



MEMO

From the office of the...

Vice-President (Education)

TO: Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Vice-President (Education)
SUBJECT: Tuition Task Force Report #1
DATE: July 14, 2015

Dear SRA,

This memo outlines the first official report for the Tuition Task Force, with the intention of updating the SRA on its workings, and satisfying one dimension of the task force's mandate, which was to report once per term to the SRA.

To date, the Tuition Task Force has held two meetings, the first occurring on May 28th from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM and the second occurring on July 10th from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM. At the first meeting our agenda was:

1. Introductions (All)
2. Updates from the Chair and President (Spencer & Ehima)
3. Review of Task Force Mandate (Spencer)
4. Priority Sharing (All)
5. Develop advocacy approach (All)
6. Develop policy approach
7. Develop SFA Breakdown approach
8. Next Steps

This meeting benefited from relatively high attendance and a willingness to discuss big ideas and objectives regarding affordability. The discussions from this meeting also led to the development of our eight primary objectives for the MSU for the 2015-2016 year, as well as potentially long-term aspects as well. These priorities will be presented in this report as well.

For the second meeting, our agenda is summarized below:

1. Introductions (All)
2. Updates from the Chair and President (Spencer & Ehima)
3. Tuition Policy Paper Updates/Discussion (Saad & All)
4. MSU Bursary (Daniel & All)
5. Student Financial Assistance Documents (All)
6. Tuition 101 (All)
7. Letter-Writing Campaign (All)

8. Needs-based Scholarships (All)
9. Board of Governors Advocacy (All)
10. Tuition Research (All)
11. Next Steps

In terms of active participation, the meetings have been a mixed bag. None of the nine elected SRA and MSU members to the committee have attended both meetings, and quite a few of them in fact have attended neither. Although the summer is a difficult time period, the absence in voices at the table has most likely been the chief challenge to the success of the committee. Thankfully, observers such as the EA, UA, and Finance Commissioners, VP Finance and Student Life Development Coordinator have been sustained participants, in addition to myself and the MSU President.

In terms of actual priorities, the Tuition Task Force has developed eight key areas that we intend to focus on this year. I have greatly summarized these areas here, but if you have any questions regarding them please feel free to ask.

1) Tuition Policy Paper

Over the next months the External Affairs Committee will be developing a renewed MSU tuition paper that outlines our official stances on affordability of education. This process will involve student focus groups and consultation, followed by greater review at the Tuition Task Force as well. The goal is to pass the paper at the SRA in October.

2) MSU Bursary

The MSU Emergency Bursary is set for September of this year and the Tuition Task Force will play a role in promoting the bursary and evaluating its use throughout the year. This body will then provide recommendations for its future implementation depending on its use this year.

3) Student Financial Assistance Documents

The MSU will be working closely with the Student Success Centre on their Mac Money Centre and translating its information and resources to the MSU as well. We hope to do this in the form of information on our website, as well as developing easy to navigate and understandable infographics and tools for students to understand how and when to access student financial assistance.

4) Tuition 101

This will be the first of our two affordability related campaigns. This campaign will focus on providing stats to students regarding their education, while also being largely informative. We hope to partner with the university on this campaign by running chats with upper level University administration with the intention of informing students about the current tuition landscape and answering student questions regarding their tuition.

5) Letter-Writing Campaign

This is the second of our two affordability related campaigns. This campaign will focus on galvanizing student support for a tuition freeze through the writing of letters to the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities asking for a tuition freeze. The goal will ideally be to partner with OUSA, and the Council of Ontario Universities in this endeavor.

6) Needs-based scholarships

Currently the University provides merit-based scholarships to students but very limited needs-based assistance. This goal will involve conducting an audit of the quantity and value of needs-based vs. merit-based scholarships, and subsequently evaluate how to advocate for addition needs-based assistance.

7) Board of Governors Advocacy

This priority will involve Ehima and my lobbying to the university for a tuition freeze, which will likely also take the form of an MSU budget submission that considers this very change. This goal will also include the MSU meeting with Board of Governors members to discuss the MSU's priority for affordability this year.

8) Tuition Research

To be conducted by our research assistants, this priority will focus on learning more about how tuition is broken down at McMaster specifically, with the intention to provide recommendations to the university to improve transparency, accountability, and better allocation decisions.

I hope you have found this report informative. If you have any additional questions feel free to email me, and I also encourage you to attend meetings as well. In terms of next steps the task force will be meeting again in either late August or early September, and we will report to the SRA again sometime during first semester. Many of these priorities will also continue to develop in the coming months, with many coming to fruition by the end of first semester and early second semester.

Sincerely,

Vice-President (Education)
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