

February 11, 2014<sup>th</sup>**To:** Students' Council**Re:** Report to Council

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Hey Council,

This will be my first report in over a year that has not included the Acknowledgment of Indigenous Territory at the beginning. As many of you may know, this is because a similar and improved statement is now included at the beginning of every agenda package instead. In addition, an oral Acknowledgment or a reminder thereof is read at the beginning of every meeting in a fashion similar to the Oath. I think we, as a Students' Union, should take great pride in the progress that our Acknowledgment signifies. It is a crucial first step to indigenizing and decolonizing our Students' Union and our University.

BoG Job Shadow Day and Briefing on Comprehensive Institutional Plan

I'm pleased to announce that the BoG job shadow day last Friday was a success! Two students eager to learn more about the Board and the important role it plays in University Governance accompanied me to the CIP Briefing. The job shadow attendees were able to mix and mingle with the Members, asking questions and getting a feel for the general operations of the Board.

The CIP briefing provided an excellent opportunity to ask questions of the Administration about the proposed CIP and the general operations and financials of the University. I asked a question to Vice President Finance and Administration Phyllis Clark regarding the possibility of student fees being gradually lowered as the financial situation of the University stabilizes. Phyllis indicated that fees are likely to remain constant (with regular CPI increases etc) assuming that the revenue from government does not decrease and that the expenses of the University do not increase

beyond projects. Altogether, however, her response suggests that there is indeed the possibility for further student cost/fee increases if revenue decreases or expenditures rise above expectations. This concerns me because students should not be expected to cover an evermore-increasing share of the burden of operating this University. At the end of the day our University is a public good and should be respected as such by the Provincial government. The U of A is of immeasurable benefit to both domestic and international students, and it is utterly unacceptable that they should be expected to pay for what is a right.

#### Board of Governors Dinner

The Thursday evening before Friday's CIP Briefing I attended a BoG-members only dinner. The dinner provided a great opportunity to discuss the upcoming CIP with members and to advocate for students' interests on the Leadership College and other issues. President Indira was unusually frank at the meeting, which was quite refreshing. She elaborated her frustration with the institutional constraints that she has consistently come up against in her many years as President. It was fascinating to learn that in many ways she feels she can do little more than nag the other administering executives to do their job – she does not feel like she has the power to make dramatic institutional reforms on a whim.

For the most part, I think this is a good thing. Universities are massive organizations that often do not respond well to dramatic change. This shouldn't be seen as a bad thing. The institutional culture of the University of Alberta is something we should be proud of. Consultation is absolutely critical to the success of any organizations, and as a University we need to be doing more meaningful consultation, not less.

On the other hand, however, I can understand where Indira is coming from. She is an ambitious President, and has worked tirelessly to improve the U of A in every way she can. No doubt her ambitions have run aground again and again because of administrative and consultative

delays. Moreover, there is much that can be said for efficiency and responsiveness. Overall, however

I'm not convinced that it is in the long-term interest of the University of Alberta to change our institutional culture to reflect a more "businesslike" model. In fact, I think the University needs to stay a University, and we should fight as hard as we can to keep it that way.

Question from Councillor Mohammed

"To Governor Kelly

Are you satisfied with the current structure of the Board of Governors? Do you think the SU should advocate to reform BOG?"

I cannot describe how much I love this question. This is such a great question Councillor Mohammed, major props to you for asking it. Absolutely I think the Board of Governors should be reformed. The BoG as currently set up by the PSLA is essentially "rigged" against student interests. In fact, the majority of members aren't even Faculty or Staff; they're members of the public. This leaves an awful lot of power in the hands of the Provincial government in shaping the composition of the Board, somewhat to the detriment of the organization. There needs to be direct public oversight, of course. But there is often a very large knowledge gap between public and "campus-related" members; this gap has a profound effect on the decisions of the Board.

Moreover, there deserves to be much more student representation on the Board. Students by far make up the biggest portion of the campus community yet are awarded only three seats on a nearly twenty-member board. This is absolutely not reflective of the reality that the U of A is primarily made up of students. Students should have a much larger say in the operation and direction of the U of A.

As to how the SU should advocate about it. Since the U of A Board is defined and described in the Post-Secondary Learning Act, it would essentially be up to the VPX and external advocacy department of the SU to advocate for a change in the PSLA to reflect a more representative and

equitable composition on the Board. There is also considerable room for advocacy on the University side of the BoG equation, however. There are still many barriers to full participation on the Board for student members.

I could go on for weeks about this subject, but let's leave it there for now. I'd love to talk more about this with you and any other Councillors/execs, just give me a shout! Looking forward to seeing you all tonight.

In Solidarity,

**Brent Kelly**

Undergraduate Board of Governors Representative 2013-2014 | [University of Alberta Students' Union](#)

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