This year, the McMaster Students Union (MSU) has engaged with the Ontario provincial government in many capacities. Various Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), including the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Reza Moridi, as well as the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, have visited the MSU over this past year. Through the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), we also participated in OUSA’s Advocacy Week. Held in early December, this was an exciting event, as we will be discussing important topics, including: LGBTQ+ students, mature students, and tuition.

For the first time ever, OUSA will address issues exclusively related to Ontario’s LGBTQ+ students. The forthcoming policy paper recommends many changes for universities to implement, such as the creation of gender-neutral washrooms. The goal of this policy paper is to ensure every institution is safe, inclusive, and addresses the needs of all students.

The diversity of students attending university has drastically changed over the last decade, which has included an increasing enrollment of mature students. Mature students are those who do not enroll in university immediately following high school graduation. They, too, face many barriers in the PSE system, including difficulty accessing on-campus services. OUSA will address numerous concerns regarding mature students at the Spring General Assembly.

Finally, the cost of tuition is an omnipresent factor in the lives of all students. Tuition has long been on the advocacy radar of OUSA. During the Spring General Assembly, delegates will update past recommendations to reflect the current economic climate. We will be asking for a tuition freeze, as well as provincial contributions to university operating budgets.

For three days, students will discuss, debate, and recommend changes to these three policy papers to ensure they truly address the needs of Ontario students. On March 22, OUSA Plenary will take place, and the General Assembly will then decide whether or not to approve these policy papers. If approved, the content of these papers will add to our ever-growing repository of provincial lobbying initiatives. This process allows OUSA, as well as the MSU, to ensure that all of our advocacy efforts are grounded in student-centred perspectives.

If you are interested in seeing how OUSA Plenary works, attendance is open to everyone on Sunday March 22, beginning at 10:00 a.m. in Council Chambers (Gilmour Hall 111). Additionally, if you would like to find out more about OUSA, the General Assembly, or provincial advocacy, do not hesitate to contact me anytime at vped@msu.mcmaster.ca.