pinch situation); Be clear in your instructions and expectations since again while you might know the nitty gritty of different PSE issues the team members probably don't.

Early in the year, Rebecca and I had multiple 1-on-1 meetings to develop a plan for the year. She was incredibly organized, so she made a timeline for the year and never dropped the ball with any planning and execution. She also followed MSU promotional channels and branding quite well. However, we need to find a way to make Advocacy initiatives not just 'blend in' with other services' events, which can be tough. Perhaps some slight deviation from the style guide could do it – similar to how Campus Events brands their things – they don't just look like generic "MSU Events".

The Street Team volunteer base is a critical issue in my personal opinion. You will get a lot of 'randoms' as volunteers, and they often do it somewhat halfheartedly. The training and selection process could be improved dramatically, and building a sense of purpose and community as well. I wish I had a silver bullet for this one. Perhaps instead of getting them out for one-off campaigns throughout the year, the coordinator could also prioritize getting them out, talking to students, telling them about current issues of the MSU, etc. on a more regular basis. Campaigns are also great, of course, but perhaps they shouldn't be the only thing the "Street Team" does.

I *really* think Advocacy Street team could be doing much more on social media. I included this as a note in Rebecca's transition report to Jess, but it is worth reminding her and perhaps tasking her to develop a social media strategy and holding her accountable to that. Alex becomes really key in this as well – people devour little bits of information and graphics on social media, and we should be capitalizing on this and be student union trendsetters in this advocacy format.

Jess also has the lovely honor of planning Spring GA. I can't really tell you too much on this point, since I didn't help plan GA in my year, but you, Jess, and the OUSA Operations Coordinator will probably likely be going back and forth quite a bit on the planning aspect of this. You're in 'charge' through, so share your vision for GA (if you have one), and then get them to plan and execute on that.

Many students don't have an understanding of the scope of MSU Advocacy efforts, why it's important and how they specifically can aid in the process. Improving Advocacy is a constantly evolving process, and I think in many ways we had to start back at square one this year (after a couple of rough years). In doing so, I've also identified some of the most important structural challenges for Advocacy and some ways to improve it. Advocacy is a critical tool to execute your campaigns, so please take my above advice so we don't reinvent the wheel.

### **Teaching Awards**

Although the VP Ed oversees this PTM, Teaching Awards is almost a process that runs itself (as long as the PTM doesn't drop the ball) and doesn't require super active management, like the Advocacy Coordinator or Researcher. However, as you spend a significant amount of time out of the office, supervising this PTM is still important. Ensure that they have confirmed a date and location to hold the event should be done as soon as possible. Furthermore, they also need to ensure attendance from all university administrators (President, Provost, AVP Academic, Dean of Students, etc.) as their schedules fill up quickly. Because the Teaching Awards takes place in March be sure that it doesn't conflict with Student Recognition Night. I would recommend meeting with Mina every so often so she's on track for the nomination periods, and overall planning and is utilizing every single available resource to promote nominations. Jacob did a great job promoting nominations – beating nomination records for the MSU. This was because he followed every promotional strategy to the T. Ensure Mina is doing everything Jacob did, and is also reaching out to SRA members and other MSU insiders to help promote nominations.

Never underestimate the importance of Teaching Awards. Many professors put these awards on their C.V. and it's likely one of the most important things we do at the MSU, but is highly underrated. Thinking of creative ways to enhance the process and bring more student attention to appreciation of teachers might help to further legitimize this ceremony as it's still in a tender stage of recovery. One interesting area of collaboration might be with MIIETL. For example, you could utilize the nomination qualitative data and work with MIIETL staff to create a set of best practices for teaching from a student perspective and creatively advertise it to professors as encouragement to take further seminars with MIIETL.

Jacob also did an Evaluate Your Education survey last year. Please ensure that this research gets codified into MSU policy in a way – useless survey data is one of the most frustrating things to me. The results should be on your server.

### **Policy Writing**

The VP Education is the chief policymaker of the board and organization. Policy is one of those things where some VP Eds really like it, and for others, it just doesn't turn their crank. I personally enjoyed writing policy, and I find it important for three main reasons.

1. Defining your Principles
2. Consolidating your Thoughts
3. Transferring Knowledge.

Defining your Principles: Firstly, it is a fairly big responsibility to advocate on over 21,000 students at Mac – especially considering we have diverse needs, interests, and values. So defining a policy position on an issue can be tough sometimes, but also extremely important. Writing

policy forces you to think critically about representing the holistic needs of students, only speaking for anything students truly believe in, and pushing back on issues that are unfair to students. You also think critically about the multiple sides of any argument, and put thought into how best to solve the issue. Having a position on things can also really help sell new ideas. The fact that someone takes the time to write out a thoughtful argument, and that students vote to approve it, means that your arguments hold more weight. It's a fact.

Consolidating your Thoughts: This especially applies to OUSA-like policy and the PCR model. Many issues in PSE are multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder, involve lots of moving parts, are rooted in history and culture, and are not easy to solve with one simple solution. Reading and writing policy helps to sort through the rubble, and helps you realize that there is not just one simple answer for most issues in PSE. Take experiential education for example – a simple question like “why don’t more students have access to experiential education” unlocks multiple tangents such as university financial issues, broader community issues, economic conditions, student willingness, faculty willingness, administration willingness, rising costs, a history of a lecture style predominance, etc. The solutions are also endless as well. Policy helps make sense of the situation.

Transferring Knowledge: This one’s pretty simple: if your thoughts and research are in writing, then they can be passed down from generation to generation in the MSU and other student organizations. It’s quite helpful when the next person doesn’t have to start from square one.

## **Media Tools**

As VP Ed, you want to be a bit of a diva and always want attention in the media – one of the most important ways to push your agenda. Brandon will be a great help with this, especially when biggish PSE stories are in the provincial media spotlight (usually stories will last for a couple days). This year I did a couple radio spots on student financial assistance this year, wrote multiple pieces for the Globe and Mail and Spec, did a TV spot for unpaid internships on CHCH, and was quoted in quite a few newspaper stories in the Sil, Spec, and even the Toronto Star.

Press releases are generally Wooder’s domain. When you want one done (generally responding to a fairly big issue), just ask him, and work through it with him. He will generally need some key bits of information from you first, so talk it out for a few minutes. He will refine your message into something that news reporters will want to reach out and ask for comment on. Once you okay it, he will send it out to the MSU’s media contacts. Ensure you get it out on the same day as the event/announcement – in news, time = money!

On that note, when you do get a media request for an interview, radio spot, tv spot, etc, Wooder is a great resource to help you craft a message and stay on point. You can even walk through some sample question and answers, and talk about how you’ll address curveball questions, etc. After a certain point, you will become quite comfortable with dealing with the media yourself.

A lot of your media relations will come through Brandon. He is constantly reaching out to Steering Committee to comment on stories, do interviews, provide quotes, and submit written content. Please try to make time for this. As I mentioned, sometimes it’s easy to put OUSA things off, but these are the types of things I’m talking about when I say that every SC member needs to pull their weight. It’s important that we have students in the media providing our perspective.

Social media is important – but perhaps not in the same way as traditional media. I really tried to prioritize using Facebook and Twitter as tools for communicating with students, asking them questions, sharing interesting bits of PSE knowledge, sharing important events and issues. I see you’re already starting to do this – which is GREAT. I can tell you that I had a good number of students throughout the year message me or tell me that they appreciated how up-to-date I kept them. Because again, if it’s not you, then it’s no one.

Social media is also a really cool way of making contact with politicians and other key decision makers, and its power comes from the fact that it’s a public forum for all to see. So use it! Jeff saw good success with that this year and I started to pick up a number of social media cues from him. Always be respectful on social media, as one bad tweet could sour a relationship forever (especially with politicians). With that being said, always stick to your guns and tweet away, especially regarding current events related to PSE and #HamOnt things.

### **President's Page**

The Silhouette only has a couple summer editions, but once the year starts you and your board will have to start producing articles on a weekly basis. We try to use the Prez Page very strategically – essentially to advance our advocacy causes.

Traditionally, the President and VP Ed write the lion’s share of the articles, as you are the ones leading the advocacy wing of the organization. We also had a number of full-board pages, including for Presidencies, and end-of-year wrap-up. We also used it to brag about our accomplishments – a hugely successful Welcome Week, or our first Fall Break, etc.

I personally really enjoyed Prez Page, as it allowed me to publicly share what OUSA and CASA were up to, and share specific university ideas and concerns. Get your stories in on time, please! If possible, you should try and send them to Woorder by Tuesday afternoon so he has time to edit. The PR Assistant also needs time to render the page, add graphics, pictures, and charts, etc.

### **Lobbying 101**

As one of the most overused words in the MSU, you will quickly learn that lobbying is an art. Feel free to ask OUSA Home Office for their presentations and documents on this topic. While everyone has a different style, there are a couple key things that you should always remember.

1. BE PREPARED. Put together a brief on the issue you are going to discuss and make sure you know what you are talking about, again getting a researcher will be a godsend for this. Nothing is worse than walking into a meeting and attempting to bullshit your way through an issue when you could have had the opportunity to understand it prior, a lot of these administrators have been around for a long time and tend to be quite good judges of character and quite well versed on this issue, they are in their position because just like yourselves they are the best of the best. While a year might seem like a long time for you, for these administrators they have seen a long line of your predecessors and as such you only have limited opportunity to earn their respect and prove your mettle.

2. DON’T MAKE THINGS UP. In the event that you are asked a question that you cannot answer, don’t make it up. Be honest, say that you don’t have that particular statistic on you at the moment, but can get it for them as soon as you get back to your office.

**3. ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL.** Whether you're talking to an administrator, politician, or community member – stories are important. They give the human angle to your discussion and are likely to persuade someone more than anything else, student stories and surveys are really important since they make it a larger issue than it just being a policy pet peeve of the VP Ed being discussed. SRA members, Faculty Societies and Students obviously are big assets for you to obtain this information. Also keep on top of blogs and twitter for new and interesting stories to help sell your point.

**4. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** As you will learn, you have to interact with people in different ways. The way you approach a Liberal is different from a Conservative or NDP. Furthermore, lobbying an administrator is fundamentally different than dealing with a community member or the director of a service from within student affairs.

**5. BE CONCISE.** Take your points and simplify them. You won't have a lot of time to persuade the individuals you are meeting with, so take the time and learn how to take complex issues and make them simple. I made it a principle to never have a meeting longer than 30 minutes and to set clear objectives for myself to ensure we don't run in circles. Plus, politicians don't like technical details (mostly because they don't understand them). Be direct, get to the point. This is why VP Eds fall into using buzzwords and catchphrases, it's because they're simple to convey your message. #BlueSkyDreaming #Innovation #Productivity

**6. BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE.** Don't worry - you know your shit! Don't rely on starting any sentence with, "I don't know, but..." or let someone feed you a line that you know isn't true. Too many students have been walked over because they weren't confident in what they know. More often than not, as VP Ed you are the most knowledgeable PSE person in the room – embrace it.

**7. FOLLOW UP. ALWAYS.** Whenever you finish a meeting, send a follow-up email thanking them for their time and try to rehash some of the things you discussed and indirectly remind them of some of the deliverable items they promise, same for if you made a promise to them. This holds them accountable to the promises made.

### **HPSAG/Satellite Lobbying**

Try and set up as many satellite lobby meetings as possible. Especially during the summer when many MPPs/MPs are on break, or the 'barbeque circuit' as it's termed. This past year, through my own efforts and through both OUSA and CASA lobbycons the MSU met with every single one of the eight Hamilton area MPPs and MPs at least once. Not all local MP/MPPs will be available for Lobbycons so don't just rely on that as your only opportunity to meet with them. It takes a bit of time to set these up, but with concentrated pestering you can get meeting with all of them since you technically represent your constituents, most of them are also quite vested in the progress of the citizens in their riding so if you can tie in your policy based recommendation and lobbying points with stories of McMaster students, they are more likely to take on your issue and move it up the chain. Satellite lobbying is also useful for ensuring that some specific McMaster related issues are brought to the attention of politicians since Lobbycons only cover specific three topics. As well, you can lobby on non-PSE issues that are still important to students (for example, LRT).

These meetings should include yourself and Teddy, possibly the EA Commissioner and you should put together the lobbying brief in advance, then prep the other two for the meeting and

bring Wooder into the loop so he can advise you folks on lobbying strategies. You will essentially quarterback and lead the entire process however, including the lobby meetings themselves. Oh, and HPSAG is basically just a tri-annual satellite meeting with Ted, so follow the standard protocols.

Other important individuals to meet with prior to LobbyCon if you can't get all eight include Chris Charlton, David Christopherson, Andrea Horwath, and David Sweet. Send out letters inviting them to the office for a meeting and move from there. More often, they will want you to visit their offices, which is fine. With the 2015 federal election upcoming, it is likely that MPs will be interested in meeting with you more so than usual. Last year we took the opportunity to lobby all local MPs on the CASA pre-budget submission in late summer, so it might be good to repeat that this year.

With that being said - be careful about Photo Ops since in the 2011 Election the VP Ed got in trouble with a few members of the SRA since a photo appeared of them with two Liberal Politicians (Who were on campus to address a lecture) in front of the MSU office sign in the Silhouette newspaper within weeks of an election. General non-election pictures are fine, but AVOID THIS KIND OF SITUATION AT ALL COSTS. MSU prides itself in its non-partisan nature, so be politically savvy to ensure we adhere to this.

### **Municipal Advocacy**

Municipal advocacy isn't *technically* in your portfolio, so you are not obligated to do it, but since it's really the missing 'level' between university advocacy and provincial/federal advocacy, you will be the best person equipped to undertake it, along with the President (based on his own interests too). What I will say though, is that your portfolio is already quite busy without tackling any sort of municipal advocacy, so it is quite easy for it to fall off your general day-to-day radar. Other board members, particularly the president, can certainly do municipal relations.

Organize semi-regular meetings with Brian McHattie and the new Ward 1 councilor. Get Josh and Spencer into these meetings and develop an agenda of what you want to discuss in the days beforehand. Dale is Brian's executive assistant, and she is wonderful for getting you really quick access to Brian whenever needed. He will probably stay pretty busy with the mayoral campaign over the next few weeks, but a good idea to discuss is how his platform/attitude as mayor could be more student-focused.

Municipal advocacy, in general, is interesting because students often have an agenda that can be at direct odds with other groups (for example, the Ainsliewood-Westdale Community Association wants less students in the area, and is anti-McMaster expansion). This differs from university/provincial/federal advocacy because most people that student issues are important – the difficulty becomes how our priorities stack up against competing ones (both in terms of PSE asks against each other, or PSE vs. non-PSE issues).

In any sense, you gain more power in municipal advocacy by partnerships – because partnerships show that you're engaged in your community and understand what makes it tick. We've done a couple things to position ourselves as more important stakeholders in the city, and through working with partners, we will be a more prominent voice in Hamilton.

The Your City Survey and efforts by the MSU in the past few years have also set us up as important stakeholders for those in the know. You have great momentum going into your year for the board to really get solid results from the recommendations of the Your City Survey and

subsequent EA Youth Retention Policy. For example, you will want to continue working Hamilton Economic Development (Carolyn Reid's office) and Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. Huzaifa kept me updated on initiatives that him and Keanin were working on, and we collectively kept pressure on the province on LRT and youth jobs in Hamilton. It's also usually worth it to make regular calls to Kwab (Mac's government relations person) to stay briefed on issues that appear on Mac's radar.

The municipal election will probably be the centerpiece for your municipal advocacy this year. Be strategic in terms of placing issues on the radars of ward councilor and mayoral candidates. You want to get them talking about why McMaster University and its students are crucial to the future of Hamilton – especially in terms of jobs, entrepreneurship, the knowledge economy, and young people. Apart from the general voter outreach, it would be a good idea to partner with the Chamber, YEP, the Hive, and other young professional networks to drive forward an agenda of job growth and youth retention in the city. The way that things become election issues is through general buzz on the issue. Candidates hearing the same thing from multiple stakeholders in meetings or in media means that these issues get talked about by the candidates.

Municipal Lobbycon – you will want to decide early in the year whether its better to hold the lobbycon before the election or afterwards. My recommendation would be to have it soon after the election – November, December or January. Put Woorder in charge of the organization and logistics, then work with your advocacy team to figure out what you want to lobby councilors and city staffers on. This would be the first time we do it, so aim to just keep it simple – one day/afternoon of 2-3 on 1 lobby meetings with councilors. No bells and whistles – it complicates it more than it needs to be.

Teddy seems to be pretty keen on the off-campus safety thing, which should be good. Not sure what your role might be in that, perhaps more on the strategy end of things.

## **Ombuds**

The VP Ed and the AVP Students form the two-person Ombuds management team. Early in the year the Ombuds will come in and give an overview of their role within the university – essentially to be ‘guardians of fairness’, which is actually pretty important. In an environment so decentralized and broad, the services of Ombuds as confidential help when students are experiencing issues of mistreatment from others in the university (be it academic, cultural, student life oriented, literally anything) is important to have. John McGowan also sits in on these meetings and is almost like a third member of the management team, which is good because of his HR experience and longevity within the MSU.

The team this year (and probably in the few years to come) are Carolyn and Kileen. Each works 2.5 days of the week, meaning that the office has the equivalent of one full-time staff member. They operate very autonomously, keeping the details of cases completely confidential, even from us. We do meet semi-regularly to discuss issues that come up. Here are the major issues we dealt with this year with Ombuds and what to expect in the future:

1. Usage Equity with other groups on campus. Essentially FT undergraduate students pay the vast lion's share to fund Ombuds, yet their usage is only partially representative of the entire user base. Faculty, staff, and graduate students also use Ombuds significantly. Late

this year I developed a plan for equitable payment into Ombuds based on proportional caseload. Sean is already having conversations about fees equity for graduate students for SWC, and has committed to bringing up the issue with the other groups as well.

2. Annual Reporting from the Office. Simply put, Carolyn and Kileen were not doing annual reporting based on the trends they were seeing, and what recommendations they have for changing potentially unfair university or MSU policy, which is an important function of any Ombuds office. I developed guidelines and expectations for these annual reports, based on what information I would find useful in advocacy. Sean and John both liked these guidelines as well, and I believe you are discussing the guidelines with the team at your first Ombuds meeting of the year.

### **Community Cleanup**

While it began as community-relations initiative from VP Ed Joe Finkle, my goal for Community Cleanup was to transfer most of the planning and logistics of the event to SCSN, but have the VP Education involved with the more political aspects (essentially getting Brian McHattie there to judge and make a little spiel at the barbecue). Especially since Josh is returning this year as SCSN director, he will definitely know what to do. He might rely on you for support (I went with him to pick up trash bags from facilities during WW, for example), but he should be doing the lion's share of the planning. With that being said, you should still be involved in this event, again with the political side, but also actually attending, helping lead it, judging it, and supporting Wooder on the PR stuff that surrounds it. This is a great Welcome Week event, and so you should help make it a success!

With that being said, I am going to copy last year's instructions that Huzaifa gave me, but keep in mind that Josh should be doing most of this now. Set up a meeting with him in June and go through the joint responsibilities.

"Ask VP Admin to let you know if it ever randomly drops off the welcome week schedule at planning committee. Start by putting together a proposal to the Welcome Week Core Committee so they have an idea of what you envision the event to look like this year. They will expect you to give updates throughout the summer, but most communication will likely go through the VP Administration. Keep tabs on this as the week draws nearer. Your first step should be to contact Councillor McHattie to see if he is available for when the event has been scheduled. Last year, he wasn't able to make it at the last minute due to another event but is usually quite interested to come and give a small talk(mostly about the importance of students in the community). I also added the AWWCA Exec to the list of judges to extend an early hand out and they really seemed to appreciate that. The VP Ed before me also partnered with the Alumni Association and a community group (Bay Area Restoration Council), but you don't necessarily have to go that same route. Alumni paid for the cost of food at the BBQ two years ago, so it was a pretty awesome deal, I contacted Anne Marie at Alumni for funding and she did promise \$500 but I'm not sure whether that funding ever made it in (Me and Accounting couldn't locate it). You'll also have to take a look at getting materials for students to clean with (i.e. bags, gloves, etc.) far in advance. City Hall will give you these materials for free, so don't worry about cost – just make sure you have enough, The SCSN Director was a big asset for this since she went out and grabbed the material from the city for me. Make sure you have a large amount of bags since technically each residence can send up to two teams of 10 each, you could easily get over 200 people.

Talk to Rick from TwelvEighty as far in advance as possible so he's available to cook and has the food necessary. Don't forget to plan for vegetarians, and more people showing up than

expected since we don't really check. You could give out raffle tickets as an entry; Having a system where only those who participated get free food is a good idea to ensure that the right people are benefitting and you're keeping costs low. Make sure you engage the ROP and the ROA's throughout the week, distributing waivers, signup sheets (you could also deliver it to them during Rez Life training, arrange that with Brandon. This could be a more effective delivery mechanism to explain the event and get questions out of the way) to get first year involvement. I made an effort to visit all residences a few times to ensure they were signing people up, since points are at stake the event will be a natural motivation for ROAs but it is also on the Friday where first years and reps have become jaded and as such any incentives will help. I gave out Union Market giftcards and other random tidbits Woorder had lying around his office, make it a point earlier in the summer to obtain interesting gifts to give out (eg: for the most interesting piece of garbage). Essentially, do whatever you can to ensure atleast one full team per residence and SOCS. Faculty reps are fine to participate as well, but prioritize equipment for residences first, and only give them to faculties if there are extras. You'll have to decide if you want to fund additional food for Faculty Rep teams and more prominently advertise (with endorsement from Faculty Cup Committee) to them that they can gain bonus Campus Spirit points. I also asked the Maroons Coordinator to send a bunch of reps just in case residences can't send a team of 10 so they can fill in and at the same time help maintain the spirit/cohesiveness of the event, which is important since it's quite isolating to get everyone at the starting point (Mills Plaza or BSB Field, make it clear on your form) on time and in full numbers and try and control them (while they are talking/cheering) through a measly portable loudspeaker (maybe book a stronger Mic system from Avtek?); make sure you give training/instructions to the Maroons so they can help you run the event.

The reps will be your connection to engaging the first years in the CleanUp, and the BBQ part and gift items will sell itself. The day of the event is the busiest, as there are a couple other Welcome Week events also taking place. Having your board assist will ease the burden and make it less of an isolating experience but you should be the one taking a leadership position. Set out the routes for people to clean in advance, and make sure to give each team a copy. Plan for stragglers, or teams to be bigger/larger than initially anticipated. Time appropriately as students will need to come back in time for the BBQ, as well there may be other scheduled events.”

### **Valedictorian Selection**

To be honest, I never understood why this was the VP Education's responsibility, but alas, it is. The Fall valedictorian selection process is different than the Spring. You will have to play a part in both, however, so stay on top of this as best you can.

For the fall convocation, graduate students make up the majority of graduates, and as such, many of them will also apply for valedictorian. Graduate Studies coordinates the selection process, but ensure the MSU has proper representation on selection committees, and that the right people are coming together for them. There are only two ceremonies in the fall, but all of this information can be accessed via the Valedictorian package on the server. Peter or Vanessa will probably ask you to help advertise nominations, so help them in any way you can (or refer them to Woorder).

Your responsibilities for Spring valedictorian selection are greater. Begin the Spring process of Valedictorian as early as February because there are many selection committees that need time to meet after the nomination period has been exhausted. Admittedly, I was not super proactive on this, and began to receive some emails from office assistants and associate deans on the coordination process.

The first thing you'll want to do is refer to the Operating Policy on Valedictorian Selection and kind of just go from there. Let the Faculty Associate Deans offices know in advance when nomination packages are going to come out and close. Their emails are in a listserv on your email, so use that to contact them! Though the listserv should be complete, make a point of asking if there are any people from that faculty who didn't receive the information necessary, and then add their contact info to the listserv.

Once all valedictorians have been selected, save keep them for University PR to access them and then post them on the MSU website. You could even send them congratulatory letters. Be very vigilant and ask for faculties to send the names and positions of their committees to ensure they are following the policy (this applies in other general areas for the policy too) and strongly insist that they pick the undergrad reps as the SRA members you recommended rather than a random student of their choosing.

Since this award can have a huge personal impact on people, please ensure that you are using all possible channels to promote. The biggest request you can make to associate deans (perhaps by attending at a physical meeting) could be that their staff respect and strictly adhere to the outline valedictorian policy since in the past there were several instances of Faculties wanting to bend or break the rules intentionally or unintentionally (although I didn't experience any bumps myself). We had a much more smoother experience this past year, but in previous years we've had quite a few annoyed faculty offices caused by the MSU not following through or conducting this prestigious process early enough.

### **Being a Corporate Officer**

The VP Education position is a weird one. It is entirely possible to spend all of your time wrapped up in external and internal issues of education – and have no clue what is happening within our services or businesses, depending on how up-to-date the other board members keep you.

**\*\*Disclaimer\*\*** This following paragraph is a relic from Vish that keeps getting passed down from year to year – it is a classic “day in the life” of the misunderstood VP Education:

What you see: “Oh man, I’m so excited! I have this conference in Ottawa to attend where we’ll be meeting with MPs and actually influencing change. How often do we get an opportunity to interact with the people that can take our policy and put it into action. This is going to be awesome.” [End of the Week hits] “Man, that week was awesome. Got to meet with the Prime Minister’s Office, and the Finance Minister on issues related to the Canada Student Loans Program! It’s Sunday night, and I’m exhausted – I think I’ll take tomorrow off, maybe even two days just to recuperate from the long week I’ve had.”

What other people see. “Oh man, Rodrigo used to be so diligent, but now all he does is go on trips. He really is the VP Travel and Tourism. He’s never in the office, and whenever his conferences are over, he takes days off. What is this? I heard all he does is meet with some people, and drink the rest of the time. How come he can’t be like the rest of the board? Why did we even elect him?” While dramatized, this is the perception of the VP Ed at times, since even your own Board Members can sometimes admit to you that they don’t particular have much of an understanding of what you did last week, perhaps explaining in more details at Board Meetings during calendar updates could be a way to educate them on what you do on a day to day basis.

**Relationship with Full-Time Staff**

Contained in the non-EB version.

**Student Representative Assembly (SRA)**

Contained in the non-EB version.

**Executive Board**

Contained in the non-EB version.

**University Affairs and External Affairs**

Contained in the non-EB version.