Dear McMaster Community,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my excitement for the academic year that lies ahead. From this moment forward, the year will be marked by a new term as MSU President, I have been courageously pushing forward with my campaign agenda, whilst learning the nuances of the organization. This article is my opportunity to sum up some of the work that I have been undertaking over the past few months. I will focus on what has been accomplished over the summer to advance my platform for students.

Something Old: Bridge Study Space

My predecessor, Matt Dillon-Larch, was very dedicated to creating more study space on campus. I have been actively continuing that effort. Before I ran for President, I met with the Hospitality Services management team who were supportive of the idea of allowing the physical space in Bridges to be accessible to students for extended hours during the exam period. I will be working this semester to ensure that something is in place for the December exam period in collaboration with MSU Diversity Services.

Something New: MSU Peer Support Line

A large amount of work has been done over the summer in order to establish a peer support line on campus. To that effect, the meeting committee consisting of myself, VP (Administration) David Campbell, MSU Club presidents of Kids Help Phone and COPES, Student Mental Health Alliance, along with staff from the Student Wellness Centre met several times. Currently, volunteer applications are available via the MSU and Student Wellness Centre websites, due by October 12, 2012. If you are interested in becoming a Peer Support Line Volunteer, please visit www.msumcmaster.ca for more details on the application process. Training for the Peer Listeners will be held on November 17 and 18 and we expect a soft launch of the service in the second term.

Something Borrowed: Green Roof Initiative

This summer I hosted several meetings with the meeting committee for the Green Roof Initiative, comprised of the Office of Sustainability, MUSC Administration, MacGreen, and the original drafters of the Green Roof proposal. We all conducted a number of survey feedback rounds and counting. The preliminary findings of the survey will be posted shortly and we now have a project manager assigned to this initiative from Facilities Services. We are currently searching for an architect that will draft several designs for the space. Once we have decided on our design, we will circulate them in a survey to gather student opinion as to which design is best. With a maker preference established, I will begin the process of soliciting vendors and forming a contractual agreement.

First Year Street Team

The Street Team will help enhance the visibility of FCVC on campus. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that more first year students are engaged with the mission of the MSU. I have been working with NKA Science representative Christina Ung, as well as the Inter Residence Council (IRC) and the Society of Off-Campus Students (SOCs), who are interested in helping to facilitate the project. I will also be communicating with faculty society presidents at our first Presidents Council Meeting this month about inviting first year representatives from their societies to participate in the street team. This initiative focuses on three main areas: Advocacy, Mentorship and Events/Promotions. The First Year Street Team meetings will be facilitated by the elected members of FCVC and the first meeting for the Street Team will be in October. The First Year Street Team is open to any first year student at McMaster. Visit www.msumcmaster.ca for more information.

Something for You: Fall Break

As planned, I used the summer months to hold meetings with a number of stakeholders regarding the concept of a fall break. Having met with the majority of Associate Deans as well as the University Registrar, staff from the Scheduling and Examinations Office and senior administrators including President Diame and our new Provost Dr. David Wilkinson, I believe that the concept of a fall break is gaining traction amongst decision makers. It is my sincere belief that something will be achieved this year, to take effect in 2013-2014. The Scheduling and Examinations Office has started a beta project looking at what alterations can be made to the exam timetable structure to allow for a “grace break” over the academic term. Once they have gathered the exam requests from professors, Scheduling and Examinations will formulate the data for a trial run. At the same time, I plan to initiate a survey of McMaster students to gauge the appetite for a fall break. Having student voices in hand, I will continue a multi-faceted approach to advocating for a fall break. First will be the discussion about potential alterations of the exam schedule, allowing for more flexibility in the general timetable. Secondly, I will be meeting with faculty leaders and University administration to define the parameters of a fall break, in order to present for the academic requirements needed for the completion of a variety of courses. My vision is for a uniform break across campus, in the fall semester, for all students who need it to make menstruation easier.

I would like to take just a few more lines to bring you up to speed on a number of initiatives that are underway within the operational side of the MSU. The year MacFarland opened its doors, much earlier than usual, Mac Farland is a great example of an MSU service that has blossomed and become integrated into the McMaster experience, as the earlier opening was well received by the McMaster community. Look for Mac Farland every Tuesday and Wednesday through October (weather and produce dependent).

Additionally, funding is available for great ideas that you might have to improve your experience on campus. The deadlines for the Undergraduate Student Initiation Fund is fast approaching (for proposals/projects taking place before November 30, 2012). This pool of funds is available to undergraduate students (18 units or more) and MSU clubs who seek capital to pursue extra-curricular endeavours and goals. Visit the MSU homepage and find the link to the USIF on the bottom right of the page. The deadline for first semester funding requests is September 24, 2012.

The MSU is also involved in several para-university initiatives. For example, a number of MSU clubs and services are participating in the First Annual Open Streets McMaster event, taking place this Sunday, September 23 on campus. Also, be sure to check out the 2nd Annual Leadership Seminar for Women, happening October 26th at Hamilton City Hall.