Every Monday afternoon at 4:00 p.m., I meet with the McMaster Students Union’s (MSU) communications team to discuss the organization’s priority messages for the week ahead. As a part of that conversation, our communications director suggests a President’s Page topic. From there, one of the four members of the Board of Directors (BoD) writes something that hopefully bears resemblance to relevant, thoughtful, and timely prose.

This week, we decided our message should focus on the participatory budgeting platform I promised during the 2014 presidential election. I had promised to include students in large-scale financial decisions, offering the opportunity to significantly fund student life enhancement projects. I spent the past ten months working with our Vice President (Finance), as well as many others, to make this happen, and it did. Last week, the BoD worked with the University to allocate half of one million dollars to the student-generated projects, including: new seats in the McMaster University Student Centre, lights on the track to extend our intramurals program, and a renovated study space in Mills Library, just to name a few. With such exciting enhancements on the way, you can see why our communications team was excited for me to write on this topic, as it is undoubtedly great news. But the MSU is doing so much more than what initially meets the eye.

In all honesty, when I was a student, I really didn’t care what the MSU was doing. I didn’t even know we paid a fee to the organization. Thus, when I decided to run for President, my team and I thought it was essential to get students involved in financial decision-making processes, so that the actions of the organization could become more relevant to students. Cash flow guides an organization’s behaviour, so I felt students deserved the chance to call a few of the shots.

Successfully introducing the student voice to participatory budgeting was a step forward, but it is absolutely not the only thing the MSU does to keep student interests at the forefront of our financial decision-making. Being an involved member of the organization has shown me just how often student needs are incorporated into its decision-making processes. In house, our budget is passed through the Student Representative Assembly, a group that you have elected, and trust, to advocate on your behalf. Beyond that, the student voice is sought out for a series of decisions made at many other levels. In all honesty, when I was a student, I really didn’t care what the MSU was doing. I didn’t even know we paid a fee to the organization. Thus, when I decided to run for President, my team and I thought it was essential to get students involved in financial decision-making processes, so that the actions of the organization could become more relevant to students. Cash flow guides an organization’s behaviour, so I felt students deserved the chance to call a few of the shots.

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The point I’m circling here is that the MSU is constantly listening to students, even when its efforts may not be immediately obvious. We strive to keep the student voice central to every conversation we are invited to, or to which we invite ourselves. Participatory budgeting through the Student Life Enhancement Fund allowed the MSU to directly include students in major financial decisions, but please know that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

President
TEDDY SAULL

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