



**SPENCER**  
**NESTICO-SEMIANIW**  
*for* VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION

Dear Assembly,

It is with great excitement that I put forward my platform for VP (Education) of the McMaster Students Union. The ideas that I discuss here are the result of extensive work completed not just in the run up to this election, but from the meetings, working groups, professional experience, and academic classes that I have had the opportunity to participate in during my time at McMaster.

The VP (Education) has always been a position I have respected within the MSU. The portfolio, the advocacy, and the student-centered approach are all characteristics that are essential to student government, and are essential to students themselves. University should be a rewarding experience for all who want to participate, yet we are faced with an environment that constantly places challenge upon challenge on our students. Entering, progressing, and moving forward after university all place unique problems on our students, and these are issues that are being addressed and require considerably more support moving forward. Thus, I firmly believe that my platform satisfies the holistic, balanced, and extensive nature of the VP (Education) portfolio, and that I have acquired the experience, knowledge, and leadership ability to complete this platform in my term. I am incredibly excited to continue this journey with students.

Sincerely,

Spencer Nestico-Semianiw

## EXPERIENCE

External Affairs Standing Committee Commissioner April 2014 – March 2015

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance Summer Intern May 2014 – August 2014

Student Representative Assembly Arts & Science Member April 2014 – March 2015

Research Assistant to VP Education Spencer Graham August 2013 – April 2014

Advocacy Street Team External Groups Coordinator April 2014 – March 2015

OUSA Research Council Member and GA Delegate September 2013 – April 2014

## PLATFORM

### External Portfolio

#### Federal - Explore Federal Advocacy Options

With the MSU recently opting to leave CASA (the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations), the MSU must explore future avenues for federal advocacy. By working closely within the MSU's advocacy portfolio, I intend to explore these options to ensure that the MSU does not give up its ability to influence the federal government in the realm of post-secondary education. The following are several options to do so.

#### Assessing CASA

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, the SRA voted to end the MSU's membership with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. This decision arose after the SRA voted for associate membership in the previous year, and has been part of a long and tumultuous relationship between the MSU and CASA. This being said, the tone of the SRA conversation was hopeful that after several changes to CASA's operation are made, the MSU would rejoin with full confidence in the organization's lobbying potential. Thus, I have outlined the ways to ensure that these end goals are met.

##### 1) Request CASA Observer Status

After leaving CASA, the organization has made it clear that the MSU would have the option to request observer status for the 2015-2016 year. This status would allow the MSU to officially observe CASA's conferences, including events such as Foundations and Policy and Strategy. Moreover, the MSU would also be able to participate in large advocacy events such as CASA's LobbyCon, which will occur in February of next year and which will allow the MSU to be present in high profile meetings with Members of Parliament and federal party members. Thus, by remaining an official observer with CASA, the MSU can show both its students and the Alliance that it is serious about maintaining ties with federal organizations that represent the interests of post-secondary students.

##### 2) Continue CASA's Structural Changes

In 2014, previous MSU VP (Education) Spencer Graham presented several reports updating students on the MSU's efforts to restructure CASA. In these reports, the main deficits with CASA were discussed. Amongst these were issues regarding CASA's board structure, its voting and fee structure, its research and policy process,

and its effectiveness as an advocacy organization. However, under a strong push by both Mr. Graham and current VP (Education) Mr. Rodrigo Narro Perez, CASA has implemented several changes. Board structure continuity was improved through bylaw codification, Home Office will now complete research as tasked by CASA's membership, and advocacy and policy have become two of CASA's key priority areas.

More work has to be done however. CASA's voting and fee structure is still problematic for the MSU, and CASA still lacks a strong advocacy direction that will yield substantial, tangible results. Thus, as VP (Education) I would meet with CASA's Board at several CASA conferences to discuss various ways in which the voting and fee structure can be transitioned into a more equitable system. One idea would include having schools represented proportionally by votes, to match the financial contribution that they pay. However, to recognize the high number of CASA schools that have smaller populations, the solution may instead be to reach a compromise.

### 3) Strengthen CASA's Advocacy

One of the persisting criticisms of CASA is that it does not lobby hard enough for student interests, and does not effectively provide gains for students through its advocacy. In spite of this, the federal government exercises a phenomenal influence on post-secondary education, with operation of programs related to Canada student loans and youth unemployment, the running of NSERC and SSHRC, and the creation of policy related to international and Indigenous students. Thus, there is no shortage of venues through which CASA can lobby the federal government. In addition, CASA will be implementing a new conference this year on Election Preparedness, where CASA advocates can discuss what will be discussed and lobbied on when engaging with political parties for the election. As a result, there are several ways in which I hope to influence CASA's advocacy points for these meetings.

#### a. Canada Student Grants

As articulated in CASA policy, currently the Canada Students Loans Program operates such that if a student earns upwards of \$100 per week, every additional dollar is taken away from the financial aid that these students receive. This presents significant issues to students, as the reality is that they will need to increase work to cover the rising costs that the province is observing in tuition and other costs of education. Thus, as VP (Education) I would like to see CASA advocate on increasing and expanding the student grants program in the upcoming Federal Election. For instance, CASA currently advocates to the federal government to have grant allocation increase by 25% to match the increase in education since 2009. This would allow students to feel better supported as they progress throughout their education, despite the rising costs associated with attending a PSE institution.

## b. Tax Policy

Similar to OUSA's stance, CASA advocates that tax credits should be replaced with a system of upfront grants. Currently, close to one third of the support that the Canadian government provides to post-secondary students occurs through the tax system. However, review of this system is near unanimous in repurposing tax credits into other forms of student financial assistance, especially upfront grants. Thus, as OUSA and CASA both lobby on this issue, it is extremely important for these bodies to share resources and advocate in unison this year. As a result of the role I wish to play in both influencing CASA's agenda and OUSA's advocacy, I believe this can be a successfully advocacy goal that we work towards in the 2015-2016 year.

## c. Indigenous Students

Indigenous students are one of the most marginalized student populations on university campuses not just in Ontario, but nationwide. Historic, cultural, and social barriers are constantly challenging the success of Indigenous students on McMaster's campus specifically as well, and this creates an atmosphere that does not value the health, safety, success, and identity of many Indigenous students. Thus, I believe it is extremely important for Indigenous students to be a priority for CASA this year, to ensure that the government is allocating sufficient funding for specific support services, as well as creating robust strategies by which universities can increase the enrollment of Indigenous students to mitigate the challenges that prevent many of these individuals from pursuing a university education.

## d. International Students

Currently international students face a variety of unique challenges when it comes to their experience in Ontario post-secondary education. Tuition barriers, alienation on campus, and lacking the appropriate student support services can make it difficult for international students to succeed on campus. CASA currently recognizes barriers for international students and articulates concerns around the lack of student financial assistance for international students. Thus, I believe a priority this year should be lobbying for international students to have access to private loans, as well as federal scholarships and grants.

## Federal Election

The next Federal election is currently slated for October 19th, 2015. Thus, it will be under the mandate of the incoming VP (Education) to promote the election on-campus, make party platforms accessible to students, and ensure students know how, where, when, and why to vote. There are several approaches in which to do this.

### 1) Election Promotion

As opposed to the municipal elections, the presence of polling stations on campus will eliminate a huge barrier for students to vote. I intend to work closely with Elections Canada to ensure campus polling stations are placed in centralized student locations, while also ensuring they are physically accessible to all students. In addition, I will request CASA's election promotional materials at the cost of 5,000 dollars as a way of improving the effectiveness of our campaign. As well, I will use the Advocacy Street Team as a strong on-the-ground presence during election period, where they will be responsible for guiding students to polling stations, increasing awareness for the election, and being a constant source of information for interested students. I plan to mobilize many of the MSU's other resources too, including the Maroons, the SRA, and service volunteers to take tabling shifts in MUSC, promote the election through social media, and guide classes to polling stations. If possible, I also intend to use faculty and residence reps in this process as well.

### 2) Accessible Party Platforms

As External Affairs Commissioner, I worked with my committee to break down party and candidate platforms for both the provincial and municipal elections. I believe this approach was successful, but I do think it could be strengthened this year. For instance, I would like to print out pamphlets for candidate and party information, which could be distributed by the Advocacy Street Team during the election period. This information could also be placed in venues such as The Silhouette or residence televisions, to ensure more students have access. Lastly, the most direct way to engage students with platforms is by organizing for Hamilton MP candidates to come to campus to discuss party priorities. This would involve inviting the candidates of Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale to participate in an MSU-moderated debate, similar to the one conducted for the municipal election.

### 3) Creating a Culture that Votes

For many, political participation can be a daunting concept. Although a privilege to Canadians when compared to other countries' systems, many students often choose not to vote because of a lack of knowledge, a lack of willpower, or a lack of personal investment. Over the last year the MSU has challenged this however, with a MacVotes campaign that has been widely praised for infusing campus with a positive voting culture. I hope to continue that with updates to the MacVotes website, and more promotion material related to encourage students how to vote. This would include the locations of polling stations, times to vote, and documentation required to do so. Most importantly however, promotional material would focus on why students should vote. This is extremely important, and will motivate students by understanding the reason for which their participation in this election is necessary.

### Building the MSU's Federal Brand

After extensive discussions surrounding the MSU's place in CASA occurred, it appears instrumental that the MSU consider other ways to advocate federally. With this in mind I have set forward several approaches that I would like to use next year to both strengthen the MSU's personal brand of federal advocacy, while also investigating ways to lobby in unison with other organizations.

#### 1) Meeting MPs

In Hamilton there are five local Members of Parliament, with David Sweet of Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale officially representing McMaster's electoral district. Currently there is very little communication that occurs between the MSU and these representatives, and I would like to change this by meeting on a bi-monthly basis with each MP to discuss student issues. In doing so, I would be bringing MSU general policies to the meetings, and would specifically review recommendations on behalf of students to the federal government. In addition, I would also open dialogue to hear about what MPs are doing for students, and this would allow a better form of communication to flow between our two bodies.

#### 2) Adopting Best Practices

Recently Waterloo's Federation of Students chose to leave CASA. This year the Western Students' Union left as well. It is important for the MSU to engage in conversations with schools that currently have no vehicle for federal advocacy as a way to learn about what approaches they do or will implement to still have influence on the federal scale.

Very closely related to this is the MSU's role in developing new organizations for federal advocacy. Thus, by working with OUSA's future Steering

Committee, I plan to continue imagining different vehicles by which the MSU can approach federal advocacy. Specifically, in light of both the MSU and the Western Students' Union voting to leave CASA, all OUSA schools except Brock are now in a position of having no official mode for federal advocacy. Thus, if elected VP (Education) I would reach out to other OUSA schools to first discuss their plans for federal advocacy for the new year. As well, by testing the climate for collaboration, I would ideally like to see these six schools collaborate to form an Ontario-centered federal lobbying organization. I believe this is extremely important to ensure that regardless of CASA's restructuring, the MSU does have an appropriate secondary option in place to lobby on the federal level with a united front.

## Provincial – The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

Currently, the McMaster Student's Union maintains a very positive and productive working relationship with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. I wish to continue and extend the successes of this relationship to McMaster students in several ways. In addition, there are various other avenues through which the MSU can maintain a strong presence in the province's PSE sector.

### OUSA Leadership

Traditionally, the MSU VP (Education) has adopted a predominantly internal focus when it comes to advocacy and educational priorities. However, there are several reasons for why it is important to reassess the position's direction for this year. First, President-elect Ehima Osazuwa ran on a platform that was very external and advocacy focused. Most notably, many students connected with his vision to talk tuition, and to set the stage for increased university affordability. With the province's tuition framework being negotiated in 2016 – 2017, it is extremely important for the MSU to play a strong role in these discussions. There is no better way to do so than by leading OUSA's advocacy efforts and creating strong, policy-driven asks from the government.

Second, the Board of OUSA is responsible for maintaining a strong and productive relationship with the organization's Executive Director. As a result of my internship with OUSA last summer, there is no stronger relationship that I could imagine Mr. Sean Madden and I having. Since I am also very close with OUSA's Home Office operations as well, I am extremely confident in my ability to work well with them and Steering Committee throughout the year.

Thirdly, the MSU has undergone several changes to its advocacy structure over the past year. The availability of summer hours for commissioners, as well as the addition of a research assistant for federal affairs has made the MSU's advocacy efforts more robust. However, more work needs to be done and more work will be done this year to strengthen MSU advocacy. These plans are clearly articulated in the internal portion of this platform. Thus, with these changes the MSU can allow

its VP (Education) to pursue strong external advocacy without concern over the internal portfolio suffering.

Thus, I am very interested in running for a Board position with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. If elected, I plan to have consistent discussions with the SRA, the incoming Board, the President-elect, and Rodrigo Narro Perez on which position is best for the MSU VP (Education) to take on.

## OUSA Presence

In addition to taking on a leadership role in OUSA, there are also various ways in which OUSA can be better promoted on campus. Due to the time commitment attached to OUSA President however, the External Affairs committee would likely be empowered to take on many of these tasks. However, because of my role as EA Commissioner last year and my experience with these topics, I am confident I would be able to fully support the committee in successfully completing these goals.

### 1) Blog Schedule

This year students from the MSU were responsible for writing around a dozen blogs for OUSA. Many of these blogs were from EA committee members, but several were also from general students. Thus, I would like to encourage McMaster students to continue to participate in OUSA's weekly blog schedule. OUSA's blog is a great way for students to publicize issues or successes in their post - secondary environment and help them feel empowered to improve their education. In addition, sharing these blogs on social media can raise interest regarding OUSA's role and these particular student concerns.

### 2) On-Campus Awareness

Despite the work OUSA does, many students are still unaware of what the acronym even stands for. I believe this can change if the MSU hosts an informational campaign in first semester on what OUSA does for students. For instance, I would work with the Advocacy Street Team to advertise and promote OUSA and PSE concerns to undergraduate students through social media and campus campaigning. In discussion with incoming Advocacy Street Team Coordinator Christine Yachouh, I have learnt that she is very interested in continuing the team's close connection with OUSA. In our discussions we also considered circulating promotional materials that would highlight areas of concern in McMaster's educational landscape as well as promoting OUSA's role in attending to these.

### 3) OUSA Maroon Papers

This year I worked on passing several MSU General policies as External Affairs Commissioner. Hamilton Public Transit, Sustainability, Access Copyright, and Student Engagement and Retention were just several of the papers that were edited, completed, or passed at the SRA. In addition, EA Committee passed official Maroon papers as well, which were shortened two-page documents summarizing the intention of these papers. Thus, I would work with the EA Committee to create Maroon papers for each of OUSA's policy papers and have these present on the MSU website. I believe this would ensure that these papers are both present and accessible for MSU members, and would help bridge the knowledge gap between students and OUSA.

## Municipal Affairs

### ChangeCamp

This year the MSU completed the first-of-its-kind ChangeCamp, in partnership with the University and the City of Hamilton. This event occurred at the Art Gallery of Hamilton and was extremely successful, with stakeholders ranging from Mohawk representatives, the MSU, Volunteer Hamilton, and various city community members.

I feel there are several ways in which ChangeCamp can be expanded and improved upon next year. First, after meetings with the AVP Faculty Dr. Giroux, the general sentiment was for more community members and residents to be invited to participate in these discussions. In addition, many of the ways to improve ChangeCamp for next year will be founded on the report that is currently being done by MSU research assistant Matthew Brodka. Once this report is released, it will be imperative for the VP (Education) to bring this report to both the University and to the City to ensure that tangible recommendations are being made. As well, when ChangeCamp is hosted a year from now, it will be important that it builds upon these discussions and does not start anew. This will ensure that participants are aware of the previous conversations and are working towards continuing the objectives outlined originally.

## Network for Community-Campus Partnerships

Currently this network is comprised of University representatives and community members to highlight and recognize people who conduct pioneering work in community-engagement, as well as conducting community-engaged research and initiatives between the University and the surrounding community. For instance, this network was responsible for the initial idea and planning of ChangeCamp, as well as providing teaching awards to faculty who do great work

in community-engagement. Thus, the role of the MSU VP (Education) moving forward is devoted to continuing the role that Mr. Narro-Perez has had in this network, and ensuring that future tasks are developed in pioneering new ways of engaging students with the City.

## Lobbycon

Each year, OUSA hosts an advocacy week where its members go out and meet with various politicians and Ontario stakeholders to lobby on student issues. It was proposed last year that the MSU adopt a similar agenda, where student advocates would meet with Hamilton stakeholders to discuss issues related to McMaster. I believe this idea has enormous potential to both engage students in PSE issues, and raise awareness in the Hamilton community about student concerns. Meetings would include: the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Hamilton's Mayor, Ward 1 Counselor, and MPPs in the Hamilton area. In terms of the issues being lobbied, I intend to target areas related to student employment, municipal transit, and issues in student-family mixed neighborhoods. In addition, many different student leaders would be able to participate in the week's events. The MSU's Board of Directors, EA and UA Commissioners, and SCSN and AST part-time managers would all be important advocates during this week.

After occurring, reports would be compiled detailing the week's conversations. This would be done so that the current MSU advocates are able to use this information for the remainder of their terms, as a means of following up with stakeholders and politicians on the conversations that took place. Lastly, these reports will signal the beginning of a trend for MSU advocacy. By compiling reports from each year's LobbyCon, future MSU VP (Educations) will remain informed on the issues that were lobbied over the past years. This is instrumental for continuity, and will mitigate the problem of turnover within the MSU.

## McMaster Innovation Park Entrepreneurship Conference

In the previous year, VP (Education) Spencer Graham laid much of the groundwork for creating a campus that is more receptive to entrepreneurial innovation and learning. To continue this work, I believe it will be important for the VP (Education) to plan and complete a conference on continuing the entrepreneurial spirit at McMaster.

The nature of this particular event would be to empower both entrepreneurially minded students and faculty. This would occur through the use of several sessions throughout the conference. First, students would participate in a session very similar to the MSU's Clubsfest, in which students would be able to connect with MSU and University clubs and services related to entrepreneurship. This would allow them to learn all about the various campus resources available to them. In addition, other sessions would involve keynote speakers, and specific training for students on how to successfully run a startup, including issues around

funding, legal knowledge, and best practices to ensure success. Furthermore, students would also have the opportunity to connect with local Hamilton businesses to learn about and apply for summer internships. One of the sessions I am most excited about however is one where faculty would be able connect with local Hamilton business. This would be designed such that faculty can learn about ways to implement experiential components into their courses, allowing students to explore the Hamilton community for assignments. As well, the MSU would be able to collaborate with a wide variety of services and organizations on this conference including SPECTRUM, which is responsible for supporting McMaster entrepreneurs.

### MSU and City of Hamilton Employment Initiative

During my work with the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Policy and Research Analyst Huzaifa Saeed described the challenges facing Hamilton's economy. One of the major challenges is the brain drain from poor graduate retention in Hamilton. Since employability is also a major concern for students, I see improving this area as a mutually beneficially endeavor for both students and the City. Thus, I would like to establish a strong connection between the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and the MSU to help connect graduating students with jobs in Hamilton.

When discussing this idea with Mr. Saeed, he was able to provide guidance that shaped my view of the issue. Currently, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce President Keanin Loomis is working to implement Magnet, which is a government funded not-for-profit powered by Who Plus You, a job matching site developed by Ryerson University. The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce will be working with their members to sign them up and place their jobs on the website. On the side of McMaster University however, Dean of Students Sean Van Koughnett is on board with this initiative, although many of McMaster's career offices have yet to begin participating.

As VP (Education), I would attempt to lobby the university to engage in this project to ensure McMaster adopts it once it comes to fruition. Another role of the VP (Education) would be to ensure the supply end (students using the website for jobs) was met and this would require a high level of advertising to increase campus awareness of the service.

## Internal Portfolio

### Advocacy Restructuring

Over the last years, there has been a trend within the MSU's education portfolio. Past VP (Education)s have consistently commented on the overburdened nature of their work, and the lack of resources that the MSU may devote to its advocacy pillar. However, this year many positive developments were made to confront this issue. Summer variable hours were given to all commissioners at a quantity of 100 each, and this will be vital in allowing the External Affairs and University Affairs commissioners to support their term work during the summer. In addition, the Advocacy coordinator received increased hours, and the MSU has also added two research assistants to support education initiatives. These allow the MSU to have three research assistants, with the Federal and Provincial research assistant, the University Affairs research assistant, and the Community Engagement Coordinator. Thus, the MSU will already have an extremely more robust system of education-related support internal. However, more work still needs to be done.

As VP (Education), one of my goals will be to raise the number of hours for EA and UA commissioners specifically. Not only do these positions already typically work well over their specified hours, but it is also important that the MSU sets an expectation for the amount of work that these positions should be completing. My official recommendation will be to increase the hours of EA and UA commissioner to 15 hours per week. This would allow a substantial increase in productivity, and would better adhere to the principle that the MSU pays students for the work they complete. In addition, I would also explore other ways in which to add support to the portfolio by analyzing the operations at other Ontario and Canadian schools. By analyzing other schools, the MSU can evaluate best practices and discover how to add additional positions to improve our school's educational landscape.

### Past VP Continuity

When it comes to student government, the common blessing and curse is that student leaders pass through very quickly. This can often be an advantage to advocacy because it brings in new ideas and new approaches, while also providing a continual flow of students with important leadership and personal growth opportunities. However, the negative aspect of student government is that by losing student leaders, oftentimes projects that were in the process of completion may fall to the wayside. Thus, there are three specific projects started by past VP (Education) positions that I wish to continue implementing this year.

### 1) Course Wiki

As a member of the Academic Affairs Council under Spencer Graham, I had the opportunity to work first hand on the Course Wiki initiative. I provided preliminary information for many Arts & Science courses, and was exposed to both the purpose and future operations of the Course Wiki. Thus, as the University Affairs Committee continued work on this project this year, essentially all courses are updated for this initiative. The role of the MSU VP (Education) next year will be multidimensional. First, I will provide a hard launch for the wiki, by getting VP Academics and faculty societies to promote it to their students as well as creating awareness through MSU SRA members, services, and committees. In addition, it will be important to assign VP Academics or other interested students with the task of continually updating the wiki. Since the nature of this service is to be transient and evolving, it is of utmost importance that we continue promoting it such that students are constantly editing courses as they change each academic year.

### 2) Peer Tutoring Network

One of Teddy Saull's Presidential platform points was developing the peer tutoring network, which would allow students to receive tutoring services from registered student tutors. Over the last year extensive work has been done on creating this network, and it is currently ready for implementation for the 2015 – 2016 year. Specifically, the role of the VP (Education) next year will be to assess its pilot year and to ensure that students feel supported in both the quality of education and the treatment they receive by tutors. As well, the MSU allocated 10,000 dollars to subsidize the cost for students who have financial barriers when it comes to the 15 dollar price point per hour. Thus, the VP (Education) will maintain a role alongside the President and VP (Finance) to ensure that this money is distributed effectively to students in financial need.

### 3) Academic Affairs Council

In second year, I worked with the AAC as a research assistant to VP (Education) Spencer Graham. That year I worked with VP Academics on the State of Education Report, and found this experience extremely successful and productive. However, this year Rodrigo identified a difficulty with VP Academic participation, mainly because many of them are not mandated to come to meetings and reasonably participate. Thus, I have outlined a strategy to mitigate this issue to ensure the Academic Affairs Council is as productive as possible.

First, what I imagine Academic Affairs Council to be is a project-based body. Ideally, the AAC should be able to complete one project throughout the duration of the year, or one smaller project each semester. In addition, I firmly believe that the strength of AAC is that it provides a perspective from every

academic faculty on campus. Thus, my approach with this committee would be to schedule a first meeting at the end of April, and promote a dialogue on what each member wants out of the committee. I would do this to first gauge where AAC falls in VP Academic portfolios, and to then negotiate what the expectation would be for the amount of work completed by each VP. I believe this would allow the VP (Education) to have a better expectation of which members are interested and to what degree, so that they can plan accordingly when developing a platform.

Lastly, it is also important to plan what project the AAC would be responsible for doing. In fact, I will not put forward a concrete project until after I meet with the incoming VP Academics. The reason for this is essentially because I believe the VP Academics should be the ones setting the direction for this project. This will ensure that they are engaged and passionate about the issue, and will address the fact that many VPs often reduce the amount of work put into AAC as the semester progresses. However, I do believe that AAC could be responsible for taking leadership on one of the internal goals addressed in my platform. For instance, Career and Co-op Services would be a great initiative for VP Academics to take a lead on, as it falls under their portfolio and is a campus-wide issue that is still unique for each faculty.

## Tuition On-Campus

In addition to the strategy I plan to implement externally through OUSA, there are also several means by which the MSU VP (Education) can support tuition talks on campus. I sincerely believe these are instrumental in creating a robust and multidimensional tuition strategy that targets both provincial lobbying as well as focusing on the tuition landscape at McMaster specifically.

### 1) MSU Task Force

One of President-elect Ehima Osazuwa's platform points related to creating an internal MSU task force on tuition. The intention of this committee is to get students involved in discussions on tuition, and the MSU VP (Education) would be chairing and organizing this committee. Essentially, this group would be multidimensional and focus on several issues related to tuition and the financial burden for McMaster students. First, Ehima and I have agreed that it should focus on researching and then informing students on how their tuition is broken down and used by the University. Second, there should be a strong focus on understanding the holistic issue of tuition in the province, to gather a strong understanding of the current tuition framework. Lastly, this committee would also look at the myriad of financial assistance that is available to McMaster students. This is extremely important because regardless of what decisions happen with tuition at McMaster, students need to be best supported in knowing the financial resources available to them for access as they progress through or are preparing to enter the University.

## 2) Board of Governors Advocacy

Another important initiative is to take OUSA's recently passed tuition policy and use it to advocate to the University. After meeting with Mr. Osazuwa to discuss this idea, we plan to present to the McMaster Board of Governors in May, where we would advocate for tuition to not increase for the 2015-2016 year by the maximum 3% increase. This will be done first as an accountability measure, as it is important for students to know that the Board of Directors takes seriously the platform on which Mr. Osazuwa was elected. In addition, I believe my role here is dual. First, I am ready to support the stance that tuition should not increase by the 3% maximum allowance. However, I believe it is also important that a proposal is given to the University to recommend ways for costs to be cut to ensure that the reduction in expected tuition will not cause student services and learning to suffer. Thus, looking at issues such as faculty compensation, building lighting costs, and increasing private funding are ways that the university can subsidize this change so that students do not suffer.

## 3) Exploring New Modes of Financial Assistance

This year the MSU created its first emergency bursary with a dollar value of 500 dollars. I strongly believe this initiative moves the MSU towards better supporting students as they progress throughout their education. This being said, it is important for the MSU to assess the success of this initiative after this year and recommend whether this program should be expanded to reach more students. I believe if feasible for the organization the MSU should continue to provide bursaries for students, since as tuition climbs it is increasingly important for the MSU to provide support. However, it is also important to recognize that these bursaries are funded by students through their MSU fund. Thus, it is important to recognize the principle that students should never be required to support each other financially in order to continue their degree. It is a reflection of the extreme difficulty that the province has put students in when student unions are required to provide financial assistance because tuition is too high.

The MSU should also be advocating for increased needs-based scholarships offered by the University. Currently, McMaster University offers an extremely large system of merits-based entrance scholarships, yet their needs-based scholarships are nowhere near as numerous. Thus, as VP (Education) I would enter into discussions with the University on how best to convert merit-based scholarships into needs-based ones. This is not to say that the goal is to not provide any merits-based scholarships, but instead for needs-based scholarships to increase to reflect the growing number of students who are in financial need.

## Mental Health

In 2013, the McMaster Student Mental Health Forum was established, which brought together students, health professionals, faculty, and administration in the pursuit of discussing the mental health needs of students on campus. These discussions were followed up on in 2014 by McMaster's Student Affairs, and eventually led to this year's Student Mental Health & Well-Being Strategy. This strategy provided five key recommendations that are now being adopted by the University. Thus, there are several ways in which the VP (Education) must support this action plan.

First, this plan recommends the establishment of a working group on developing training, resource recommendations, and guidance to the community. This would also include providing training to faculty departments and academic advisors to ensure these individuals are knowledgeable on how to identify student mental health concerns and direct these students to the appropriate resources. Thus, I plan to be heavily involved in this working group to ensure that students are receiving the best care from their faculties and advisors. Second, an accommodation policy committee is being struck to improve the ways that mental health concerns can be granted academic accommodation. This is a particular interest of mine, and I would also sit on this committee as well. Lastly, the mental health strategy focuses on conducting research into mental health issues at McMaster. I believe the MSU could be an important support in conducting this research, especially when related to the impact of mental health issues on academic performance.

Outside of the specific Student Mental Health & Well-Being Strategy, there is also the development of a Student Mental Health Network. This network would include students, MSU clubs, and student groups that are passionate about mental health issues. As VP (Education) I would be responsible for working specifically on developing this network, and setting the priorities such that tangible mental health goals are articulated and achieved. Related to this would also be my involvement with restructuring the MSU's services. There was preliminary discussion this year on placing all the MSU's peer support services under one umbrella, and I would also be involved with the dialogue around that restructuring, to ensure that it provides better service to students.

## Quality of Teaching

### 1) OUSA Policy Paper

As research assistant to Spencer Graham last year, I had the opportunity to learn a massive amount concerning the quality of education both at McMaster University, as well as across the province. One of my largest projects was the State of Education Report, by which I worked with VP Academics from each faculty to assess the diversity of pedagogical experiences at each McMaster faculty. In

addition, my first OUSA General Assembly focused on the Student Success policy paper, which was very focused on quality of teaching and learning. Thus, I would like to continue promoting McMaster's history of excellence and innovation in teaching by writing the new OUSA general policy on teaching and learning. This will allow McMaster's innovative approach to pedagogy to pave the way for Ontario universities, and to ensure that faculty, administration, and students are all best supported to create an environment that values education.

## 2) TA Training

The next aspect of teaching and learning is related to TA training. This year, CUPE will be renegotiating their TA Collective Bargaining Agreement. Thus, it is topical for the MSU to take a leadership role in ensuring that TAs are trained to perform the best they can in the classroom. One of the main issues is that CUPE has the stance that TAs should not be mandated to complete training if it is not paid. If elected VP (Education), I would recognize this position, and work towards modifying training modules so that important training on quality teaching, anti-oppression, and sensitivity occurs. TAs are currently paid for 130 hours of work per semester, and 3 of these hours include the current modules devoted to training TAs. I would thus work to condense these trainings so that new modules on these additional topics occur, so that TAs are paid for them, while also improving their performance in the classroom.

## 3) Course Evaluations

Currently the University is very interested in evaluating the success of course evaluations. By meeting with the AVP Faculty Dr. Susan Giroux, we had an extremely important meeting regarding the current climate towards course evaluations. From these discussions, it was evaluated that there needs to be a greater focus towards the efficacy of midterm evaluations, as well as whether these evaluations should be in person or online. Lastly, course evaluations are only one part of a holistic review of teaching quality. Course evaluations are discussed in tandem with a professor's teaching philosophy and teaching style, and peer review and faculty oversight will occur during important tenure and promotion decisions. Thus, I intend to look at course evaluations in a holistic sense, and look into the entire process of how faculty are assessed year to year. In addition, I plan to continue sitting on the Teaching Evaluations Committee to provide a student perspective to all of these course evaluations decisions.

## Career and Co-op Offices

Based on conversations with current VP (Education) Rodrigo Narro Perez, there are a variety of challenges with McMaster's current career services. For instance, as it stands most faculties as well as the Student Success Centre provide

career and co-op services. This mix of decentralized and centralized systems causes many students to pay two separate fees to fund their faculty's services as well as the services provided by the SSC. In addition, the nature of these services makes it natural for many students to approach their faculty for career and co-op advice, because their faculty will often understand their program better than the SSC. Thus, all these factors play into the current landscape feeling very disjointed at McMaster.

As VP (Education), there are several approaches I would take to improve career services at the University. First, I would work with faculties and the University to discuss whether a centralized or decentralized system is better to serving students. Since last year Student Affairs was very focused on the mental health framework these discussions largely fell to the wayside, but this year career and co-op will likely be a strong priority for the University. Moreover, I plan to work to ensure that career services provide more experiential opportunities for students, and that these positions are in students' field of study specifically. In addition, I also believe that our career services should put a focus on Hamilton-based jobs as a means connecting students with the community and encouraging student engagement and retention. Lastly, I also believe it is important for the VP (Education) to take a critical eye to other universities career services. For instance, Waterloo is renowned for its innovative and entrepreneurial approach to co-op and careers, and the MSU needs to evaluate how it can benefit from the operation of other organizations.

## Accessibility Campaign

This year the SRA began discussions on splitting Diversity Services to create a new service on Abilities. If this were to occur, the MSU's new Abilities service would focus on a variety of accessibility issues on campus, as well as creating a safer campus environment by which students with disabilities feel safe and supported. Thus, although abilities on campus would have a specific venue for the MSU, it is still extremely important for the VP (Education) to support accessibility on campus. I plan to do so by launching a social media accessibility campaign.

When attending Accessibility Forum last semester, one keynote speaker talked about a social media campaign that could be implemented at McMaster. This campaign would essentially focus on students taking pictures of physical inaccessibility at McMaster, including elevators that are not working, snow mounds that prevent mobility, and lack of ramps to buildings and bus shelters. Afterwards, students would be able to tweet these pictures to McMaster University as a means of promoting dialogue on accessibility on campus. In addition, the AMS recently conducted a similar campaign and developed an audit that they took to their University on the various accessibility issues on their campus. This is something I would be very interested in pursuing as a means of translating campaign and associated dialogue into change at McMaster.

## MIETL

This year I served as a working group coordinator with the McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning. As coordinator, I was responsible for scheduling and leading meetings related to the impact of reflection on community-engaged learning. By working alongside a MIETL research assistant and students, we conducted an expansive amount of research on the topic and devised several research tasks for MIETL to conduct over the following years. Our report will soon be compiled into the general proposal that will be presented to AVP, Teaching & Learning Director Arshad Ahmad.

My work with MIETL this year has been extremely important because the research proposal presented in April will set MIETL's research priorities for the next several years. Thus, I plan to work very closely with Arshad Ahmad over the next year to ensure that students are always involved in the planning, implementation, and reflection on this research. In addition, I also hope MIETL continues to provide student leadership positions in its work, and to continue increasing the proportion of students in many of its working groups.

## On-Campus Indigenous Support

In post-secondary education, aboriginality is considered the single greatest predictor for individuals to not attend university. As a result of the extreme cultural, economic, and political oppression of Aboriginals in Canada historically and in the present day, students attempting to both enter and succeed in the post-secondary sector face extreme challenges. On McMaster's campus these challenges continue to be very real. Thus, it is important that the MSU VP (Education) works to develop a strong strategy to address the issues faced by Aboriginal students on our campus. This strategy will have several components.

### 1) Research-based Approach

Currently, McMaster University has over 600 self-identified Indigenous students on our campuses. However, because of the barriers that Indigenous students face in many facets of academic and student life, it is often difficult to acquire extensive research on the issues Aboriginals face. Thus, the first step to this strategy is to commission research into Indigenous services to see how students are being supported at McMaster and what Indigenous students find to be the biggest barriers to their success. Running focus groups will be an extremely important aspect of this research, and will allow the MSU to learn about the issues being faced by a substantial portion of our student population.

### 2) Improving Student Support

After research has been conducted, it is imperative that the MSU follows up with improving the supports for Indigenous students. Mental health support,

Indigenous services, and providing events and initiatives to affirm the identity of Aboriginal students on campus is an extremely important way for the MSU to ensure that Indigenous students feel supported throughout their studies. In addition, based on the findings of the MSU's research, it will be very important for the MSU to work towards fostering an inclusive community of Indigenous students at McMaster. Finally, because of the MSU's recent separation from CASA, it is extremely important that the VP (Education) takes a leadership role in supporting these students. Since the federal government provides all education-related funding for Indigenous students, the VP (Education) must work on campus to ensure student support does not suffer. Thus, it is important to look at this issue in terms of what the MSU specifically can do to support Indigenous students on campus, and to work with the University when necessary to support the creation of a supportive system through which Indigenous students can succeed.

## Closing Statement

Dear Students,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to review my platform and engage with me on the ideas I have put forward. For myself, the MSU has been an organization that has constantly challenged me to think critically about student issues, and I believe that the complex and intricate nature of student advocacy and education is reflected in my thoughts above. This year I am passionate about redefining the VP (Education) portfolio. Our President-elect campaigned on a progressive platform, and I think it is of utmost importance that the incoming VP (Education) understands how to best support this direction. Moreover however, the VP (Education) must also take a strong stance on internal and external issues that will best support McMaster students, and I believe I have created an extremely well founded platform that will accomplish both of these goals. I look forward to continue having these discussions as we move forward as an organization together.

Sincerely,

Spencer Nestico- Semianiw

